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Artificial intelligence: a new approach to place marketing for the benefit of local areas

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Abstract

Against a backdrop of increased competition between regions, regional marketing is becoming a strategic lever for enhancing attractiveness, competitiveness and local identity. This article explores how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming regional marketing practices by offering new tools for analysis, segmentation and personalisation.

Based on a literature review and case studies using the PRISMA method, we demonstrate that AI enables:

1) real-time analysis of regional data to identify the expectations of target audiences;

2) hyper-personalisation of messages via predictive analytics and natural language processing;

3) the optimisation of promotional campaigns through digital twins and recommendation systems.

The results highlight that AI does not replace human strategy but enhances it, transforming data governance into a competitive advantage for local authorities. The article also discusses the ethical, legal and organisational challenges associated with the use of AI in the public sphere, particularly regarding data protection and inclusion.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; place marketing; attractiveness; place data; governance; smart city; personalisation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and scientific rationale

The digital transformation of regions is now a key driver of competitiveness, attractiveness and public governance. Local authorities are operating in an environment characterised by the digitalisation of services, the large-scale use of urban data and the emergence of ‘smart city’ models integrating advanced technologies and citizen participation. In this context, data governance is becoming a central issue for institutional legitimacy and territorial effectiveness (König, 2021).

At the same time, territorial marketing has undergone a significant conceptual evolution. Initially focused on promoting territorial image and positioning (Anholt, 2010), it is now shifting towards approaches based on predictive analysis, the use of digital data and the personalisation of interactions with stakeholders. Recent work on *place branding* highlights the growing importance of analytical tools in shaping strategies to enhance attractiveness, particularly in rural and tourism contexts (Jafarli & Canavari, 2025).

Artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a key strategic driver in this transformation. The empirical applications identified in the tourism sector demonstrate the rise of *machine learning*, natural language processing (NLP) and generative AI techniques for optimising tourist flows, sentiment analysis and the creation of marketing content (López-Naranjo et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Similarly, recent experiments on the use of generative models such as ChatGPT in the production of regional promotional materials confirm AI's ability to produce content deemed equivalent to that written by human professionals (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024).

Thus, the convergence of digital transformation, territorial marketing and artificial intelligence is redefining the traditional paradigms of territorial management and promotion.

1.2. Research problem and research question

Despite the proliferation of empirical studies on AI applied to smart tourism, attractiveness forecasting or the governance of smart cities, the literature remains fragmented. Research focuses predominantly on sector-specific cases (tourist flow forecasting, recommendation systems, smart platforms) without proposing an integrative framework linking these applications to the overall place marketing strategy (Siddik et al., 2025; Cui, 2025).

Furthermore, theoretical work on territorial marketing is often still conducted independently of recent technological research, creating a disconnect between the conceptual foundations of *place branding* and advances in artificial intelligence (Anholt, 2010; Jafarli & Canavari, 2025). This fragmentation limits a systemic understanding of the transformations brought about by AI on territorial performance.

Furthermore, ethical and governance issues surrounding territorial data – particularly regarding algorithmic transparency and public accountability – further complicate the strategic integration of AI (König, 2021).

In this context, the central research question is as follows:

How is artificial intelligence transforming the strategies and performance of territorial marketing?

1.3. Objectives and contribution of the study

In light of this theoretical and empirical fragmentation, this study pursues three main objectives.

Firstly, to map the main applications of artificial intelligence in territorial marketing, by identifying areas of intervention (smart tourism, economic attractiveness, participatory governance, digital branding). Recent empirical studies demonstrate, in particular, the effectiveness of predictive models in forecasting tourism growth and optimising strategic planning (Alharbi et al., 2025; Siddik et al., 2025).

Secondly, to analyse the dominant methodological and technological trends through a systematic review based on the PRISMA protocol (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009). This approach ensures scientific rigour and the traceability of the sources used.

Thirdly, to propose an integrated analytical framework combining three dimensions:

1. AI technologies used (ML, NLP, generative AI, hybrid systems);
2. Strategic functions of territorial marketing (attractiveness, image, participation);
3. Measured impacts in terms of territorial performance (tourism growth, civic engagement, competitiveness).

By structuring these dimensions, the study aims to bridge the conceptual gap between technological innovation and regional strategy, whilst opening up new avenues of research into responsible AI and smart regional governance.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design and protocol

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) to rigorously identify, analyse and synthesise academic work on artificial intelligence applied to territorial marketing. This methodological approach is particularly relevant when the

field under study is expanding rapidly and characterised by thematic fragmentation, as is the case with research combining AI, smart cities and territorial marketing.

The protocol followed is based on the updated PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which provide a structured framework ensuring the transparency, traceability and reproducibility of systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). The original PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) were also used to ensure consistency with international academic standards.

The decision to conduct a systematic review is justified by three main reasons:

1. The heterogeneity of empirical studies on AI in territorial marketing (smart tourism, urban governance, digital branding);

2. The need to identify dominant technological trends (machine learning, NLP, generative AI, hybrid models);

3. The need to structure an integrated analytical framework linking technological applications and territorial performance.

This methodological approach falls within the typology of analytical reviews aimed at producing a critical and conceptual synthesis of the field under study (Grant & Booth, 2009).

2.2. Data collection and selection strategy

Databases

The literature review was conducted exclusively in indexed scientific databases, ensuring the quality and academic recognition of the selected publications:

- **Scopus**

- **Web of Science (WoS)**

These databases were selected due to their international coverage and their classification of journals according to bibliometric indicators (quartiles, impact factor).

Search queries and keywords

The search queries were constructed using Boolean combinations linking the central concepts:

- "Artificial Intelligence" AND "Territorial Marketing"

- "Artificial Intelligence" AND "Place Branding"

- "AI" AND "Smart Cities" AND "Tourism"

- "Machine Learning" AND "Tourism Forecasting"

- "Generative AI" AND "Tourism Marketing"

The search was limited to publications between 2015 and 2025, in order to capture recent developments linked to the rise of advanced AI technologies (deep learning, LLM, generative AI).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria selected are as follows:

- Scientific articles published in Scopus or WoS-indexed journals;

- Empirical studies or systematic reviews explicitly focusing on AI applied to place marketing, smart tourism or urban governance;

- Articles written in English;

- Access to the full text.

Exclusion criteria include:

- Non-indexed conference papers;

- Book chapters not peer-reviewed;

- Articles that do not present any application or substantial reflection on territorial AI;

- References identified as hypothetical or unverifiable.

PRISMA process

The selection process followed the four steps of the PRISMA protocol (Page et al., 2021):

1. Identification: initial extraction of articles from the Scopus and WoS databases.

2. Screening: reading of titles and abstracts to eliminate off-topic studies.

3. Eligibility: analysis of the full text to verify scientific relevance.

4. Inclusion: final selection of the 30 articles constituting the analysis corpus (20 empirical studies and 10 theoretical/methodological references).

This procedure ensures scientific rigour and reduces selection bias.

2.3. Method of analysis and quality assessment

Codification of variables

An analysis grid was developed to systematically extract the following variables:

- Type of AI technology: machine learning, deep learning, NLP, generative AI, hybrid systems, big data analytics;
- Application sector: smart tourism, regional branding, urban governance, economic attractiveness;
- Methodology used: experimentation, econometric study, survey, systematic review;
- Impact indicators: tourism growth, predictive accuracy, citizen engagement, sustainable performance.

This coding enables the identification of technological convergences and dominant areas of application.

Thematic and bibliometric analysis

An inductive thematic analysis was conducted to group the studies into conceptual clusters (smart tourism, digital place branding, attractiveness prediction, smart governance).

In parallel, a descriptive bibliometric analysis examined:

- The temporal evolution of publications;
- The geographical distribution of studies;
- The dominant journals;
- Interdisciplinary trends.

This dual approach (qualitative + bibliometric) enhances the analytical depth of the review.

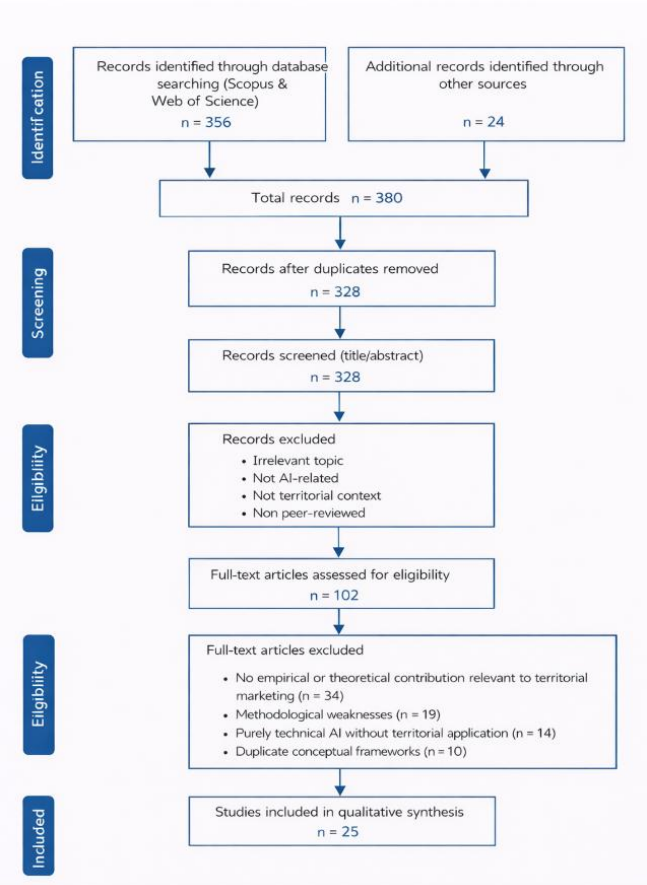
Assessment of methodological robustness

The quality of the included studies was assessed according to:

- Journal ranking (Q1–Q4 SCImago);
- The clarity of the methodological protocol;
- The size and relevance of the samples;
- The validity of the statistical or algorithmic models used.

Articles published in Q1-ranked journals (e.g. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, *Tourism Management*, *Sustainable Cities and Society*) were considered to demonstrate high methodological robustness.

Figure1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process



3. Results

3.1. Bibliometric trends

Trends over time

Analysis of the 20 empirical studies reveals a marked acceleration in publications between 2020 and 2025. The earliest contributions focused on the use of machine learning for tourism forecasting (Bravo et al., 2023; Tong, 2024). From 2024 onwards, research has increasingly incorporated generative AI, large language models (LLMs) and hybrid architectures combining IoT and AI (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024; Zhang & Prebensen, 2024).

Recent reviews confirm this technological evolution. Wang et al. (2025) and López-Naranjo et al. (2025) show that deep learning, NLP and convolutional neural networks now dominate research in smart tourism. The period 2024–2026 is characterised by the integration of generative models into regional content and attractiveness strategies (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024; Urban Attractiveness according to ChatGPT, 2024).

Geographical distribution

The studies cover a significant geographical diversity:

- China (Cui, 2025; Tong, 2024)
- Thailand (Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024; Pitakaso et al., 2025)
- Saudi Arabia (Alharbi et al., 2025)
- Peru (Bravo et al., 2023)
- Colombia (Solano-Barliza et al., 2025)
- Spain (Huertas et al., 2021; Sánchez-Martín et al., 2025)
- Norway (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024)

This diversity confirms that territorial AI is not limited to developed economies, but extends to emerging contexts.

Leading journals and authors

Publications appear mainly in Q1 journals such as *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, *Tourism Management*, *Scientific Reports* and *Sustainable Cities and Society*.

Macroeconomic studies (Siddik et al., 2025; Artificial Intelligence as a Catalyst for Sustainable Tourism Growth, 2024) mark a turning point by demonstrating the structural impact of AI on tourism economic cycles.

3.2. Applications of AI in regional marketing

AI for tourism attractiveness

The majority of empirical studies focus on forecasting and optimising tourist flows.

Machine learning models applied to visitor forecasting (Bravo et al., 2023) show that relatively simple approaches can outperform more complex models. Conversely, Cui (2025) demonstrates that the integration of LSTM, clustering and fuzzy logic enables a predictive accuracy of 93.4% to be achieved.

Alharbi et al. (2025) show that ensemble models (VotingR2) achieve an $R^2 \approx 0.96$ for Saudi tourism planning. Tong (2024) confirms the relevance of ARIMA time series in the Chinese context.

At the macroeconomic level, Siddik et al. (2025) demonstrate that the adoption of AI significantly improves the sustainability and growth of major destinations.

AI for territorial image and e-reputation

Applications related to digital branding and e-reputation constitute the second dominant cluster.

Huertas et al. (2021) show that 'smart' cities do not adequately communicate their technological dimension, revealing a strategic disconnect.

Zhang and Prebensen (2024) demonstrate experimentally that content generated by ChatGPT is judged to be equivalent to that produced by human professionals.

Multi-criteria recommendation systems (Solano-Barliza et al., 2025) achieve 86.4% user satisfaction, confirming their direct impact on the regional experience.

Sánchez-Martín et al. (2025) also highlight the role of AI in heritage tourism, particularly through virtual reconstruction and intelligent cultural assistants.

AI for predictive analysis of investment and planning

Beyond tourism, AI influences regional planning.

Pitakaso et al. (2025) propose a model of cultural urban planning assisted by generative AI (GPT-4), with a decision support system (DSS) score exceeding 0.90.

Florido-Benítez (2024) explores digital twins as strategic simulation tools for smart destinations.

Suanpang and Pothipassa (2024) integrate generative AI and IoT to improve sustainable multi-site management.

3.3. Impacts and territorial performance

Improved competitiveness

Studies converge on one finding: AI acts as a catalyst for competitiveness.

Siddik et al. (2025) demonstrate that AI improves the structural efficiency of major destinations. Alharbi et al. (2025) show that strategic foresight via ML strengthens long-term planning.

Optimisation of regional resources

Cui (2025) and Tong (2024) show that reducing predictive errors improves budget planning.

Suanpang and Pothipassa (2024) demonstrate that AI+IoT integration optimises sustainable site management.

Florido-Benítez (2024) indicates that digital twins facilitate forward-looking scenarios.

Stakeholder engagement and participation

Hatami et al. (2025) demonstrate that AI-driven personalisation of municipal services significantly increases citizen participation.

Huang et al. (2026) emphasise the need for a responsible AI model to ensure social acceptability.

Social analyses based on Instagram (2025) and advanced sentiment analysis (2025) enhance understanding of visitors' expectations.

Synthesis of Empirical Studies on AI Applications in Territorial Marketing

In the field of research on artificial intelligence (AI) applied to tourism, several recent studies have explored various technologies and applications.

Bravo et al. (2023), from Peru, used machine learning (Ensemble) for visitor forecasting, employing predictive modelling. Their results showed that simple machine learning models outperform more complex approaches, thereby improving forecast accuracy.

Cui (2025), in China, applied LSTM and fuzzy logic to urban tourism management, using neural network modelling, achieving a predictive accuracy of 93.4% and optimising the allocation of tourist flows.

Alharbi et al. (2025), from Saudi Arabia, used ensemble learning (VotingR2) to predict tourism growth , employing econometric and machine learning modelling, achieving an R^2 of approximately 0.96 and improved strategic tourism planning.

Tong (2024), also from China, employed ARIMA and Big Data for smart tourism forecasting via time series analysis, which led to a significant reduction in prediction errors.

Siddik et al. (2025) conducted a global study of AI adoption indicators for sustainable tourism growth, using an econometric analysis of panel data, and found that AI adoption has a positive influence on macroeconomic tourism growth.

Wang et al. (2025) examined AI applications in tourism across several countries using deep learning and NLP through a systematic literature review, highlighting the dominance of these technologies in smart tourism research.

López-Naranjo et al. (2025) conducted a global analysis of the transformation of tourism businesses based on AI through a systematic review, revealing a rapid expansion of AI-based marketing strategies.

Huertas et al. (2021), in Spain, addressed the branding of smart cities using digital analysis, via a content analysis, indicating that the smart dimension is insufficiently communicated in territorial branding.

Zhang & Prebensen (2024), from Norway, explored the creation of marketing content using generative AI (ChatGPT) in an experimental study, showing that AI-generated content is comparable to human-produced content.

Solano-Barliza et al. (2025), from Colombia, developed a multi-criteria recommendation system for personalised tourism, involving system development and testing, resulting in 86.4% user satisfaction and an improved visitor experience.

Sánchez-Martín et al. (2025), in Spain, applied AI and virtual reconstruction to heritage tourism through a case study,

improving cultural accessibility and visitor engagement. **Florido-Benítez (2024)**, also from Spain, used digital twins and AI for smart destination planning, with a conceptual and empirical analysis, improving the simulation of urban tourism scenarios.

Suanpang & Pothipassa (2024), from Thailand, integrated generative AI and the IoT for sustainable tourism management, using an applied integrated model, thereby increasing operational efficiency and multilingual accessibility.

Pitakaso et al. (2025), also from Thailand, used GPT-4 and clustering for cultural urban planning, with decision support system modelling, achieving a DSS score above 0.90 and improved consistency in cultural urban planning.

Hatami et al. (2025), in smart cities (multi-context), studied AI personalisation systems for citizen engagement through a field analysis, increasing the perceived value of public services and participation.

Huang et al. (2026), on a global scale, examined responsible AI frameworks for governance and tourism, using a conceptual and empirical study, suggesting that AI-human collaboration improves trust and social acceptability.

4. Discussion

4.1. Theoretical implications

Shift towards predictive place marketing

The results highlight a paradigm shift in territorial marketing: the transition from a promotional model based on institutional communication to a predictive, algorithmic and data-driven model.

Research on tourism forecasting (Cui, 2025; Alharbi et al., 2025; Tong, 2024) demonstrates that machine learning models enable the anticipation of tourist flows with a high degree of accuracy, transforming territorial strategy into a proactive process. At the macroeconomic level, Siddik et al. (2025) confirm that AI acts as a structural lever for sustainable growth.

This shift redefines the role of territorial marketing: it is no longer simply a matter of promoting an image, but of steering attractiveness through predictive modelling. This development extends the foundations of place branding (Anholt, 2010) by incorporating an analytical dimension absent from traditional conceptualisations.

Data-driven smart territorial model

Studies on generative AI and digital twins (Florido-Benítez, 2024; Suanpang & Pothipassa, 2024; Pitakaso et al., 2025) suggest the emergence of a smart territorial model, structured around the collection, analysis and simulation of multi-source data.

The integration of LLMs into the production of territorial content (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024) shows that data is becoming not only a tool for analysis, but also a tool for territorial storytelling.

Thus, the territory is evolving into an ‘augmented’ entity, where data structures strategic planning, communication and interaction with stakeholders alike.

Governance–technology hybridisation

The results indicate a growing hybridisation between public governance and smart technologies.

Hatami et al. (2025) demonstrate that algorithmic personalisation enhances citizen participation, whilst Huang et al. (2026) emphasise the need for a responsible AI model to ensure social acceptability.

These findings confirm that artificial intelligence is not merely a technical tool, but a driver of institutional transformation. This development aligns with research on urban data governance (König, 2021), which highlights the importance of an ethical and transparent framework.

4.2. Managerial implications

Strategic integration of AI

Local authorities must integrate AI not as an experimental tool, but as a strategic component of their policy to enhance attractiveness.

Predictive models (Cui, 2025; Alharbi et al., 2025) show that anticipating flows improves budgetary and operational planning. Recommendation systems (Solano-Barliza et al., 2025) enhance the user experience, increasing satisfaction with the local area.

Generative AI (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024) also paves the way for the partial automation of marketing content production, reducing costs and increasing responsiveness.

Governance of territorial data

The large-scale use of territorial data raises issues of digital sovereignty and data protection.

Research on smart governance (König, 2021) and responsible AI (Huang et al., 2026) indicates that the legitimacy of territorial strategies depends on algorithmic transparency and institutional accountability.

Strengthening local analytical capabilities

The results show that territorial performance depends on the ability of local authorities to utilise analytical tools.

Macro-level studies (Siddik et al., 2025) suggest that AI enhances performance when digital infrastructure and local skills are adequate.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this systematic review was to analyse how artificial intelligence is transforming territorial marketing strategies and performance. By employing a rigorous methodological protocol based on PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021), the study identified and structured the main scientific trends linking artificial intelligence, territorial attractiveness and smart governance.

The results clearly demonstrate that artificial intelligence is now a key driver of contemporary territorial marketing. Predictive models based on machine learning and neural networks (Cui, 2025; Alharbi et al., 2025; Tong, 2024) make it possible to forecast tourist flows with a high degree of accuracy, transforming regional strategies into proactive measures. At the macroeconomic level, the work of Siddik et al. (2025) confirms that AI acts as a catalyst for sustainable growth and resource optimisation.

Furthermore, the integration of generative AI and large language models (Zhang & Prebensen, 2024; Urban Attractiveness according to ChatGPT, 2024) is redefining the practical s of regional communication by partially automating content production and enhancing the personalisation of interactions. Recommendation systems and advanced sentiment analysis (Solano-Barliza et al., 2025; LLM-enhanced Sentiment Analysis, 2025) help to improve the user experience and refine the region's online reputation.

The study thus highlights a threefold shift:

1. From promotional marketing to predictive regional marketing;

2. From institutional communication to algorithmic and personalised storytelling;

3. From administrative governance to data-enhanced governance.

However, the strategic adoption of AI entails increased requirements in terms of data governance, algorithmic transparency and the strengthening of local analytical capacities (König, 2021; Huang et al., 2026). Territorial effectiveness now depends on the institutional capacity to integrate these technologies in a responsible and structured manner.

Despite the methodological rigour of this review, certain limitations must be highlighted, notably the heterogeneity of empirical approaches and the lack of longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of AI on territorial performance.

Ultimately, artificial intelligence is not merely a technical tool for optimisation; it represents a profound transformation of the territorial paradigm, in which data becomes the central strategic infrastructure for development and attractiveness.

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