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**Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies for Digital Brand Analysis:  
Applications in Hospitality and Tourism**

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*To Florida,  
where my mind was challenged,  
my goals refined,  
and my dreams encouraged.*

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## Introduction

In the rapidly evolving hospitality and tourism industry, digital branding constitutes a key strategic approach to shaping competitive identities and building sustained engagement with audiences. Digital platforms are now central arenas where businesses and destinations create, communicate, and negotiate brand values. Yet digital branding is not merely a strategic activity—it is also a discursive one (Rossolatos, 2023). It involves the use of language and other meaning-making systems to craft persuasive narratives, establish credibility, and evoke symbolic meanings that influence consumer behavior and stakeholder engagement.

From this perspective, a brand is a “discursive instance” (Marrone, 2007, p. 15), an effect of meaning produced through underlying mechanisms of signification that integrate its economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Branding, as the *-ing* suffix suggests, is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic process constantly shifting and reshaping itself through discourse. This view emphasizes branding as a fluid semiotic construct shaped by sociocultural narratives and symbolic associations.

For instance, the Starbucks brand constructs meaning through values such as emotional connection, personalization, ethical consumption, community engagement, and sensory pleasure, positioning itself not merely as a coffee retailer but as a socially responsible lifestyle brand and site of culturally meaningful consumption (Chang, 2020; Li, 2022). Similarly, the destination brand of Italy is discursively constructed through values such as heritage, aesthetic beauty, artisanal quality, and the pleasures of slow living. These associations—often conveyed through narratives of art, cuisine, landscape, and lifestyle—frame Italy as a place of authenticity, emotion,

and timeless cultural richness (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Manca, 2016). In both cases, brand meaning emerges from the interplay of discourse, culture, and consumer interpretation, demonstrating how branding operates via ideologically charged and emotionally resonant narratives.

Drawing on discourse studies, strategic communication, and marketing, this dissertation analyzes digital branding in the hospitality and tourism industry from a discourse-analytic perspective. As Jacobs (2025) observes, despite the centrality of discourse in branding, strategic communication and marketing research often emphasize outcomes such as brand awareness or equity, with limited attention to the communicative processes through which brand meaning is constructed and negotiated. In contrast, the field of discourse studies has offered rich insights into language use in the digital landscape but has only recently begun to explore branding as a discursive practice.

While foundational studies have approached the discursive dimension of branding from semiotic, multimodal, and critical perspectives (Lischinsky, 2017; Rossolatos, 2015), they have largely relied on small-scale, qualitative analyses. As branding increasingly unfolds across interactive and data-rich environments, there remains a notable gap in methodological approaches that combine the scalability of quantitative approaches with the interpretative depth of discourse analysis. This need is particularly pronounced in hospitality and tourism research, where discourse analysis has often relied on limited datasets and traditional qualitative approaches (Qian et al., 2018). Integrating a corpus-assisted approach into discourse analysis offers the potential to process large volumes of textual data while enhancing qualitative inquiry. This supports more nuanced insights at both macro- and micro-levels of digital brand discourse.

This study contributes to addressing this gap by adopting Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker, 2023; Gillings et al.,

2023) for digital brand analysis. Situated at the intersection of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, CADS enables the systematic identification of linguistic items in large textual datasets while remaining sensitive to the sociocultural and ideological context. Its analytical tools allow for a rigorous yet interpretive examination of how brands use language in meaning-making. Importantly, CADS aligns with the constructivist view that language does not merely reflect reality but actively shapes it (Foucault, 1972)—a perspective that is essential for understanding how brands create and manage symbolic value in digital contexts. As Gillings et al. (2024) highlight, these features make CADS a valuable alternative to text-mining approaches (Feldman & Sanger, 2007; Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017), which are widely used in business research but often overlook the contextual, discursive, and ideological dimensions of language. Building on this foundation, this dissertation is organized into three chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, offering a critical review of the literature on digital discourse—with particular emphasis on its role in branding—and presenting the foundations of CADS. The chapter conceptualizes digital branding as a discourse phenomenon and traces the historical development and methodological principles of CADS, positioning it as an interpretivist and constructivist approach well suited to examining the ideological and cultural dimensions of digital branding. Finally, it outlines the key analytical techniques employed in the dissertation and provides a rationale for their use in analyzing digital brand discourse.

Chapter 2 presents the first empirical study, which investigates the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami-Dade County (Florida, United States). It focuses on the role of Italianness as a cultural-ideological system in the construction of restaurant brand identity and as a strategy in brand positioning. Drawing on custom-built corpora of

official restaurant websites, the analysis employs keyword and concordance techniques to examine how themes such as authenticity, heritage, craftsmanship, and regionality are encoded in digital texts. Italianness is shown to function both as a cultural signifier and a commercial asset that enables differentiation in a competitive multicultural market.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus from digital restaurant branding to digital destination branding, extending the investigation to rebranding and brand co-creation in the context of spring break tourism in Miami Beach. With respect to rebranding, the chapter assesses the social media impact of the *Miami Beach Is Breaking Up With Spring Break* campaign, a marketing initiative aimed at repositioning the city as a sustainable and responsible destination by discouraging unruly spring break tourism. With respect to brand co-creation, it explores the role of digital prosumers (Lutzky, 2021; Maci, 2020) in the co-creation of the destination brand. Using frequency, collocation, and concordance techniques to examine user-generated content (UGC) in response to the campaign, the chapter investigates how online users react to and engage with official branding efforts.

This research project was enriched by direct field experience in Miami-Dade County, where the empirical case studies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 were conducted. During my doctoral program, I was affiliated with Florida International University (FIU) and collaborated with the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB), the county's official destination marketing organization (DMO). This experience deepened my understanding of the case studies by providing valuable empirical and contextual insights into the local hospitality and tourism industry. Specifically, the academic environment at FIU fostered interdisciplinary exchange on issues related to tourism, culture, and communication, while the collaboration

with the GMCVB offered a practical perspective on destination management and marketing, including the contextual background of spring break tourism, the relationship between the DMO and local stakeholders, destination branding strategies, sustainable tourism initiatives, and the strategic use of digital platforms and data analytics in tourism communication.

This study contributes to multiple areas of scholarship, including discourse studies, strategic communication, marketing, and, more broadly, hospitality and tourism research. Theoretically, it advances a discourse-oriented perspective on branding; methodologically, it demonstrates how CADS can be effectively applied to analyze digital brand dynamics—specifically brand identity construction, brand positioning, rebranding impact, and brand co-creation across corporate and user-generated texts.

In sum, this research positions digital discourse at the heart of digital branding, providing empirical evidence from the hospitality and tourism industry. By employing CADS to examine the linguistic construction and negotiation of brand meaning, this study offers a robust theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how brands function as cultural, social, and strategic constructs.

# CHAPTER 1

## Digital Brand Discourse and CADS: A Literature Review

### 1.1 Introduction

Digital technologies have profoundly transformed how individuals and organizations communicate and construct meaning (Esposito & KhosraviNik, 2024a). These transformations have introduced new genres, interactional norms, and communicative practices that challenge traditional analytical paradigms and demand adapted theoretical and methodological tools (Zappavigna & Ross, 2025). To explore these contemporary dynamics, this chapter reviews digital discourse research and emphasizes the intersection between digital discourse and branding as a central thematic focus. It draws on theoretical insights from discourse studies, strategic communication, and marketing, while integrating Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) as the core methodological framework to analyze this intersection.

Section 1.2 examines the concept of discourse, outlining key perspectives ranging from structural and functional traditions to poststructuralist views that highlight the ideological and socially constitutive role of language.

Section 1.3 discusses the impact of digital technologies on communication and delves into digital discourse research, identifying its main features, tracing its evolution, and outlining current trends and future directions.

Section 1.4 narrows the focus to digital brand discourse from a strategic communication perspective, emphasizing the discursive dimension of brands and highlighting the shift in digital brand communication from a one-to-many to a many-to-many model. It also identifies three key gaps in the literature: (i) the limited integration of

discourse approaches in strategic communication, (ii) the underexplored discursive dimension of digital branding, and (iii) the need for combined approaches capable of analyzing large volumes of textual data while remaining sensitive to the socio-semiotic complexity of brand meaning-making.

Section 1.5 introduces CADS as a distinctive methodological approach that combines the empirical rigor of corpus linguistics with the interpretative depth of discourse analysis. The section traces the development of CADS, outlines its theoretical and institutional context, and presents its core analytical components—namely, corpus design, linguistic units, and core analytical procedures—emphasizing its value for analyzing digital brand discourse. It concludes by discussing the strengths and limitations of CADS.

Section 1.6 reviews studies in hospitality and tourism research that have adopted corpus linguistic techniques to analyze digital discourse. Although such studies remain limited in number within this field, they demonstrate the methodological flexibility of combining qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative corpus tools, thereby underscoring the contribution of CADS to the study of digital communication in hospitality and tourism contexts.

Finally, Section 1.7 offers a summary of the key theoretical and methodological insights discussed throughout the chapter. It reiterates the relevance of adopting a discourse-analytic lens to investigate digital branding as a meaning-making process and reflects on the value of combining corpus linguistic techniques with qualitative interpretation.

Overall, this chapter lays the theoretical and methodological foundation for the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3, positioning CADS as a robust and context-sensitive methodological framework for the analysis of digital brand discourse.

## 1.2 Conceptual and Analytical Perspectives on Discourse

Discourse is a complex and multi-layered concept that has been defined and used in diverse ways across disciplines (Gee, 2014). While the term may initially appear straightforward, its range of meanings and conceptual implications underscore its centrality in understanding how language functions within social life.

A traditional view, rooted in linguistics, defines discourse as “language above the sentence or above the clause” (Stubbs, 1983, p. 1). This structural approach emphasizes how language users organize information cohesively and coherently in texts and conversations. A recipe, for example, is organized according to a recognizable structure: it begins with a title, lists ingredients with numerical and measurement units, and follows with a series of imperatives in the preparation steps. Discourse, in this view, refers to predictable patterns of linguistic organization across genres.

Another influential perspective defines discourse as “language in use” (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1). This functional approach focuses on how language is employed by language users to accomplish communicative goals in specific contexts. It is primarily concerned with the functions that language performs—such as requesting, narrating, or persuading—and how these functions contribute to successful interaction. For example, a restaurant review may be used to evaluate a dining experience, share opinions, and influence potential customers. From this perspective, discourse is a dynamic tool shaped by context and purpose, facilitating social interaction and the exchange of meaning.

A complementary view highlights the categorization of specific types of language use, often associated with thematic or professional contexts, such as *business discourse* (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2013; Darics, 2015; Mautner & Rainer, 2017). This

view underscores how language varies across domains, each characterized by distinct linguistic patterns, registers, styles, genres, and communicative goals. It draws attention to how communication is shaped by the conventions, expectations, and interactional norms specific to different fields of activities. In this regard, Gotti (2003) advances the notion of *specialized discourse*, “which reflects more clearly the specialist use of language in contexts which are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical, and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice” (p. 24).

A more critical understanding of discourse emerges from Foucault’s (1972) poststructuralist view that defines discourse as “practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). This perspective shifts the focus from communicative function to the role of language in constituting knowledge, shaping social reality, and reproducing ideologies. Fairclough (2015) builds on this by framing discourse as “language as social practice determined by social structures” (p. 51), emphasizing the dialectical relationship between language and society. In this framework, discourse not only reflects the world but also actively shapes and legitimizes particular ways of understanding it, contributing to the construction of meaning and social reality.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2020) suggest another perspective, arguing that discourse involves the convergence of multiple semiotic resources—referred to as *modes*—such as verbal, visual, and aural modes. This *multimodal* view broadens the analytical lens, acknowledging that meaning is constructed through the interplay of diverse signifying systems embedded in social practices. This is particularly relevant in digital contexts, where communication often

unfolds through the integrated use of language, image, layout, and sound.

The diversity of conceptual frameworks surrounding discourse underscores the inherently interpretive nature of its analysis: discourse analysts are, indeed, always embedded within the very discursive formations they attempt to study (Baker, 2023).

Over the past four decades, as Vásquez (2022a) explains, discourse analysis has developed into a robust interdisciplinary field (i.e., *Discourse Studies*) that incorporates approaches from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and beyond. Discourse analysis is thus a powerful means to examine the interplay between language (and other meaning-making systems) and social practices.

While approaches to discourse analysis vary in focus and epistemology, all share the following key parameters (Angermüller et al., 2014):

- A focus on naturally occurring language use by real language users, rather than on artificially constructed examples or abstract language systems
- An emphasis on extended units of communication rather than isolated words or sentences
- An extension of linguistics toward the exploration of how language functions as social action and interaction
- The recognition of multimodality in communication, encompassing non-verbal semiotic resources
- Attention to the dynamic nature of language use, including socio-cognitive and interactional processes

- A concern with how language use is shaped by and embedded within various contexts
- The analysis of a wide array of linguistic features, including cohesion, coherence, anaphora, topics, macrostructures, speech acts, interactions, turn-taking, signs, politeness, argumentation, rhetoric, mental models, and many other aspects of language

Despite the novel challenges introduced by technological innovations, as discussed in the next section, these foundational parameters remain central in discourse analysis.

### **1.3 Digital Discourse Research: Evolution, Current Trends, and Future Directions**

The emergence of new digital technologies has reshaped how individuals and organizations interact and produce meaning, giving rise to what is now widely referred to as *digital discourse*—i.e., “texts and interactions in digitally mediated contexts” (Hafner, 2018, p. 375). These technologies have created new communicative environments that challenge traditional understandings of communication (Jones et al., 2015). Digital environments offer affordances that support multimodal expression, enable both asynchronous and synchronous interaction, and amplify one-to-many communication—allowing online users to reach geographically dispersed audiences more quickly—while also facilitating a broad spectrum of digitally mediated social practices (Vásquez, 2022a).

Websites, social networking sites, microblogging services, video-sharing platforms, and messaging apps have each fostered the development of indigenous communicative genres, which both reflect and shape evolving cultural, social, and ideological norms (Zappavigna & Ross, 2025). In digital spaces, users often engage in communication

practices mediated by platform-specific semiotic resources—including images, emojis, hashtags, and other visual and verbal features—that differ significantly from those used in offline settings. These performances are shaped by both the technological affordances of digital media and broader sociocultural structures (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). Digital discourse, therefore, marks a significant shift in how language and meaning are constructed, circulated, and interpreted in society.

Given these profound shifts in how meaning is constructed and communicated online, discourse analysis is increasingly challenged to both adapt existing theoretical and methodological frameworks and develop new ones capable of addressing the complexity and fluidity of digital interactions. For instance, the ephemeral and rapidly evolving nature of digital content imposes methodological constraints: the relevance of any dataset may be limited to a specific moment in time, requiring scholars to act swiftly in data collection and publication (Vásquez, 2022a). In parallel, the blurring of boundaries between public and private communication on digital platforms raises important ethical considerations. Researchers must navigate concerns related to informed consent, anonymity, and user expectations of privacy (Tagg & Spilioti, 2022).

Digital discourse research has matured into a robust interdisciplinary field. The foundational work by Herring (1996) marked a pivotal moment in the investigation of computer-mediated communication (CMC), focusing on text-based interaction via emails, chatrooms, and online forums. This early research was followed by contributions that expanded the scope of analysis to include multilingual and cross-cultural dimensions (Danet & Herring, 2007), language change (Rowe & Wyss, 2009), sociolinguistic perspectives on new media (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011), and the interpersonal dimension

of meaning-making and ambient affiliation on social media (Zappavigna, 2012).

Subsequent volumes, such as *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication* (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2015), *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions* (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019), and *Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis* (Vásquez, 2022b) have consolidated the field by providing comprehensive overviews of methodological advances and theoretical debates.

More recently, scholars have advanced this trajectory by proposing new theoretical orientations and empirical tools specifically tailored to the complexities of digital discourse. Esposito & KhosraviNik (2024b) call for a new tradition in critical discourse research that meaningfully engages with the communicative conditions of the participatory web. Their volume emphasizes the need to adapt existing critical frameworks to account for the power dynamics, technological affordances, and digital mediation that shape contemporary discourse, advocating for triangulated and context-sensitive methodologies.

Zappavigna & Ross (2025) adopt a social semiotic approach to social media discourse, addressing challenges such as intermodality, relationality, and intersubjectivity. Their work reconceptualizes existing analytical tools and introduces new methodologies for analyzing everyday communication on these platforms.

Similarly, Vásquez & Chovanec (2025) foreground the concept of *digital experiences* to explore how users rely on mediating technologies to communicate and form social bonds. Their edited volume is structured around three core themes: user engagement, multimodal communication, and online activism.

All these works underscore the heterogeneity of digital discourse, as it spans a wide range of genres, platforms, and user practices, each

with their own communicative norms and ideological underpinnings. This diversity complicates attempts to formulate a unified theory of digital discourse and instead invites a pluralistic, context-sensitive approach.

The digital era offers both new opportunities and unique challenges for discourse analysts, who must strike a balance between qualitative depth and the methodological scalability required to handle vast and dynamic datasets. In this context, several scholars have emphasized the potential of big data approaches. For instance, Lutzky & Kehoe (2022) highlight the value of corpus linguistics as a scalable and systematic method for analyzing digital discourse through large-scale electronic textual datasets, whereas Volo & Irimiás (2021) underscore the growing visuality of digital environments and advocate for the integration of visual methods to analyze big visual data.

Building on this body of research, the present study draws on CADs to examine digital branding from a discourse perspective. The following section narrows the focus to digital discourse in business contexts, exploring how discourse and branding intersect in the digital landscape and positioning this intersection within the interdisciplinary field of strategic communication.

#### **1.4 Digital Brand Discourse: A Strategic Communication Perspective**

Since the *discursive turn* in business studies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), which marked a shift toward a linguistic and socially constructed perspective on business practices, researchers have investigated discourse in multiple business contexts, including leadership (Walker & Aritz, 2014), organizational change (Oswick & Li, 2023), strategy (Balogun et al., 2014), and marketing and consumption (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015; Skålen et al., 2007). With the rise of digital media, scholars have further examined discourse in digital business

communication (Breeze, 2013; Darics, 2015; Lutzky, 2021; Vásquez, 2014). Despite these advancements, strategic (business) communication has only recently begun to incorporate discourse approaches, making this integration an emerging and underexplored area of inquiry within the field (Jacobs, 2025).

Hallahan et al. (2007) define strategic communication as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (p. 3). An expanded definition is provided by Zerfass et al. (2018):

*Strategic communication encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals. (p. 493)*

Strategic communication is both a professional practice and a field of academic research. Professionally, it is carried out by communication specialists across diverse domains, including business, politics, military science, and public health, among others (Botan, 2018). Academically, strategic communication has emerged as a major interdisciplinary research field, with particular relevance to business studies (Werder et al., 2018). Its theoretical foundations span both the social sciences and the humanities, as explained by Falkheimer & Heide (2022):

*Strategic communication research is based on social science disciplines, such as sociology, social psychology, organizational theory, marketing, and political science—focusing on communication, media, persuasion, organizations, and society. Strategic communication research is also connected to the*

*humanities owing to the interest in language, rhetoric, discourse, and communication. (p. 3)*

Although discourse approaches to strategic communication have gradually developed over time, gaining significant scholarly attention in the early 2000s (Balogun et al., 2014), discourse-oriented research continues to represent a relatively marginal strand within the field. While the number of studies adopting discourse approaches has increased, such research remains less prominent than traditional organizational and managerial perspectives that continue to dominate strategic communication scholarship (Jacobs, 2025).

These traditional perspectives offer valuable insights into areas such as goal-oriented planning, strategy formulation, organizational performance, and managerial decision-making, among others, emphasizing organizational control and the instrumental role of communication in achieving measurable outcomes (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015). However, they often treat communication as a neutral conduit for transmitting information, underestimating its constitutive role in shaping organizational meaning and strategic action.

Conversely, discourse approaches foreground the performative and ideological dimensions of communication, enabling a deeper understanding of how strategic meanings are constructed, negotiated, and circulated. At the same time, the interpretative and constructivist orientation of discourse approaches may pose challenges for those seeking prescriptive models or broadly generalizable findings. Nonetheless, these characteristics are also what make discourse approaches uniquely suited to uncovering the nuanced ways in which meaning operates in strategic communication.

This study seeks to engage with both traditions and bridge the gap between them by employing CADS to analyze digital branding as

a discursive practice within the broader field of strategic communication. By acknowledging the value of both empirical rigor and interpretive depth, this study illustrates how discourse approaches such as CADS can complement traditional organizational and managerial perspectives by uncovering the narratives and ideologies that shape strategic communication practices.

Branding represents one of the most prominent forms of strategic communication, especially in the digital landscape, enabling organizations to manage meaning and foster engagement in highly interactive contexts (Fiocca & Gambetti, 2020). According to the American Marketing Association (n.d.), “a brand is any distinctive feature like a name, term, design, or symbol that identifies goods or services.” The term *brand* derives from the Old Norse word *brandr*, meaning “to burn”—a reference to the historical practice of marking cattle to signal ownership (Rowles, 2025). This etymology foregrounds the roots of branding in signification, identification, and differentiation, which remain central to contemporary brand communication.

Two key concepts are central to branding: *brand identity* (i.e., how a brand wants to be perceived) and *brand image* (i.e., how a brand is actually perceived).

*While brand image is usually passive and looks to the past, brand identity should be active and look to the future, reflecting the associations that are aspired for the brand. While brand image tends to be tactical, brand identity should be strategic, reflecting a business strategy that will lead to a sustainable advantage. (Aaker, 1995, p. 70)*

The strategic process that aligns brand identity with brand image is *brand positioning*. This involves understanding the target consumers

and identifying key competitors to establish a distinct and favorable place for the brand in the market and in the minds of consumers, thereby ensuring it is both recognizable and differentiated (Ries & Trout, 2000). As Keller & Swaminathan (2020) emphasize, brand positioning is most effective when it clearly articulates what makes a brand distinct, valuable, and emotionally resonant within a given competitive landscape.

Branding is grounded in discourse as both can be thought of as systematic ways for shaping and viewing the world through the deployment of specific semiotic choices (Ledin & Machin, 2015). As a discursive practice, branding involves the construction, dissemination, and negotiation of meanings within sociocultural contexts. In this view, brands become ideological referents, framing cultural rituals, economic activities, and social norms (Schroeder, 2009). They operate as mediators of meanings, prioritizing certain ideologies while suppressing others (Lischinsky, 2017).

Although branding has been investigated by both researchers and practitioners since the mid-1980s (Heding et al., 2020), its discursive dimension remains relatively underexplored, especially in digital contexts. Existing discourse-oriented studies on branding primarily adopt semiotic, multimodal, or critical approaches.

Marrone (2007) conceptualizes the brand as a powerful social signifier, suggesting that in the wake of the decline of grand narratives, brands occupy a quasi-religious role in shaping consumer identity. Oswald (2012) argues that brand meaning is central to brand equity—i.e., the value a brand contributes to a product or service (Aaker, 1991)—and advocates for managing it through semiotic analysis, emphasizing the importance of structural semiotics in decoding the verbal, visual, and spatial elements of brand discourse.

Machin & Thornborrow (2003) apply a multimodal discourse analysis approach to examine how global brands like *Cosmopolitan* magazine construct fantasy-driven identities across localized editions. Their work demonstrates how branding operates through low-modality imagery and discursive strategies that signal belonging to branded worlds.

From a critical-discursive perspective, Lischinsky (2017) explores how corporations manage internal stakeholder perceptions of the brand, showing how branding extends beyond consumer-facing communication to shape internal organizational culture through subtle linguistic and visual cues.

*The Handbook of Brand Semiotics* by Rossolatos (2015) seeks to consolidate these diverse approaches, serving as a foundational volume for scholars navigating the intersections of branding and discourse. This work highlights methodological diversity—spanning brand image, symbolism, transmedia storytelling, and multimodal analysis—while advocating for a more integrated research agenda.

Similarly, *Advances in Brand Semiotics & Discourse Analysis* by Rossolatos (2023) addresses the growing need to adapt semiotic and discourse-analytic methods to the co-creative, data-rich realities of digital branding. The volume examines how tools such as corpus analysis and other big data approaches can be combined with discourse theory to investigate brand communities, identity construction, and ideological meaning-making online.

While these studies have laid important groundwork for understanding branding from semiotic, multimodal, and critical perspectives, research on brand discourse in contemporary digital environments remains relatively scarce. Given the central and expanding role of digital media in contemporary brand

communication, this scarcity underscores an urgent need for further research at the intersection of digital discourse and branding

Organizations increasingly rely on digital media for both internal and external communication, taking advantage of their immediacy, accessibility, and interactivity. These platforms allow companies to quickly reach their target audiences and disseminate real-time information; facilitate the construction and maintenance of stakeholder relationships at a relatively low cost; and empower consumers to engage in digital brand construction, transforming them into *digital prosumers* (i.e., individuals who simultaneously produce and consume digital content) (Maci, 2020; Lutzky, 2021).

Prosumers actively create and distribute user-generated content (UGC) across digital media, offering evaluations, testimonials, criticisms, and praise. Through posts, comments, and reviews, they co-create brand meaning alongside official brand efforts (Siano et al., 2022). While positive brand engagement can serve as an organic form of public relations, the viral spread of negative content, such as complaints or critiques, can rapidly escalate into reputational crises (Morgan & Wilk, 2021).

This shift in agency is encapsulated in the concept of *brand democracy* (MacDonald, as cited in Rowles, 2025), which holds that a brand is no longer defined solely by what it claims to be, but by the collective voices of all who engage with it.

In this context, *brand discourse* refers to the use of language, and other semiotic resources, in two distinct yet interconnected processes: the construction of brand identity, which defines the internal values and personality of the brand, and brand positioning, which involves strategically differentiating the brand within a competitive market. *Digital brand discourse* builds on these foundational aspects but also represents a further development: it reflects the influence of digital

technologies on branding practices and the shift from one-to-many communication to many-to-many interaction.

As digital brand discourse increasingly unfolds within complex, data-rich, and interactive environments, there is a growing need for methodological approaches that allow for large-scale analysis while maintaining interpretative sensitivity—responding directly to the complexity and breadth of digital brand discourse (Rossolatos, 2023). This dissertation contributes to addressing this need by adopting CADS as its methodological framework, which is discussed in the following section.

### **1.5 Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of CADS**

As discussed in Section 1.2, discourse analysis encompasses a variety of approaches, each shaped by distinct epistemological orientations and methodological preferences. Among these approaches, CADS stands out for triangulating the interpretive lens of discourse analysis with the empirical rigor and data-oriented nature of corpus linguistics.

Corpus linguistics is an approach to the study of language that uses computational tools and statistical techniques to analyze large amounts of language data stored in corpora (i.e., extensive electronic sets of textual data) (Brezina & McEnery, 2020). A corpus (the singular form of *corpora*) is defined by McEnery et al. (2006) as “a collection of (i) machine-readable, (ii) authentic texts (including transcripts of spoken data), which is (iii) sampled to be (iv) representative of a particular language or language variety” (p. 5). Overviews of the widely used software tools for corpus analysis can be found in Brezina & McEnery (2020) and McEnery & Hardie (2012). For the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3, the #LancsBox software (Brezina et al., 2021) was used.

As Baker (2023) observes, corpus linguistics remained relatively uncommon until the 1970s. The widespread availability of personal computers in the 1980s marked a turning point, catalyzing its rapid development as a methodological framework. Since then, corpus linguistics has been applied across a wide range of domains in both theoretical and applied linguistics.

One of the most prominent institutions in this field is Lancaster University (UK). Renowned for its long-standing expertise in corpus linguistics, this institution has been at the forefront of methodological innovation and theoretical reflection, as McEnery & Hardie (2012) note.

Despite the strong emphasis on statistics and computational technology, Biber et al. (1998) underscore that corpus linguistics incorporates both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Building on this foundation, the integration of corpus linguistics into discourse analysis gave rise to CADS as a distinct methodological approach.

While this integration began to take shape in the early 1990s (Baker, 2023), the term *Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies* was first coined by Partington (2004) to designate an eclectic approach combining the quantitative rigor of corpus linguistics with the qualitative depth of discourse analysis. As Partington et al. (2013) explain, CADS recognizes the value of corpus techniques as one analytical resource among many, privileging a flexible methodological stance.

This flexibility is reflected in the choice of the term *corpus-assisted*, which deliberately avoids the *corpus-based* versus *corpus-driven* dichotomy (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). These two approaches offer distinct perspectives: in the former, corpus data are used to investigate theories and hypotheses for validation, refutation, or refinement; in the latter, the corpus itself is the sole source of theories and hypotheses.

The label *corpus-assisted* underscores the role of corpus tools as analytical aids that support, but do not determine, interpretation.

CADS is not tied to a single school of thought but draws flexibly on diverse traditions to uncover *non-obvious meaning*—i.e., the implicit, subtle, and often unintended patterns of meaning that emerge from large quantities of discourse (Partington et al., 2013). To uncover such meaning, CADS combines quantitative overviews—such as frequency counts, keyword lists, and collocation profiles—with close qualitative analysis of specific concordance lines and contextual cues (as discussed in the following subsections). Unlike traditional corpus linguistics, which often privileges large, heterogeneric corpora aimed at general language description, CADS typically engages in the ad hoc compilation of specialized corpora tailored to a specific discourse type or research question (Gillings et al., 2023; Partington et al., 2013). These may include media texts, policy documents, public feedback, or digital communications.

Another defining characteristic of CADS is its use of comparative analysis. As Partington et al. (2013) argue, only by comparing discourse types across contexts can researchers meaningfully assess the salience of particular patterns or metaphors. The identification of a metaphor like *business is a game*, for instance, only becomes analytically significant when it is shown to be prevalent in business discourse but absent or less frequent in other domains.

The methodological innovation and conceptual reach of CADS are also reflected in the expanding body of literature and scholarly infrastructure supporting it. Foundational texts include *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)* (Partington et al., 2013), *Corpora and Discourse Studies: Integrating Discourse and Corpora* (Baker & McEnery, 2015), *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review*

(Taylor & Marchi, 2018), *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis* (Baker, 2006, 2023), and *Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies* (Gillings et al., 2023). Additionally, the *Journal of Corpora and Discourse Studies*, founded in 2017, provides a dedicated venue for CADS scholarship. Key academic institutions involved in CADS research include Lancaster University (UK), the University of Birmingham (UK), the University of Bologna (Italy), and Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria) (Baker, 2023; Gillings et al., 2023; Partington et al., 2013).

In sum, CADS represents a distinctive, interdisciplinary approach that merges the systematic observation of corpus linguistics with the interpretive aims of discourse analysis. It enables researchers to extend qualitative analysis, empirically test and refine interpretative insights, and uncover the underlying ideological aspects of discourse across diverse social domains. In the context of this dissertation, CADS offers a robust methodological framework for investigating digital brand discourse, specifically within the hospitality and tourism industry.

The remainder of this section explores CADS in greater depth through seven dedicated subsections. Subsection 1.5.1 outlines the principles of corpus building, addressing key considerations such as corpus typology, representativeness, size, and ethical concerns, with particular attention to the challenges and strategies relevant to digital data. Subsection 1.5.2 introduces the concepts of tokens, types, and lemmas, which form the basis for computational analysis and are essential for identifying the lexical units under investigation. Subsection 1.5.3 presents frequency, dispersion, and distribution as tools for detecting recurring linguistic features and assessing their spread across and within texts. Subsection 1.5.4 turns to keyword analysis, a comparative technique for identifying lexically salient items that distinguish one discourse domain from another. Subsection 1.5.5 discusses collocation analysis, which examines lexical associations to

reveal underlying ideological or evaluative meanings. Subsection 1.5.6 explores concordance analysis, the key qualitative procedure through which CADS researchers interpret keywords and collocates in context. Finally, Subsection 1.5.7 reflects on the strengths and limitations of CADS.

Together, the following subsections provide a comprehensive overview of the key concepts and analytical procedures of corpus linguistics, demonstrating how it can support interpretive discourse analysis in digital contexts.

### **1.5.1 Corpus Building**

The foundation of CADS lies in the construction of a reliable and purpose-driven corpus. Building such a corpus is not a purely mechanical task but a critical methodological stage that demands thoughtful design, ethical awareness, and a strong alignment between the corpus and the research objective (Baker, 2023).

Corpora can be broadly categorized as either *general* or *specialized* (Gillings et al., 2023). General corpora aim to reflect language use across a wide range of contexts, while specialized corpora are constructed to represent specific genres, registers, or discourse domains. In CADS research, specialized corpora are typically employed to examine language use within a particular social, cultural, or institutional context. General corpora, by contrast, are often used as reference corpora—serving as benchmarks for comparison. They enable researchers to identify what is typical or expected in broader language use, which in turn allows for the detection of discursive salience in smaller, specialized corpora—particularly through keyword analysis (see Subsection 1.5.4).

A further distinction in corpus typology is between *synchronic* and *diachronic* corpora (Baker, 2023). Synchronic corpora capture

language at a specific point in time, whereas diachronic corpora span multiple time periods, enabling the study of language change and discourse evolution. The latter are particularly valuable for examining how ideologies, representations, and framings shift over time.

Researchers often construct *subcorpora* (i.e., smaller, internally consistent segments of a larger corpus) based on specific criteria. Subcorpora are useful for comparative purposes, allowing researchers to examine variation across different groups or categories within the same overall dataset. For example, a specialized corpus of online restaurant reviews may be divided into subcorpora based on review platform, sentiment polarity, or geographic origin. The analytical flexibility of subcorpora makes them a valuable resource in CADS, particularly when performing contrastive analyses using keyword or collocation tools.

Two core statistical considerations in corpus building are *representativeness* and *corpus size* (Brezina, 2018). Representativeness refers to the extent to which a corpus reflects the relevant characteristics of the broader language population it aims to model, thereby allowing for generalizable insights. Although random sampling is statistically ideal, it is rarely feasible in linguistic research due to the absence of a comprehensive record of language use. As a result, corpus designers typically adopt stratified sampling, guided by a predefined sampling frame—a structured plan that organizes text selection across relevant categories to ensure balanced and representative coverage (Brezina, 2018). Corpus size is likewise a key consideration. There is no fixed standard for how large a corpus should be; rather, corpus size and sampling strategy should both align with the research objectives and the nature of the data (Gillings et al., 2023).

The increasing availability of digital texts has further expanded the possibilities for corpus building. As Lutzky & Kehoe (2022) explain,

web-based corpora generally follow one of two approaches: *web as corpus* or *web for corpus*. The *web-as-corpus* approach treats the Internet as a vast, ready-made repository of texts. Researchers adopting this approach extract linguistic data directly from the web, using commercial search engines such as Google or specialized tools. However, as Sinclair (2005) points out, the web lacks defined boundaries, is constantly evolving, and was not designed for linguistic analysis, making it problematic to treat it as a corpus in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, this approach remains useful in pedagogical contexts. By contrast, the *web-for-corpus* approach involves systematically selecting and downloading texts from the web to build a custom corpus. This method, adopted in Chapters 2 and 3, offers greater control over corpus design and composition, allowing researchers to construct a linguistically meaningful and representative dataset with a known size and structure, which is essential for reliable quantitative analysis.

In the context of digital discourse research, ethical considerations also play a crucial role in corpus compilation. Researchers must address issues such as copyright, informed consent, and anonymization, especially when working with sensitive topics or potentially vulnerable populations (Baker, 2023; Lutzky, 2021).

Finally, as Partington (2003) emphasizes, researchers are encouraged to develop familiarity with their data during the corpus-building process, as close interaction fosters deeper understanding and facilitates hypothesis formation.

In the empirical studies of this dissertation, corpus building involved the ad hoc collection of digital texts from specific online contexts in the hospitality and tourism industry. These texts were compiled into specialized corpora in line with the typological, statistical, and ethical considerations discussed above.

### **1.5.2 Tokens, Types, Lemmas, and n-Words**

In CADS, words and phrases function as the basic linguistic units and variables under investigation. For a systematic study, researchers must first define what constitutes a “word” in computational analysis. Although this may appear straightforward, the concept is more complex than it seems. Different levels of abstraction are used to represent words in corpora, most notably *tokens*, *types*, and *lemmas*.

Baker (2023) clarifies the differences among these concepts. A token is a single occurrence of a word form in a text. Each time a string of letters or numbers appears, separated by white space or punctuation, it is counted as one token. A type, by contrast, is a unique word form. Unlike tokens, which count every occurrence, types count each distinct word form only once, regardless of how frequently it appears. A lemma is a group of inflectional forms that share the same base and belong to the same word class. This includes, for example, singular and plural noun forms (e.g., *restaurant/restaurants*), verb tenses (e.g., *travel/traveled/travels*), or comparative adjective forms (e.g., *clean/cleaner/cleanest*).

Each of these representations supports different types of analysis in CADS. Token counts are fundamental to frequency-based measures, types reveal aspects of lexical variety, and lemmas enable the grouping of morphologically related forms for broader semantic interpretation (Brezina, 2018).

Furthermore, the ratio between types and tokens provides insight into *lexical diversity*, which refers to the variety of unique word forms used in a given corpus. The *type/token ratio (TTR)* expresses the proportion of unique word types to the total number of tokens in a corpus: a higher TTR indicates greater lexical diversity.

However, TTR is highly sensitive to corpus size and tends to decrease as the number of tokens increases, making comparisons

across corpora of different sizes problematic (Brezina, 2018). To address this limitation, the *standardized type/token ratio (STTR)* (Malvern & Richards, 2002) offers a more robust alternative. STTR is calculated by dividing the corpus into fixed-length segments—typically 1,000 tokens—computing the TTR for each segment, and averaging the results. This method accounts for internal variation and minimizes the effect of corpus size, allowing for more meaningful cross-corpus comparisons. Metrics such as TTR and STTR contribute to a more nuanced understanding of lexical patterning and provide deeper interpretative insights.

Gillings et al. (2023) argue that although individual words can reveal important aspects of discourse in a corpus, analyzing sequences of multiple words—referred to as *n-grams*, with *n* indicating the number of words in the unit—can yield additional insight. They highlight that longer *n-grams* are often more distinctive of a particular corpus, as they tend to capture more context-specific or idiomatic phraseology.

In CADS, it is crucial to report clearly which unit of analysis is used, especially when comparing corpora or conducting statistical procedures. A solid understanding of these distinctions is essential for interpreting results accurately and ensuring methodological transparency. In this study, different units of analysis are employed to align with the nature of the data and the research aims of each chapter.

Chapter 2 uses lemmas as the primary unit of analysis, as lemmas group morphologically related word forms under a single base form. This choice is appropriate for analyzing formal, curated brand discourse on restaurant websites, where linguistic variation tends to be more controlled, and normalization helps identify underlying discursive patterns without noise from inflectional differences. In contrast,

Chapter 3 adopts types as the unit of analysis to preserve the surface-level variation found in user-generated social media comments. This level of granularity is necessary for exploring affective expressions, stylistic diversity, and platform-specific language practices, which are central to understanding how users participate in brand co-creation.

### **1.5.3 Frequency, Dispersion, and Distribution**

One of the most fundamental concepts in CADS is *frequency*—the number of times a linguistic item occurs in a corpus. Although simple in concept, frequency analysis offers a powerful starting point for identifying patterns, raising questions, and guiding deeper interpretive inquiry. It can draw attention to salient patterns, highlight recurring themes, and foreground both expected and unexpected language choices within large corpora.

From a discourse perspective, frequency is significant because language use is not random. Language operates through conventions and regularities, and repeated choices often reflect broader social practices, communicative goals, or ideological positions (Baker, 2023). As Stubbs (1996) observes, linguistic choices are never ideologically neutral—repetition may reinforce dominant narratives, while deviant or marked forms can reveal resistance or alternative framings. Similarly, grammatical choices, such as using a noun form versus an adjective, can subtly frame the subject in different ways. These patterns of preference, revealed through frequency, help expose the ideological undercurrents of discourse.

In this sense, frequency not only quantifies language use but also serves as an indicator of textual preference and communicative intent. It draws attention to the tension between rule-governed linguistic systems and the creative agency of language users, particularly in cases

where non-default choices are made. Such deviations can offer valuable insights into speaker positioning, rhetorical strategies, and the sociocultural norms embedded in discourse (Gillings et al., 2023).

Closely tied to frequency are the concepts of *dispersion* and *distribution*. While frequency measures how often a linguistic item appears, dispersion refers to how evenly or unevenly that item is spread across a corpus. As Baker (2023) explains, corpora consist of multiple texts, and a word may appear frequently overall while being heavily concentrated in only a few texts. Distribution, by contrast, refers to the presence or absence of a linguistic item across texts in a corpus. While dispersion focuses on how evenly a word occurs across a corpus, distribution indicates where it occurs.

Furthermore, dispersion is also concerned with positional patterns within texts. Since texts often follow narrative or rhetorical structures—with identifiable beginnings, middles, and ends—it may be relevant to determine whether a term tends to occur in one part of the text more than others. For instance, a word that consistently appears at the beginning of texts may function as a framing device, while one concentrated in a specific section might reflect localized rhetorical emphasis. Dispersion analysis thus enables researchers to approach context in a preliminary yet systematic way, highlighting internal textual structures that frequency alone might overlook.

Together, frequency, dispersion, and distribution offer a nuanced understanding of corpus data, helping to contextualize patterns of repetition, thematic prominence, and stylistic or ideological positioning both within and across texts. In corpus analysis tools such as #LancsBox, frequency can be calculated as raw or relative; dispersion is measured using statistical metrics (e.g., coefficient of variation) to determine how evenly a word is spread across documents; distribution, by contrast, refers more generally to where a word appears—whether

in specific texts or genres—offering insights into contextual and genre-specific usage. For more detailed discussions on the analysis of frequency, dispersion, and distribution, see Baker (2023), Brezina (2018), and Gillings et al. (2023).

#### **1.5.4 Keyword Analysis**

Keyword analysis is a core technique in CADs that supports the identification of salient patterns and meanings in discourse. In this context, a *keyword* is defined as “a word which occurs statistically significantly in one corpus when compared against a second corpus” (Gillings et al., 2023, p. 33). Crucially, keywords are not merely frequent words, but words that occur significantly more (or less) frequently in a corpus of interest than in a reference corpus.

Words that occur significantly more often in the corpus of interest than in the reference corpus are known as *positive keywords*. Those that occur significantly less often are classified as *negative keywords*, while words with similar frequencies in both corpora are referred to as *lockwords* (Baker, 2023). This classification depends on a statistical threshold—i.e., a minimum score that a word must reach to be considered a keyword—set by the researcher to determine what level of frequency difference is deemed meaningful.

Keywords help condense the extensive linguistic content of a corpus into a focused list of significant terms that point to areas of discursive interest and highlight lexical items warranting further analysis (Gillings et al., 2023). As Baker (2023) notes, keyword analysis enables discourse analysts to detect dominant concepts, ideologies, and genre-specific lexical features.

A key methodological decision is the selection of an appropriate reference corpus that aligns with the research objectives. Ideally, the reference corpus should be larger than—or at least comparable in size to—the corpus of interest, in order to ensure a stable basis for

comparison. A well-matched reference corpus enables meaningful contrasts that bring discourse-specific lexical preferences into sharper relief (Brezina, 2018).

Corpus analysis software, such as #LancsBox, performs keyword comparisons using statistical metrics that determine a word's *keyness* value (i.e., how strongly a word stands out in a specific corpus). Common metrics include *log-likelihood* (Brezina, 2018), the *Simple Maths Parameter (SMP)* (Kilgarriff, 2009), *%DIFF* (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2012), *log ratio* (Hardie, 2014), and *Cohen's d* (Egbert & Biber, 2023). Log-likelihood and the SMP are *significance test statistics*, whereas %DIFF, log ratio, and Cohen's *d* are *effect size statistics*. The former group assesses whether a statistically significant difference exists between relative frequencies, whereas the latter measures the magnitude of that difference (Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2018).

Brezina (2018) and Gillings et al. (2023) argue that, although log-likelihood is widely used in keyword analysis, there is no consensus on a single preferred metric, as the choice typically depends on the research objectives. Gabrielatos & Marchi (2012) advocate for the use of *effect size* statistics, arguing that they provide a more reliable measure of keyword relevance by assessing the *practical significance* of a difference through standardized values (i.e., how meaningful or useful a result is in the real world, beyond just being statistically significant). Significance test statistics tend to highlight relatively high-frequency words, even when the actual difference between corpora is small. In contrast, effect size statistics emphasize the magnitude of difference, which can make them more sensitive to lower-frequency but highly distinctive words (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2012; Gillings et al., 2023).

Additionally, research by Pojanapunya & Watson Todd (2018) demonstrates that significance test statistics often highlight commonly occurring words associated with genre-related functions,

while effect size statistics identify more specialized words associated with discourse-oriented functions. Genre-oriented analyses typically focus on the recurring linguistic features of a text type, often favoring frequent words. Discourse-oriented analyses, by contrast, aim to uncover words that reflect the specific concerns or perspectives embedded in a set of texts, even if those words are less frequent.

In line with these perspectives, the keyword analysis in Chapter 2 employed Cohen's *d*. This effect size metric is calculated as follows (Egbert & Biber, 2023):

$$d = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{SD_{pooled}}$$

where:

- $M_1$  = mean for corpus 1
- $M_2$  = mean for corpus 2
- $SD_{pooled}$  = average of standard deviations for corpus 1 and corpus 2

Table 1.1 displays the standard interpretation of this metric, as recommended by Cohen (1988).

**Table 1.1**

*Standard Interpretation of Cohen's d*

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Cohen's d</b>
Small	0.2
Medium	0.5
Large	0.8

*Note.* From Cohen (1988).

In practical terms, a small effect suggests a subtle but potentially meaningful difference between corpora, a medium effect indicates a moderate and noticeable difference, while a large effect reflects a substantial and potentially impactful difference in how a word is used across corpora.

In CADS, keyword analysis functions as a diagnostic tool for identifying lexically marked items that call for further qualitative exploration. Keywords serve as entry points for more detailed investigations through collocation and concordance analyses, which are discussed in the following subsections.

### **1.5.5 Collocation Analysis**

Collocation analysis is another key technique in CADS, used to uncover patterns of lexical association that may reflect underlying discourse structures or ideologies (Baker, 2023). *Collocations* are defined as “combinations of words that habitually co-occur in texts and corpora” (Brezina, 2018, p. 67).

In collocation analysis, the *node* is the focal word under investigation, while the words appearing in close proximity to the node are called *collocates*. These are identified within a predefined span, known as the *collocation window*, which specifies how many words to the left and right of the node are considered relevant (Brezina, 2018).

These pairings can be identified either through absolute frequency or, more commonly, through the use of *association measures*—i.e., statistical measures that quantify the strength of co-occurrence between lexical items (Gillings et al., 2023). The choice of association measure, including the threshold score—i.e., the minimum statistical value a word pair must reach to be considered a valid collocation—along with the size of the collocation window, is

determined by the researcher based on the specific research objectives (Gillings et al., 2023).

As Brezina (2018) notes, *Mutual Information* (MI), originally introduced by Church & Hanks (1990), is one of the most widely used statistical measures for identifying collocational strength. It calculates the degree of association between two lexical items by comparing the probability of their joint occurrence with the probability of their independent occurrence—i.e., how likely it is to find the node and its collocate together versus by chance alone (Church & Hanks, 1990).

Because of this formulation, MI often highlights rare but exclusive lexical pairings, especially content words that are distinctive within a given corpus (Hunston, 2002). This tendency has made it a widely adopted measure in CADs, as it foregrounds semantically rich or specialized terms that may carry ideological or contextual significance (Evert, 2008).

However, MI's sensitivity to low-frequency items can sometimes skew results by overemphasizing infrequent co-occurrences. To mitigate this issue, modified versions of the measure have been developed.  $MI^2$  (the squared version) and  $MI^3$  (the cubed version) reduce this bias by incorporating observed frequency more strongly into the calculation. These adjusted measures generate collocate lists that include both rare and more commonly occurring words, thereby balancing exclusivity with frequency (Brezina et al., 2015).

In particular,  $MI^3$  provides a compromise between sensitivity to rare events and recognition of more frequent associations (Daille, 1995).  $MI^3$ , as implemented in corpus tools such as #LancsBox, adjusts the standard MI formula by cubing the observed frequency of co-occurrence. This modification reduces the measure's bias toward low-frequency pairings by giving weight to collocates that occur relatively often (Brezina et al., 2015). The formula is expressed as (Brezina, 2018):

$$MI^3 = \log_2 \left( \frac{O_{11}^3}{E_{11}} \right)$$

where:

- $O_{11}$  = observed frequency of co-occurrence between the node and the collocate
- $E_{11}$  = expected frequency of co-occurrence under the assumption of independence
- $\log_2$  = base-2 logarithm

The result is a measure that favors collocations that are both exclusive and relatively frequent. Based on these advantages,  $MI^3$  was selected for the identification of collocates in the collocation analysis presented in Chapter 3.

Collocation analysis is especially valuable in CADs for identifying recurrent lexical patterns that may signal discursive framing, ideological positioning, or evaluative stance (Baker, 2023). It often serves as a bridge between quantitative keyword analysis and more fine-grained qualitative techniques such as concordance analysis (discussed in the following subsection), which further contextualize lexical co-occurrences within their textual environments.

### **1.5.6 Concordance Analysis**

Concordance analysis is a crucial qualitative technique in CADs, enabling researchers to examine how a specific lexical item is used across a corpus by analyzing its immediate textual surroundings (i.e., the *co-text*). A *concordance* is typically presented as a table listing each occurrence of the node word within a consistent span of words to its left and right. Each occurrence is known as a *concordance line* (Baker,

2023). Figure 1.1 shows an example of a concordance with *authentic* as the node word.

**Figure 1.1**

*Example of Concordance on #LancsBox*

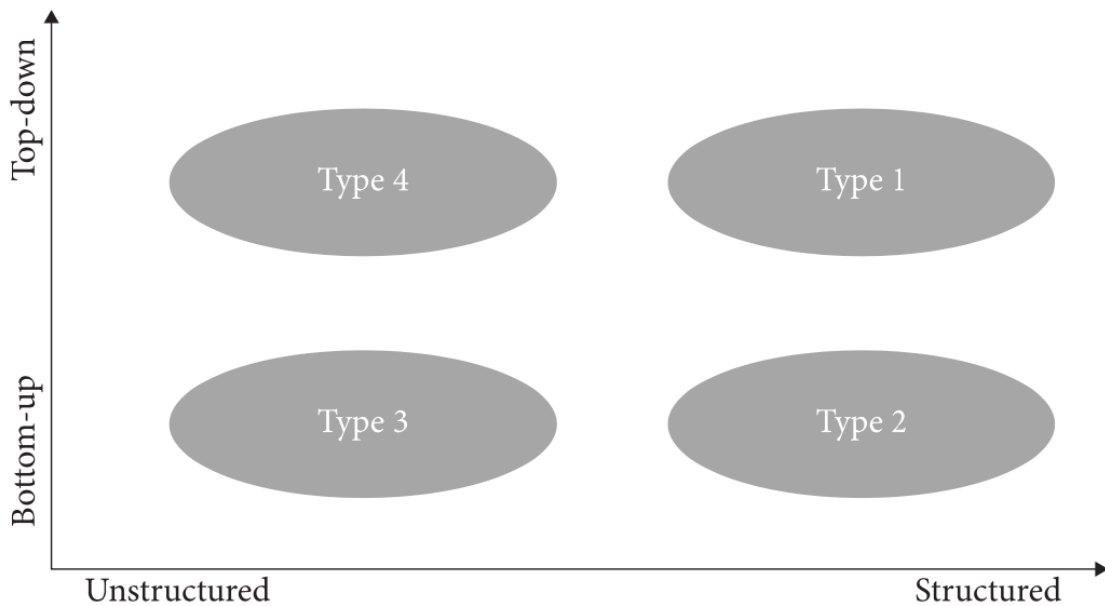
Index	File	Occurrences	Texts	Corpus	Node	Context	Display Text
1	C_Press_reviv	20 (0.20)	9/15	Brown	authentic	7	Left Right
2	C_Press_reviv						Many Hollywood films manage somehow to be authentic, but not realistic. Strange, but true— authenticity
3	C_Press_reviv						bearing the imprimatur of Hollywood is physically authentic— in fact, impeccably so. In any given
4	C_Press_reviv						and Boaz and sets that are meticulously authentic. But except for a vague adherence to
5	C_Press_reviv						was not a program intended to illustrate authentic folk styles. On the contrary, Miss Mao
6	E_Skills_tot						Salinger can create a fictional world so authentic that it hurts. Here, in the most
7	F_Pop_lore.to						verify his own experiments. Because of the authentic homogeneity of his early Nationalistic materials, and
8	F_Pop_lore.to						hodgepodge of period pieces, few of them authentic or aesthetic. Mrs. Kennedy shows a determination
9	G_Belle_lett.j						Committee for the White House, to locate authentic pieces as well as to arrange ways
10	G_Belle_lett.j						war with Britain. If Franklin was an authentic genius, then Alexander Hamilton, with his exceptional
11	J_Academic.1						to illustrate another point where Faulkner touches authentic Southern materials and also earlier literary treatment
12	J_Academic.1						each provide on two occasions a seemingly authentic account of the narration of verse in
13	K_Fiction_ger						and uncertain facts are designated by?). An authentic diffraction pattern is always obtained and optical
14	K_Fiction_ger						marble. I wish to make Jesus an authentic Jew. I can not accomplish this if
15	L_Fiction_myp						recognition after a time, a quality of authentic uniqueness about them, which, once established by
16	P_Romance.t						had that rich man's look which was authentic enough and came from two good prep
17	P_Romance.t						blonde's place. He was a little more authentic than usual because he smelled slightly of
18	P_Romance.t						in the second place, it doesn't look authentic; and in the third place, it would
							I said," Mr. McKenzie, it is as authentic as careful research can make it". He

Concordance analysis allows researchers to explore meaning in use, identify discursive patterns, and investigate lexical choices in context. It plays a crucial role in moving from surface-level quantitative observations (e.g., keywords and collocations) to deeper qualitative interpretation. Because CADS combines quantitative and interpretive methods, concordance analysis is not governed by a fixed protocol. Instead, it must be adapted to the nature of the dataset and the research questions guiding the study (Gillings et al., 2023).

Gillings & Mautner (2023) propose four prototypical approaches to concordance analysis, positioned along two continua: *top-down* versus *bottom-up* and *structured* versus *unstructured* (Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2**

*Four Prototypical Approaches to Concordance Analysis in CADs*



*Note.* From Gillings & Mautner (2023).

These four types of approaches serve as methodological reference points and reflect varying degrees of categorization, structure, and interpretive openness:

- Type 1 is a structured top-down approach in which the researcher applies a predefined framework or set of categories to a sample of concordance lines.
- Type 2 is a structured bottom-up approach where categories emerge organically from the data, rather than being imposed in advance.
- Type 3 is an unstructured bottom-up approach that relies on intuitive, holistic interpretation of concordance lines without formal categorization.

- Type 4 is an unstructured top-down approach in which the researcher begins with externally defined categories and searches for concordance lines that align with them.

As observed by Gillings & Mautner (2023), types 1 and 2 are more systematic and typically lend themselves to quantitative treatment. Since every concordance line in a sample is reviewed and categorized, researchers can report category frequencies and even assess intercoder reliability. By contrast, types 3 and 4 are more qualitative and exploratory. They do not support the calculation of frequencies, but instead facilitate interpretive depth—either through emergent reading (type 3) or targeted verification based on prior knowledge (type 4).

Importantly, these types are not rigid categories. As Gillings et al. (2023) note, concordance analysis in CADs often involves hybrid approaches. A researcher might begin with a top-down framework and refine it inductively as the analysis progresses, thus allowing the process to evolve in response to the data.

In Chapter 2, a structured top-down approach (type 1) was employed to investigate digital brand discourse in restaurant brand identity and positioning. Keywords were first identified through a keyword analysis, and concordance analysis was then used to qualitatively explore these keywords within their co-textual environments. This analysis was guided by pre-established research aims—namely, to uncover how Italianness functions both as a cultural-ideological construct in brand identity and as a strategic device in brand positioning. Each concordance line was systematically reviewed, and recurring patterns were categorized in relation to these two interpretive dimensions, reflecting a deductive approach aligned with type 1 analysis.

In Chapter 3, a structured bottom-up approach (type 2) was used to analyze digital brand discourse concerning how online users perceived destination rebranding and participated in the co-creation of the destination brand. Here, concordance analysis followed a frequency analysis of *n*-grams extracted from platform-specific corpora. Rather than applying a predefined coding scheme, the analysis involved exploring co-text and inductively categorizing frequent *n*-grams into emergent semantic and evaluative categories based on the corpora under investigation. This bottom-up approach allowed for the discovery of recurring attitudes and themes that were not predetermined but grounded in the data.

Taken together, the following chapters exemplify how CADS can productively employ different types of concordance analysis depending on the structure of the corpus and the analytical goals. By applying both top-down and bottom-up structured approaches, this dissertation demonstrates the adaptability of concordance analysis as a tool for investigating discourse in digital contexts.

### **1.5.7 Strengths and Limitations**

CADS offers a powerful interdisciplinary approach that integrates the empirical precision of corpus linguistics with the interpretive depth of discourse analysis. Its epistemological foundation is constructivist and interpretivist, making it particularly well-suited to research that investigates how language both reflects and constructs social reality (Gillings et al., 2024).

One of the central strengths of CADS lies in its capacity to reduce researcher bias. By grounding interpretation in systematic patterns of language use, CADS helps mitigate common cognitive distortions (Baker, 2023). This empirical anchoring strengthens the transparency and reproducibility of discourse analysis.

CADS also enables methodological triangulation. Researchers can toggle between quantitative techniques (e.g., keyword analysis) and qualitative interpretation (e.g., concordance analysis), combining macro-level pattern detection with micro-level semantic investigation. This bidirectional movement supports both top-down hypothesis testing and bottom-up discovery, making CADS particularly versatile (Gillings et al., 2023).

Another advantage is its ability to capture the incremental effects of discourse (Baker, 2023). Repetitive language use—such as common metaphorical framings or evaluative terms—plays a central role in the construction and normalization of ideologies. By identifying repeated lexical or grammatical patterns across large datasets, CADS enables researchers to trace how such ideologies become dominant in public communication. In this way, analysis does not merely describe linguistic regularities but also helps uncover the ideological work of language in shaping social perceptions and reinforcing dominant narratives.

Furthermore, CADS presents a compelling alternative to text-mining approaches, which have become dominant in business research. As Gillings et al. (2024) argue, CADS retains the syntactic, semantic, and narrative structures of texts—features often disregarded in text-mining approaches, which tend to treat words as isolated data points, detached from their discursive and situational context. This decontextualization limits the depth of insight such analyses can provide, particularly when exploring how meaning is constructed and communicated in brand discourse. In contrast, CADS enables researchers to remain in close contact with complete texts throughout the analysis, facilitating the interpretation of linguistic patterns within their pragmatic and ideological contexts.

By privileging interpretative depth over statistical abstraction, CADS aligns more closely with constructivist epistemologies and is better suited to uncovering how strategic communication constructs meaning. These features make CADS not only a robust methodological choice for this study but also a promising foundation for future conceptual work aimed at business audiences.

Despite its strengths, CADS also presents important limitations. First, it is primarily limited to the verbal mode. While some advancements have been made in corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (Bednarek, 2015; Caple, 2018; Sibai & Jaworska, 2024), standard corpus tools do not yet support the integration of images, audio, or layout features. This restricts the analysis of multimodality, which is especially important in digital brand discourse.

Second, although CADS brings to light linguistic patterns, the interpretive work still lies with the researcher. Corpus tools do not explain why patterns occur or what they mean. The researcher must analyze findings through a theoretical lens and make reasoned judgments about their significance. These interpretations may vary depending on the researcher's disciplinary background, positionality, or methodological decisions (Baker, 2023; Gillings et al., 2024).

Third, CADS emphasizes frequency and regularity, which may result in the underrepresentation of less frequent but ideologically important discursive features. Additionally, corpora do not always reflect communicative influence proportionally: a single, powerful speech or viral post might have wide social impact while remaining statistically insignificant in a large corpus (Baker, 2023; Partington et al., 2013).

Finally, CADS can be misused when researchers over-rely on automated outputs like frequency lists or collocation tables without critically interpreting their discourse functions. As Gillings et al. (2024)

warn, CADS is most effective when linguistic patterns are explored in relation to their semantic, ideological, and contextual functions—not treated as results in themselves. Corpus analysis must always be followed by careful interpretation.

## **1.6 CADS in Hospitality and Tourism Research**

Although CADS offers a valuable approach to the study of digital discourse, relatively few studies have applied corpus-assisted methods to analyze digital communication in hospitality and tourism. Even fewer have used such methods to examine digital brand discourse, despite the importance of branding in the industry. This section reviews a selection of studies that employ corpus techniques to investigate digital discourse in hospitality and tourism. While these works demonstrate the value of integrating corpus analysis with discourse-oriented inquiry, they also reveal a persisting gap in the application of CADS to digital brand discourse. This dissertation addresses this gap by applying CADS to the analysis of digital discourse in branding dynamics—specifically, brand identity construction and brand positioning in the context of Italian restaurants abroad, as well as the impact of destination rebranding on social media and the role of online users in the co-creation of destination brand meaning.

A few studies have explored how food-related ideologies and cultural values are discursively constructed in digital environments. Corrizzato (2018) analyzes promotional texts on the websites of Italian wineries to examine how they align with the *Made in Italy* (Mil) brand. Her findings emphasize themes such as authenticity, craftsmanship, and quality, showing how digital platforms are used to reinforce national brand narratives. A complementary perspective emerges in the study by Cesiri (2024), which investigates self-positioning strategies in a corpus of English-language food blogs. Her study explores how

food bloggers construct their identity and establish a rapport with their audience. The findings show that bloggers often position themselves as distinct from both their readers and external cultural or institutional references, revealing how digital discourse shapes relational dynamics and perceptions of otherness in food-related communication.

Within the hospitality industry, specifically in the context of mega-events, Jaworska (2016b) demonstrates how CADS can be used to investigate identity construction around global events. Drawing on a corpus of British newspaper coverage of the 2012 London Olympics, the study explores how the event functions as a high-stakes discursive arena in which national, racial, and gender identities are represented, contested, and ideologically charged.

Other studies have examined how tourism destinations and local identities are represented in tourism promotion. Jaworska (2016a) analyzes representations of local hosts in promotional tourism materials, focusing on 16 destinations that had been colonized at some point in their history. She compares texts produced by both Western and local tourism industries, addressing the geographical and empirical limitations of previous studies. Her findings verify and refine existing claims about stereotypical and colonial representations, showing that while hegemonic discourses persist, destination-authored materials often offer more nuanced portrayals that challenge simplified binaries and contribute to a more complex understanding of host representation. In a related study, Jaworska (2017) investigates the persuasive use of metaphor in promotional texts for both proximate and distant destinations. Her findings indicate that exotic locations are more likely to be described using sensory-rich metaphors, thus constructing them as objects of consumption and reinforcing ideologically loaded imaginaries.

Research has also addressed how sustainability is discursively framed in tourism communication. Lazzeretti (2020) adopts a contrastive perspective to analyze English and Italian representations of sustainable tourism, showing how culturally specific communication strategies frame responsible tourism either through inclusive and factual language or through evaluative and polarized discourses.

Alongside research on top-down promotional discourse, scholars have also investigated user-generated content (UGC) and digital interactions between consumers and service providers. Nichele (2019) examines how perceptions of authenticity are discursively constructed in online reviews of lower-scale Italian restaurants in Lancaster, UK. She analyzes over 2,400 TripAdvisor reviews to compare evaluations of Italian and non-Italian restaurants, identifying statistically significant associations between specific dining components and (perceived) authenticity. Her findings show that authenticity is not uniformly relevant across all aspects of the dining experience but is instead invoked selectively depending on topic, reviewer expectations, and cuisine type.

Further insights into consumer–corporate interaction are provided by Lutzky (2021, 2024) and Lutzky & Ruytenbeek (2024), who examine customer service discourse on X (formerly Twitter) in the transport sector. Lutzky (2021) analyzes digital communication between British and Irish transport operators and their customers, shedding light on how companies manage crises, provide assistance, and shape expectations. Similarly, Lutzky (2024) focuses on Ryanair’s tone and messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing a provocative communicative style that blends crisis response with promotional engagement. In a multilingual context, Lutzky & Ruytenbeek (2024) analyze railway interactions in France, Belgium, and

Switzerland, identifying recurrent linguistic and communicative patterns across different national settings.

Some studies have adopted innovative methodological integrations of corpus-assisted discourse analysis with complementary approaches. Bandini & Corduas (2019) combine corpus techniques with surveys to explore how Italian food is perceived in Germany. Their findings show how culinary practices are discursively framed as markers of cultural identity and how food discourse contributes to the construction and negotiation of ethnic belonging in a transnational context. This study illustrates how perceptions of food are closely tied to broader processes of cultural representation and identity formation.

Gatti et al. (2023) analyze English-language social media communication by South Tyrolean tourism destinations during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, combining ethnographic interviews with corpus-assisted discourse analysis. Their findings show how future-oriented and corrective linguistic strategies were employed to envision a post-crisis recovery, conveying hope and resilience amid uncertainty.

A more explicitly brand-oriented contribution is offered by Lo Mascolo et al. (2024), who integrate CADS with web analytics to investigate Sicily's projected destination image and brand engagement on the official website of *Le Soste di Ulisse*, an association of Sicilian luxury hospitality businesses. The study identifies three interconnected micro-discourses—corporate, food, and authenticity—that collectively shape both the association's brand and the island's projected destination image. In addition to revealing how cultural excellence is strategically framed, their analysis shows that brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand awareness and brand equity, emphasizing the role of interactive and immersive digital content in reinforcing brand performance.

Together, these studies demonstrate the analytical potential of corpus-assisted approaches to investigate digital discourse in the hospitality and tourism industry. From metaphorical constructions and customer interactions to promotional narratives and user reviews, they reveal the ideological and communicative dynamics that underpin digital communication across this domain. However, a key limitation remains: few studies have systematically examined digital brand discourse.

This dissertation addresses this gap by applying CADS to the analysis of digital brand discourse in two key settings: the digital branding of Italian restaurants in Miami-Dade County (Chapter 2) and the digital destination branding of Miami Beach in the context of spring break tourism (Chapter 3).

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the conceptual and methodological foundations that underpin the investigation of digital brand discourse, situating the study within an interdisciplinary space that bridges discourse studies, strategic communication, and marketing.

It first outlined key theoretical perspectives on discourse, ranging from structural and functional views to critical and multimodal approaches, emphasizing the social, ideological, and context-dependent nature of language, as well as its convergence with other semiotic resources.

The chapter then reviewed the key literature in digital discourse research, exploring how digital technologies have transformed communicative practices and contributed to the emergence of new discursive genres, ethical considerations, and methodological challenges. In doing so, it positioned digital brand discourse as a form

of strategic communication shaped by the interplay between institutional actors and online users across digital platforms.

The chapter also examined CADS, the core methodological framework underpinning this dissertation. It outlined the principal components of the approach, including corpus design, units of analysis, and key analytical procedures. The discussion highlighted the key strengths of CADS—its empirical grounding, analytical scalability, capacity for methodological triangulation, and effectiveness in revealing ideologically patterned language use—while also acknowledging its limitations.

Finally, the chapter reviewed existing studies that have applied corpus-assisted methods to investigate digital discourse in hospitality and tourism. It highlighted both the methodological flexibility of CADS in this domain and the persisting gap in the application of CADS to digital brand discourse. This gap provides the rationale for the empirical analyses in the following chapters.

Overall, this chapter underscores the value of CADS for capturing the complex dynamics of digital brand discourse. By synthesizing theoretical insights and methodological tools, this chapter lays a solid foundation for the empirical studies presented in Chapters 2 and 3, where CADS serves as the analytical lens through which digital brand discourse is traced, interpreted, and situated within broader sociocultural and communicative contexts.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **Investigating Restaurant Brand Identity and Positioning on Official Websites: The Case of Italian Restaurants in Miami-Dade**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Branding plays a central role in shaping how businesses in the hospitality industry create value, convey meaning, and engage with culturally diverse audiences. As Dabeva (2012) argues, branding in the restaurant context is a multi-channel process that relies on the synchronization of the culinary product, the physical environment, and staff performance—elements that coalesce to create an intangible yet powerful fourth component: the atmosphere. This atmosphere is not a discrete feature but a cumulative, immaterial outcome that emerges when all tangible and intangible components are harmonized. In this regard, the brand is not communicated through isolated elements but constructed through the coherence and unity of the entire dining experience. This distinguishes restaurant branding from more transactional industries.

Restaurant brands are not only lived and performed but also strategically communicated across multiple sensory, material, and interactional dimensions. The effectiveness of restaurant branding thus depends on the coherence of communicative practices that integrate product, environment, and service into a unified experiential narrative. Given the multisensory and performative nature of restaurant branding, communication becomes a central mechanism for aligning these elements into a coherent brand experience.

It is through communicative practices that restaurants not only present their offerings but also construct meanings around their brands (Magnini & Kim, 2016). In this context, language operates as both

a representational and relational tool, shaping how the brand is perceived, experienced, and remembered.

Food, in particular, is deeply entangled with language in restaurant branding, as it conveys cultural values, signals identity, and fosters emotional connections. As Bandini & Corduas (2019) note, food and language function as interlinked markers of cultural identity and social positioning, with culinary practices operating analogously to linguistic codes. This highlights the increasing importance of digital discourse in restaurant branding, especially on official websites, which serve as curated platforms for self-presentation, storytelling, and strategic differentiation (Yu et al., 2023).

From a branding perspective, digital platforms are not merely functional. They are strategic and symbolic, providing a discursive interface through which brands communicate their ethos and competitive value. Website content, particularly the “About Us” section, plays a vital role in brand positioning (Breeze, 2013), offering restaurants an opportunity to articulate brand identity and position the brand in relation to heritage, authenticity, and emotional connection (Spezzano et al., 2024).

In digitally mediated food and beverage (F&B) brand narratives, food becomes a semiotic resource for identity formation. Consequently, brand discourse intersects with food discourse, which Karrebæk et al. (2018) define as the dynamic and consequential interplay between language (and other meaning-making resources) and food across processes of production, consumption, and circulation. In this view, food discourse extends beyond mere references to food, encompassing communicative practices involving, mediated by, and centered on food that generate social meanings, moral evaluations, cultural identities, and economic value. In this regard, Burton (2016) argues that digital

food discourse reflects socio-economic and ethnic dimensions of identity and ethos-building in online environments.

Building on this discussion, the present chapter turns to the case of Italian restaurants in Miami-Dade County, Florida (hereafter Miami) to examine how digital brand discourse intersects with language, culture, and food. In doing so, it explores how Italianness is discursively performed and strategically leveraged in digital restaurant branding within a competitive, multicultural hospitality industry.

To guide this inquiry, the chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.2 outlines the study context, presenting Miami's multicultural F&B landscape and explaining the significance of Italian cuisine within it. Section 2.3 explores how language shapes brand identity and positioning in digital restaurant branding, with particular attention to how digital communication practices intersect with food discourse. Section 2.4 examines the role of culture in digital brand discourse, focusing on Italianness as a culturally and commercially significant resource in the F&B sector. Section 2.5 details the methodology employed in this study, outlining the data collection and data analysis procedures used to investigate Italianness in the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami. Section 2.6 presents and discusses the empirical findings from the analysis, focusing on Italianness both as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity and as a strategy for brand positioning. Finally, Section 2.7 offers a conclusion, summarizing the key findings and reflecting on their implications for digital brand discourse in hospitality.

## **2.2 Study Context**

The empirical study presented in this chapter situates itself at the intersection of branding, discourse, and food culture. While exploring digital brand discourse in the hospitality industry—and more

specifically in the F&B sector—the chapter contributes to ongoing debates on food discourse (Balirano & Guzzo, 2019; Naccarato et al., 2017; Sassatelli, 2019).

The focus is on Italian restaurants abroad, specifically those located in Miami. Florida’s culinary prestige has grown in recent years, driven by destination marketing initiatives and international partnerships (Michelin North America, 2021; Visit Florida, 2023) that have positioned the state as a key hub for gastronomic tourism and multicultural culinary innovation. Miami, in particular, features a vibrant and diverse F&B scene, distinguished by internationally renowned events (e.g., the *Food Network South Beach Wine and Food Festival*<sup>1</sup>) and a wide range of culinary offerings, also recognized by esteemed F&B publications (Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2024; Palmer, n.d.).

Within this multicultural gastronomic landscape, Italian cuisine holds a prominent position—both as a celebrated culinary tradition and as a marker of cultural identity. Renowned for its sensory richness, regional diversity, and historical depth, Italian cuisine functions both as a cultural cornerstone and as a powerful symbol of the nation’s global brand (Veronesi & Schiavello, 2023).

This dual focus on Miami and Italian restaurants responds to both Miami’s significance as a multicultural F&B destination and the global symbolic weight of Italian cuisine as a culturally charged identity in the international hospitality industry. Despite this cultural and commercial

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<sup>1</sup> The *Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival* (SOBEWFF) is a four-day event that brings together leading figures in the culinary world, including acclaimed chefs, wine and spirits producers, and other high-profile gastronomic personalities. It is presented by Capital One and produced by the Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management at Florida International University and Souther Glazer’s Wine & Spirits.

relevance, the relationship between branding and discourse in the F&B sector remains relatively underexplored—particularly in digital environments.

Accordingly, this chapter seeks to address this gap by analyzing the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami through the methodological lens of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). Specifically, by examining a sample of official restaurant websites, the chapter investigates *Italianness*—understood as a set of cultural meanings, values, and symbolic associations commonly linked to Italian identity, heritage, and lifestyle—both as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity and as a strategy in brand positioning.

### **2.3 Identity and Positioning in Digital Restaurant Branding**

Brand identity is not simply communicated through logos, visuals, or product offerings—it is discursively constructed through language and other meaning-making systems. As digital environments become central to consumer engagement, digital brand discourse plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of cultural identity, authenticity, and quality in the hospitality industry. From a marketing perspective, it also supports brand positioning by articulating identification and differentiation (Ries & Trout, 2000). Through lexical choices, narrative structures, and rhetorical strategies, businesses craft recognizable and emotionally resonant brands that align with consumer desires and expectations.

In the F&B sector, digital brand discourse intersects with food discourse, shaping key themes such as tradition, authenticity, quality, and personalization. Burton (2016) demonstrates that the rhetorical power of food discourse in digital environments enables complex expressions of selfhood, ethos, and lifestyle, showing that culinary storytelling online is embedded with sociocultural meanings. Frye &

Bruner (2012) argue that food discourse is imbued with political and cultural dimensions, functioning as a symbolic system where ideologies are embedded and contested. These narratives often reference regional origins, artisanal preparation methods, family traditions, and emotional memories. In doing so, restaurants invite consumers to experience not just a meal, but a sense of belonging and cultural immersion.

Official websites are especially well suited to this function. Despite the rise of social media, they continue to serve as authoritative and relatively stable channels for brand communication (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010; Wu, 2018; Yu et al., 2023). In particular, “About Us” webpages are critical website sections where businesses articulate who they are, what they offer, and why they are distinctive. These texts function as curated spaces for self-representation, enabling the creation of a coherent brand voice that communicates values, heritage, and consumer experience (Breeze, 2013). In the hospitality industry, such webpages allow brands to present a unified identity that integrates product offerings, service philosophy, and cultural positioning. This is especially important for restaurants representing national or ethnic cuisines, where identity is central to both differentiation and consumer appeal.

Moreover, the discursive construction of brand identity in hospitality increasingly incorporates symbolic and affective dimensions. Building on this, Jaworska (2020) argues that, in corporate settings, discourse often combines strategic marketing goals with appeals to trust, personality, and emotional resonance. In restaurant branding, this includes relational and experiential language—highlighting personal journeys, evoking memories, or conveying passion for food. These strategies are particularly effective in creating humanized brands that appear authentic, relatable, and culturally

rooted. The importance of perceived authenticity is further underscored by Gilmore & Pine (2007), who suggest that in saturated markets, consumers are drawn to what feels “real” rather than contrived, making authenticity a key determinant of brand success.

#### **2.4 The Role of Culture in Digital Brand Discourse: A Focus on Italianness in the F&B Sector**

While the previous section explored how digital discourse shapes brand identity and positioning—specifically in the F&B sector—it is essential to examine how these branding practices intersect with culturally embedded narratives. Among the many national and ethnic identities mobilized in F&B branding, Italianness stands out as a uniquely rich and commercially strategic construct. In global hospitality, it functions dually: conveying deep cultural meaning on the one hand, and serving as a powerful branding asset on the other.

The symbolic and economic value of the *Made in Italy* (Mil) brand has contributed to the global appeal of Italian cuisine, framing it not merely as a national product but as a lifestyle and experience marked by tradition, quality, and authenticity (Cappelli et al., 2017; Corrizzato, 2018; Temperini et al., 2016).

Globalization and Italian migratory movements have facilitated the worldwide diffusion of Italian cuisine, as evidenced by the ubiquity of Italian restaurants (Giampiccoli, 2017). This international popularity has elevated Italianness into both a symbolic and commercial resource. Restaurants, marketers, and consumers draw on this identity to evoke emotional resonance, communicate authenticity, and stand out in a crowded market.

Culturally, Italianness is closely tied to tradition, regionality, and intergenerational knowledge. Within this framework, food is not merely

nourishment or entertainment—it becomes a marker of belonging and a vehicle for shared values.

This cultural framing of food as identity-rich and tradition-bound is directly linked to broader debates on authenticity in food discourse. Scholars have emphasized that authenticity should not be understood as fixed or objective, but as socially and discursively constructed. Karrebæk & Maegaard (2017) show that authenticity is performed through cultural and communicative practices, carrying tangible sociocultural implications. Authentic food is typically framed as tied to geographic origin and historical continuity, while inauthentic food is framed as lacking provenance and fidelity to tradition—often connoted negatively as artificial, imitative, or superficial (Gazzardi & Vásquez, 2025). These distinctions are central to how Italianness is leveraged in restaurant branding.

Le et al. (2019) add that authenticity in dining is a multidimensional construct, involving the product, the self, and the organization—each shaping consumer evaluations. Authenticity thus becomes not merely a marketing tool but a form of cultural stewardship. Italian cuisine is widely perceived as collective heritage, meriting protection from misrepresentation and commodification. DeSoucey's (2010) concept of *gastronationalism* frames food as a politically and emotionally charged domain for articulating national identity. Italian cuisine, frequently deployed as a cultural ambassador, is therefore subject to heightened scrutiny and cultural safeguarding.

This protective impulse is also codified institutionally. Italian legislation regulates the use of the *Mil* label, enforcing symbolic boundary policies to distinguish genuine Italian products from imitations or “Italian-sounding” alternatives (Gazzardi & Vásquez, 2025; Temperini et al., 2016).

A growing body of scholarship has examined Italianness and the Mil brand in digital food contexts. From a transnational perspective, Federici & Bernardelli (2016) analyze the websites of Italian-American cheese producers, revealing how diasporic branding emphasizes family heritage, pride in Italian descent, and food traditions. They argue that authenticity in this context is hybrid and dynamic, shaped by migration and cultural adaptation. Bandini & Corduas (2019) investigate perceptions of Italian food in Germany and analyze representations of Italian culinary identity across blogs, websites, and online reviews, showing how food discourse functions as a medium for expressing ethnic belonging and negotiating cultural identity in transnational contexts. Corrizzato (2023) focuses on Instagram accounts of Italian agri-food companies targeting U.S. consumers and shows how word formation processes—such as borrowings and compounds—serve as branding tools, highlighting how linguistic creativity supports the global diffusion of Italian identity.

Another stream of research has explored the role of celebrity chefs in constructing and circulating Italianness across digital environments. Rossolatos (2020) analyzes the digital travelogues of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and introduces the concept of “(dis)placed branding” to describe how Oliver appropriates Italy as a place brand and reframes cultural authenticity through constructed originality. The study shows how celebrity chefs use discursive and multimodal strategies to embed place-based signifiers into their global brand identity. Similarly, Irimiás & Volo (2022) examine the Instagram videos of Michelin-starred chef Massimo Bottura, combining *mise-en-scène* with multimodal critical discourse analysis. Their findings reveal how leftovers—framed through aesthetically rich and emotionally resonant narratives—become symbolic of Bottura’s pro-environmental philosophy, intertwining ethics, inclusivity, and Italian culinary identity.

Together, these studies underscore how celebrity chefs act as cultural intermediaries who discursively rearticulate Italianness for global audiences.

Scholars have also investigated how Italianness is represented in company-owned digital media—branded platforms curated by businesses. Kohler & Perrino (2017) examine the corporate narratives of Italian family-owned firms, showing how they construct brand identities grounded in tradition, responsibility, and cultural pride—values that align with the moral authority of the *Mil* label. Corrizzato (2018) contributes a complementary perspective by analyzing promotional texts on the websites of Italian wineries. Her study shows how digital platforms are used to reinforce national brand narratives by emphasizing authenticity, craftsmanship, and quality—key themes within the broader *Mil* discourse. Her findings underscore how cultural identity is strategically articulated through digital storytelling in sector-specific corporate media.

In contrast, other scholars have turned to user-generated content (UGC) to examine digitally mediated performances of Italianness from the perspective of individual online users and consumers. Nichele (2019) examines over 2,400 Tripadvisor reviews of Italian and non-Italian restaurants in Lancaster, UK, highlighting how perceptions of authenticity are discursively constructed through dining components such as food, service, and ambiance. Her findings reveal that authenticity is not invoked uniformly but varies by topic, reviewer expectations, and cuisine type—suggesting that the construction of Italianness in UGC is selective, context-dependent, and ideologically motivated. Vásquez & Cenni (2025) analyze Airbnb’s “Meet Your Host” bios, showing how hosts of Italian online experiences construct culinary authenticity and entrepreneurial identity by referencing ancestry, education, and tourism experience. Gazzardi & Vásquez (2025) focus on

restaurant reviews written by Italian tourists in the United States, highlighting how authenticity is evaluated through emotionally charged language and culturally situated expectations. Their study reveals a paradox: while many reviewers assume authentic Italian food cannot exist abroad, they nonetheless offer strong praise or criticism, co-constructing authenticity through personal experience and ideological attachment.

While these studies provide valuable insights into Italianness across consumer behavior, digital media, and food culture, little is known about how it is discursively constructed, authenticated, and leveraged in digital restaurant branding. This gap is particularly significant in competitive, multicultural destinations such as Miami, where Italian restaurants must assert cultural distinction amid a wide array of culinary offerings. Furthermore, previous research primarily relies on qualitative discourse analysis, overlooking the potential of large-scale, corpus-assisted investigation.

To address these gaps, this chapter adopts CADS as a methodologically robust approach to analyze the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami. By combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, it investigates how Italianness is discursively leveraged on the restaurants' official websites to construct brand identity and support brand positioning, thereby strategically engaging global consumers. In contrast to prior scholarship, this study demonstrates how CADS can operationalize the analysis of Italianness at scale—beyond isolated narratives—and reveal recurring discursive strategies embedded in digital restaurant branding. CADS offers a valid and effective framework for identifying broader communicative patterns across multiple establishments, while maintaining interpretive sensitivity to the sociocultural and strategic dimensions of meaning-making.

## **2.5 Methodology**

This study draws on CADS to investigate Italianness in the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami. As a methodological framework, CADS combines the quantitative strengths of corpus linguistics with the interpretive depth of discourse analysis, making it particularly well suited for examining meaning-making practices across official restaurant websites. The following two subsections outline the empirical procedures employed in the study. Subsection 2.5.1 describes the data collection process, including the sampling strategy, corpus construction, and criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Subsection 2.5.2 details the analytical procedures based on CADS, which integrate keyword and concordance analyses to explore the cultural and strategic dimensions of Italianness in digital restaurant branding.

### **2.5.1 Data Collection**

Data collection began with a search on Tripadvisor<sup>2</sup> for restaurants in Miami. As Antonio et al. (2020) state, Tripadvisor has established itself as one of the most widely used digital platforms, serving as an online travel guide that features UGC related to hospitality and tourism. By 2018, the platform had gathered approximately 730 million reviews and opinions, covering more than eight million listings, including restaurants, hotels, vacation rentals, and attractions. It reportedly reaches around 490 million unique visitors and sends close to 80 million emails each week. Users can browse a wide array of categories such as accommodations, restaurants, activities, flights, cruises, and car rentals. To ensure content quality, Tripadvisor encourages reviewers to provide honest advice based on personal

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<sup>2</sup> Tripadvisor listings and website content are dynamic and change over time; this data collection reflects the state of the platform as it appeared in February 2024.

experience, emphasizing that reviews should be grounded in firsthand encounters and contribute meaningfully to the subject matter.

In addition to its global reach, Tripadvisor was selected for this study because its categorization system allows for the reliable identification of restaurants by both location and cuisine type, making it a valuable resource for the analysis conducted in this chapter. By applying the filters “restaurants” (as category) and “Miami” (as destination), the search returned a total of 6,077 restaurants. After applying the “Italian cuisine” filter, 430 of those restaurants were identified as Italian, while the remaining 5,647 were categorized as non-Italian. In the context of this study, the term *Italian restaurants* refers specifically to those classified as such by Tripadvisor based on their cuisine offering.

From the initial population of 430 Italian restaurants, systematic sampling was conducted by selecting every second restaurant, yielding a sample of 215. However, 78 restaurants were excluded because they lacked an official website, appeared as duplicate listings on Tripadvisor, or belonged to chains using a single corporate website for multiple establishments. After these exclusions, the final sample consisted of 137 Italian restaurants.

Each restaurant’s website was closely examined through a process of close reading, focusing on the homepage and the “About Us” section. This made it possible to identify which Italian restaurants explicitly leverage Italianness on their websites and which do not. This distinction was operationalized as the presence of explicit cultural, linguistic, geographic, or symbolic references to Italian identity in the restaurant’s self-presentation. Indicators of leveraging Italianness included, for example: direct references to Italy or specific Italian regions; use of Italian language or Italianisms; invocation of Italian heritage, family origins, or cultural authenticity; and emphasis on

traditional Italian ingredients or culinary methods. Restaurants were classified as leveraging Italianness if their website content included at least one such reference.

The homepages and “About Us” sections of all 137 websites were manually extracted and compiled into individual text files, ensuring a one-to-one correspondence between each website and its corresponding text file. Manual extraction enabled precise selection of digital discourse related to branding, excluding irrelevant data such as contact information, opening hours, and cookie notices.

Using #LancsBox, a corpus composed of two subcorpora was created. The main one, referred to as the ITALIAN corpus, includes text files from all Italian restaurants. Within this corpus, the ITALIAN-1 subcorpus comprises those restaurants that explicitly leverage Italianness, while the ITALIAN-2 subcorpus includes those that do not.

For the remaining 5,647 non-Italian restaurants, a separate sample was generated by selecting one restaurant out of every 20, resulting in a sample of 282. Applying the same exclusion criteria used for the Italian sample, 119 restaurants were removed, yielding a final sample of 163 non-Italian restaurants.

The official websites of these restaurants were similarly examined to extract digital brand discourse from their homepages and “About Us” sections. This ensured a consistent one-to-one correspondence between websites and text files. The resulting set of texts formed the NON-ITALIAN corpus.

In all cases, digital texts were extracted following a web-for-corpus approach.

### **2.5.2 Data Analysis**

The analysis was conducted at the level of lemmas, integrating keyword and concordance techniques. Italianness was investigated

both as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity and as a strategy for brand positioning. Given the dual objective of the study, the analysis was structured in two stages, as outlined in Subsections 2.5.2.1 and 2.5.2.2.

**2.5.2.1 Italianness as a Cultural-Ideological System in Brand Identity.** The first analytical stage employed keyword analysis to compare the ITALIAN corpus (corpus of interest) with the NON-ITALIAN corpus (reference corpus), contrasting the digital brand discourse of Italian and non-Italian restaurants in Miami. The goal was to investigate Italianness as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity by identifying keywords unique to the ITALIAN corpus. The NON-ITALIAN corpus, comprising texts from other ethnic restaurants, served as a useful baseline for comparison.

Cohen's  $d$  was selected as the metric for identifying keywords, with a threshold of  $d \geq 0.2$ . All keywords with a Cohen's  $d$  value equal to or greater than 0.2 were considered salient in the corpus of interest. While this threshold indicates a small effect size, it was chosen to capture not only strong and moderate keyword effects but also more subtle ones with potential interpretive significance in digital brand discourse.

The keywords identified in the ITALIAN corpus were then examined through concordance analysis to qualitatively explore their co-textual environments. Guided by the research aim—i.e., investigating Italianness as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity—a structured top-down approach was applied. Concordances were reviewed with reference to the research aim and keywords were categorized into semantic groupings that reflected recurring discursive patterns. These groupings were not the result of automated clustering or statistical techniques, but were developed through interpretive

analysis informed by the overarching analytical focus. The assignment of specific keywords to thematic categories was based on their contextual function and meaning in digital brand discourse. As such, the semantic groupings reflect a qualitative, interpretive process aligned with the structured top-down approach to concordance analysis.

**2.5.2.2 Italianness as a Strategy in Brand Positioning.** The second analytical stage compared the ITALIAN-1 subcorpus (corpus of interest) against the ITALIAN-2 subcorpus (reference corpus), contrasting the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants that explicitly leverage Italianness in their brand positioning with those that do not. The same metric and threshold used in the first stage were applied to identify keywords of the ITALIAN-1 subcorpus.

As in the first stage, keywords were examined through concordance analysis to qualitatively explore their co-textual environments. A structured top-down approach guided the interpretation of concordance lines in relation to the research aim—namely, investigating how Italianness is strategically articulated in brand positioning. Concordances were systematically reviewed and keywords were grouped into semantic categories that reflected recurring discursive patterns relevant to this strategic function. These groupings were not derived through statistical or automated methods, but through close interpretive analysis consistent with the overall analytical framework. The categorization of keywords into thematic groupings was informed by their contextual meanings and rhetorical functions within the digital brand discourse. Accordingly, the resulting thematic groups reflect a qualitative, interpretive process coherent with the structured top-down approach to concordance analysis.

## 2.6 Results and Discussion

Before turning to keyword and concordance results, this section presents the corpus statistics for the ITALIAN and NON-ITALIAN corpora (Table 2.1), as well as for the ITALIAN-1 and ITALIAN-2 subcorpora (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.1**

*Corpus Statistics for the ITALIAN and NON-ITALIAN Corpora*

	<b>ITALIAN</b> (All Italian restaurants in Miami)	<b>NON-ITALIAN</b> (All non-Italian restaurants in Miami)
<b>Files</b>	137	163
<b>Tokens</b>	40,632	57,474
<b>Types</b>	5,994	7,924
<b>Lemmas</b>	5,546	7,289

**Table 2.2**

*Corpus Statistics for the ITALIAN-1 and ITALIAN-2 Subcorpora*

	<b>ITALIAN-1</b> (Italian restaurants leveraging Italianness)	<b>ITALIAN-2</b> (Italian restaurants not leveraging Italianness)
<b>Files</b>	91	46
<b>Tokens</b>	31,704	8,928
<b>Types</b>	5,042	2,387
<b>Lemmas</b>	4,632	2,258

The number of text files and tokens varies slightly between the corpora, with the ITALIAN corpus including fewer files (137 vs. 163) and a smaller token count (40,632 vs. 57,474), reflecting its slightly narrower sample. The two corpora also differ in vocabulary size: the ITALIAN corpus contains 5,994 types and 5,546 lemmas, compared to 7,924

types and 7,289 lemmas in the NON-ITALIAN corpus. Despite these differences, the variation remains relatively modest.

By contrast, a striking asymmetry emerges from the comparison of the two subcorpora. The ITALIAN-1 subcorpus (91 files) contains over three times as many tokens (31,704 vs. 8,928), as well as a larger number of types (5,042 vs. 2,387) and lemmas (4,632 vs. 2,258), than the ITALIAN-2 subcorpus (46 files).

While these data offer a general overview of corpus and vocabulary size, they do not account for lexical diversity. To address this, the standardized type-token ratio (STTR) was calculated for each corpus (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3**

*Standardized Type/Token Ratios for the ITALIAN and NON-ITALIAN Corpora and the ITALIAN-1 and ITALIAN-2 Subcorpora*

	<b>ITALIAN</b>	<b>NON-ITALIAN</b>	<b>ITALIAN-1</b>	<b>ITALIAN-2</b>
<b>STTR</b>	147.52	137.87	159.03	267.36

As shown in Table 2.3, the STTR values are relatively close for the ITALIAN (147.52) and NON-ITALIAN (137.87) corpora, suggesting broadly comparable levels of lexical diversity. The slightly higher STTR of the ITALIAN corpus—despite its smaller number of files and tokens—may reflect more varied lexical choices or stylistic preferences in the brand discourse of Italian restaurants.

A more pronounced contrast emerges within the ITALIAN corpus: the ITALIAN-2 subcorpus (267.36) displays a substantially higher degree of lexical diversity than ITALIAN-1 (159.03), despite comprising fewer files and tokens. This elevated value may indicate more heterogeneous discourse patterns among restaurants that do not leverage Italianness in their digital branding—possibly reflecting less standardized brand

narratives or a broader range of influences shaping their brand discourse.

Moving from corpus statistics and lexical diversity to the analysis of keywords and concordances, the following results are organized into two parts, reflecting the dual analytical focus of this study. Subsection 2.6.1 examines Italianness as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity, analyzing how it is discursively constructed through distinctive lexical patterns that convey broader cultural meanings. Subsection 2.6.2 shifts the focus to Italianness as a brand positioning strategy, exploring how Italian restaurants that explicitly emphasize Italian values differentiate themselves discursively from those that do not.

Taken together, the following subsections illustrate the multifaceted ways in which Italianness is used in digital brand discourse—both as an implicit identity marker and as an explicit strategic asset. The thematic categories within each subsection are based on interpretative salience and are organized to ensure a coherent progression within each interpretative dimension.

### **2.6.1 Italianness as a Cultural-Ideological System in Brand Identity**

The keyword analysis of the ITALIAN corpus yielded 160 semantically relevant keywords, each tagged for part of speech and ranked by Cohen's *d* value (Appendix A). Only three keywords—*Italian*, *Italy*, and *pasta*—exhibited medium to large effect sizes. All remaining keywords fell below the 0.5 threshold, indicating small effect sizes. This distribution suggests that the discursive construction of Italianness as a cultural-ideological system does not depend on a narrow set of dominant markers, but instead emerges from the accumulated presence of moderately distinctive lexical items. The resulting discursive formation is layered and textured, illustrating how cultural

identity is subtly encoded across multiple dimensions of brand discourse.

The predominance of small-effect-size keywords also highlights a limited degree of lexical exclusivity. Many of these terms, while more frequent in the ITALIAN corpus, are also used (albeit less frequently) in the brand discourse of non-Italian restaurants. This underscores the need for co-textual and contextual interpretation: meaning is not inherent in the keywords themselves but is activated through the ways they are framed within broader discursive patterns.

To explore these keywords further, concordance analysis was used to examine their immediate co-text. This qualitative investigation revealed recurring collocational patterns, semantic prosody, and pragmatic functions. It showed how Italianness is discursively constructed through emotionally charged, culturally resonant, and narratively embedded expressions that go beyond denotation to activate ideological meaning.

The keywords *Italian* and *Italy* serve as anchoring terms that legitimize the cultural authenticity of brand identity. *Italian* frequently co-occurs with evaluative adjectives such as *authentic*, *true*, *genuine*, and *classic*, as in “authentic Italian cuisine,” “true Italian flavors,” and “classic Italian traditions.” These patterns construct Italianness not simply as an ethnic marker, but as a signifier of quality, legitimacy, and cultural prestige. Similarly, *Italy* reinforces this ideological positioning through phrases like “imported from Italy,” “flavors of Italy,” and “Italy’s culinary legacy,” portraying the country as a source of authority and tradition.

Keywords related to emblematic food and dishes—such as *pasta*, *pizza*, *tiramisu*, *gnocchi*, *rigatoni*, *ravioli*, *risotto*, *lasagna*, *parmigiano*, and *margherita*—function as culturally embedded food symbols. These terms regularly appear within descriptive frames that emphasize

artisanal preparation, regional specificity, and tradition. Expressions such as “homemade lasagna from our family recipe,” “rigatoni alla bolognese,” and “traditional Neapolitan pizza” illustrate how food serves as a narrative vehicle that transmits Italianness as both a heritage and an experience.

This culinary narrative is enriched by geographic and regional references, as showed by keywords like *Neapolitan*, *Naples/Napoli*, *Sicily*, *Florence*, *Roman*, *Coast*, and *Europe*. Phrases such as “authentic Neapolitan crust,” “Florence-style steak,” and “flavors of the Amalfi Coast” function as spatial signifiers that enhance the authenticity of the culinary offer. By anchoring dishes in specific geographical areas, these terms construct Italianness as regionally grounded, yet nationally cohesive. Keywords such as *district*, *neighborhood*, *residential*, and *harbor* also contribute to the spatial discourse by situating restaurants within evocative or locally embedded geographies.

Beyond cuisine and geography, affectively charged keywords such as *memory*, *history*, *life*, and *beloved* invoke nostalgia and emotional resonance. These terms appear in narrative frames such as “dishes that bring back memories of home,” “sharing our family’s beloved recipes,” and “celebrating life with Italian flavors,” where Italianness is depicted as a lived, emotional experience that spans generations and evokes domestic warmth.

The presence of Italian lexical items—such as *di*, *alla*, *antipasti*, *pepe*, *cacio*, *parmigiano*, *napoletana*, and *appetito*—highlights the linguistic performance of Italianness. These terms appear in both naming conventions (e.g., “cacio e pepe” and “pizza napoletana”) and affective expressions (e.g., “buon appetito”). Their inclusion signals cultural specificity while embedding Italian language into the brand’s narrative, lending symbolic weight and linguistic authenticity.

Evaluative terms like *authentic*, *authenticity*, *true*, and *genuine* act as discursive gatekeepers, reinforcing boundaries between authentic and inauthentic representations. Expressions such as “crafted with authenticity,” “the true taste of Italy,” and “only genuine Italian ingredients” affirm a commitment to cultural fidelity and portray authenticity as a core ideological value. Keywords like *worth* and *satisfaction* further strengthen this alignment by emphasizing consumer gratification, while general-purpose intensifiers such as *amazing*, *memorable*, *unforgettable*, and *cool* amplify the affective charge of brand discourse, enhancing its appeal through enthusiasm and emotional resonance.

Authenticity is further emphasized by the keywords *osteria* and *trattoria*, which refer to traditional types of Italian eateries historically associated with simplicity, regional cuisine, and a familial atmosphere. These terms frequently appear in expressions such as “a small Roman osteria” or “family-owned trattoria with homemade recipes,” reinforcing the cultural narrative of culinary authenticity and rootedness in local tradition.

Keywords related to the sensory and spatial environment—including *ambiance*, *atmosphere*, *cozy*, and *homey*—extend the performance of Italianness beyond cuisine into the realm of sensory and spatial experience. Phrases such as “cozy vintage trattoria” and “ambiance inspired by the Italian countryside” construct Italianness as a multisensory landscape tied to memory, comfort, and idealized aesthetics. This is further supported by keywords such as *refined* and *contemporary*, which contribute to a stylized aesthetic design. These terms are often embedded in expressions that position Italian dishes and settings as elegant, curated, and visually distinctive, reinforcing Italianness as a visual and experiential ideal. Other spatial descriptors—

such as *garden*, *patio*, *inside*, and *outdoor*—help construct culinary environments that are rustic, enclosed, or traditionally inspired.

Relational keywords such as *brother*, *invite*, and *friendly* appear in brand stories that humanize and personalize restaurant identity. Expressions like “the brothers grew up in Naples and brought their passion to Miami” and “we invite you to share our family’s love for cooking” foreground interpersonal warmth.

This focus on interpersonal connection is further reinforced by the integration of UGC, which introduces consumer voices into the discursive construction of Italianness. The keyword *Yelp* reflects how restaurants incorporate UGC into their websites, particularly by embedding positive customer reviews from platforms such as Yelp and Tripadvisor. These external testimonials function as forms of social validation, enhancing credibility and fostering trust through peer-to-peer affirmation. The use of the first-person perspective, as evidenced by the keyword *I*, introduces consumer voices into brand discourse, reinforcing the credibility of the narrative. This approach contributes to the co-construction of Italianness as a shared cultural identity.

A further dimension of Italianness emerges from keywords related to service and operations, such as *host*, *book*, and *customize*. These terms highlight the ways in which Italian restaurants construct brand identity not only through cultural symbolism but also through representations of hospitality, efficiency, and accessibility. Expressions such as “we host your special moments,” “book your table today,” and “customize your dining experience” emphasize consumer-centered service as part of the Italian dining ethos. Additional terms such as *approach*, *knowledgeable*, and *study* capture responsive service, conveying expertise, flexibility, and culinary intentionality—as in the case of “our knowledgeable chefs” and “a chef who studied traditional techniques.”

The recurrence of keywords such as *daily*, *freshly*, and *sourced* points to the discursive construction of immediacy and freshness. Phrases like “prepared daily” and “ingredients sourced with care” contribute to a temporal framing that aligns Italianness with artisanal labor, culinary attention, and moment-by-moment quality. This emphasis supports the perception of Italian cuisine as vibrant, dynamic, and attentively crafted. Terms like *homemade*, *handcraft*, *artisanal*, and *ingredient* reinforce the centrality of artisanal preparation as a hallmark of Italian culinary identity.

In parallel, commercially resonant keywords—such as *executive*, *house*, *selection*, *famed*, and *acclaimed*—frame Italianness as a marker of exclusivity and refinement. Expressions like “our executive chef’s celebrated antipasti,” “house specialties,” and “selection of famed Italian classics” position Italianness as a premium offering that merges cultural legitimacy with commercial appeal. Additional keywords such as *gourmet* and *winner*, contribute to a curated discourse of prestige, consistency, and high-quality experiences.

These findings demonstrate that Italianness functions as a cultural-ideological foundation of brand identity—constructed not through a few dominant signifiers, but through the interplay of a semantically cohesive and contextually embedded lexicon. While most keywords exhibit small effect sizes, they collectively form a dense and ideologically saturated discourse that communicates core cultural values. Through keyword and concordance analyses, it becomes clear that Italianness is not merely referenced but discursively performed, affectively charged, and narratively sustained. As a result, cultural identity is not only signaled but intricately woven into brand discourse—serving as a symbolic and ideological anchor that shapes how brand identity is constructed and communicated in the F&B sector.

### **2.6.2 Italianness as a Strategy in Brand Positioning**

While Subsection 2.6.1 examined how Italianness operates as a cultural-ideological system that underpins brand identity, the present subsection delves into how Italianness is leveraged as a strategic asset—focusing on how cultural elements are repurposed to construct competitive value propositions and brand distinctiveness in a digital marketplace. Here, Italianness is not merely embedded in cultural meaning but is deliberately mobilized to achieve market differentiation and consumer engagement. The emphasis shifts from symbolic construction to brand performance, where Italianness becomes a discursive resource that adds tangible value to brand positioning.

The keyword analysis of the ITALIAN-1 subcorpus—comprising the websites of Italian restaurants in Miami that explicitly emphasize Italianness—yielded a large number of semantically rich terms. To facilitate in-depth analysis, the top 150 keywords were considered (Appendix B). Two keywords—*Italian* and *Italy*—showed large effect sizes, while nine others—*tradition*, *traditional*, *pasta*, *authentic*, *fine*, *recipe*, *cuisine*, *list*, and *import*—fell within the medium range. The remaining items exhibited small effect sizes. This distribution suggests that Italianness as a strategy in brand positioning is not leveraged through a few obvious or stereotypical markers but is instead dispersed across a wide-ranging lexical field.

Although these lower-ranked keywords may seem less statistically prominent, their semantic significance becomes evident when interpreted within ideologically rich and contextually grounded discourse. Rather than functioning as standalone cultural markers, many small-effect-size keywords gain rhetorical force through consistent embedding across diverse contextual frames. Concordance analysis revealed that these terms are not isolated signifiers but are

integrated into broader strategies that personalize, humanize, and emotionally elevate the brand.

From a strategic perspective, *Italian* and *Italy* are not merely markers of cultural authenticity but are deployed as persuasive assets to enhance the brand's market positioning. Expressions like "authentic Italian dining experience" or "imported directly from Italy" link the brand to a premium narrative, using heritage and geographic specificity to signal exclusivity and justify higher value propositions. These terms function as discursive tools that align the brand with consumer expectations of quality, tradition, and sophistication—strategically differentiating it from competitors and reinforcing its place in the upscale dining segment.

Alongside national identifiers, regional references such as *Naples/Napoli*, *Neapolitan*, *Sicily*, *southern*, and *northern* are also frequently invoked to anchor Italianness in specific culinary traditions. Statements like "Neapolitan-style pizza in the heart of Miami" or "inspired by the flavors of Sicily" further emphasize localized authenticity, presenting Italianness as both distinctive and versatile.

Beyond geographic anchoring, brand discourse also relies on references to heritage and craftsmanship to consolidate Italianness as a symbol of quality and trust. Keywords such as *tradition*, *traditional*, and *authentic* are strategically employed to position Italianness as a marker of quality, consistency, and brand trustworthiness. Phrases like "prepared using traditional recipes" or "authentic Italian ingredients" reinforce the cultural legitimacy by associating it with time-honored practices and artisanal credibility. These claims are often intensified by modifiers such as *truly*, *best*, and *original*, which amplify consumer appeal and lend persuasive force to the brand's promise of cultural legitimacy and premium experience.

Complementing geographic and heritage-based appeals, culinary keywords such as *cuisine*, *recipe*, *bread*, *calzones*, *pasta*, *bolognese*, *gnocchi*, and *dessert* function as symbolic anchors of artisanal expertise and gastronomic authenticity. These terms frequently appear in narrative frames that highlight craftsmanship and culinary tradition—for instance, “homemade pasta” and “traditional bolognese recipe.” Such brand discourse leverages emblematic Italian dishes not only to signify cultural origin but also to project artisanal credibility and added value.

Beyond signature recipes, a range of keywords related to ingredients and sensory appeal—*ingredient*, *cheese*, *mozzarella*, *tomato*, *herb*, *fruit*, and *aroma*—expand the culinary lexicon toward experiential dimensions of taste and smell. These terms are often embedded in promotional language that evokes freshness, richness, and multisensory engagement. Phrases such as “a rich blend of Italian herbs,” “the creamy texture of buffalo mozzarella,” or “the aroma of sun-dried tomatoes” exemplify how brands mobilize sensory cues to construct an immersive, quality-oriented food experience. Collectively, these references frame Italianness as a sensory journey.

In addition to food and ingredients, brand discourse also foregrounds values of care, passion, and expertise through keywords such as *dedication*, *curate*, *select*, *passionate*, *attentive*, *professional*, and *ability*. These terms are frequently embedded in affective and agentive constructions—such as “an authentic experience crafted with dedication by our team,” “our carefully curated wine list,” and “professional service with a personal touch.” In these examples, Italianness is not only linked to culinary tradition but is also aligned with human-centered, emotionally resonant production and service processes. This blend of affective labor and professional competence reflects core values in hospitality branding, where emotional

authenticity and service expertise are key to building a trustworthy and memorable brand.

Extending these values into concrete brand practices, a subset of keywords highlights the operational and service-oriented dimensions of Italianness. These include *operate*, *host*, *cater*, *event*, *wedding*, *accommodate*, and *receive*. These terms articulate how Italianness is not only an ethos but a flexible approach for delivering curated experiences. Phrases such as “host your private event with Italian flair,” “we cater weddings with authentic Italian cuisine,” and “we accommodate every guest with care” demonstrate how Italian identity is extended into commercial and experiential offerings that align hospitality with cultural branding.

Building on the emotional and professional dimensions of Italianness, family-centered storytelling further reinforces the brand’s connection to heritage and trust. Keywords such as *family*, *founder*, *father*, *mother*, *childhood*, *legacy*, *family-owned*, and *generation* anchor the brand within narratives of continuity and emotional authenticity. Expressions like “recipes passed down through generations,” “a family-owned trattoria since 1980,” and “inspired by our founder’s childhood in Naples” construct Italianness as a transmittable, emotionally resonant inheritance—positioning the brand as both culturally rooted and personally meaningful.

In parallel with family-based narratives, brand discourse employs emotionally charged language to deepen consumer attachment and foster a sense of belonging. Keywords such as *love*, *soul*, *beloved*, *wonderful*, *fabulous*, *pleasure*, *welcome*, *friend*, *favorite*, and *deeply* create affective entry points that invite emotional investment. Formulations like “a dining experience filled with soul,” “our beloved family recipes,” and “we welcome you like family” position Italianness as

a shared emotional world—strengthening brand intimacy and encouraging consumers to identify personally with the brand’s values.

Beyond emotional resonance, Italianness is also framed as a lifestyle ideal rooted in elegance, charm, and timeless appeal (i.e., *la dolce vita*). Keywords such as *elegance*, *elegant*, *charm*, *modern*, and *iconic* are used to elevate the brand beyond culinary authenticity, positioning it within a broader aesthetic and aspirational register. Expressions like “elegant ambiance inspired by the Italian countryside,” “iconic southern flavors with modern design,” and “timeless charm in every detail” frame Italian restaurants as curated spaces of sophistication, where dining becomes an immersive expression of refined taste and lifestyle aspiration. The keyword *beautiful* further reinforces this stylization, often appearing in descriptions of both food and setting. Phrases such as “beautifully presented dishes” or “set in a beautiful space” frame Italianness as an aesthetic value, linked to visual appeal and upscale branding.

In line with its aspirational positioning, brand discourse also draws on recognition-oriented language to confer external validation. Keywords such as *acclaimed*, *famed*, *award*, *magazine*, *win*, and *extraordinary* are strategically used to associate the brand with prestige and credibility. Expressions like “Tripadvisor Travelers’ Choice Award,” “as featured in top culinary magazines,” and “famed for our authentic Neapolitan pizza” mobilize third-party endorsements to reinforce Italianness as a trusted, high-status brand identity that has earned public recognition and distinction.

While much of the brand narrative emphasizes heritage, emotion, and prestige, a parallel set of keywords introduces a forward-looking orientation grounded in creativity and innovation. Keywords such as *creative*, *design*, *innovative*, and *inspiration* signal a strategic tension between tradition and modernity. Statements like “our

innovative menu blends heritage with creativity” frame Italianness not as a fixed cultural identity but as a dynamic brand value capable of adaptation and reinvention. This construction allows Italian restaurants to preserve cultural authenticity while engaging contemporary aesthetics and consumer expectations—positioning Italianness as a living tradition that evolves within global culinary and digital marketplaces.

Taken together, the findings presented in Subsection 2.6.2 demonstrate that Italianness is not simply invoked for symbolic or cultural resonance, but is strategically leveraged across multiple discursive domains to construct compelling brand value propositions. The analysis reveals how references to national and regional identity, artisanal tradition, sensory engagement, emotional authenticity, family legacy, aesthetic appeal, and external recognition are orchestrated to differentiate Italian restaurants in a competitive digital marketplace.

Italianness emerges as a versatile and adaptable resource—simultaneously evoking heritage and innovation, intimacy and sophistication, familiarity and aspiration. Through the strategic use of a semantically diverse and narratively embedded lexicon, Italianness is mobilized not only to communicate authenticity but to perform brand excellence, foster consumer attachment, and articulate a distinctive lifestyle narrative. In this way, digital brand discourse transforms cultural identity into a dynamic and performative asset for market positioning.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter examined how Italianness is constructed and mobilized in the digital brand discourse of Italian restaurants abroad, using Miami as a case study. The analysis focused on official restaurant websites, specifically the homepages and “About Us” sections, to

understand how national culture is embedded in F&B brand narratives. Positioned within the broader objective of this dissertation, the chapter illustrates how digital brand discourse functions as a key mechanism through which cultural ideologies are produced, performed, and strategically communicated in the hospitality industry.

The analysis proceeded in two stages, each addressing a different facet of Italianness in digital branding. The first stage explored Italianness as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity. This dimension revealed how cultural authenticity, memory, and emotional resonance are symbolically woven into brand narratives to create a sense of tradition and belonging. Italianness emerged as a lived cultural imaginary that is enacted through affectively and ideologically charged language, expressed through keywords linked to food, geography, language, aesthetics, family, and interpersonal connection. The findings highlighted how even keywords with small effect sizes contribute to an ideologically saturated and narratively sustained discourse of Italianness—where cultural identity is performed across co-textual rich environments.

The second stage examined Italianness as a strategic resource in brand positioning. Here, Italianness was shown to function as a flexible and marketable asset used to differentiate restaurants in a competitive market. Strategic storytelling, lifestyle framing, and emotional appeals are deployed to enhance perceived brand value, transforming cultural references into tools of commercial distinction. Italianness is strategically articulated through discursive frames emphasizing artisanal tradition, family legacy, aesthetic sophistication, consumer engagement, and third-party recognition. The analysis revealed that Italianness is mobilized not only to communicate authenticity but also to perform brand excellence and articulate aspirational lifestyle narratives.

Beyond its empirical contributions, this chapter demonstrates the analytical value of CADS in examining digital brand discourse. By combining quantitative pattern detection with qualitative interpretation, CADS enabled a nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed across different layers of textual data. This approach effectively captured both the ideological underpinnings and the strategic functions of digital brand discourse in F&B settings.

In addition to its analytical rigor, this approach also offered significant breadth, enabling a large-scale quantitative exploration of digital brand discourse across a diverse sample of restaurant websites. By systematically examining language patterns from a broad corpus, the study was able to identify recurring discursive features that characterize Italianness in digital branding. This quantitative dimension was further enhanced through qualitative, interpretative analysis, which provided context-sensitive insights into how these patterns function within specific co-textual environments. The integration of both scales—macro-level frequency patterns and micro-level discourse interpretation—ensured a robust, multilayered understanding of how Italianness is constructed and mobilized in digital restaurant branding.

Finally, the chapter contributes to the theoretical and practical discussions central to this dissertation. It shows that digital branding is not merely a communicative practice but a process of discursive negotiation where culture and commerce intersect. In the context of hospitality and tourism, where identity and experience are core to value proposition, understanding how cultural ideologies like Italianness are constructed through language is vital. As such, the study presented here offers a concrete case of how corpus-assisted discourse analysis can illuminate broader dynamics in digital branding, affirming the relevance of discourse-oriented approaches to brand analysis in global hospitality settings.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **Assessing Destination Rebranding and Brand Co-Creation on Social Media: The Case of Spring Break Tourism in Miami Beach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In an increasingly competitive global tourism market, destinations are compelled to differentiate themselves not only through their physical attributes but also through strategically crafted brands. Destination branding has emerged as a key mechanism through which places articulate their unique value propositions, aiming to attract specific tourist segments while enhancing long-term competitiveness (Pike, 2021). In this context, digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping and disseminating destination brands, as branding increasingly relies on digital discourse to construct persuasive narratives, engage audiences, manage perceptions, communicate values, and respond to challenges (Confetto et al., 2023; Maci, 2020).

However, tourism itself has become particularly challenging for destinations grappling with seasonal overtourism and significant social pressures, where the benefits of increased visitor influx must be balanced against concerns of sustainability, public order, and resident well-being.

One notable example of such a challenge is spring break tourism, a phenomenon that embodies both the opportunities and threats of high-intensity seasonal tourism. Spring break, typically occurring between late February and mid-April, has become a well-established North American tradition, marked by the annual movement of large numbers of college and high-school students to warm-weather destinations (Sönmez et al., 2006). In the United States, this period has evolved into a major economic driver for many tourist hubs, with Florida

ranking among the most popular choices (Ribeiro, 2019). Despite the considerable financial returns, spring break is often characterized by an extreme party atmosphere involving excessive alcohol consumption, drug use, and a culture of sexual promiscuity (Boirot, 2023). These behaviors lead to significant negative outcomes for both visitors and host communities, such as increased risks of accidents, injuries, and criminal activity.

Miami Beach has faced these realities firsthand, prompting intervention by the local government. In 2024, a key action involved destination rebranding, with social media and online users playing a crucial role. In line with this dissertation's focus on digital brand discourse dynamics, the present chapter investigates how Miami Beach's rebranding efforts were perceived on social media and how online users contributed to the co-creation of the destination brand through their user-generated content (UGC). While Chapter 2 analyzed the interplay between digital brand discourse and food discourse, this chapter examines how digital brand discourse intersects with tourism discourse.

Drawing on previous research (Dann, 1996; Francesconi, 2014; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005; Maci, 2020; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010), tourism discourse refers to the domain-specific communicative practices and semiotic resources associated with tourism as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon. It encompasses language and other modes used for promotional purposes, professional interaction, and the enactment of tourist experiences across contexts such as travel, hospitality, and place-making. Tourism discourse thus involves communication among a wide range of actors—including institutions, businesses, and tourists—across diverse genres and platforms that both shape and reflect tourism practices.

In this chapter, UGC is understood as tourism discourse insofar as it conveys public narratives, evaluations, and reactions related to the destination of Miami Beach, and as digital brand discourse in that it directly interacts with, responds to, and helps shape the city's branding efforts. Through supportive, critical, or alternative interpretations of the rebranding strategy, online users actively participated in the dynamic construction of the destination brand, either reinforcing or challenging the official brand narrative.

Building on these considerations, the chapter unfolds as follows. Section 3.2 introduces the study context, framing the negative impacts of spring tourism in Miami Beach, outlining the city's institutional responses, and describing the rebranding strategy. Section 3.3 delves into destination branding and sustainability challenges in the context of high-intensity seasonal tourism, with a focus on spring break. Section 3.4 explores the intersection of digital brand discourse and tourism discourse, emphasizing the role of prosumers and UGC in the co-creation of destination brands. Section 3.5 presents the methodology, detailing the data collection, corpus design, and analytical procedures employed in the study. Section 3.6 discusses the results of the analysis, focusing on online user reactions to the rebranding campaign and the discursive co-construction of Miami Beach's brand across social media platforms. Finally, Section 3.7 offers concluding remarks, stressing the study's implications for digital brand discourse in the context of destination marketing and sustainable tourism.

### **3.2 Study Context**

Over the past few years, Miami Beach has struggled to balance the economic benefits of spring break tourism with growing social and security concerns. The 2021, 2022, and 2023 spring break seasons prompted city authorities to declare states of emergency to manage

severe crowd control issues, escalating violence, and strained public services.

As Hudak (2024) reports, the 2021 season saw the introduction of an 8 p.m. curfew, heightened police presence, and restricted beach access in response to unruly behavior. The situation intensified in 2022, when multiple shootings and violent incidents led to another state of emergency and the enforcement of a midnight curfew. This alarming trend peaked in 2023, culminating in fatal shootings, numerous assaults, and a surge in drug-related arrests, despite substantial law enforcement efforts. These events underscored the urgent need for a more sustainable and controlled approach to tourism management during spring break.

In response, the city government of Miami Beach developed a comprehensive strategy for the 2024 season, in collaboration with the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB). Key elements of this strategy included curfews, restricted beach access, traffic and parking regulations, increased city staffing, and bans on specific beach activities—such as public drinking, smoking, large gatherings, and loud music.

At the heart of this strategy was the *Miami Beach Is Breaking Up With Spring Break* marketing campaign—a bold rebranding initiative aimed at repositioning the city as a safer and more community-oriented destination. The campaign employed a breakup metaphor to signal a decisive shift away from the chaotic spring break culture, prioritizing the safety and quality of life of both residents and visitors. This metaphor functioned not just as a rhetorical flourish but as a communication strategy, designed to reframe Miami Beach's brand identity while deterring undesirable tourist behavior.

The campaign's centerpiece was a public service announcement (PSA) video (City of Miami Beach, 2024), disseminated on the city's

official website (<https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/>) and social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, X, YouTube, and Facebook), featuring local residents delivering a breakup-style message to spring breakers. The video, which catalyzed significant online engagement (Williams, 2024), was further echoed through complementary content—including simulated text message exchanges (Figure 3.1) and dating app scenarios (Figure 3.2)—that also leveraged the breakup metaphor. These materials were prominently shared on social media and displayed in public spaces. Together, these multimodal products targeted spring breakers, encouraging reflection on tourist behavior while reinforcing the campaign’s overarching narrative.

Miami Beach’s rebranding campaign has already been the subject of academic investigation. Spezzano & Lusby (2024b) conducted a case study analyzing the strategic use of storytelling and emotionally resonant narratives to address high-impact tourism, promote sustainability, and enhance community well-being. The case study also delved into the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to evaluate marketing communication outcomes. Similarly, Spezzano & Lusby (2024a, in press) combined Critical Discourse Studies and Speech Act Theory to examine the discursive tactics, ideologies, and power relations embedded within the PSA, with a focus on its rhetoric of behavioral change and the promotion of sustainable-responsible tourism.

While previous studies examined the supply side of the campaign, this chapter shifts focus to the demand side, aligning with the dissertation’s overarching interest in digital brand discourse. In so doing, it employs Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) to investigate how online users reacted to the rebranding campaign and contributed to the destination brand through their UGC across social media platforms. By focusing on the case of spring break tourism in

Miami Beach, this chapter illustrates how institutional destination branding initiatives intersect with tourism policy and sustainability challenges. It offers insights into the complex role of brand discourse in rebranding narratives and in brand co-creation processes that define contemporary digital communication.

**Figure 3.1**

*Breakup Text Conversations Featured in the Rebranding Campaign*



**Figure 3.2**

*Dating App Scenarios Featured in the Rebranding Campaign*



### **3.3 Destination (Re)Branding and Sustainability Challenges in Spring Break Tourism**

Destination branding is a strategic mechanism through which places differentiate themselves within the global tourism landscape. As a subset of place branding (Anholt, 2008, 2010), it seeks to construct and communicate a coherent identity that attracts visitors, appeals to specific market segments, and enhances competitiveness (Hanna et al., 2021). Unlike product or corporate branding, destination branding must account for the complexity of places as socially constructed, multi-stakeholder environments with diverse narratives and limited centralized control. This makes the branding process inherently more fragmented and dynamic (Pike, 2021). Within this context, three interrelated elements—identity, image, and positioning—play a central role in shaping how destinations are promoted and perceived.

Destination brand identity is typically developed by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), government bodies, and tourism stakeholders who aim to highlight a place's unique characteristics,

cultural heritage, and value propositions (Cai, 2002; Pike & Page, 2014). However, constructing identity is not a unidirectional process. Rather, it involves negotiation among various local actors, including community members, businesses, and public institutions (Pike, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2020). As such, destination brand identity reflects both strategic planning and collective input, making it a complex product of governance and collaboration.

Conversely, destination brand image is the actual destination image held by consumers, which may or may not align with the intended brand identity (Cai, 2002; Pike, 2021). Crompton (1979) defines it as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). Three dimensions of destination image have been identified (Gartner, 1993): *cognition*, *affect*, and *conation*. Cognition relates to an individual’s awareness and knowledge about a destination, formed through mental processes that evaluate its known attributes. Affect reflects the individual’s emotional responses toward the destination and encompasses the internal, affective reasons that generate positive, negative, or neutral attitudes. Conation refers to the behavioral dimension—how an individual intends to act toward the destination. It involves the decision-making process that follows the evaluation of both cognitive and affective stimuli, ultimately influencing the intention to visit.

In addition, Baloglu & McCleary (1999) recognize two major forces in destination image formation: i.e., *personal factors* and *stimulus factors*. While personal factors include sociodemographic and psychological variables, stimulus factors are those that stem from external stimuli as well as previous experience.

A discrepancy between projected identity and perceived image can lead to branding inconsistencies and reduce marketing effectiveness, which is why positioning plays a pivotal role in aligning

internal strategies with external realities. Effective brand positioning entails understanding the target audience and recognizing key competitors to guide effective brand communication, thereby achieving differentiation and competitive advantage (Ries & Trout, 2000).

A well-defined, stakeholder-aligned market position must be communicated effectively to stand out amidst competing messages from rival destinations. When successful, positioning helps establish the destination as the top choice in the minds of the target audience. An effective brand positioning strategy should leverage strengths, address weaknesses, reduce threats, and maximize opportunities, aiming for recognition of attributes significant to the target market (Pike, 2021).

As market conditions, consumer preferences, and social contexts evolve, destination brands must adapt to stay competitive and relevant. This need for adaptation often leads to rebranding, a strategic process that involves redefining and repositioning a destination brand to align with new goals, overcome negative perceptions, or respond to crises (Bowen & Sotomayor, 2022; Garanti et al., 2022). Destination rebranding builds on the foundational elements of existing branding while seeking to transform and revitalize the brand narrative to resonate with contemporary audiences. Previous research has shown that rebranding can improve destination competitiveness (Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kotler & Gertner, 2002) and requires stakeholder engagement, such as collaboration with residents and local businesses (Govers & Go, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2004).

These theoretical considerations become particularly relevant for destinations affected by high-intensity, seasonal tourism, such as spring break. Similar to other forms of uncontrolled mass tourism, spring break presents substantial risks to destination safety and

sustainability, generating negative consequences across environmental, economic, cultural, and social dimensions (Lusby, 2021).

From an environmental perspective, it contributes to pollution, resource depletion, and the degradation of fragile ecosystems due to overcrowding and excessive waste. Economically, while spring break may generate short-term gains, it often fosters dependence on a seasonal and unstable tourist flow, potentially undermining other local industries. Culturally, the dominance of mass tourism during spring break can lead to the commercialization of local traditions and the erosion of cultural authenticity, as destinations adapt to visitors' expectations rather than safeguarding their heritage (Atasoy, 2021). On a social level, the disruptive behaviors commonly associated with spring break may foster negative attitudes among residents, straining relationships between visitors and host communities (Andereck et al., 2005). In more severe instances, this tension can give rise to a phenomenon known as *tourismphobia*—characterized by “a mixture of rejection, mistrust, and contempt” toward tourists (Almeida-García et al., 2021).

In response, the concept of sustainable-responsible tourism has emerged as a counterbalance to unsustainable tourism practices. This model promotes environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and equitable economic development while advocating for tourist behavior that aligns with local values and expectations (Mihalic, 2016). Destinations implementing this model often adopt regulatory measures such as eco-taxes, educational campaigns, and community-based initiatives to manage visitor flows and reinforce positive interactions (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019).

One key mechanism for promoting sustainable-responsible tourism is strategic communication. Messaging plays a central role in shaping visitor expectations, guiding behavior, and signaling the values

that the destination upholds. Within this context, destination branding becomes an essential strategy for places seeking to transition from problematic tourism models toward more sustainable frameworks. Rebranding, specifically, involves altering the symbolic representation of a place in order to correct misconceptions, address crises, or align with new priorities (Bowen & Sotomayor, 2022; Garanti et al., 2022). It requires a long-term vision and the cooperation of multiple stakeholders, including public institutions, private operators, and the local community (Govers & Go, 2009).

In light of these dynamics, tourism discourse emerges as a crucial tool in destination branding and rebranding dynamics. It enables destinations not only to communicate strategic narratives but also to engage with diverse audiences, shape perceptions, and promote sustainable tourism values. As branding increasingly unfolds in digital spaces, the intersection of digital brand discourse and tourism discourse becomes central to how destinations are imagined, negotiated, and co-created in real time.

### **3.4 Tourism and Digital Brand Discourse: A Focus on Prosumers and Destination Brand Co-Creation**

Tourism discourse research is grounded in the pioneering work on Dann (1996), who argues that:

*Tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, has a discourse of its own. Seen in this light, the language of tourism is thus a great deal more than a metaphor. Via static and moving pictures, written texts, and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients. (p. 2)*

Building on this foundation, tourism discourse emerges as a specific instance in which language and other signifying systems intersect with social and cultural dynamics. This perspective not only emphasizes the persuasive and ideological nature of tourism discourse but also highlights its multimodal constitution—encompassing verbal, visual, and aural elements—that shapes imaginaries of place and motivates travel behavior. Since Dann’s (1996) seminal contribution, numerous scholars have further explored the complexities of tourism discourse, leading to the development of a robust interdisciplinary field.

Jaworski & Pritchard (2005) advance the field by adopting a social semiotic perspective that emphasizes the performative and ideological dimensions of tourism communication. Their work brings together interdisciplinary contributions from discourse studies, sociology, and tourism studies, addressing key concepts such as identity, space, authenticity, and representation. Similarly, Thurlow & Jaworski (2010) explore tourism discourse in a variety of genres through the lens of global mobility, revealing how everyday tourism texts participate in the symbolic and economic processes of globalization.

Hallett & Kaplan (2010) introduce a focus on digital environments by analyzing official tourism websites. Their study employs multimodal and critical discourse analysis to explore how national and regional identities are constructed online, emphasizing the role of tourism websites not only in promotion but also in shaping social imaginaries and fostering ideological messaging. Francesconi (2012, 2014) investigates the evolution of tourism genres and their multimodal transformations, showing how traditional forms like brochures and guidebooks are increasingly hybridized through digital platforms and participatory practices. Her 2014 study further highlights how meaning is co-constructed across verbal and visual modes in contemporary tourism materials.

Extensive research has also been devoted to the promotional dimensions of tourism discourse. In this regard, Francesconi (2007) highlights the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used to craft persuasive representations of place, focusing on tourism texts about Italy. Her genre-based analysis demonstrates how textual organization, lexical choices, and evaluative language align with marketing objectives. Similarly, Manca (2016) proposes a range of methodological frameworks—drawing on systemic functional grammar, visual grammar, corpus linguistics, and cultural theory—to examine how national identity and culturally specific values are conveyed through persuasive strategies on tourism websites. Her comparative analysis reveals how tourism discourse adapts to different cultural contexts by tailoring persuasive appeals accordingly.

Maci (2020) explores how professional, promotional, and digital voices have evolved in response to changing market dynamics and consumer expectations. Her research illustrates how tourism discourse increasingly employs euphoric tones, hypertextual formats, and affective cues to personalize tourism communication and subtly guide user behavior. In parallel, Cappelli (2023) examines the linguistic construction of stereotypical representations in both traditional and digital genres, emphasizing how tourism language fulfills persuasive functions by meeting culturally encoded expectations and reinforcing ideologically charged images of place. Together, these studies underscore how promotional tourism discourse operates not merely as information delivery, but as a form of strategic communication that seeks to seduce, reassure, and align with the desires of different audiences across platforms.

Recent research has also examined how tourism discourse responds to broader socio-environmental challenges, particularly sustainability and crisis management. Lazzeretti (2020) investigates

how sustainable tourism is discursively represented in English and Italian web communication, revealing that Italian texts adopt a more evaluative and polarized stance, while English texts emphasize proximity and factuality. Spinzi & Maci (2020) analyze a global tourism campaign launched by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) during the COVID-19 crisis, along with Kenya's national response, highlighting how multimodal tourism discourse conveys messages of solidarity, shared responsibility, and future-oriented promotion. Similarly, Gatti et al. (2023) explore how South Tyrolean destinations used English-language social media to communicate hope, resilience, and recovery during the pandemic, showing how tourism discourse contributes to shaping post-crisis imaginaries. Together, these studies demonstrate how tourism discourse adapts to emerging priorities by crafting narratives of responsibility, recovery, and ethical travel.

The emergence of UGC has further transformed tourism discourse from a top-down, institutional monologue into a dynamic, many-to-many exchange. No longer confined to the passive reception of promotional materials, contemporary tourists actively engage in creating and disseminating information about destinations and tourist experiences (Maci, 2020). Rather than solely relying on official sources, prosumers contribute to consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions by sharing personal experiences, reviews, photographs, and videos.

Social media, in particular, are crucial platforms that facilitate the continuous flow of content shared by travelers worldwide. These digital environments have become central to online travel information search behavior, as travelers increasingly rely on the experiences and evaluations of their peers or influencers (Zollo, 2021), significantly shaping both expectations and destination choices.

A growing body of research has examined how user-generated texts reflect and shape travel experiences on digital tourism platforms. Cenni & Vásquez (2023), for instance, investigate reciprocal compliments exchanged between guests and hosts on Airbnb, demonstrating how users balance formal language and platform-specific conventions in professionalized digital interactions. Their findings highlight the importance of context and relational dynamics in shaping discursive choices within commercially mediated tourism platforms. Similarly, Cenni (2024), provides a cross-linguistic analysis of negative hotel reviews on Tripadvisor, showing how tourists share their experiences using consistent communicative moves and evaluative strategies across languages. This convergence suggests an emerging standardization in how travel narratives are constructed and interpreted on global platforms.

Despite the extensive scholarship on tourism discourse, its intersection with digital branding remains underexplored. While some scholars have examined how tourism discourse is strategically employed to promote positive destination images on tourism websites (Cesiri, 2019; Plastina, 2012; Qi & Sorokina, 2021), fewer have addressed its role in broader digital branding dynamics. Notably, recent studies by Lo Mascolo et al. (2024) and Spezzano et al. (in press) investigate how tourism discourse contributes to digital branding on the corporate websites of luxury hospitality businesses.

Unlike traditional branding practices, which rely on top-down, controlled messaging, digital branding is inherently dialogic and participatory. It enables a continuous negotiation of meaning through both institutional communication and UGC. This interplay is especially significant in tourism contexts, where discourse not only promotes destinations but also constructs values and imaginaries. In this regard, digital brand discourse and tourism discourse intersect as mutually

reinforcing systems: the former frames branding strategies, while the latter reflects and reshapes how destinations are experienced, evaluated, and represented by travelers.

Yet, despite the expansion of research on tourism discourse, its intersection with digital brand discourse remains insufficiently addressed—particularly in relation to how institutional narratives and prosumer voices interact in destination brand co-creation. Moreover, while studies on tourism discourse have grown in number, much of the existing work relies on qualitative methodologies, often focused on small samples, single platforms, or isolated communicative events (Qian et al., 2018). This limits the possibility to capture broader discursive patterns and the complexity of branding in large-scale, data-rich environments.

This chapter addresses these gaps by investigating both online user reactions to destination rebranding and the role of UGC in co-creating the destination brand on social media. In doing so, the study examines how institutional and public discourses interact, foregrounding the discursive mechanisms through which branding strategies are received, negotiated, and reshaped by online users.

A key methodological contribution of this study lies in its adoption of CADS. By integrating quantitative insights with qualitative interpretive inquiry, CADS enables the systematic exploration of UGC across digital platforms. This approach overcomes the limitations of small-scale discourse analyses by allowing for the investigation of big data in tourism communication, capturing both macro-level patterns and the nuanced meanings embedded in social media discourse.

### **3.5 Methodology**

This section outlines the methodology adopted in this chapter, which draws on CADS to examine both online user reactions to

destination rebranding efforts and the role of UGC in co-creating the destination brand on social media. Section 3.5.1 describes the processes of extracting comments from social media platforms and compiling them into corpora, while Section 3.5.2 details the analytical techniques employed—namely frequency analysis, collocation analysis, and concordance analysis.

### **3.5.1 Data Collection**

Comments directly responding to the PSA video published on the official City of Miami Beach social media accounts—i.e., Instagram, X, YouTube, and Facebook—were collected through automated extraction. Specifically, data were retrieved using ExportComments (<https://www.exportcomments.com/>), a web-based data scraping tool designed to extract publicly accessible comments from social media posts. To cover both the core spring break season and the immediate aftermath, comments published between March 1 and May 31, 2024 were collected. Data extraction followed a web-for-corpus approach.

Each comment was exported as an individual text file, maintaining a one-to-one correspondence between comments and files. Table 3.1 shows the total number of comments extracted from each platform.

**Table 3.1**

*Number of Comments Extracted per Social Media Platform (March 1 – May 31, 2024)*

	<b>Instagram</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Facebook</b>
<b>Number of comments</b>	2,283	1,467	867	75

Following extraction, data were organized into five distinct corpora using #LancsBox. Four of these are platform-specific, corresponding to Instagram (IG corpus), X (X corpus), YouTube (YT corpus), and Facebook (FB corpus). In addition to these, an aggregate corpus—referred to as the SB corpus (i.e., the spring break corpus)—was created to include all collected comments across platforms.

This corpus design enabled both platform-specific analyses of user reactions to the rebranding campaign and a comprehensive examination of how UGC across platforms contributes to destination branding narratives and meanings.

### **3.5.2 Data Analysis**

In this chapter, data analysis is conducted at the level of types to retain surface-level variation characteristic of user-generated social media comments. This granularity is essential for capturing affective nuances, stylistic diversity, and platform-specific language practices.

To explore how online users reacted to the rebranding campaign on social media, a frequency analysis of *trigrams* (i.e., three-word *n*-grams) was carried out for each of the four platform-specific corpora. The decision to focus on trigrams, rather than single words or *bigrams* (i.e., two-word *n*-grams), was based on their capacity to provide greater contextual richness and reveal more meaningful discursive patterns (Gillings et al., 2023). Using #LancsBox, the top 10 most frequently occurring trigrams for each platform were identified to unveil dominant themes and recurring topics in response to the rebranding campaign. Considering the limited number of comments on Facebook, only the top five most frequently occurring trigrams were considered for this platform.

Trigrams were then examined through concordance analysis, using a structured bottom-up approach, which enabled an in-depth

exploration of their co-text. This inductive process led to the categorization of trigrams into emergent semantic categories that reflected evaluative and thematic dimensions of UGC. This categorization allowed for the identification of patterns in how users engaged with, supported, or criticized the rebranding efforts, ultimately unveiling the range of reactions to the campaign across social media.

To investigate how online users participated in the rebranding narrative across social media through their UGC, a collocation analysis was conducted on the aggregate SB corpus using #LancsBox, with *Miami* selected as the node word. This analysis aimed to uncover how the city is discursively constructed on social media through its lexical associations. The choice of *Miami*—rather than *Miami Beach*—as the node word was motivated by its more frequent and varied use in the data. Users often refer to the destination simply as *Miami*, even when discussing Miami Beach explicitly. Using *Miami* as the node word thus ensured broader coverage of relevant discourse and reduced the risk of overlooking significant associations due to inconsistent terminology.

Collocates were identified using the cubed Mutual Information ( $MI^3$ ) statistical measure, with a collocation window of four words to the left and right and a threshold score of  $\geq 9$ . All content-bearing collocates meeting this threshold—excluding functional words and focusing on semantically rich items—were then examined through concordance analysis, following a structured bottom-up approach.

By triangulating frequency, collocation, and concordance analyses, the chapter captured both platform-specific and overarching digital discourse patterns that reflected public perceptions of the rebranding campaign and contributed to the co-creation of Miami Beach's destination brand within the context of spring break tourism.

### 3.6 Results and Discussion

The five corpora built from UGC vary in size (Table 3.2), reflecting different levels of user engagement with the rebranding campaign: Instagram shows the highest level of engagement, while Facebook shows the lowest.

The results are presented in two analytical subsections. Subsection 3.6.1 examines platform-specific reactions to the city's rebranding campaign, identifying distinct discursive patterns and user perspectives across Instagram, X, YouTube, and Facebook. Subsection 3.6.2 offers a cross-platform analysis of how UGC contributes to the co-creation of Miami Beach's destination brand.

The discussion is organized to ensure a coherent progression within each semantic dimension, enabling a systematic exploration of the main themes that emerged from the data. Taken together, the two subsections offer insights into how meaning is negotiated through digital brand discourse in the context of destination marketing.

**Table 3.2**

*Corpus Statistics for the IG, X, YT, FB, and SB Corpora*

	<b>IG</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>YT</b>	<b>FB</b>	<b>SB</b>
<b>Files</b>	2,283	1,467	867	75	4,692
<b>Tokens</b>	28,033	21,785	19,071	1,625	70,514
<b>Types</b>	4,338	3,852	3,466	683	8,055
<b>Lemmas</b>	4,262	3,783	3,317	667	7,923

#### **3.6.1 Social Media Reactions to Destination Rebranding**

The analysis of trigrams across the four social media platforms revealed diverse and, at times, conflicting reactions to Miami Beach's rebranding campaign. On Instagram, UGC conveyed a generally supportive sentiment toward the rebranding strategy, particularly in

relation to restoring order during the chaotic spring break season, with this tone reflected in comments containing trigrams such as those reported in Table 3.3. Trigrams like “I love this” and “this is great” appeared in comments where users praised the city's proactive approach to spring break (e.g., “as a local, I LOVE THIS!!” and “this is great for all Miami residents”).

At the same time, noticeable frustration emerged regarding strict regulations, particularly parking fees, as evidenced by trigrams such as “\$100 parking is,” “have to pay,” and “the people who.” Online users criticized these measures, with comments like “\$100 parking is 100% crazy pls gtfo,” “ridiculous that I have to pay to see my own beach,” and “this abuse of power also affects the people who work there.” These sentiments suggest a tension between support for restoring order and opposition to specific policies perceived as burdensome to residents and visitors.

Trigrams such as “on the beach” and “in South Beach” highlighted spatial concerns, with users identifying South Beach as the epicenter of disruptive tourist behavior. Comments like “spring breakers leave literal tons of garbage on the beach” and “police is a joke in South Beach! Look at Ocean Drive, it looks like Chicago, full of dealers” reinforced this perception of territorial disruption, where public spaces were seen as being overrun, disrespected, and temporarily lost to outsiders.

The trigram “live in Miami” foregrounded the perspectives of local residents, who voiced concerns about spring break tourism (e.g., “dude, I live in Miami Beach and these fuckin tourists ruin everything”). Similarly, the trigram “the spring breakers” was often used in comments that both criticized the disruptive behavior of tourists and pointed to deeper social problems in South Beach. For example, one user wrote “there is not only the spring breakers... South Beach is the

ghetto just at a higher price,” indicating that some residents see spring break as part of a broader pattern of urban neglect and mismanagement.

Finally, the trigram “to Fort Lauderdale” appeared in comments expressing concern from users—likely based in Fort Lauderdale—about the possibility of spring breakers shifting their destination from Miami Beach to their city. These users reacted with apprehension to the idea of becoming the next hotspot for spring break tourism. For example, comments like “oh no, now they’re going to come to Fort Lauderdale instead” reflect fears of inheriting the same disruptions and social burdens associated with spring break crowds in Miami Beach.

**Table 3.3**

*Top 10 Trigrams in the IG Corpus*

<b>Trigram</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
on the beach	9.63 %
I love this	6.42 %
live in Miami	5.35 %
the spring breakers	4.99 %
in south beach	4.99 %
to Fort Lauderdale	3.92 %
\$100 parking is	3.56 %
this is great	3.21 %
the people who	2.85 %
have to pay	2.85 %

On X, a racial debate emerged around Miami Beach’s rebranding campaign, with Black individuals frequently referenced in comments featuring trigrams listed in Table 3.4. While the campaign itself did not explicitly mention race, many users interpreted it through a racial lens,

triggering polarized reactions about who the true targets of the initiative were.

The racial debate featured two dominant sides: those who attacked the campaign for allegedly targeting Black communities, and those who defended it as a race-neutral initiative. The trigram “people of color” appeared in comments accusing city officials of using spring break discourse to scapegoat minorities, as in “they (the politicians) say people of color are the reason for the issues in South Beach during spring break.” In contrast, other users pushed back, arguing that race was not explicitly referenced and that the campaign focused on behavior rather than identity. Comments expressing this view frequently contained trigrams such as “they don't want” (e.g., “they don't want drunk people fucking shit up and shooting random people. Why you think they mean Black people?”), “about Black people” (e.g., “how'd you come to the conclusion they were speaking about Black people?”), “crime and lawlessness” (e.g., “they are worried about the crime and lawlessness, you inherently correlate that with ‘shades’”), and “out of control” (e.g., “they don't want drugs and out of control violence. This has nothing to do with race”). These comments reflect an ongoing negotiation over the social meaning and implications of the campaign's messaging.

At the same time, some users engaged in explicitly racist discourse, reinforcing stereotypes and blaming Black individuals for disorderly spring break behavior. Comments with trigrams like “no one wants” (e.g., “no one wants large numbers of Blacks in their cities”), “of Black people” (e.g., “large groups of Black people are often violent and destructive”), “we don't want” (e.g., “Black and brown people commit more crime so we don't want them ruining the vibe”), and “you don't want” (e.g., “shutting down spring break because you don't want Black people in your city is a great idea”) expressed overtly racist attitudes.

These views were met with strong criticism from other users who condemned the racial generalizations, often in comments featuring the trigram “Black people are” (e.g., “pretty racist to imply Black people are automatically the violent ones”). These dynamics highlight not only the racialized framing of the campaign but also the contested nature of public discourse around race, safety, and belonging.

**Table 3.4**

*Top 10 Trigrams in the X Corpus*

<b>Trigram</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
they don't want	6.89%
people of color	6.42 %
black people are	5.35 %
crime and lawlessness	4.99 %
we don't want	4.99 %
about black people	3.92 %
of black people	3.56 %
out of control	3.21 %
no one wants	2.85 %
you don't want	2.85 %

On YouTube, UGC was strongly characterized by skepticism regarding the campaign’s potential to produce meaningful change, as suggested by recurring trigrams shown in Table 3.5. Trigrams such as “will not stand,” “is not going,” “is going nowhere,” “and will continue,” and “law and order” appeared in numerous comments doubting the initiative’s effectiveness. Users expressed sentiments like “these measures will not stand. Shut up!” and “it is not going to work.” Other comments emphasized continuity in the problem, as in “spring break is going nowhere, there will be no breakup at all” or “this campaign was

and will continue to be a failure.” The trigram “law and order” was often used sarcastically or critically, as in “these law and order and heavy-handed tactics will be thrown out.” Collectively, these expressions suggest that many users viewed the campaign as symbolic rather than actionable, unlikely to deter spring break tourism or prevent future disruptions.

Racial discourse also emerged on YouTube, though with a different focus than on X. While the X platform featured debates centered around accusations of anti-Black targeting, the racial lens on YouTube placed White spring breakers at the center of criticism. Trigrams such as “lily White spoiled” and “White spoiled Republicans” were used to characterize the spring break crowd as privileged and entitled. For example, one user wrote, “I don’t think those lily White, spoiled Republicans will complain,” implying that the campaign is unlikely to affect privileged White partygoers who are both racially and politically immune from criticism or enforcement. This perspective contrasted with the racialized discourse on X and suggested a different kind of critique—one targeting a predominantly White demographic perceived as disrupting the social order in Miami Beach.

Although critical views dominated, a few comments expressed appreciation for the campaign or interpreted its messaging in specific ways. The trigram “I love this” was used to signal support, particularly among users identifying with local or industry interests, as in “I love this and I work in tourism. This kind of ‘tourism’ is destructive and awful for residents. Good job Miami Beach!” Other trigrams like “we don’t want” reflected a focus on the campaign’s implied messaging, with comments such as “what they really mean is we don’t want broke people coming here taking up space.” Meanwhile, the trigram “last year was” introduced references to past events to justify the campaign’s rationale, as in “last year was nuts. Almost 600 arrests, 100 guns

confiscated, shootings, and deaths.” These comments framed the rebranding effort as a response to historical patterns of violence and disruption, even if doubts about its future success remained.

**Table 3.5**

*Top 10 Trigrams in the YT Corpus*

<b>Trigram</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
will not stand	5.77 %
is not going	5.24 %
lily white spoiled	3.67 %
I love this	2.62 %
white spoiled republican	2.62 %
is going nowhere	2.10 %
law and order	2.10 %
we don't want	2.10 %
last year was	1.57 %
and will continue	1.57 %

Although fewer in number, Facebook comments were intense in tone, displaying both skepticism and hostility toward the campaign, with relevant trigrams displayed in Table 3.6. Trigrams like "will not stand" and "not going to" appeared in comments where users dismissed the campaign as ineffective, with statements such as “these moves will not stand and will be overturned” and “it is not going to work.” More alarmingly, the trigram “I hope your” revealed underlying anger in comments such as “I hope your beaches this spring break and onward are FLOODED,” signaling an extreme and destructive reaction to the city’s law enforcement measures.

In addition to general hostility, racial and geographical concerns also surfaced on Facebook. The trigram "to keep people" reflected

suspicious that the campaign was racially motivated, particularly to exclude people of color from Miami Beach (e.g., “this is to keep people of color off the beach”). Meanwhile, the trigram “is just south” pointed to the geographic concentration of these issues in South Beach, with comments like “this is just South Beach. There are other places to go,” reinforcing narratives of localized unrest and targeted enforcement.

**Table 3.6**

*Top Five Trigrams in the FB Corpus*

<b>Trigram</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
will not stand	24.65 %
not going to	12.32 %
I hope your	12.32 %
is just South	6.16 %
to keep people	6.16 %

These findings reveal a fragmented and highly polarized public reception of Miami Beach’s rebranding campaign across social media platforms. While some users—particularly on Instagram—welcomed the initiative as a necessary step toward restoring order and promoting more sustainable forms of tourism, others viewed it with deep skepticism, especially on platforms like YouTube and Facebook, where the campaign was widely dismissed as ineffective or symbolic. Meanwhile, on X, the campaign sparked intense racial debate centered on the perceived targeting of Black individuals, whereas on YouTube, racial discourse focused on White spring breakers framed as privileged and disruptive.

The semantic dimensions emerging from the trigram analysis—supportive sentiment, regulatory frustration, spatial concerns, racial discourse, and skepticism—illustrate how the campaign produced

divergent interpretations shaped by user identity, platform norms, and political sensitivities. Rather than reinforcing a cohesive destination image, the campaign gave rise to competing narratives that both supported and undermined the city's rebranding efforts. This underscores the challenges of strategic destination branding in contexts marked by overtourism and social tension, where communicative strategies must not only promote regulation but also anticipate the varied social dynamics of public discourse across platforms.

### **3.6.2 Destination Brand Co-Creation**

The collocation analysis, conducted using *Miami* as the node word, yielded 28 semantically rich collocates with an MI<sup>3</sup> score  $\geq 9$ . Among these collocates, 18 appeared to the left of the node word, nine to the right, and one occurred with equal frequency on both sides (middle position). The full list of collocates is reported in Table 3.7.

Concordance analysis, performed through a structured bottom-up approach, revealed how these lexical associations contribute to the discursive co-creation of Miami Beach's destination brand across social media. UGC not only reflects individual opinions but also functions as a collective narrative space where identity, place, and values are constructed, contested, and negotiated.

**Table 3.7***Collocates of "Miami" in the SB Corpus*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Collocate</b>	<b>MI<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Frequency (collocation)</b>	<b>Frequency (collocate)</b>
1	R	beach	21.28	235	539
2	L	live	15.28	35	114
3	L	go	14.43	36	223
4	L	good	14.29	34	207
5	R	residents	14.21	25	87
6	L	city	13.56	31	261
7	L	people	13.38	39	586
8	L	love	12.91	21	127
9	L	👏	12.71	15	53
10	L	great	11.10	12	83
11	L	moved	10.95	9	39
12	R	finally	10.25	9	63
13	R	sucks	9.78	5	15
14	L	lauderdale	9.66	8	67
15	R	south	9.63	10	133
16	R	black	9.61	12	234
17	R	😄	9.44	10	152
18	M	florida	9.37	10	160
19	R	party	9.31	7	57
20	R	tourism	9.30	8	86
21	L	stay	9.24	7	60
22	L	welcome	9.23	6	38
23	L	beautiful	9.23	5	22
24	L	come	9.20	10	179
25	L	white	9.15	8	95
26	L	lol	9.13	9	137
27	L	damn	9.08	6	42
28	L	made	9.06	7	68

The collocate *beach* stood out with a markedly higher MI<sup>3</sup> score, unsurprisingly reflecting the compound toponym *Miami Beach*. Although some users correctly distinguished between Greater Miami and Miami Beach, the node word *Miami* was chosen because many users referred to both areas interchangeably, often using *Miami* as a shorthand.

Online users frequently position themselves as insiders, drawing boundaries between locals and tourists. The collocate *live* appeared in comments asserting disconnection from the spring break scene, such as “let's be honest! People who live in Miami don't hang out in South Beach,” suggesting that locals regard the area as overtaken by tourists and characterized by undesirable behaviors. Similarly, *residents* featured in expressions of support for the city's regulatory measures (e.g., “congratulations City of Miami Beach! We, the residents with little kids, appreciate that”). The collocate *people* was also used to criticize disruptive visitor conduct, as in “we don't want violence and people acting like Miami Beach is their place to trash,” reinforcing the portrayal of tourists as outsiders who disrespect local norms. Taken together, these examples construct a protective stance toward the city, positioning locals as guardians of a more livable and family-friendly community.

The collocate *moved* signaled a decisive form of disengagement from the city, often framed through critical evaluations of Miami's livability. For example, “I moved away from Miami because of the garbage that it has” expresses a rejection of the city's perceived decline, linking relocation to social degradation and disorder.

Behavioral norms and critiques were further reinforced by the collocate *party*, as in “if you are really from Miami, you don't party in South Beach,” invoking a boundary between authentic locals and stereotyped tourist behavior. Broader critiques of the industry surfaced

in examples with the collocate *tourism*, such as “Miami Beach tourism has always been trash,” reflecting deep-seated discontent with the destination’s positioning and its seasonal dependence on mass tourism.

Other users appeal to civic and economic reasoning, as in the example tied to *city*: “that’s dumb asf! Spring break makes the city of Miami over 30 million dollars annually,” challenging the campaign’s rationale from a financial perspective.

Affective and evaluative language featured prominently in UGC. Positive sentiments are conveyed through collocates such as *good*, *great*, *love*, and the emoji 🍌, often used in affirmational or celebratory tones. Examples include: “good job Miami Beach!! Let’s get our beach back,” “this is great for all Miami residents,” and “I love this!! Good for Miami,” which express enthusiasm and community pride, reinforcing the campaign’s message of safety and civic order. The emoji 🍌 functioned as visual applause, as in “Well done Miami Beach 🍌.”

However, support is not unanimous. Sarcasm and mockery emerged through collocates such as *lol*, 😂, and *damn*, conveying dismissive attitudes: “lol people still go to Miami Beach,” “crazy part nobody on the video or comments really from Miami 😂,” and “this whack commercial will not stop a damn thing.” These ironic responses destabilize the campaign’s authority and contribute to a counter-branding discourse.

The collocate *sucks* exemplified explicit disillusionment: “Miami Beach sucks with or without spring break,” framing the destination as inherently unappealing. Such polarized affective responses—whether celebratory or cynical—illustrate how UGC shapes destination branding by reinforcing or resisting institutional narratives.

Spatial and movement-related collocates played a central role in the co-construction of brand meaning. Collocates such as *go*, *come*,

and *stay* appeared in directive and exclusionary expressions like “you shouldn’t go to Miami Beach,” “please, do not come to Miami,” and “stay away from Miami, please.” These utterances delineate who is welcome and who is not, contributing to the construction of a brand identity grounded in selective inclusion and protective boundaries.

Redirection to alternative destinations also emerged, with *Lauderdale* indicating a preferable option (e.g., “go to Fort Lauderdale! Miami sucks”), while the collocate *south* was often tied to references to South Beach, framed as the epicenter of spring break disorder (e.g., “Miami and South Beach are over”), implying that the area had lost its appeal due to excessive tourism and unruly behavior.

The brand narrative also triggered racialized and class-based critiques. Collocates such as *Black*, *White*, *welcome*, and *made* were embedded in comments accusing the city of exclusionary tactics. For example, “Miami basically made being Black illegal during spring break” linked enforcement strategies to racial discrimination. The collocate *White* was used to highlight perceived double standards: “when spring break was essentially all White students: Miami Beach be like: WELCOME!!!! When spring break is diverse: Miami Beach all of a sudden: NOPE!” Similarly, *welcome* underscored class boundaries: “as long as you’re not poor, then you’re welcome,” suggesting that economic privilege mediates access to the destination. The collocate *made* was central to accusations of spatial policing, as in “you made Miami into an open-air prison,” critiquing the city’s authoritarian branding practices. These user responses reframed the rebranding efforts as racially and economically exclusive, infusing the brand with ideologically charged counter-narratives.

Finally, emotional connection and symbolic place detachment were expressed through collocates such as *beautiful*, *Florida*, and *finally*. In “we need to protect our beautiful Miami Beach community,”

emotional investment and preservation are foregrounded. The collocate *finally* reflected a sense of relief and resident alignment with the campaign's aims, as in "Miami Beach finally getting rid of those rowdy spring breakers." Meanwhile, *Florida* appeared in comments expressing broader emotional disillusionment with the state: "never going to Miami. Never going to Florida," and "it's not just Miami, it's most of Florida," indicating that the campaign's reputational fallout extended beyond city limits. These examples highlight how online users contribute to destination brand meaning through affective investment, local attachment, and moral commentary—whether by reinforcing local pride or expressing detachment and critique.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that UGC is not merely reactive but plays an active, constitutive role in shaping the destination brand. Through emotionally charged evaluations, socio-spatial judgments, and ideological contestations, online users collectively participate in the branding process. Rather than simply echoing official narratives, they reshape, support, or resist them, turning social media into a key arena for brand negotiation and reimagination.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter investigated the intersection of digital brand discourse and tourism discourse through a corpus-assisted analysis of UGC responding to Miami Beach's rebranding campaign against unruly spring break tourism. Drawing on CADS—and employing frequency, collocation, and concordance analyses—the study revealed how destination branding unfolds not only through institutional messaging but also through participatory public discourse on social media.

The findings demonstrate that Miami Beach's rebranding strategy provoked a range of fragmented and contested online user

reactions across digital platforms. While some users—particularly on Instagram—endorsed the campaign, praising its efforts to restore order and promote sustainable-responsible tourism, others—especially on YouTube and Facebook—criticized it as ineffective, exclusionary, or symbolic. Meanwhile, on X, the campaign ignited racially polarized debates. These divergent reactions underscore the complexity of strategic destination branding in socially sensitive contexts, where institutional narratives intersect with varied user identities, platform dynamics, and political sensitivities.

UGC emerged as a discursive force that both supported and subverted the campaign’s rebranding narrative. The analysis revealed a range of semantic dimensions through which users co-constructed the meaning of Miami Beach’s rebranding effort. These included expressions of resident identity and local frustration, critiques of tourism culture and economic priorities, affective evaluations ranging from pride to sarcasm, and spatial positioning that delineated who belongs and who does not. Furthermore, racialized and class-based narratives further exposed tensions around inclusion and privilege.

Within and across these dimensions, users engaged in emotionally charged evaluations, socio-spatial judgments, and ideological contestations that reshaped the city’s brand. Supportive voices helped reinforce a civic-oriented, family-friendly image, while dissenting perspectives articulated deeper anxieties over exclusion, the erosion of local identity, and the perceived decline in livability. These findings demonstrate that destination branding in digital environments is not simply received—it is negotiated and reimagined through the diverse discourses of online publics.

Rather than merely echoing official communication, online users supported, contested, and reframed brand messaging. Positive appraisals and celebratory emojis reinforced the campaign’s goals, but

sarcastic remarks, nostalgic comparisons, and racialized critiques challenged the coherence and legitimacy of the rebranding effort. These discursive negotiations illustrate that destination branding is not a unidirectional process but a dialogic one, shaped by public meaning-making in real time.

This chapter contributes to literature on digital and tourism discourse, branding, and destination marketing, emphasizing rebranding as a socially contingent and ideologically contested process. While institutional actors may attempt to reposition a destination to address issues of overtourism, safety, and sustainability, the success of such efforts hinges on how they are received, interpreted, and rearticulated by diverse publics. In the case of Miami Beach, the campaign catalyzed not only brand support but also dissent, satire, and resistance—revealing the limits of top-down communication in complex tourism environments.

For DMOs and policymakers, these findings highlight the need for inclusive, dialogic, and transparent branding strategies. Rebranding efforts must address practical challenges while also acknowledging and engaging with resident perspectives, social equity concerns, and digital discourse in its full complexity. Monitoring user reactions across platforms can serve as a valuable tool for evaluating campaign resonance and adjusting brand positioning in real time. Moreover, fostering collaborative branding practices—by incorporating resident and visitor feedback—can help align brand identity with image and ensure that destination narratives remain authentic, resilient, and socially grounded.

While this chapter offers valuable insights, it is limited by its focus on a single case and a defined temporal window. Future research could adopt longitudinal or comparative approaches to examine how co-created branding narratives evolve over time and across different

geographic and sociocultural contexts. In addition, a fine-grained qualitative analysis of larger chunks of discourse and a deeper exploration of multimodal communication—particularly visual and audiovisual elements—would enrich our understanding of how destination meanings are constructed and contested in the digital sphere.

In conclusion, this case illustrates the dynamic and contested nature of destination branding in the digital era. UGC is not merely a reflection of tourist sentiment but a constitutive element of brand discourse—shaping, supporting, and challenging destination narratives. As destinations navigate the tensions between tourism development, sustainability, and community well-being, understanding and engaging with digital public discourse will be essential to fostering destination brands that are inclusive, adaptive, and attuned to the voices of those they represent.

## Conclusion

This study explored the discursive dimension of digital branding in the hospitality and tourism industry through the lens of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). It aimed to advance the understanding of digital brand discourse as a socially and ideologically constructed phenomenon that emerges at the intersection of discourse studies, strategic communication, and marketing. Drawing on a constructivist-interpretivist framework, the research employed a combined approach that integrated quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative discourse analysis. Each chapter examined a distinct facet of digital brand discourse.

Chapter 1 provided the theoretical and methodological foundation by reviewing key literature on digital discourse, digital branding, and CADS. It introduced the concept of digital brand discourse and framed CADS as an effective approach for exploring the communicative and ideological dimensions of branding in digital contexts. The chapter also presented the main analytical tools of CADS, outlining how they enable researchers to move from patterns in large corpora to interpretive insights.

Chapter 2 analyzed how Italian restaurants in Miami-Dade County construct and leverage Italianness on their official websites through digital brand discourse. Adopting a two-stage CADS approach integrating keyword and concordance analyses, it explored Italianness both as a cultural-ideological system in brand identity and as a strategy in brand positioning. By comparing corpora of Italian and non-Italian restaurants, as well as those that explicitly foreground Italianness with those that do not, the chapter revealed how authenticity, regionality, heritage, tradition, and storytelling are strategically mobilized to express Italian cultural identity and differentiate brand offerings.

Chapter 3 investigated destination branding dynamics within the context of spring break tourism in Miami Beach. It focused on social media reactions to a rebranding campaign targeting spring breakers and on how online users co-create the destination brand through user-generated content (UGC). Drawing on platform-specific and aggregate corpora of social media comments, the chapter examined how users responded to and engaged with the city's rebranding efforts through specific lexical choices and narrative evaluations. Frequency, collocation, and concordance techniques were employed to assess both the public reception of the campaign and the discursive processes through which users actively shaped brand meaning in a context marked by sustainability concerns and social tension. Together, these chapters demonstrate that digital brand discourse is not merely a set of promotional messages, but a complex, dialogic process involving ideological positioning, cultural negotiation, and collective meaning-making.

The key insights of the overall study can be grouped into four thematic areas. First, the study addresses critical gaps in the literature identified in Chapter 1, including: the limited integration of discourse approaches within strategic communication research, the underexplored discursive dimension of digital branding, and the lack of methodological frameworks capable of analyzing large-scale digital texts while remaining attuned to the socio-semiotic complexity of brand meaning-making. To respond to these gaps, this research adopts CADS as a scalable and context-sensitive approach for analyzing digital brand discourse. CADS enables the systematic identification of linguistic patterns across corpora and supports the interpretive analysis of their semantic, cultural, and ideological significance. This methodological orientation provides the necessary tools to examine

how language shapes brand meaning, communicates values, and facilitates engagement in dynamic digital environments.

Second, the analysis presented in Chapter 2 demonstrated the crucial role of culture in digital branding. Italianness as a food and beverage (F&B) brand is discursively constructed through recurring references to authenticity, tradition, and regional identity. These features function both as symbolic resources that evoke shared cultural values and as strategic tools for differentiating brand propositions in a multicultural market. Italianness is conveyed not only through explicit references but also through lexical patterns and themes that suggest artisanal craftsmanship, intergenerational continuity, and gastronomic excellence. These discursive strategies underscore how brand identity in the F&B sector is shaped through culturally resonant narratives that connect product, place, and experience.

Third, the case study in Chapter 3 illustrated that digital branding is a negotiation process, which can be supported or contested by online users. While the rebranding campaign of Miami Beach sought to reposition the city as a safer and more sustainable destination, user-generated responses revealed a diversity of perspectives. Some users supported the campaign, emphasizing the importance of public order and community well-being. Others rejected it as ineffective, restrictive, or discriminatory. The analysis of trigrams and collocations revealed conflicting narratives that either aligned with or challenged the city's rebranding efforts, highlighting how public discourse may reinforce or destabilize official brand messages.

Fourth, the research confirmed that UGC is integral to brand co-creation in digital environments. Online users are not passive recipients of branding messages but active participants in the construction of brand meaning. Through evaluative language, emotional expressions, and stance-taking, they co-produce the symbolic dimensions of

brands. This dynamic illustrates a fundamental shift from monologic (one-to-one) communication to dialogic (many-to-many) interactions, with significant implications for how brand strategies are designed, implemented, and interpreted.

From a managerial perspective, the findings underscore the importance of aligning digital brand discourse with cultural values and audience expectations. For F&B businesses, the analysis suggests that drawing on cultural narratives—such as authenticity and regionality—can enhance brand positioning. However, these narratives must remain credible, consistent, and adaptable to diverse markets. Managers should recognize that authenticity is not a static feature but a negotiated construct shaped by corporate discourse and consumer interpretation.

For destination marketing organizations (DMOs), the study highlights the importance of engaging with UGC as an integral part of branding. Public reactions to campaigns provide valuable insights into audience sentiment, potential backlash, and emerging counter-narratives. In the case of Miami Beach, the findings revealed that attempts to promote sustainable-responsible tourism were met with a range of interpretations, some of which questioning the inclusivity and legitimacy of the campaign. Policymakers are therefore encouraged to adopt a dialogic approach to destination branding—one that incorporates public participation, addresses community concerns, and anticipates alternative readings of institutional discourse. Rebranding, in this light, should be understood not as a one-time intervention but as an ongoing communicative process requiring coherence, stakeholder alignment, and narrative continuity.

This dissertation contributes to multiple strands of scholarship. It advances the field of discourse studies by applying CADS to branding, which is often explored through other approaches. By combining

corpus techniques with interpretive discourse analysis, it demonstrates how CADS can be used not only to describe discourse but to explain how branding constructs social realities.

The research also contributes to strategic communication and marketing by foregrounding the discursive and participatory nature of brand dynamics. It emphasizes how digital brand discourse unfolds through language choices and narrative framings that shape user perceptions and engagement.

Finally, the study extends hospitality and tourism research by analyzing how digital platforms mediate F&B brand narratives, destination imaginaries, stakeholder negotiations, and public reactions to tourism campaigns. Specifically, the investigation of UGC in the context of destination rebranding offers new insights into the role of prosumers in brand co-creation, particularly in periods of crisis or transition marked by overtourism and social tension.

Methodologically, the dissertation demonstrates the versatility and value of CADS for examining branding. By integrating frequency, keyword, collocation, and concordance analyses, CADS offers a scalable and flexible approach for uncovering underlying patterns and contextual meanings in large corpora. This is particularly relevant for digital environments, where abundant textual data require both scale and interpretive depth. The comparative design in Chapter 2 and the platform-specific corpus design in Chapter 3 illustrate how CADS can be adapted to different research contexts and data types.

The study also shows how corpus methods can complement traditional discourse analysis by grounding interpretations in empirical evidence while preserving contextual nuance. The use of trigrams and collocates in the analysis of UGC provides a replicable model for studying digital brand discourse dynamics, highlighting how language constructs, reinforces, or contests official branding efforts. The inclusion

of emojis in the analysis further extends CADS into multimodal territory, pointing to future research opportunities.

While the study offers a robust methodological framework, it is not without limitations. Although CADS enables large-scale analysis, the process of corpus building inevitably involves subjective choices. For instance, decisions about which restaurants to include or which social media platforms to analyze may introduce bias. While efforts were made to ensure representativeness and consistency, these limitations should be acknowledged. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on textual data, with limited attention to multimodal components of digital branding. While some elements such as emojis were included, future research could expand the analytical scope by incorporating multimodal analysis more systematically. Finally, while CADS provides valuable tools for discourse analysis, it requires a high level of technical and interpretive competence. Researchers must be equipped to handle both corpus software and theoretical interpretation to fully realize its potential.

Several future research directions emerge from this work. Longitudinal studies could investigate how brand discourse evolves over time in response to sociocultural shifts or crises. Comparative studies across different destinations, cuisines, or branding contexts could help distinguish universal from context-specific strategies. Further integration of multimodal analysis would allow scholars to explore how images, videos, and layouts interact with language in constructing brand narratives. Additional research could also explore power and ideology more explicitly—for example, by examining how brand messages reproduce or challenge social hierarchies, cultural stereotypes, or dominant power structures, as well as how marginalized voices participate in brand co-creation or contest prevailing narratives. Finally, applied research could bridge academic insights from CADS

with professional practice by developing actionable frameworks or toolkits.

Ultimately, this dissertation shows that digital branding is, at its core, a discursive phenomenon. It is not merely the result of visual design or marketing tactics, but a dynamic process of meaning-making shaped by language, culture, and social interaction. In the age of digital media, branding is no longer unidirectional—brands are co-constructed by institutions, professionals, and publics in continuous dialogue.

By applying CADS to real-world cases in hospitality and tourism, this research has illuminated the communicative mechanisms through which brands are constructed, contested, and negotiated. It also underscores the importance of critically engaging with digital brand discourse—not only to understand how it functions, but to reflect on whose voices are heard, what values are promoted, and what visions of business or place are conveyed.

As hospitality businesses and tourism destinations face increasingly complex social, economic, and environmental challenges, discourse will remain a key tool for defining what they stand for and understanding how they are perceived. Researchers, managers, and policymakers alike must remain attentive to the language of branding—not just as a marketing tool, but as a vehicle for social meaning and public imagination.

Recognizing the power of digital brand discourse is essential for both scholars and practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of digital branding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this sense, CADS offers more than a methodological toolkit—it offers a way of seeing digital branding as a form of cultural production, one that invites us to think critically about the stories we tell, the identities we project, and the futures we envision.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A:** Keywords of the ITALIAN Corpus 145

**Appendix B:** Keywords of the ITALIAN-1 Subcorpus 149

## Appendix A

### *Keywords of the ITALIAN Corpus*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Cohen's <i>d</i></b>
1	italian	adjective	1.20
2	italy	noun	0.78
3	pasta	noun	0.65
4	pizza	noun	0.48
5	import	verb	0.41
6	neapolitan	adjective	0.39
7	dough	noun	0.39
8	atmosphere	noun	0.39
9	selection	noun	0.36
10	ambiance	noun	0.35
11	trattoria	noun	0.34
12	memory	noun	0.33
13	world	noun	0.33
14	tiramisu	noun	0.32
15	true	adjective	0.32
16	italian	noun	0.32
17	di	preposition	0.32
18	bolognese	adjective	0.30
19	brother	noun	0.30
20	oil	noun	0.29
21	entire	adjective	0.29
22	key	adjective	0.29
23	flour	noun	0.29
24	approach	noun	0.29
25	homemade	adjective	0.29
26	wine	noun	0.29
27	olive	adjective	0.28
28	pizzeria	noun	0.28
29	amazing	adjective	0.28
30	be	verb	0.28
31	memorable	adjective	0.28
32	cozy	adjective	0.28
33	authenticity	noun	0.28
34	important	adjective	0.28
35	daily	adjective	0.27
36	unforgettable	adjective	0.27
37	quality	noun	0.27
38	patio	noun	0.27
39	house	noun	0.27

40	sourced	verb	0.27
41	touch	noun	0.26
42	europe	noun	0.26
43	famed	adjective	0.26
44	enthusiast	noun	0.26
45	host	verb	0.26
46	appetito	noun	0.26
47	originate	verb	0.26
48	prosciutto	noun	0.26
49	gnocchi	noun	0.26
50	high	adjective	0.26
51	friendly	adjective	0.25
52	dinner	noun	0.25
53	cool	adjective	0.25
54	miami	noun	0.25
55	ingredient	noun	0.25
56	yelp	noun	0.24
57	beach	noun	0.24
58	napoli	noun	0.24
59	garden	noun	0.24
60	knowledgeable	adjective	0.24
61	northern	adjective	0.24
62	extra	adjective	0.24
63	authentic	adjective	0.24
64	beloved	adjective	0.24
65	naples	noun	0.24
66	importance	noun	0.24
67	acclaimed	adjective	0.23
68	reliable	adjective	0.23
69	buon	adjective	0.23
70	ravioli	noun	0.23
71	really	adverb	0.23
72	allow	verb	0.23
73	freshly	adverb	0.23
74	margherita	noun	0.23
75	pepe	noun	0.23
76	vegas	noun	0.23
77	traditional	adjective	0.23
78	medium	adjective	0.23
79	history	noun	0.23
80	gourmet	adjective	0.23
81	classic	adjective	0.22
82	trip	noun	0.22
83	genuine	adjective	0.22

84	breeze	noun	0.22
85	custom	adjective	0.22
86	ordinary	adjective	0.22
87	happen	verb	0.22
88	dish	noun	0.22
89	recipe	noun	0.22
90	gateway	noun	0.22
91	olive	noun	0.23
92	save	verb	0.22
93	lasagna	noun	0.22
94	directly	adverb	0.22
95	arugula	noun	0.22
96	sicily	noun	0.22
97	again	adverb	0.22
98	risotto	noun	0.22
99	neighborhood	noun	0.22
100	invite	verb	0.22
101	worth	adjective	0.22
102	dining	noun	0.22
103	cacio	noun	0.22
104	district	noun	0.21
105	executive	adjective	0.21
106	vineyard	noun	0.21
107	I	pronoun	0.21
108	wide	adjective	0.21
109	third	adjective	0.21
110	satisfaction	noun	0.21
111	parmigiano	noun	0.21
112	walk	verb	0.21
113	bomb	noun	0.21
114	napoletana	adjective	0.21
115	life	noun	0.21
116	homey	adjective	0.21
117	inside	adverb	0.21
118	study	verb	0.21
119	alla	preposition	0.21
120	restaurants	noun	0.21
121	harbor	noun	0.21
122	residential	adjective	0.21
123	seal	verb	0.21
124	crown	noun	0.21
125	connection	noun	0.21
126	creamy	adjective	0.21
127	fire	verb	0.21

128	antipasti	noun	0.21
129	historic	adjective	0.20
130	fall	noun	0.20
131	coast	noun	0.20
132	book	verb	0.20
133	childhood	noun	0.20
134	wood-burning	adjective	0.20
135	outdoor	adjective	0.20
136	come	verb	0.20
137	florence	noun	0.20
138	oven	noun	0.20
139	roman	adjective	0.20
140	artisanal	adjective	0.20
141	herb	noun	0.20
142	charcuterie	noun	0.20
143	suitable	adjective	0.20
144	hesitate	verb	0.20
145	handcraft	verb	0.20
146	rigatoni	noun	0.20
147	contemporary	adjective	0.20
148	boy	noun	0.20
149	tomato	noun	0.20
150	osteria	noun	0.20
151	refined	adjective	0.20
152	dessert	noun	0.20
153	hidden	adjective	0.20
154	regular	adjective	0.20
155	customize	verb	0.20
156	winner	noun	0.20
157	craft	verb	0.20
158	from	preposition	0.20
159	extraordinary	adjective	0.20
160	timeless	adjective	0.20

## Appendix B

### *Keywords of the ITALIAN-1 Subcorpus*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Cohen's <i>d</i></b>
1	italian	adjective	1.25
2	italy	noun	1.10
3	tradition	noun	0.69
4	traditional	adjective	0.65
5	pasta	noun	0.64
6	authentic	adjective	0.62
7	fine	adjective	0.62
8	recipe	noun	0.55
9	cuisine	noun	0.54
10	list	noun	0.51
11	import	verb	0.50
12	times	noun	0.49
13	group	noun	0.47
14	own	verb	0.47
15	passion	noun	0.47
16	truly	adverb	0.46
17	chef	noun	0.45
18	experience	verb	0.44
19	full	adjective	0.44
20	dedication	noun	0.43
21	best	adjective	0.43
22	neapolitan	adjective	0.42
23	trattoria	noun	0.42
24	help	verb	0.41
25	wonderful	adjective	0.41
26	move	verb	0.41
27	join	verb	0.41
28	live	verb	0.40
29	founder	noun	0.40
30	family	noun	0.40
31	elegance	noun	0.39
32	surround	verb	0.39
33	please	verb	0.39
34	operate	verb	0.39
35	old	adjective	0.38
36	continue	verb	0.38
37	award	noun	0.38
38	host	verb	0.38
39	bolognese	adjective	0.38

40	curate	verb	0.37
41	select	verb	0.37
42	passionate	adjective	0.37
43	italian	noun	0.37
44	white	adjective	0.37
45	dedicate	verb	0.36
46	celebrate	verb	0.36
47	father	noun	0.36
48	love	noun	0.36
49	welcome	verb	0.35
50	soul	noun	0.35
51	expand	verb	0.35
52	attentive	adjective	0.35
53	flavor	noun	0.35
54	professional	adjective	0.35
55	treat	verb	0.35
56	acclaimed	adjective	0.35
57	beloved	adjective	0.34
58	extend	verb	0.34
59	cater	verb	0.34
60	mother	noun	0.34
61	naples	noun	0.34
62	go	verb	0.34
63	perfection	noun	0.34
64	promise	verb	0.34
65	childhood	noun	0.34
66	family-owned	adjective	0.34
67	he	pronoun	0.33
68	restaurateur	noun	0.33
69	dessert	noun	0.32
70	ability	noun	0.33
71	win	verb	0.33
72	friend	noun	0.32
73	famed	adjective	0.32
74	event	noun	0.32
75	southern	adjective	0.32
76	appetito	noun	0.32
77	iconic	adjective	0.32
78	ingredient	noun	0.32
79	san	adjective	0.32
80	meet	verb	0.32
81	gnocchi	noun	0.32
82	constantly	adverb	0.32
83	casa	noun	0.32

84	modern	adjective	0.32
85	remember	verb	0.32
86	age	noun	0.32
87	wedding	noun	0.32
88	receive	verb	0.32
89	hospitality	noun	0.32
90	testament	noun	0.32
91	mozzarella	noun	0.32
92	team	noun	0.31
93	pleasure	noun	0.31
94	his	pronoun	0.31
95	magazine	noun	0.31
96	produce	noun	0.31
97	calzones	noun	0.31
98	bread	noun	0.31
99	regional	adjective	0.31
100	artisan	noun	0.31
101	cook	verb	0.31
102	menu	noun	0.31
103	bring	verb	0.31
104	herb	noun	0.31
105	disappoint	verb	0.31
106	napoli	noun	0.30
107	producer	noun	0.30
108	deeply	adverb	0.30
109	design	verb	0.30
110	creative	adjective	0.30
111	decide	verb	0.30
112	northern	adjective	0.30
113	mind	noun	0.30
114	accomodate	verb	0.30
115	charm	noun	0.30
116	cheese	noun	0.30
117	inspiration	noun	0.30
118	strive	verb	0.29
119	impeccable	adjective	0.29
120	favorite	adjective	0.29
121	original	adjective	0.29
122	heritage	noun	0.29
123	numerous	adjective	0.29
124	coast	noun	0.29
125	book	verb	0.29
126	pastry	noun	0.29
127	reliable	adjective	0.29

128	able	adjective	0.29
129	beautiful	adjective	0.29
130	fabulous	adjective	0.29
131	elegant	adjective	0.29
132	blend	verb	0.29
133	accommodate	verb	0.28
134	entire	adjective	0.28
135	name	verb	0.28
136	innovative	adjective	0.28
137	generation	noun	0.28
138	legacy	noun	0.28
139	pay	verb	0.27
140	feast	noun	0.27
141	culture	noun	0.27
142	fruit	noun	0.27
143	tomato	noun	0.27
144	aroma	noun	0.27
145	international	adjective	0.27
146	sicily	noun	0.27
147	share	verb	0.27
148	extraordinary	adjective	0.27
149	italian-inspired	adjective	0.27
150	owner	noun	0.26

## PhD Research Output and Awards

Findings from this dissertation, along with those from other collaborations undertaken during the PhD program, were presented at the following conferences:

- *2023 ABC Regional Conference (Europe, Africa, and the Middle East)—Re-Thinking and Re-Mediating Business Communication: Continuity and Evolution* (January 12–14, 2023, Federico II University of Naples, Naples, Italy)
- *Tourism Imaginaries, Identity and Branding in the Mediterranean Area: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (November 27–28, 2023, University of Catania, Catania, Italy)
- *29<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism* (January 4–6, 2024, Florida International University, Miami, United States)
- *2024 AIA Brixen Conference: A Linguistic Lens on Narratives in Professional Settings* (May 16–18, 2024, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Brixen, Italy)
- *2024 Sinergie–SIMA Management Conference: Management of Sustainability and Well-Being for Individuals and Society* (June 13–14, 2024, University of Parma, Parma, Italy)
- *6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the American Pragmatics Association* (September 27–29, 2024, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, United States)

- *27<sup>st</sup> SIM Conference: Brands and Purpose in a Changing Era* (October 17–18, 2024, IULM University, Milan, Italy)
- *89<sup>th</sup> Annual ABC International Conference—The Pulse of Progress: Amplifying Business Communication for Impact* (October 28–30, 2024, virtual conference)
- *16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Island Tourism* (November 22, 2024, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy)
- *Enhancing Sustainability: Bridging Corporate Practices with Academic and Popular Discourse* (December 18–20, 2024, L'Orientale University of Naples, Naples, Italy)
- *Twenty-First International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic & Social Sustainability—Sustainable Development for a Dynamic Planet: Lessons, Priorities, and Solutions* (January 23–25, 2025, Florida International University, Miami, United States)
- *2025 ABC Regional Conference (Europe, Africa, and the Middle East): Building Bridges Between Business Communication and Management* (June 4–6, 2025, Norwegian School of Economics, Bergen, Norway)
- *2025 Sinergie–SIMA Management Conference—Tertiarization & Sustainability: New Challenges for Management in the Digital Era* (June 12–13, 2025, University of Genoa, Genoa, Italy)

- *Tenth International Conference on Tourism & Leisure Studies—Hospitality the Caribbean Way: Global Lessons from Local Experiences* (June 18-20, 2025, University of Curaçao, Willemstad, Curaçao)
- *16<sup>th</sup> Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage (IRTP) Conference* (June 25–28, 2025, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy)

The following works, resulting from both the PhD research project and other collaborations, were produced during the PhD program:

#### **[Contributions in conference proceedings]**

- Spezzano, W., De Cantis, S., & Buschman, J. D. (2024). Leveraging Italianness abroad: A corpus-assisted discourse approach to restaurant branding. In A. Mocciaro Li Destri, M. Ugolini, G. Cristini, and B. Luceri (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2024 Sinergie–SIMA management conference: Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society* (pp. 727–732). CUEIM. ISBN: 978-88-94-7136-5-7.
- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (2024). Mitigating overtourism in Miami Beach through sustainable destination branding: A tourism discourse analysis of the anti-spring break marketing campaign. In *Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> SIM conference: Brand and purpose in a changing era*. ISBN: 978-88-947829-1-2.
- Lo Mascolo, G., Spezzano, W., Levanti, G., Chiodi, M., & Mocciaro Li Destri, A. (2024). Delving into digital destination branding: The

case study of Sicily and Le Soste di Ulisse. In *Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> SIM conference: Brand and purpose in a changing era*. ISBN: 978-88-947829-1-2.

- Spezzano, W. (2025). Exploring the discourse dimension of digital branding: Insights into strategic communication research and practice. In V. Rice McCray & L. Gueldenzoph Snyder (Eds.), *Association for Business Communication: Proceedings of the 89<sup>th</sup> annual international conference* (pp. 199–201). ISSN: 2472-0658.
- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (2025). Assessing the impact of social media user-generated content and online news on sustainable destination branding: The case of spring break in Miami Beach. In D. Humphreys & J. Gutiérrez-Pérez (Eds.), *Twenty-first international conference on environmental, cultural, economic & social sustainability conference proceedings* (p. 61), Common Ground Research Network. ISBN: 978-1-966214-37-3.
- Spezzano, W., Lo Mascolo, G., & Vásquez, C. (in press). Strategic brand management in luxury tourism: A multimodal discourse analysis of Mangia's online communication. In *Proceedings of the 2025 Sinergie-SIMA management conference—Tertiarization & sustainability: New challenges for management in the digital era [Edited book in press]*. CUEIM
- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (in press). Framing the Caribbean in cruise tourism: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Royal Caribbean's digital destination narratives. In *Tenth international conference on tourism & leisure studies conference proceedings [Edited book in press]*. Common Ground Research Networks.

- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (in press). Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on corporate sustainability discourse: A diachronic CADS analysis of sustainability reporting in the cruise line industry. In *Association for Business Communication: Proceedings of the 90<sup>th</sup> annual international conference [Edited book in press]*.

### **[Articles in journals]**

- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (2024). Rebranding unsustainable destinations: The case study of Miami Beach breaking up with spring break. *Tourism Cases*, tourism202400088.  
<https://doi.org/10.1079/tourism.2024.0088>
- Pagano, N., & Spezzano, W. (in press). Sustainable tourism and eco-hotel corporate identity. *Tourism Cases*.
- Lo Mascolo, G., Spezzano, W., Levanti, G., & Mocciaro Li Destri, A. (2025). *Digital branding in the luxury hospitality industry: Insights from corpus-assisted discourse studies and web analytics* [Manuscript submitted for publication].

### **[Chapters in edited books]**

- Spezzano, W., & Lusby, C. (in press). Miami Beach is breaking up with spring break: A tourism discourse analysis of sustainable destination rebranding. In *Routledge studies in rhetoric and stylistics [Edited book in press]*. Routledge.

### **[Edited special issues in journals]**

- Lusby, C., & Spezzano, W. (Eds.). (in press). Sustainable coastal and marine tourism: Past, present, and future [Special issue]. *Tourism Cases*. eISSN: 2788-5607.

During the PhD program, the following awards were received in recognition of scholarly merit and academic involvement:

- *Emerging Scholar Award* by Common Ground Research Network (2025)
- *Student Travel Grant* by the Association for Business Communication (2025)