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Section 1. Economics of recreation and tourism

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DIGITAL MARKETING IN ADVENTURE TOURISM: TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS: A REVIEW

Anduela Lile¹, Lumtor Shkreli¹

¹ Department of Sport Management and Tourism, Faculty of Physical
Activity and Recreation, Sports University of Tirana, Albania

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Abstract

This review explores integrating digital marketing strategies in the context of adventure tourism. Focusing on recent studies, this paper examines how digital marketing tactics might be used in the context of adventure tourism. The analysis explores the new developments, difficulties, and effects of promoting adventure tourist experiences through digital marketing. According to empirical data, adventure tourism companies are increasingly using digital marketing strategies to reach their target markets. According to recent studies, social media sites like Instagram and YouTube, podcasts, and blogs have developed into effective marketing tools for adventure travel and activities. Additionally, cutting-edge virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) experiences have become important tools for engrossing potential tourists in exhilarating adventure tourism services. User-generated content has also grown in popularity because adventure travelers' reviews and images are a major source of inspiration and engagement.

Keywords: *social media, information security, marketing tools, user-generated content*

Introduction

Adventure tourism, defined by its emphasis on immersive and nature-based activities, has emerged as a notable niche within the larger travel and tourism business. As the digital landscape evolves, adventure tourism stakeholders are increasingly relying on digital marketing methods to communicate with their target customers. This review seeks to provide an overview of the most recent re-

search on digital marketing in adventure tourism, shedding light on effective techniques and their consequences for the business. Over the last decade, adventure tourism has grown significantly, owing to shifting consumer preferences and technology improvements.

Methodology

To review digital marketing strategies in adventure tourism, the following methodology

was employed. A systematic search of academic databases, journals, and books was conducted, focusing on articles and sources related to digital marketing in adventure tourism published between 2017 and the knowledge cutoff date in December 2024. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria were defined as follows. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the topic, including a focus on digital marketing strategies in adventure tourism. Non-English sources and those not meeting these criteria were excluded.

Digital Marketing Strategies in Adventure Tourism

In this environment, digital marketing has emerged as a critical instrument for promoting and improving the adventure tourist experience. Chaffey & Smith (2022) offer a practical guide to developing and implementing integrated digital marketing strategies that combine traditional marketing planning methodologies with the innovative use of new digital models and digital

resources. Their book (Chaffey & Smith, 2022) offers an outline for an integrated digital marketing plan by assessing and implementing digital marketing ideas and models while combining online and offline communication and by analyzing the best methods for reaching and engaging your audiences through the use of the major digital marketing platforms. Digital Marketing Strategies in Adventure Tourism are presented as follows. Santos & Silva (2019). Mele & Cantoni (2017, 2018) studies offer a detailed review about website usage in tourism marketing. Bekele & Raj (2024) perform a comprehensive bibliometric examination of digital transformation in tourism and define key research clusters such as digital innovation, smart tourism ecosystems, eTourism, and smart destination experiences. Rosário et al. (2023) offer a roadmap for future research directions in the field.

Table 1 presents a summary of articles related to digital transformation in tourism marketing strategies.

Table 1. *Summary of articles related to digital transformation in tourism marketing strategies*

Main Topic	Articles	Key Aspects
Digital Transformation	Bekele & Raj (2024) Hanelt, A., Bohnsack, R., Marz, D., & Antunes Marante, C. (2021) Barykin, S., De la Poza, E., Khalid, B., Kapustina, I., Kalinina, O., Iqbal, K. M. J. (2021)	Insights and implications of digital transformation on strategy and organizational change. Effects of digital transformation on the tourism industry.
Marketing Strategies	Rosário et al. (2023) Chaffey, D., & Smith, P. R. (2022) Santos, J. D., & Silva, O. L. (Eds.) (2019) Mele, E., & Cantoni, L. (2017) Mele, E., & Cantoni, L. (2018)	Planning, optimizing, and integrating online marketing strategies. Digital marketing strategies for tourism, hospitality, and airline industries. Theory and practices of website localization in tourism destinations.
Augmented Reality in Tourism	Kečkeš, A., & Tomicic, I. (2017) Ozkul, E., & Kumlu, S. (2019)	Overview of augmented reality's research and applications in tourism.

Social Media Marketing

Social media channels have become crucial in the promotion of adventure tourism. According to (Hanelt et al., 2021). Social media plays an important role in boosting engagement, communication, and content

co-creation between adventure travelers and locations. According to Barykin et al. (2021) social media in particular has emerged as a valuable medium for showcasing visually appealing adventure activities.

Storytelling and Content Creation

Effective storytelling on digital platforms may elicit emotional responses and increase the attraction of adventure tourism. Buhalis (2015) research emphasizes the value of intriguing storylines in driving consumer engagement and loyalty. According to Hanelt et al. (2021) using user-generated content can enhance the authenticity of adventure experiences and promote a feeling of community. Furthermore, Buhalis (2015) emphasizes how crucial content development is to promoting adventure tourism. Adventure tourism companies may engage their audience more deeply by developing intriguing storylines for multimedia material like videos, blogs, and social media posts. Potential clients are drawn in by this style of storytelling, which also creates a sense of anticipation and excitement, increasing their propensity to go on risky adventures. As a result, according to Hanelt et al. (2021), adventure tourism companies should spend money on carefully created user-generated content to both boost engagement and strengthen their position in the market.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):

Adventure tourism marketing could be revolutionized by the incorporation of VR and AR technologies. A study by Ozkul & Kumlu (2019) explores the immersive features of these technologies, which enable potential adventure tourists to preview locations and activities and consequently affect their decision-making. Kečkeš & Tomicic (2017) study provides a general overview of the research and application sides of augmented reality in the tourism industry. The use of VR and AR technologies could completely change the way adventure tourism is marketed. Ozkul & Kumlu investigate how these technologies' immersive capabilities help potential adventure travelers preview destinations and activities, which in turn influences their choice of travel destination.

Search Engine Optimization

Businesses in the adventure tourism industry must ensure strong presence on search engines and provide easy online booking procedures. Barykin et al. (2021) study stresses the importance of SEO in increasing website traffic, and examines how user reviews and

ratings affect purchasing decisions. With regard to Search Engine Optimization (SEO), it is evident that in order to succeed in the cutthroat market, adventure tourism companies must leverage the power of digital visibility. According to Barykin et al. (2021), SEO has a crucial role in increasing website traffic, which is important for enterprises in this sector. Maintaining a strong internet presence is crucial for drawing in adventure-seeking tourists, beyond just ranking higher on search engine results pages. The study by Barykin et al. also explores the complex relationship between customer reviews, ratings, and their impact on purchasing choices, highlighting how crucial it is to succeed in the adventure tourism market not just by showing up on the digital map but also by upholding a positive online reputation.

Challenges and Future Directions

While there are many prospects for adventure tourism in digital marketing, there are also difficulties. Further research is needed on the problems of information overload and preserving authenticity in a digital context (Hanelt et al., 2021). Additionally, due consideration must be given to the risk for over-commercialization and environmental effects brought on by an increase in tourism demand (Buhalis, 2015).

The digital marketing landscape for active tourism is continuously evolving, influenced by various trends and innovations. Drawing from recent research, including Hanelt et al. (2021), Barykin et al. (2021), Chaffey and Smith (2022), Santos and Silva (2019), Mele and Cantoni (2017), Mele and Cantoni (2018), Kečkeš and Tomicic (2017), and Ozkul and Kumlu (2019), here are several trends shaping the present and future of digital marketing for active tourism:

Personalization remains a dominant trend, as highlighted by Barykin et al. (2021). Digital marketers in the active tourism sector are leveraging data analytics, AI, and machine learning to create highly personalized experiences for potential tourists. Tailoring content, recommendations, and offers to individual preferences and behaviors not only enhances engagement but also drives conversion rates. This approach fosters a sense of connection and resonance, making tourists more likely to

choose adventure experiences that align with their interests and expectations.

The integration of immersive technologies, such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), as explored by Ozkul and Kumlu (2019), is gaining momentum. These technologies allow prospective adventure tourists to virtually explore destinations and activities, providing a taste of the adventure before committing. This trend not only enhances decision-making but also opens up new avenues for storytelling. Marketers can create immersive digital content that transports users to remote and thrilling locations, fostering excitement and anticipation.

Sustainability is a growing concern in the adventure tourism sector, as emphasized by Chaffey and Smith (2022). Bekele and Raj (2024) point out that digitalization and digital transformation are not just trends but essential shifts shaping the future of the tourism industry.

Digital marketing is increasingly used to promote responsible and eco-friendly adventure experiences. Companies are showcasing their commitment to sustainability through content marketing, highlighting initiatives such as eco-friendly accommodations, carbon offset programs, and conservation efforts. In addition, the transparency afforded by digital platforms enables tourists to make informed choices that align with their values, contributing to the growth of sustainable adventure tourism.

Conclusion

Promotion and engagement for adventure tourism now cannot be done without digital marketing. The investigation looks at the recent advancements, challenges, and outcomes of promoting adventure tourism through digital marketing. Empirical research shows that adventure tourism businesses are increasingly utilizing digital marketing techniques to reach their target audiences. Recent studies have shown that blogs, podcasts, social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, and podcasts have become powerful marketing tools for

adventure travel and activities. Innovative virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) experiences have also developed into crucial marketing tools for luring potential travelers into thrilling adventure tourism services. Due to the fact that adventure travelers' evaluations and photos are a significant source of inspiration and engagement, the utilization of user-generated content has increased in popularity. For stakeholders in the industry, utilizing social media, captivating narratives, immersive technologies, and efficient online booking systems is crucial. However, achieving a balance between technical development and sustainability issues continues to be a major difficulty. This evaluation advocates for more research to address new concerns as it advances knowledge of the increasing role of digital marketing in adventure tourism. Due to the fact that adventure travelers' evaluations and photos are a significant source of inspiration and engagement, the utilization of user-generated content has increased in popularity. In the adventure tourist sector, there are many opportunities for digital marketing, but there are also many challenges. Research shows that while using digital platforms, it's critical to maintain the uniqueness and authenticity of adventure interactions. Striking a balance between the need to promote moral and ecological tourism practices and the desire to attract tourists becomes essential. Managing information security concerns carefully is also necessary, particularly when using personal data for targeted marketing campaigns. While there are many prospects for digital marketing in the adventure tourism industry, there are also many obstacles to overcome. According to research, it's crucial to preserve the authenticity and distinctiveness of adventure encounters when using digital platforms. It becomes crucial to strike a balance between the need to draw tourists and the need to promote ethical and sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, information security issues need to be managed carefully, especially when leveraging personal data for targeted marketing initiatives.

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Contact: alile@ust.edu.al



Section 2. Management of innovation

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MODERN JOURNALISM AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: RISKS, CHALLENGES AND POSITIVE SIDES

*Giorgi Abazadze*¹

¹ Mass Communication Akaki Tsereteli state university, Georgia

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Abstract

Technological progress, especially the integration of AI, is changing not only the forms of dissemination and reception of information, but also the psychology of its generation, planning and reception. The article examines the impact of artificial intelligence on modern journalism, especially in the context of changing the professional function of a journalist. It discusses how AI affects the process of collecting, processing and distributing news, whether it simplifies editorial work and, most importantly, whether it reduces the need for journalists in the media industry. The article describes both the positive capabilities of AI (speed, automation, data analysis) and its negative aspects (ethical uncertainty, replacement of human intuition). Real cases are examined (The Guardian's use of GPT-3) and (BBC and RADAR (Reporters and Data and Robots) to answer the main question: is AI a professional threat to journalists or a new opportunity?

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence and Journalism; Modern Journalism; Change in the Journalist's Work*

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly important in various fields, however, the use of AI is accompanied by serious ethical and professional challenges, especially in the media space. Technological progress, especially the integration of AI, is changing not only the forms of information dissemination, but also the psychology of its generation, planning and reception. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming an integral part of mod-

ern journalism. It is changing the format of information generation, dissemination and consumption. The new technological environment offers both significant opportunities and serious challenges, which concern media ethics, the professional role of journalists and the quality of public information. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is deeply integrated into journalistic work. Its applications range from automated text generation to data analysis and the provision of personalized content.

However, this technology is associated with both opportunities and professional and ethical challenges. It is important to evaluate journalism not only as a provider of information, but also as a public institution whose stability and credibility are being tested in the new conditions of AI.

The aim of the study is to analyze how AI is changing journalistic work: whether the technology represents assistance, competition, or a change in the nature of the profession.

Methodology

The research is based on content analysis and case study methods. Academic literature, international studies, reports, and media analytics are used.

AI Integration in Journalism: Context and Dynamics

The main function of artificial intelligence in journalism is focused on optimizing information processing – the topic will touch in depth on data-driven journalism, automated article generation, and the so-called “narrative architecture”. Natural Language Generation (NLG) technologies are particularly relevant, which create article texts based on standardized data (for example, a financial report or a review of sports results). The transformation of technology and its assimilation in journalism naturally raises the question of whether AI will reduce the work of journalists? Which we should consider in several contexts. AI already fulfills the traditional functions of a journalist: compiling news, automating sports reports, financial analysis (Bloomberg’s Cyborg, Forbes’ Bertie). This is how specific tasks are reduced from human resources, which clearly reduces the demand for technical editors and standard reporters (Diakopoulos, N., 2019). AI successfully collects data, creates headlines and optimizes SEO. However, it cannot provide the depth of context, empathy and socio-political interpretation. Analysis of complex topics, investigative journalism and value assessment still depend on human intelligence. In the modern sense, a journalist may no longer be just a news broadcaster, but also becomes a content curator, news filter, data interpreter, fact checker (Marconi, F., 2020). Accordingly, the complete disappearance of the profession is not expected, but the transformation of the

role is inevitable. Along with saving human resources, artificial intelligence should also be considered as a means of financial optimization, as small editorial offices often use AI to reduce costs. Which reduces the number of journalistic staff and enhances selective cooperation. This poses a professional threat, especially for employees of regional media.

To better analyze the risks and challenges mentioned above, we will consider several cases.

The Guardian’s Experiment with GPT-3

In 2020, the British newspaper The Guardian published an article that was entirely generated by OpenAI’s GPT-3. The headline of the article was: “A robot wrote this entire article. Are you scared yet, human?” (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/08/robot-wrote-this-article-gpt-3>)

The article was clearly edited by a human, although the main text was created by GPT-3.

The important conclusion was: AI can generate relatively simple texts with linguistic sequence and logic; it cannot create deep journalistic investigations, cannot evaluate and interpret context; the trust of readers is questioned – they need to know when they are talking to a “human” and when – to an algorithm.

BBC and RADAR Project

RADAR (Reporters and Data and Robots) is a joint initiative of leading British agencies that uses AI to write automated articles. RADAR publishes thousands of texts every day on small topics (local crime statistics, weather forecasts, municipal information, and more) (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news>).

- The texts are informative, factually correct, but not based on journalistic research;
- Editors actively control the content;
- Such a system meets information needs, but does little to promote deep analytics or critical understanding of society.

Risks and challenges:

The integration of AI into journalism creates several key risks:

- Ethical uncertainty: Who is responsible in the event of inaccurate information – the algorithm, the editor or the platform?

- Crisis of trust: It becomes important for readers to know whether a text is produced by a human;
- Professional devaluation: If a large part of the texts is automated, how does the function of the journalist and the market demand change?

Pros and opportunities

Despite the risks, the integration of AI includes several clear benefits:

- Speed and volume: automated systems are able to generate thousands of materials at once;
- Data-driven journalism: AI will help journalists with research, analysis, and visualization;
- Unburdening routine work: Journalists spend less time on simple texts and focus more on investigation and in-depth topics.

Research results

The analysis of the named cases (The Guardian and RADAR) shows that artificial intelligence currently cannot replace a professional journalist in creating in-depth analytical and investigative material, although it is clearly successful in the rapid generation of standardized information.

AI creates a “new profession” within the media – a journalist who works not only on the topic, but also with the algorithm. Technology can become a support, but not a replacement.

Conclusion

AI-related predictions should be neither utopian nor pessimistic. Artificial intelli-

gence is changing the landscape of journalism, but this change does not mean the abolition of the profession – it means transformation.

Despite the potential for optimization, the use of AI involves serious risks: Disinformation and Deepfakes: Deepfake technology creates visual and audio materials that serve to manipulate audiences. Ethical opacity: It is often unclear whether AI-generated content meets ethical and editorial standards. Reduced audience trust: Automated communication can be perceived as unresponsive or “inhuman”. The risk of loss of control: AI can be seen as an autonomous “communicator”, making it difficult to manage the organizational message. Technological competence, editorial responsibility and ethical caution will be important for journalists in the future. Media organizations should define a clear policy on the use of AI in order to maintain the reliability of information and professional standards.

In modern journalism, artificial intelligence is both a powerful tool and a strategic challenge.

If its use is based on ethical standards, open communication and human control, it ensures accuracy, efficiency and strengthens the democratic space. However, excessive automation, the abolition of professional responsibility and the obsolescence of content can cause serious damage to the public space. Therefore, a balance needs to be maintained: technological progress and human values must develop hand in hand.

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© Abazadze G.
Contact: abazadze58@gmail.com



Section 3. Regional economy

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NATION BRANDING OF AZERBAIJAN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE MIDDLE CORRIDOR

*Xin You*¹

¹ Baku State University (Baku, Azerbaijan)

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Abstract

This paper examines Azerbaijan's nation branding strategy in relation to its strategic position along the Middle Corridor. Utilizing the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index as an analytical framework, the study explores how Azerbaijan aligns its national branding efforts with broader geopolitical and economic objectives to enhance its international profile and advance sustainable development. The findings highlight the dual role of nation branding as a diplomatic mechanism and an economic strategy, underscoring the importance of governance, cultural diplomacy, and service quality in shaping a resilient and competitive national identity.

Keywords: *Nation Branding, Middle Corridor, Regional Connectivity, Geoeconomics, Azerbaijan-China Relations*

Introduction

In an increasingly complex and strategically contested global environment, nation branding has become an essential tool for countries seeking to shape their international image, attract investment, expand exports, and build soft power (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008). For emerging economies undergoing structural transformation, nation branding serves not only as a form of public diplomacy but also as a strategic framework for redefining national identity, improving global market positioning, and adapting to evolving geopolitical dynamics (Al-Azemi & Ahmad, 2021). Azerbaijan, a resource-rich post-Soviet state

at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, exemplifies this approach. Since launching the "Made in Azerbaijan" initiative in 2016, the country has sought to promote non-oil exports, diversify its economy, and construct a modern international image rooted in cultural heritage and regional engagement.

This strategy unfolds amid a reconfiguration of the global economic order, marked by a move away from liberalized globalization toward more fragmented and regionally managed interactions (IMF, 2023). Rising geopolitical tensions and disrupted supply chains have accelerated this trend. Within this context, in 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

has emerged as a key platform for regional connectivity and economic cooperation. Azerbaijan's location along the BRI's Middle Corridor offers significant opportunities to enhance economic integration and elevate its strategic profile in Eurasia (Valiyev, 2019).

Azerbaijan's engagement with the BRI aligns closely with its nation branding goals. Investments in infrastructure, expanding trade routes, and stronger international partnerships have reinforced the visibility and credibility of the national brand. At the same time, branding allows Azerbaijan to shape how it is perceived within a multilateral framework, asserting narrative control while contributing to regional cooperation (Ibadoghlu, 2024). Nation branding thus operates as both an economic development strategy and a diplomatic tool to advance geopolitical interests.

Cultural diplomacy reinforces Azerbaijan's international image. By hosting high-profile international events such as the Eurovision Song Contest, Formula 1 Grand Prix, UEFA matches, and the COP29 climate summit, Azerbaijan projects itself as a modern and culturally dynamic actor on the global stage. These events enhance visibility and consolidate its identity as an engaged regional player.

While nation branding has attracted increasing scholarly attention, there remains a relative lack of research exploring how such strategies evolve in the context of expansive international frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the alignment and adaptation of Azerbaijan's "Made in Azerbaijan" initiative within the strategic contours of the BRI. The findings suggest that a thoughtful integration of national branding with regional connectivity efforts can generate reciprocal advantages. Azerbaijan's experience illustrates how nation branding may not only advance economic diversification but also cultivate a cooperative and distinctive international identity. As the BRI continues to develop, fostering greater synergy between domestic branding objectives and regional integration could enhance both policy coherence and long-term strategic outcomes.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case analysis to assess Azerbaijan's nation brand-

ing strategy, with a focus on its strategic role along the Middle Corridor. Drawing on the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index, it focuses on six dimensions: exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, tourism, and investment and immigration. The analysis highlights how these aspects contribute to Azerbaijan's international image, economic diversification, and regional integration efforts.

Results analysis

The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) stands as a globally established benchmark for evaluating the international image and brand performance of countries. Although Azerbaijan is not included in the official list of countries surveyed by the NBI, the index's six-dimensional structure provides a comprehensive and robust analytical framework that can be effectively utilized to assess Azerbaijan's nation branding efforts and its evolving strategic positioning on the global stage. The following analysis applies the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) to assess the scope and effectiveness Azerbaijan's nation branding:

- **Exports:** Historically, Azerbaijan's international visibility has been largely shaped by its abundant hydrocarbon reserves. This resource-based identity gained particular prominence after the signing of the "Contract of the Century" in the 1990s, which positioned Azerbaijan as a major energy supplier within the Caspian region. While this branding strategy significantly contributed to the country's economic development and geopolitical standing, it gradually revealed structural vulnerabilities. In response, the nation has undertaken a strategic shift in its branding narrative, gradually transitioning from an "Energy Label" toward a more multifaceted and future-oriented "Cultural Calling Card." The "Made in Azerbaijan" program embodies this transformation, aiming to diversify the country's export base by promoting sectors such as agrifood, handicrafts, design, textiles, and cultural industries including music, film, and visual arts.

Figure 1. *Six Dimensions of Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI)*



- **Governance:** The Governance dimension of the Nation Brands Index reflects global perceptions of a country's political competence, institutional transparency, adherence to the rule of law, and alignment with international standards. In Azerbaijan's case, governance constitutes both a practical domain of reform and a symbolic component of its nation branding strategy. The government has implemented a range of institutional reforms aimed at improving administrative efficiency, modernizing public services, and fostering a more conducive environment for foreign investment, particularly in light of the country's growing strategic relevance along the Middle Corridor. Although these efforts signal a commitment to modernization and development, international assessments continue to raise concerns regarding democratic governance, media freedom, and judicial independence. As such, the governance dimension presents both opportunities for enhancing Azerbaijan's international image and ongoing reputational challenges. The long-term credibility of these branding efforts, however, depends on the government's ability to balance domestic institutional consolidation with

the external projection of legitimacy, transparency, and trustworthiness.
- **Culture and Heritage:** The Culture dimension of the Nation Brands Index measures how a country's cultural heritage and creative outputs are perceived globally. Azerbaijan's rich cultural mosaic, shaped by Turkic, Persian, Caucasian, and Russian influences, plays a key role in shaping its international image and soft power. The "Made in Azerbaijan" campaign highlights traditional crafts such as carpet weaving, as well as music including the renowned Mugham tradition, literature, and culinary heritage, which together emphasize a distinctive national identity. Additionally, Azerbaijan invests heavily in cultural diplomacy through hosting international festivals, art exhibitions, and promoting UNESCO World Heritage sites such as the Old City of Baku. These efforts increase the country's cultural visibility and encourage regional cultural exchanges. By prioritizing culture, Azerbaijan supports economic diversification and strengthens its profile not only as a strategic transit corridor but also as a vibrant cultural crossroads along the Middle Corridor.
- **Tourism:** The Tourism dimension of the Nation Brands Index assesses

a country's attractiveness as a destination, including perceptions of natural beauty, cultural appeal, hospitality, and infrastructure. In Azerbaijan, tourism is closely intertwined with cultural heritage, yet it also draws significantly on the country's varied natural landscapes and culinary richness. From the Caspian Sea coastline to the snow-capped Caucasus Mountains, Azerbaijan offers ecological diversity that supports a range of leisure and adventure tourism activities. Local cuisine, shaped by Persian, Turkic, and Caucasian influences, adds a distinctive experiential layer to the visitor experience and contributes to the country's soft power. In recent years, the government has prioritized infrastructure development, eased visa procedures, and promoted international tourism campaigns to enhance visibility. These efforts not only position Azerbaijan as a cultural and logistical node along the Middle Corridor, but also as a multidimensional travel destination capable of attracting diverse global audiences.

- **People:** The People dimension of the Nation Brands Index reflects perceptions of a country's population in terms of openness, hospitality, and social values. Azerbaijan actively promotes its image as a hospitable and culturally welcoming society through public diplomacy, educational exchanges, and international events. Tourists frequently highlight informal interactions with locals as a key part of their positive experience, reinforcing the perception of Azerbaijanis as friendly and open. However, concerns have been raised about non-transparent or inconsistent pricing practices in airport transportation, which may negatively affect first impressions. Ensuring alignment between perceived hospitality and actual visitor experience remains essential to strengthening this dimension of the national brand, which may benefit from improved oversight and more consistent service standards in key areas of tourist infrastructure.

- **Investment and Immigration:** The Investment and Immigration dimension of the Nation Brands Index assesses perceptions of a country's economic environment and its attractiveness as a destination for work and residence. Azerbaijan has pursued reforms to improve its investment climate, focusing on regulatory simplification, tax incentives, and infrastructure development, particularly leveraging its strategic position along the Middle Corridor. Special economic zones and free trade areas target diversification beyond oil, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in logistics, agriculture, and renewable energy. Despite progress in administrative efficiency and digital governance, challenges in legal certainty and institutional transparency persist. In terms of livability, Azerbaijan offers a favorable work-life balance, enhancing its appeal to expatriates and skilled workers. However, relatively low wage levels compared to peer economies may hinder talent attraction and retention. Strengthening legal frameworks and improving compensation remain critical to advancing Azerbaijan's competitiveness as a destination for investment and immigration.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Azerbaijan has capitalized on the China's BRI initiative to implement numerous infrastructure projects, generating significant GDP growth, expanding employment opportunities, and enhancing public welfare. Positioned at the strategic nexus of the East and West, as well as the Middle East, Azerbaijan plays a critical role in connecting Asia and Europe through the Middle Corridor. The period from 2024 to 2025 marked a further advancement in Azerbaijan-China relations, culminating in the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership. This development has fostered deeper cooperation across diverse fields such as science and education, cultural exchange, green energy, and sustainable development.

Taken together, these achievements have substantially strengthened Azerbaijan's nation branding by reinforcing its image as

a dynamic regional hub and promoting economic diversification. To sustain this momentum, continued improvements in governance, socio-economic equity, and service quality remain essential. Azerbaijan's experience underscores the strategic value of em-

bedding nation branding within broader regional and geopolitical frameworks, offering important insights for emerging economies seeking to balance domestic progress with global integration.

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© Xin You
Contact: xin.you@bsu.edu.az

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