

Digital Communication, Territorial Marketing, and Influencers in Tourism Promotion in San Luis, Argentina.

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Digital Communication, Territorial Marketing, and Influencers in Tourism
Promotion in San Luis, Argentina

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Introduction

The expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms has substantially changed the structures of information production, circulation, and consumption in contemporary societies. This process affects public institutions, private actors, and citizens in general, reshaping the conditions under which policies are communicated, territorial identities are managed, and high-value strategic economic activities, such as tourism, are promoted. In this context, institutional and government communication has undergone a significant transformation because it must actively compete for the attention of fragmented audiences connected through multiple screens and platforms.

San Luis is a medium-sized province located in the center of the country. The tourism promotion campaign presented by provincial authorities for the summer season in Argentina combined institutional media—official news agencies and government digital platforms—with the participation of high-profile media figures, most notably the influencer Wanda Nara. This inclusion followed a specific logic: to maximize the visibility of the tourist destination by transferring the symbolic capital of the media figure to the promoted territory. It was an example of the commitment to the attention economy applied to territorial marketing, although this type of initiative raises analytical questions that go beyond the measurement of digital metrics. Are these strategies genuine public tourism policies or merely short-term communication actions? What kind of narratives about the territory do they construct, and what aspects do they omit? How is the return on public investment in influencer campaigns evaluated? What implications do they have for cultural representation, territorial equity, and the governance of public communication? These are the questions this presentation seeks to answer.

The central objective is to critically analyze tourism promotion campaigns mediated by influencers and celebrities from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates the sociology of communication, territorial marketing, the attention economy, and public policy theory. Unlike studies that evaluate these campaigns solely based on their digital performance metrics, this work proposes a broader perspective that considers their political, cultural, and normative dimensions. The case of hiring celebrities to promote advertising campaigns is of particular interest.

2. Theoretical Framework

Communication, Power, and Digital Networks

To understand the transformation of public communication in the digital age, Castells (2009) argues that power in contemporary societies is constructed and exercised primarily through communication networks that shape information flows and meaning-making processes. Digitization has given rise to a new communication model characterized by mass self-communication, in which individuals and organizations can produce and disseminate potentially global content without relying on traditional media. In this environment, public institutions face the challenge of communicating effectively in a more complex, fragmented, and competitive media ecosystem. Developing the capacity to construct narratives that capture the attention of diverse audiences and generate emotional resonance, and collaborating with influential figures, can be interpreted as an adaptive response by institutions to the shift of communicative power from traditional media to emerging actors in digital networks.

This involves developing the capacity to construct narratives that capture the attention of diverse audiences and generate emotional resonance. The Society of the Spectacle and the Mediatization of Territory

The theory of the society of the spectacle, developed by Guy Debord (1967/1995), offers a fundamental critical perspective for analyzing contemporary communication campaigns. For Debord, in advanced capitalist societies, social relations are increasingly mediated by images and symbolic representations, where the idea of the spectacle is conceived as a social relationship between people mediated by images: territory, culture, and experience become objects of visual representation designed for the gaze. This logic of spectacularization is visible in contemporary tourism communication, where tourist destinations are presented through carefully edited images of landscapes, gastronomy, festivals, and exclusive experiences, constructing an idealized and visually seductive version of the territory. The use of celebrities like Wanda Nara in tourism campaigns intensifies this process: the media figure is



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herself a spectacle, and her superimposition on the tourist destination amplifies the spectacularization of the territory. Fans not only see the destination, but experience it mediated by the symbolic aura of the celebrity.

Symbolic Capital and Media Legitimacy

According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital refers to the prestige, recognition, or social legitimacy that certain actors possess within a social sphere. Although this capital is not strictly economic, it can be transformed into material advantages when strategically activated.

Media celebrities accumulate symbolic capital through their public visibility, media presence, and ability to influence public perceptions and preferences. When they participate in tourism promotion campaigns, this symbolic capital is partially transferred to the promoted destination. However, this transfer is risky if the celebrity's reputation is compromised by scandals or controversies; the negative impact can also affect the destination with which they are associated.

The Bourdieuan perspective also allows us to analyze the power asymmetries that arise in these collaborations. Public institutions generally lack the symbolic capital possessed by high-profile media figures and, therefore, resort to the latter to amplify their visibility. However, this dependence becomes an asymmetrical relationship in which the power to define a territory's image falls into the hands of private actors— influencers and celebrities— with their own agendas and market logics that do not necessarily align with public policy objectives. The growing importance of influencers in contemporary communication can be analyzed from the conceptual framework of the attention economy, originally proposed by Davenport and Beck (2001). In an environment characterized by information overload, audience attention becomes the scarcest and most valuable resource. Actors who manage to capture and maintain public attention acquire significant power in the circulation of content and in shaping consumer preferences.

In an environment characterized by information overload, audience attention becomes the scarcest and most valuable resource, and actors who manage to capture and maintain public attention acquire significant power in the circulation of content and in shaping consumer preferences. Crystal Abidin (2016) delves deeper into this analysis, explaining that influencers build their influence by creating personal narratives that generate parasocial relationships with their audiences: relationships that simulate the closeness and trust of interpersonal bonds without actually being so. This perception of authenticity and closeness is precisely what makes influencer recommendations seem more credible than conventional institutional advertising. When an influencer visits a tourist destination and shares their experience on social media, their followers tend to interpret it as a genuine personal testimonial, not as mediated institutional communication. This logic has direct implications for public communication. Institutions that collaborate with influencers gain the attention of already established audiences and the relationships of trust that these influencers have built with their followers. However, this attention is rented, not acquired: it disappears when the collaboration ends. This raises questions about the sustainability of institutional communication strategies based exclusively on the media visibility of external figures.

Territorial Marketing and Building a Tourist Image

Tourism is an economic activity that depends heavily on building images and symbolic representations of destinations. According to Pike (2016), destination marketing involves the strategic management of a territory's image with the aim of attracting visitors and differentiating itself from the competition. In this sense, territories can be conceptualized as brands—place brands—that compete for the attention of tourist consumers in a global market of experiences.

Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2017) point out that contemporary tourism marketing is increasingly oriented toward promoting experiences. Instead of presenting destinations as static geographical spaces with natural or cultural attractions, current campaigns seek to convey emotions, sensations, and lifestyles influencing the purchasing decisions of others through their authority, knowledge, or relationship with their audience. In the tourism sector, this influence translates into promoting destinations through experiential narratives that present travel as desirable, accessible, and meaningful. At the same time, studies on social media marketing for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), such as those compiled in the IJEMSS research on Indonesian SMEs (2026), confirm that visual content strategies, paid advertising, and the creation of digital communities broaden the visibility of local brands, which has direct implications for territorial marketing.

3. Background

Digital Tourism Marketing: Global Context

The transformation of tourism marketing toward digital environments is a phenomenon documented since the mid-2000s, but it has accelerated exponentially with the proliferation of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. The bibliometric review conducted by Juwara and Fridayani (2027) on digital sociology and social media—based on 227 documents indexed in Scopus between 2014 and 2024—reveals sustained growth in academic production in this field, with an average annual growth rate of 10%. Predominant topics include digital



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identity, online activism, algorithms, and data exposure, indicating a growing academic concern about the ethical and social implications of the digital ecosystem. In the tourism sector, numerous studies have documented the impact of social media on consumers' travel decisions. The images and narratives shared by travelers and influencers on platforms like Instagram exert a significant influence on the perception of destinations and travel intentions.

In the Latin American context, the incorporation of influencers into institutional communication campaigns—including tourism promotion—is a relatively recent but rapidly expanding phenomenon. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico have progressively integrated media figures into their territorial marketing strategies. However, unlike what occurs in contexts such as Europe or North America, these initiatives are rarely accompanied by transparent regulatory frameworks, standardized evaluation protocols, or public accountability regarding the use of public resources.

The case analyzed in this presentation—the summer tourism communication campaign presented by Diego Masci, Director of the News Agency (San Luis), the official media outlet that communicates public administration—falls within this regional trend. The inclusion of Wanda Nara, a media figure with millions of followers on social networks and a significant presence in the media, responded to a logic of maximizing the reach of the communication. However, the lack of detailed public information on collaboration costs, predefined success indicators, and subsequent evaluation mechanisms highlights one of the main tensions that characterize these initiatives: the gap between the immediate visibility they generate and the transparency and accountability necessary for managing public resources.

Empirical research on the impact of digital marketing campaigns—including the use of paid advertising on platforms like Instagram—provides relevant evidence for contextualizing tourism promotion initiatives. The STJ Fresh Healthy case study, analyzed in the *IJEMSS* journal (2026), documents how a well-designed Instagram Ads campaign can multiply the reach of organic content more than twentyfold, also generating quantifiable increases in audience engagement, follower growth, and profile visits. This type of empirical evidence has direct implications for understanding influencer-mediated tourism promotion campaigns. The goals of a successful digital marketing campaign for a small business—increased visibility and building trust through authentic narratives—are essentially the same as those sought when a public institution collaborates with a high-profile media figure. The fundamental difference lies in the scale, the resources involved, and the transparency and accountability obligations that apply to the public sector.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and interpretive methodology, based on three complementary strategies: document analysis, systematic literature review, and case study. The document analysis consisted of reviewing publicly available materials on the tourism communication campaign presented by government authorities, including institutional statements, press releases, social media posts, and media coverage of the event. The analysis is based on secondary sources and the reconstruction of the case from information scattered throughout the public sphere. The systematic literature review focused on the fields of sociology of communication, territorial marketing, influence studies, attention economics, and public policy evaluation. Priority was given to sources indexed in recognized academic databases, with particular attention to works published in the last ten years that address the intersection between digital communication and public administration.

This study focuses on the Masci-Nara campaign as an illustrative example and approaches it from the perspective of critical public policy analysis. This involves describing the implemented strategy and examining its foundations, tensions, and implications in terms of governance, representation, and evaluation. The study acknowledges that access to detailed primary information about this campaign is limited, which constitutes a relevant finding: the information opacity surrounding many public communication initiatives in the Government of San Luis. The analysis is organized around four dimensions: the communication dimension—the narratives, languages, platforms, and actors involved; the political dimension—the relationship between the campaign and public tourism policies; the economic dimension—the public resources involved and the evaluation of the return on investment; and the cultural dimension—the representation of the territory and its implications for identity. This multidimensional structure allows for a more complete and critical understanding of the phenomenon studied.

5- Territorial Narratives and Cultural Identity

Images shared on social media by public figures often present highly selective and aestheticized versions of tourist destinations: spectacular landscapes, luxury accommodations, exclusive cuisine, and unique experiences. This selection reflects the visual logic of digital platforms—which prioritize visually striking content—and the commercial and identity interests of the public figures themselves. In the case of Wanda Nara, her public image is associated with an ostentatious and cosmopolitan lifestyle that may resonate with certain audience segments, but which can also seem distant or even contradictory to the values and realities of the local communities inhabiting



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the promoted territories. The question that arises is: what aspects of the tourist destination are left out of the image when the campaign is built around a celebrity? Which narratives about the territory are legitimized, and which are silenced? From a territorial marketing perspective (Pike, 2016), managing a destination's image involves not only projecting its attractions abroad but also constructing a narrative about the territory's identity and values that is recognizable and meaningful to its own inhabitants. When a destination's image is subsumed under the image of a media celebrity, this identity-building process can be distorted, generating tensions between the externally projected representation and the local community's self-perception.

The Campaign as Public Policy: Tensions and Challenges

One of the central questions raised by this case study is whether an influencer communication campaign can be considered, strictly speaking, a public tourism policy, or whether it is more appropriate to treat it as a tactical communication action. The distinction is not merely semantic: it has direct implications for how the initiative is designed, implemented, and evaluated. From the perspective of public policy theory (Dye, 2013), a public policy involves a set of government decisions and actions aimed at solving a social problem or promoting a common good. In the case of tourism, this implies the articulation of clear objectives—increasing the number of visitors, diversifying the offerings, ensuring equitable distribution of economic benefits—defined implementation tools—investment in infrastructure, training for the sector, communication and marketing—and evaluation mechanisms to determine the degree to which the proposed objectives are achieved. When influencer campaigns are not integrated into a broader public policy framework—with predefined objectives, transparent budgets, and agreed-upon evaluation metrics—they risk becoming opportunistic communication actions, more geared toward short-term political visibility than a real and sustainable tourism impact.

Evaluating the success of an influencer-mediated tourism promotion campaign requires considering multiple dimensions that go beyond conventional digital metrics. In the field of digital marketing, it is common to measure the reach of posts, the number of impressions, the level of interaction—likes, comments, shares—and follower growth. However, these metrics only capture the communicative dimension of the campaign, not its real impact on tourism. From a public policy perspective, the relevant indicators are different: increased number of visitors to the destination, higher hotel occupancy rates, changes in average tourist spending, job creation in the sector, and the territorial distribution of benefits/resources.

The connection between digital metrics and these indicators of real impact is neither direct nor automatic, and requires specific studies to establish causal or, at least, correlational relationships between media exposure and tourist behavior. Another critical aspect is the return on investment (ROI) of campaigns financed with public funds. If the cost of hiring a media celebrity is high—as is often the case with high-profile figures like Wanda Nara—the institution has an obligation to demonstrate that the economic benefits generated by the increase in tourism justify such expenditure. In the absence of rigorous evaluation mechanisms, this demonstration becomes impossible, and the campaign is exposed to legitimate criticism regarding the discretionary use of public resources.

Communication Governance and Transparency

The concept of communication governance refers to the set of rules, procedures, and institutions that regulate the production and circulation of public communication. In the context of influencer marketing in the tourism sector, communication governance implies the existence of transparent and objective selection mechanisms for choosing media personalities to participate in campaigns, the clear contractual definition of the terms of collaboration, the public disclosure of the costs involved, and the establishment of ex-ante and ex-post evaluation protocols. The absence of these mechanisms—frequent in the Latin American context—creates opacity that can lead to decisions based on political criteria or personal affinities, rather than technical criteria and public efficiency. It also opens the door to conflicts of interest and raises doubts about the proper use of state resources. The development of specific regulatory frameworks for hiring influencers in institutional campaigns is, in this sense, an outstanding issue for communication governance systems in the region.

From a comparative perspective, some European and North American countries have begun to develop specific regulations for influencer-mediated advertising—including the obligation to clearly identify sponsored content—but these regulations primarily apply to agreements between private brands and influencers, not to institutional campaigns funded with public funds. This regulatory gap is particularly relevant in the context of government communication, where transparency standards should be stricter than in the private sector.

Digital sociology—defined as the subdiscipline that studies the interaction between digital technologies and social structures (Juwara and Fridayani, 2027)—offers valuable conceptual tools for analyzing the phenomena described. In particular, recent advances in datafication, algorithmic power, and digital inequality allow us to understand tourism communication campaigns not as isolated media events, but as phenomena embedded in broader social and technical structures that determine which territories are visible, which narratives circulate, and which actors have access to the capacity to produce and disseminate information. The bibliometric research of Juwara and



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Fridayani (2027) identifies surveillance, data exposure, online activism, and the ethical consequences of digital participation as emerging themes in digital sociology. All of these themes resonate directly with the analysis of tourism communication campaigns that utilize influencers: the collection of audience data through digital platforms, the opacity of the algorithms that determine content visibility, the possibility that these campaigns may be appropriated by political actors for legitimizing purposes, and the ethical implications of using public resources to construct a media image.

6. Conclusions

Tourism promotion campaigns mediated by influencers and celebrities constitute an adaptive response by public institutions to the structural transformations of the digital media ecosystem. The incorporation of high-profile figures in these strategies responds to a logic of attention economy with a clear communicational justification: in an environment of information overload, access to consolidated audiences and pre-existing parasocial trust relationships, built by influencers, represents a significant competitive advantage for institutions that would otherwise have difficulty capturing the attention of the mass public. However, the critical analysis developed in this work reveals that these strategies, when not integrated into broader public policy frameworks, generate significant tensions. The first is the tension between visibility and transparency: the immediate communicational success of an influencer campaign can coexist with profound opacity regarding costs, collaborator selection criteria, and mechanisms for evaluating its real impact. The second tension lies between territorial representation and simplification: narratives produced by media celebrities often present highly selective and aestheticized versions of the territory, which can distort the public perception of the destination and silence relevant aspects of local identity. Institutional digital presence must be sustainable over time, regardless of occasional collaborations with influencers or celebrities.

Fourth, it is essential to establish rigorous evaluation mechanisms that allow for measuring the real impact of campaigns beyond superficial digital metrics. This requires collaboration between communication teams and tourism statistics agencies to identify the extent to which greater digital visibility translates into a real increase in visitors, tourism spending, and job creation in the sector.

Tourism communication campaigns with influencers funded with public resources deserve critical attention from citizens, the media, and civil society organizations. The demand for transparency regarding the costs of these initiatives, the criteria for selecting collaborators, and the results obtained is not only a requirement for democratic accountability, but also a condition for ensuring that public debate on tourism management is conducted on an informed basis. Communication in the contemporary media ecosystem demands adaptation and creativity, and high-profile media figures can contribute significantly to the visibility of tourist destinations and the economic development of local communities. The challenge lies in finding the regulatory frameworks and management practices that allow these opportunities to be leveraged with transparency, efficiency, and public accountability.

The third tension identified is that between dependence on and sustainability of communication: institutions that base their territorial marketing strategy on the visibility of external media figures construct a communication model that does not generate its own capabilities or become sustainable in the long term. When the collaboration with the influencer ends, the visibility disappears, without necessarily having developed its own communication capital. The fourth tension, finally, lies between efficiency and democratic legitimacy: evaluating the success of these campaigns cannot be limited to digital metrics, but must include an assessment of their real impact on tourism and the alignment of public spending with the principles of efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

The regulatory proposal that emerges from this analysis rests on the need to develop communication governance frameworks specific to institutional influence campaigns, including objective selection criteria, transparent contracts, mandatory identification of public sponsorship, predefined impact indicators, and independent ex-post evaluations. These frameworks should be understood as conditions that allow tourism communication campaigns to be both communicatively effective and politically legitimate.

7. Final Comments and Suggestions

The field of digital tourism communication with influencers remains a relatively unexplored area of research in the Latin American context. The following priorities for future research are identified: developing longitudinal studies to establish causal relationships between media exposure generated by influencer campaigns and indicators of their real impact on tourism; conducting comparative analyses between different countries and institutional contexts to identify best practices and transferable regulatory frameworks; and studying the perceptions of local communities regarding communication campaigns that use their territory as a platform for media visibility. It is also recommended to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate territorial marketing approaches with those of digital sociology, political science, and public economics. The case analyzed in this document illustrates that tourism communication phenomena cannot be adequately understood from a single discipline, but rather require analytical frameworks that integrate the communicational, political, economic, and cultural dimensions.



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For those who design and implement tourism communication campaigns, the analysis developed in this document offers the following recommendations: influencer campaigns should be integrated into broader, long-term territorial marketing strategies, with clear objectives, transparent budgets, and evaluation mechanisms defined before implementation. A campaign featuring a high-profile influencer does not constitute a tourism policy; it is, at most, a tactical tool that should serve a broader strategy. The selection of influencers or celebrities participating in campaigns should be based on objective technical criteria: coherence between the influencer's profile and the destination's identity, alignment between their audience and priority tourism segments, and a history of previous institutional collaborations, and not solely on visibility or popularity in the media. An influencer with a million highly engaged followers can be more valuable for a niche campaign than a celebrity with ten million scattered followers and little connection to tourism. Furthermore, institutions should develop their own communication capabilities that do not depend exclusively on the visibility provided by external figures. This implies investing in the production of quality content for institutional channels, in training specialized digital communication teams, and in building communities of engaged followers around tourist destinations.

Tourism communication campaigns with influencers funded with public resources deserve critical attention from citizens, the media, and civil society organizations. The demand for transparency regarding the costs of these initiatives, the criteria for selecting collaborators, and the results obtained is a requirement for democratic accountability and a condition for ensuring that public debate on tourism management takes place on an informed basis. Communication in today's media ecosystem requires adaptation and creativity, and high-profile media figures can genuinely contribute to the visibility of tourist destinations and the economic development of local communities. The challenge lies in finding the regulatory frameworks and management practices that allow these opportunities to be leveraged with transparency, efficiency, and public accountability.

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