



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Place Branding in the Metaverse

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Abstract

The present dissertation investigates the strategic utilization of the metaverse in shaping the place branding of global cities, focusing on the case studies of Seoul, South Korea, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The study uses a qualitative research design, case study methodology, and content analysis to examine the metaverse methods employed by these cities. The research attempts to understand the impact of metaverse activities on city branding by combining empirical data with insights acquired from a thorough literature review.

The analysis reveals that both Seoul and Dubai strategically leverage the metaverse to enhance their place branding strategy. Seoul, has adopted the metaverse Seoul project, which includes virtual experiences and events that expand its brand identity into the digital domain. The project highlights Seoul's cultural richness and promotes worldwide involvement through immersive virtual tourism and interactive cultural events.

Dubai, on the other hand, pursues a distinct decentralized metaverse strategy, promoting itself as a pioneer in the adoption of innovative technology. The "Dubai Metaverse Strategy" emphasizes collaboration, variety, and economic growth in the virtual sphere. Moreover, Dubai promotes the development of a virtual economy, focusing on blockchain technology to protect transactions and ownership. The metaverse serves as a platform for Dubai to promote its cultural heritage, provide virtual tourism experiences, and stimulate economic growth through digital goods and services.

The integration of empirical findings and a literature review highlights similarities and differences between the two cities, emphasizing the importance of innovation, diversified target audience involvement, and multi-channel communication in metaverse-driven place branding. The study underlines the metaverse's economic possibilities, including possibilities for entrepreneurship, employment development, and worldwide accessibility.

While the study contributes to our understanding of the metaverse's impact on place branding, it recognizes limitations such as the dynamic nature of the metaverse environment and the case study's specificity. The dissertation concludes with managerial implications, emphasizing actionable insights from the research and proposing avenues for future research, such as longitudinal studies, more diverse case selections, and in-depth assessments of internal organizational changes and ethical considerations in metaverse strategies.

Keywords: Metaverse, Place Branding, City Branding, Seoul, Dubai

Resumo

A presente dissertação investiga a utilização estratégica do metaverso na definição dos esforços de place branding das cidades globais, centrando-se nos estudos de caso de Seul, na Coreia do Sul, e do Dubai, nos Emirados Árabes Unidos. O estudo utiliza uma conceção de investigação qualitativa, uma metodologia de estudo de caso e uma análise de conteúdo para examinar os métodos do metaverso utilizados por estas cidades. A investigação tenta compreender o impacto diversificado das actividades metaversais no branding das cidades, combinando dados empíricos com conhecimentos adquiridos através de uma análise exaustiva da literatura.

A análise revela que tanto Seul como o Dubai aproveitam estrategicamente o metaverso para melhorar os seus esforços de branding de lugar. Seul, conhecida pela sua mistura dinâmica de tradição e inovação, adoptou o projeto metaverse Seoul, que inclui experiências e eventos virtuais que expandem a identidade da sua marca para o domínio digital. O projeto destaca a riqueza cultural de Seul e promove o envolvimento mundial através do turismo virtual imersivo e de eventos culturais interactivos.

O Dubai, por outro lado, segue uma estratégia distinta de metaverso descentralizado, promovendo-se como pioneiro na adoção de tecnologia inovadora. A "Estratégia do Metaverso do Dubai" dá ênfase à colaboração, variedade e progresso económico na esfera virtual. O Dubai promove agressivamente o desenvolvimento de uma economia virtual, centrando-se na tecnologia blockchain para proteger as transacções e a propriedade. O metaverso serve de plataforma para o Dubai promover o seu património cultural, proporcionar experiências de turismo virtual e estimular o crescimento económico através de bens e serviços digitais.

A integração de resultados empíricos e de uma revisão da literatura realça as semelhanças e diferenças entre as duas cidades, sublinhando a importância da

inovação, do envolvimento de públicos-alvo diversificados e da comunicação multicanal no branding de lugares orientada para o metaverso. O estudo realça as possibilidades económicas do metaverso, incluindo oportunidades de empreendedorismo, desenvolvimento de emprego e acessibilidade mundial.

Embora o estudo contribua para a compreensão do impacto do metaverso no place branding, reconhece limitações como a natureza dinâmica do ambiente do metaverso e a especificidade do estudo de caso. A dissertação conclui com implicações gerenciais, enfatizando insights acionáveis da pesquisa e propondo caminhos para pesquisas futuras, como estudos longitudinais, seleções de casos mais diversificados e exames aprofundados de mudanças organizacionais internas e considerações éticas em estratégias metaversais.

Palavras-chave: Metaverso, Place Branding, City Branding, Seul, Dubai

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1. Introduction

According to Heilbrunn (2006) and Kapferer (2007), brands have historically been linked to the identity and image of businesses and their goods, and they should be attached to a distinct personality and set of values to engage with customers. This notion goes beyond the business world and includes efforts to create and communicate the identity of places such as countries, cities, and regions (Aranda and Combariza, 2007; Anholt, 2003; Ashworth, 2009; Kolb, 2006; Kavaratizis & Ashworth, 2006). Through tactics like "Marketing of territories" and "City-branding," place branding seeks to affect a variety of industries, including business, tourism, and even political influence (Garrido et al., 2016).

The recent emergence of the metaverse, a virtual world blurring the lines between the physical and digital, has sparked significant interest in its potential impact on branding practices. Traditional brands now face the challenge of adapting their strategies to this new digital landscape, where immersive technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality play a transformative role (Bushell, 2022). Understanding the opportunities and challenges presented by the metaverse is crucial for brands to maintain a strong presence and engage with consumers effectively in this evolving digital environment.

Nonetheless, the idea of place branding in the metaverse is a comparatively untapped field within this research environment. While the traditional approach to place branding is on creating distinctive identities and associations for physical locations the metaverse offers a unique setting in which virtual places are created and experienced (Anholt, 2003; Kavaratizis & Ashworth, 2006). This distinction creates new research opportunities, therefore we look at how place branding strategies might need to change and advance to cover this interesting new territory.

Bearing the above in mind, this research explores the relationship between place branding and the metaverse, hence the purpose of this study is to address the following research question: “How can place branding effectively use the metaverse to gain a competitive advantage in the evolving digital landscape?”. Thus, this research follows an exploratory and qualitative approach by analyzing two case studies – Seoul and Dubai – centered on both their traditional place branding efforts and their respective metaverse cities. To address the research question, a thorough analysis of the potential synergies between place branding and the metaverse will be done.

To achieve the established objectives the remaining of this study is structured as follows. First, we presented the literature review, where different topics, such as place branding and the evolution of the metaverse are addressed. Second, the methodological approach used is explained and, subsequently, the main results are presented and analyzed. Third, considering relevant data from the literature review, the main findings are highlighted and discussed. Finally, some managerial implications are presented followed by this research’s main limitations and suggestions for future studies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Place Branding

In the realm of business and commerce, the concept of a "brand" transcends mere products or institutions. It includes their identity and image, embodying a set of values that resonate with the public (Heilbrunn, 2006; Kapferer, 2007). This imposes a unique personality that fosters connection and influence. Furthermore, branding extends beyond products to include territories as well, and the escalating competition in the global marketplace emphasizes the critical need for towns and cities to create unique identities and set themselves apart. While many have attractive landscapes, high quality of life, welcoming communities, and solid business infrastructure, these elements no longer provide a competitive edge. As Papadopoulos (2004) notes, establishing a strong brand - or brand equity - is vital to attract residents, workers, and visitors (Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Zenker & Martin, 2013).

The practice of strategically shaping a place's image and perception to drive social, political, and economic growth is known as place branding (Anholt, 2003). This process transcends individual organizations and involves collaboration between institutions, businesses, politicians, NGOs, and civil society (Hankinson, 2004). The trend towards place branding extends across various geographic scales (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Van den Berg and Braun, 1999), from nation-states to cities, and aims to cultivate unique identities encompassing diverse economic, social, and cultural aspects, seeking to connect place identity and perceived images via meaningful place experiences and projected visuals. Place branding bridges the gap between reality and perception through experience and communication (Biçakçi, 2012). Furthermore, place branding represents a move beyond the tourism-focused perspective of "destination branding" towards a more holistic approach (Allen, 2007; Kavaratzis,

2004). Indeed, location branding, nation branding, city branding, and destination branding are branches of place branding.

2.1.1 City Branding

A city's branding is important for a variety of reasons, the most prevalent of which is to drive economic growth. Achieving a competitive edge through city branding can increase tourism and inward investments, as well as community development by fostering a sense of local identity among residents and motivating all available social forces to support development initiatives. Furthermore, according to Dini (2010), Kavaratizis (2004), and Miyamoto (2007), the environmental aspect has grown significantly when it comes to city branding.

As Biçakçı (2012) describes, city branding is the conductor, creating a captivating narrative that resonates deeply with diverse audiences – residents, workers, businesses, investors, and tourists alike. City branding is not just about appealing brand identity signs, it is about uncovering the unique value proposition that sets a city apart, developed as part of city marketing, a crucial component of place management and urban planning.

2.2 Metaverse and Virtual Worlds

The emergence of the metaverse, has sparked significant interest in its potential impact on branding and marketing practices. Neal Stephenson first established the concept of the "metaverse" in his science fiction book *Snow Crash*. According to Stephenson (1992), it was a permanent virtual world that shaped most facets of human existence.

The metaverse can extend the physical world by using augmented and virtual reality technology, allowing users to interact effortlessly between real and simulated settings via avatars and holograms.

Virtual worlds and immersive games, including Second Life, Fortnite, Roblox, and VRChat, have emerged as forerunners of the metaverse, providing valuable insights into its potential socioeconomic implications (Dwivedi et al 2022). These early iterations offer a preliminary glimpse into the transformative capabilities of a fully functional and cross-platform metaverse. While these predecessors have demonstrated the feasibility of virtual worlds, they have also highlighted user interaction and functionality limitations. The metaverse, on the other hand, promises to transcend these constraints by empowering users with unprecedented freedom and connectivity. Within this immersive environment, individuals will have the ability to communicate, collaborate, and engage in a wide range of activities in a pseudo-face-to-face setting.

This enhanced level of immersion and interaction may revolutionize various facets of society, including education, entertainment, business, and social interactions. By seamlessly intertwining the virtual and physical realms, the metaverse holds immense potential to transform how we work, learn, play, and connect. As Mark Zuckerberg showcased at Meta's annual conference (2021), the metaverse enables users to conduct a wide range of activities that mirror our everyday lives. Virtual meetings, email responses, concert attendance, and even shopping can all be seamlessly integrated within the metaverse, blurring the lines between the virtual and physical realms. This seamless blend of digital and real-world experiences positions the metaverse as an extension of our physical existence.

On the other hand, the Meta Company is not the only involved in building the metaverse today. Some big companies are leading the way in this new direction, including Amazon, Microsoft, Epic Games, Tencent, and Roblox. Amazon has been working with augmented reality technologies for several years, from virtual try-ons for clothes to special glasses. They have also been developing software for cloud

computing and smart home devices that can potentially be connected to the "system". In May 2021, Microsoft announced the creation of a corporate metaverse. They plan to achieve this by using the Azure cloud platform, which has services for creating a digital version of anything - from individual items to entire places. All of this happens with the help of mixed reality. So, we can organize remote work or hold meetings with avatars of real people.

While the metaverse remains loosely defined, two main experiences emerge: centralized (e.g., Fortnite, Roblox) and decentralized (e.g., Decentraland, The Sandbox). In centralized metaverses, corporations dictate user engagement, while decentralized ones leverage blockchain for community-driven development (Nabben, 2022). Market forecasts indicate a promising future for the metaverse, with projections ranging from nine-digit figures by 2025 (Bobier et al., 2022) to a trillion-dollar opportunity driven by decentralization (Moy & Gadgil, 2022; Greyscale Research, 2021). This has turned the metaverse into a key discussion point for brands.

Although the metaverse is currently used as a very novel space for brand activations, prior research suggests that existing marketing and brand management frameworks can be effectively adapted to the metaverse context (Tikkanen et al., 2009; Halvorson & Steyn, 2009; Bleize & Antheunis, 2019; Barnes & Mattson, 2011; Shaurav & Mallick, 2019; Soulikhan et al., 2021).

As we move towards the realization of a fully functional metaverse, it is crucial to carefully consider the potential socioeconomic impacts and challenges it may pose. Addressing these concerns proactively will be essential for ensuring the responsible and equitable development of this transformative technology. While numerous news articles and industry reports have delved into the potential economic benefits of the metaverse (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2023; Lundmark, 2022; Morris, 2022), there is a paucity of detailed analyses on how this transformative technology will reshape consumer behavior and management practices.

2.3 Evolution of Place Branding on the Metaverse

The emergence of gaming-based virtual worlds has piqued the curiosity of a growing number of individuals, resulting in companies using these platforms for engaging with their customers. This has sparked extensive research by scholars into diverse applications and marketing techniques for brands in this domain, with notable contributions from Tikkanen et al. (2009), Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010), and Davis et al. (2009).

However, a relatively new and unexplored area within this research landscape is the concept of place branding in the metaverse. While traditional place branding focuses on building distinct identities and associations for physical locations (Anholt, 2003; Kavaratizis & Ashworth, 2006), the metaverse presents a unique environment where virtual places are constructed and experienced. Hence, it is relevant to understand how established place branding principles translate to this digital realm and what adaptations are necessary.

Ashworth and Kavaratizis (2014) defend the potential of the metaverse for city branding, suggesting the creation of virtual replicas to enrich cultural experiences and attract tourism. Virtual environments can replicate historical landmarks, iconic buildings, and even natural landscapes. Thus, the metaverse offers an opportunity for not only city branding but also for entire regions or countries to showcase their cultural richness. Moreover, Anholt (2016) posits that brand image in the metaverse is constructed through user-generated content and interactions, demanding brands to prioritize user agency and community engagement. Additionally, Bautista (2022) analyzes how both real and virtual cities leverage the metaverse for place branding, outlining key strategies and potential challenges. Thus, cases like Barbados' virtual tourist campaign, Dubai Metaverse Strategy, Metaverse Seoul, and the British Museum's "The World of the Chinese Dragon" exhibit offer insightful information

about actual implementations and results of place branding tactics used in the metaverse (Bautista, 2022).

In addition, more research is necessary to determine how new technologies like blockchain, NFTs, and augmented reality affect place branding in the metaverse. While there is great potential for these technologies, there are also certain limitations that should be carefully considered. For instance, while blockchain technology can facilitate transparent ownership and monetization of virtual spaces, and NFTs offer unique branding opportunities through limited-edition digital collectibles (Kavaratizis & Ashworth, 2017), ethical concerns surrounding environmental impact, financial speculation, and accessibility within the metaverse must be addressed (Bautista, 2022).

In the metaverse, effective branding requires more than just a visually appealing design. It also requires creating a strong sense of community and offering compelling user experiences. It is essential to look into methods for promoting user engagement, co-creation, and a feeling of community in virtual environments. This involves investigating how to curate information created by users, creating gamified experiences, and encouraging constructive social interactions (Anholt, 2016).

By researching these emerging applications and challenges, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of how place branding is adapting and evolving within the metaverse and how it can leverage this unique platform to enhance the image and perception of places in the digital age.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This study aims to understand the metaverse's potential as an innovative platform for place branding. It investigates at how cities can use the metaverse's distinct features to create captivating and effective branding experiences. Therefore, it adopts an exploratory approach due to the nascent nature of the metaverse as a marketing tool. Exploratory research methods are especially useful in unknown or underdeveloped areas, allowing researchers to gather preliminary insights and propose future study questions (Swedberg, 2020).

The goal of this research is to explore and analyze how place branding may use the metaverse's unique characteristics for effective place branding. To accomplish this, the study will analyze the case studies of Seoul and Dubai. By analyzing their strategies, the research aims to identify key insights and answer the central question: how can place branding effectively use the metaverse to gain a competitive advantage in the evolving digital landscape?

The research has a qualitative nature because it provides a more detailed knowledge of the context in which decisions and actions take place. This technique allows researchers to delve into the underlying rationales of human behaviors and events, allowing for a more in-depth examination of the specific topic (Myers, 2013). To collect data on the selected cities' place branding efforts and metaverse activities, we will use a combination of document analysis (e.g., official city reports, press releases) and website scraping to acquire publicly available content.

3.2 City Case Studies

3.2.1 Seoul, South North

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, stands as a prime example of technological innovation and cultural diversity within Asian megacities. These characteristics are the foundation of the city brand strategy "A city of passion striving for coexistence and relaxation", carefully developed by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG, 2023). This strategy transcends mere tourism promotion, positioning Seoul as a major international hub for trade, cross-cultural interaction, and sustainable growth. Thus, Seoul has a well-established brand identity and image, centred around its distinctive blend of dynamism, rich cultural heritage, and diverse offerings. This analysis delves into the core values, unique selling points, target audiences, and the channels used in the communication of this city.

3.2.1.1 Place Branding Analysis

1. Core Values and Identity:

Firstly, according to Wang et al. (2020), Seoul is a city that values innovation and technical advancement. The city is at the forefront of research and development worldwide in a variety of fields, as shown by its continuous high ranking in the Global Innovation Index of the World Intellectual Property Organization (2023). Seoul's dedication to using technology to address urban difficulties (Smart Cities Observatory, 2024) is notable, however, Seoul's modernity is not detached from its rich history. The city is proud of its cultural legacy, as seen by its well-preserved historical landmarks and numerous cultural experiences. Several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Changdeokgung Palace Complex, Gyeongbokgung Palace, and Jongmyo

Shrine, provide evidence of Seoul's historical and cultural significance (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). Furthermore, Seoul cultivates a dynamic environment that encourages creativity and entrepreneurship. This creative energy is reflected in the city's thriving arts, fashion, and design communities. Seoul is home to a wide variety of art organizations, including prominent ones like the Samsung Museum of Art and the National Museum of Korea. The city also holds a lot of art festivals and events all year long that draw audiences and artists from all over the world.

2. Target Audience and Messaging

Seoul's place branding strategy takes a diversified approach to effectively connect with a wide range of target consumers, going beyond a single message. Seoul's reputation as a global center of innovation and entrepreneurship attracts young professionals. Seoul's strong position in research and development (Kearney's 2023 Global Cities Report) is reflected in the city's thriving startup environment and rich innovation ecosystem, as demonstrated by the Invest Seoul website. Furthermore, Seoul's message to tourists fuses the modernism of the city with the tradition's appeal. As demonstrated by the city's rankings in pertinent categories, the Seoul Tourism Organization notably offers historical and cultural experiences in addition to modern attractions, catering to travellers wanting a varied cultural and culinary experience (Place Brand Observer, 2023). On the other side, Seoul's business-friendly atmosphere and economic prospects attract investors. In line with its status as a premier global metropolis, the city's report, "Invest in Seoul: A City of Unlimited Potential," highlights its business-friendly environment, infrastructural development, and economic growth (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2022; Global Power City Index, 2023).

3. **Unique Selling Proposition:**

Seoul's unique selling proposition lies in its ability to seamlessly integrate tradition and cutting-edge technology, offering a unique and dynamic urban experience. This is further emphasized through the tagline: "Seoul: Where Tradition Meets Innovation."

4. **Communication Channels:**

Traditional media still has a big part to play. There are a lot of TV channels on terrestrial, cable, and satellite platforms that provide a range of material, from entertainment and news to educational programs. Furthermore, print media continues to exist and serve particular demographic groups despite the difficulties posed by the digital era. However, the foundation of Seoul's communication strategy is the digital sphere. As a primary center, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) website ensures accessibility and diversity by providing official information, news, and services in different languages. In addition, the SMG is active on several social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and KakaoTalk, where it promotes public interaction in real-time and interactive information dissemination. Moreover, acknowledging the generalization of mobile phones, the city administration offers several mobile applications that give citizens easy access to important services, the latest news, and details on cultural events.

Seoul emphasizes citizen interaction above and beyond information transmission. This is made clear via the "Communication 123" platform, which gives citizens the ability to actively shape their city by allowing them to submit recommendations, concerns, and questions. The link between the government and its constituents is strengthened and transparency is fostered by this two-way communication.

3.2.1.2 City Metaverse Analysis

Seoul, known for setting trends, has made a significant advancement into the future with the debut of its ground-breaking “Metaverse Seoul” project in 2023. The world’s first city-backed public metaverse platform is this ground-breaking endeavor, which is being led by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, in partnership with South Korean IT giant Naver Z (Forkast News, 2023). Users can tour a virtual version of Seoul on the well-known South Korean metaverse platform ZEPETO, immersing themselves in famous landmarks and interacting with the virtual metropolis (CoinDesk, 2023). However, metaverse Seoul offers more than just sightseeing. This ambitious initiative imagines a future in which citizens can use their avatars to access a range of public services, such as expediting administrative procedures, seeking support, and navigating commercial opportunities and cultural experiences (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2023). This analysis delves into Seoul's metaverse strategy across three key areas: virtual experiences and events, digital goods and services, and partnerships and collaborations.

1. Virtual Experiences and Events

The "Metaverse Seoul" project, which aims to create a virtual duplicate of the city, is central to this focus. Through an immersive virtual lens, people all over the world will be able to experience Seoul's iconic landmarks, cultural events, and even everyday activities thanks to this ambitious project. Although a virtual city hall provides access to public services in the present beta version, more experiences are anticipated in later versions (Park & Lee, 2023). This virtual space has a lot of potential. First of all, it makes Seoul's rich cultural heritage and famous landmarks more accessible to people everywhere, irrespective of geographic limitations (Park & Lee, 2023). Second, it provides

avenues for cutting-edge virtual experiences and events to supplement real-world services, possibly leading to greater engagement and novel prospects (The Korea Times, 2023). This ambitious initiative does, however, nevertheless confront challenges. It is difficult to capture the spirit of the actual Seoul in a virtual environment; user-centric design and careful consideration of cultural nuances are necessary. Ultimately, it's critical to find a balance between highlighting virtual activities and neglecting the actual city. To guarantee that Seoul's metaverse project enhances rather than supplants the actual city's distinctive features, it will be imperative to cultivate a positive relationship between the two domains.

2. Digital Goods and Services:

While the current focus of "Metaverse Seoul" project is on integrating public services, a report by the Korea JoongAng Daily (2023) highlights the project's potential to encompass a wider range of digital experiences.

Yoo (2023) has outlined the project's enormous scope, which includes a wide range of digital goods and services that might transform several parts of life and shape a dynamic ecosystem. According to The Korea JoongAng Daily (2023), the idea facilitates easy access within a virtual city hall by expediting procedures such as acquiring residency verification, getting tax counsel, and attending consultations. Tourism flourishes through immersive virtual tours of renowned landmarks and museums, alongside captivating cultural events, catering to a global audience and enhancing accessibility and engagement (The Korea Times, 2023). Virtual spaces are fertile ground for business support; they allow enterprises to communicate and collaborate with government agencies, which in turn drives innovation and development inside the metaverse (Park & Lee, 2023). Furthermore, to produce immersive learning experiences that enhance educational chances, the field of education investigates the

possibilities of virtual libraries, classrooms, and simulations (The Korea Times, 2023). The potential integration of online marketplaces or stores fosters e-commerce and creates opportunities for the sale of both digital and possibly physical goods with local delivery. The development of digital goods and services has great potential with this diversified approach. Metaverse-based public services provide easily accessible solutions that can enhance efficiency and streamline access (The Korea JoongAng Daily, 2023). Companies can create and market virtual goods and experiences inside the metaverse to open new business prospects (Park & Lee, 2023). People from a variety of backgrounds may benefit from virtual learning environments' ability to promote deeper engagement and offer immersive learning experiences (The Korea Times, 2023). However, navigating this digital environment comes with some obstacles. To promote fair competition, consumer protection, and responsible market development, it is imperative to establish explicit regulations for transactions and services within the metaverse (Yoo, 2023). Strong security protocols are necessary to guarantee user data security on the virtual platform, protect personal privacy, and foster trust. To prevent new societal differences from emerging or escalating, it is imperative to mitigate possible concerns of digital inequality and ensure equitable access to digital products and services.

3. Partnerships and Collaborations:

The "Metaverse Seoul" project goes beyond autonomous development by actively promoting cooperation with several stakeholders (Tomorrow City, 2023). This collaborative approach positions the project at the forefront of metaverse development. Seoul actively looks to collaborate with important tech sector firms. To create and maintain the basic metaverse infrastructure, for example, partnerships with telecoms giants like SK Telecom are essential, as

they can leverage their knowledge in this vital area. In the same way, collaborations with industry titans in the electronics sector such as LG Electronics offer invaluable knowledge and resources for building the metaverse's technological backbone. Furthermore, collaborations with research centers such as KAIST guarantee that the metaverse is not only a technological marvel but also a tool for enhancing several facets of urban life, investigating its uses in urban planning, healthcare, and education. Seoul is also engaged in partnerships with other cities, such as Singapore and Dubai, to exchange information and experiences. Cities can benefit from each other's knowledge and experiences learned in the creation and uptake of the metaverse, as this cooperative interchange promotes group learning and promotes the process of mutual advancement. Through the cultivation of these tactical alliances, Seoul's initiative surpasses the constraints of lone endeavors and establishes itself as a cooperative paradigm for subsequent metaverse advancement. By utilizing the resources and combined experience of various stakeholders, this strategy opens the door to a future in which the real and virtual worlds collide to create a completely new era of human connection and experience.

Table 1. Sources for Seoul's Place Branding and Metaverse Analysis

Nº	Titles	Links
1	Official release of Metaverse Seoul - Seoul Metropolitan Government	https://english.seoul.go.kr/official-release-of-metaverse-seoul/
2	Global Innovation Index 2023	https://www.wipo.int/gii-ranking/en/republic-of-korea
3	Asian and European citizens see their cities as the 'smartest', finds 2023 IMD Smart City Index	https://www.imd.org/news/competitiveness/asian-and-european-citizens-see-their-cities-as-the-smartest-finds-2023-imd-smart-city-index/
4	Republic of Korea - UNESCO World Heritage Convention	https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/kr
5	Kearney's 2023 Global Cities Report	https://www.kearney.com/service/global-business-policy-council/gcr/2023-full-report
6	The Place Brand Observer Seoul Tourism Organization	https://placebrandobserver.com/seoul-city-performance-brand-image-reputation/
7	Seoul's Competitiveness - Seoul Metropolitan Government	https://english.seoul.go.kr/city-hall/the-ranking-of-seoul/seouls-competitiveness/
8	South Korea launches online metaverse replica of capital city Seoul to improve public services	https://forkast.news/south-korea-metaverse-capital-city-seoul/
9	South Korea Launches Metaverse Replica of Seoul	https://www.coindesk.com/tag/seoul/
10	Seoul gov't launches world's 1st public services platform in metaverse	https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/tech/2024/03/129_343778.html
11	Seoul eyes title of 'leading smart city' with multibillion-won metaverse project	https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2023/01/31/national/socialAffairs/seoul-metaverse-seoul-mayor/20230131122959558.html

3.2.2 Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Dubai, a city in the United Arab Emirates, embodies a blend of futuristic innovation and rich cultural heritage. The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM, 2023) has carefully designed the "Definitely Dubai" brand strategy, which is based on its distinct characteristics. This approach goes beyond merely promoting travel; it positions Dubai as a worldwide center for business, innovation, and cross-cultural interactions. As a result, Dubai has a strong sense of brand identity and image that revolves around its alluring fusion of modernism,

Arabian customs, and a wide range of experiences. This analysis delves into the core values, unique selling points, target audiences, and utilized place branding channels of this city.

3.2.2.1 Place Branding Analysis

1. Core Values and Identity:

According to van der Meulen et al. (2013), Dubai's brand identity is supported by several fundamental values (van der Meulen, van Meurs, & Klaassen, 2013). Projecting an image of grandeur and cutting-edge development, the city's renowned skyscrapers and futuristic architecture symbolize its devotion to luxury and innovation (Al-Jassim & Kunar, 2020). The city continually pushes boundaries with ambitious infrastructure projects and a focus on technological innovation, further solidifying its image as a forward-thinking leader. Additionally, Dubai's standing as a worldwide center that draws individuals from a variety of origins encourages tolerance and diversity in culture, placing a strong emphasis on openness and acceptance (Morgan & Pritchard, 2020). Ultimately, Dubai's standing as hub for business and entrepreneurship is cemented by the ease of conducting business and its well-established trade infrastructure (Chun, 2023). These guiding principles come together to give Dubai a distinctive and complex brand identity.

2. Target Audience and Messaging:

Dubai is a fast-changing global city that has carefully developed its brand identity through strategic communication, sending different messages to different audiences. Drawing upon Martin and Schouten's framework (2021), this analysis delves into Dubai's image construction and communication strategies for distinct audience segments.

Luxury tourists are drawn to Dubai by messages that present the city as an exclusive destination and highlight its upscale shopping, Michelin-starred restaurants, and famous monuments (Kavouraki, 2016). Communications that emphasize the city's sophisticated infrastructure, connectivity, and business-friendly atmosphere draw business travelers and position it as a major international business hub (Pennington, 2010). Messages emphasizing exciting cultural events, varied attractions, and rich heritage are engaging to cultural aficionados (Morgan & Pritchard, 2013). Messages highlighting family-friendly sights and entertainment opportunities are directed toward travelers who prioritize family time (Getz & Page, 2019). Words like "extraordinary" and "unforgettable," along with images of luxury and breathtaking architecture, are used in Dubai's messaging to evoke strong feelings in the viewer (Blain et al., 2005). Aspirational positioning emphasizes luxury and the "good life" and presents Dubai as a destination where aspirations come true (Morgan & Pritchard, 2013).

3. Unique Selling Proposition (USP):

Dubai's USP lies in its distinctive combination of luxury, cutting-edge development, and its position as a global business and tourism hub. This unique blend sets it apart from other major cities and attracts diverse audiences seeking exceptional experiences and opportunities.

4. Existing Communication Channels:

Using a combination of traditional and digital means, Dubai has developed a complex communication strategy to engage a wide audience (Visit Dubai, 2024). A key component of their strategy is the use of social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, which allow for focused messaging and direct

communication (Kavouraki, 2016). Their unquestionable social media presence promotes participation with a worldwide audience and a sense of community.

The official website of the city functions as a complete information center, delivering material on commercial prospects, cultural attractions, and tourism offerings (Visit Dubai, 2024). This easily available resource promotes openness and information sharing while serving prospective guests and investors (Getz & Page, 2019).

Moreover, Dubai carefully arranges major events such as the 2020 Dubai World Expo, which drew close to 25 million people (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2023). These activities present the city's resources, facilities, and cultural variety to an international audience (Pennington, 2010).

By using this multichannel communication strategy, Dubai can effectively communicate with a wide range of people, encourage interaction, and express its worldwide destination for travel, business, and cultural exploration.

3.2.2.2 City Metaverse Analysis

Dubai, a city known for innovation and progress, is forging its path in the developing metaverse space by choosing a decentralized approach. This decentralized strategy, initiated in late 2021 through the "Dubai Metaverse Strategy," contrasts with other urban areas which followed a centralized platform approach. This strategy fosters a diverse and heterogeneous environment, driven by the collective efforts of individual players and collaborative partnerships.

The foundation of this decentralized approach has key technological pillars for success, including the use of digital twins, or virtual representations of real-world items or systems, and extended reality, which includes augmented reality, virtual reality, and mixed reality. Understanding that data are key in the metaverse, this strategy places a strong emphasis on using real-time data streams, which are made

possible by the interplay of machine learning, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence simulations (Dubai Future Foundation, 2023).

This analysis delves into three key areas of Dubai's unique metaverse strategy: virtual experiences and events, digital goods and services, and partnerships and collaborations.

1. Virtual Experiences and Events:

Beyond just emulating the real city, Dubai has bigger plans for the metaverse. It seeks to produce entirely unique experiences that take advantage of this virtual world's unique features. Aiming to provide virtual tourism experiences that will enable people to explore famous sites like the Burj Khalifa and take in the Dubai Shopping Festival from the comfort of their homes, the Dubai Metaverse Strategy was introduced in 2021 (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2023). The Dubai Metaverse Assembly, a worldwide gathering of specialists to discuss the metaverse's future, was also held in Dubai. The fact that this event has occurred at all is evidence of Dubai's dedication to creating a thriving metaverse community.

2. Digital Goods and Services:

Dubai is actively supporting the growth of digital products and services within the metaverse as it understands its economic potential. With over 1,000 enterprises specialized in blockchain technology and the metaverse already formed, the city is luring in virtual businesses that specialize in blockchain technology and the metaverse (The Economic Times, 2023). This inflow of knowledge is creating the foundation for a flourishing virtual economy that presents chances for both individuals and enterprises. By supporting the creation of 40,000 virtual jobs by 2030, the Dubai Metaverse Strategy hopes to bolster Dubai's standing as a major worldwide hub for the metaverse economy (The Economic Times, 2023).

Moreover, Dubai's goal for blockchain technology is reliant on its vision of a safe and reliable metaverse. As stated in the Dubai Metaverse Strategy (Dubai Future Foundation, 2023), the city actively pushes the integration of blockchain since it recognizes the need of safe and transparent transactions within this virtual environment. By creating a strong basis for digital identification and asset ownership, this integration promotes a trustworthy and decentralized ecosystem. As envisioned in the initiatives, Dubai hopes to leverage blockchain technology to establish a safe and verifiable system that allows people to own, trade, and transfer digital assets within the metaverse.

3. Partnerships and Collaborations:

Dubai is aware that cooperation is necessary to realize the metaverse's full potential. The Dubai Metaverse Strategy places a strong emphasis on encouraging collaborations between public and business sectors as well as academic institutions. Through cooperation, best practices will be established, legislation for the responsible growth of the metaverse will be developed, and innovation will be accelerated. To illustrate the potential for educational institutions to contribute to the creation of this virtual space, a student at a Dubai university recently created a unique property event called "Real Estate Worldscape 2023," which was held fully within the metaverse (Rochester Institute of Technology, 2023).

Table 2. Sources for Dubai's Place Branding and Metaverse Analysis

Nº	Titles	Links
1	Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai	https://www.dubaitourism.gov.ae
2	On Branding Your City: Perception IS Everything	https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/branding-your-city-perception-everything-kevin-chung/
3	Dubai City Attractiveness, Its Brand Strength and Reputation	https://placebrandobserver.com/dubai-city-attractiveness-brand-strength-reputation/
4	The Dubai brand as cultural identity	https://www.bidoun.org/articles/dubai-inc
5	Visit Dubai	https://www.visitdubai.com/en/
6	Expo 2020 Dubai	https://www.expo2020dubai.com/en/news/stories-and-articles/over-24million-visits
7	Dubai Metaverse Strategy	https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/government-services-and-digital-transformation/dubai-metaverse-strategy
8	Dubai forging its way ahead as a Metaverse metropolis	https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/uae/dubai-forging-its-way-ahead-as-a-metaverse-metropolis/articleshow/104651246.cms?from=mdr
9	Dubai's Metaverse Push: Exploring Virtual Experiences, Digital Assets, and Collaborative Efforts	https://www.rit.edu/dubai/rit-dubai-student-entrepreneur-launches-real-estate-summit-metaverse%E2%80%A8
10	Understanding the Economic Potential of the Metaverse	https://about.fb.com/news/2023/05/economic-potential-of-the-metaverse/
11	Dubai Blockchain Strategy	https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/government-services-and-digital-transformation/dubai-blockchain-strategy
12	How Dubai is Becoming the Blockchain Capital of the World	https://newsroom.ibm.com/IBM-blockchain?item=30730

4. Discussion

This section conducts a detailed assessment of the outcomes and discussions related to the place branding strategies and metaverse activities of two leading global cities: Seoul and Dubai. The research focuses on two important areas: traditional place branding and metaverse strategies. Examining Seoul and Dubai's main branding principles, target demographics, and communication initiatives offers light on their existing strategies. Furthermore, a closer look at their "metaverse cities" discloses the specific features and functionalities that each city employs inside the virtual landscape. The study tries to understand how these cities achieve their place branding goals by examining both traditional and metaverse branding strategies. This includes determining how the metaverse might be used to supplement and improve current approaches. The analysis focuses on the shared commitment to innovation, multiple audience engagement methods, and strategic use of multi-channel communication platforms that characterize Seoul and Dubai approaches.

Seoul has a complex place branding strategy that combines innovation, cultural legacy, and economic strength. The city's commitment to being a global leader in research and development is highlighted by its core values, which are recognized through the lens of innovation and technological advancement. Featuring well-preserved landmarks and a dynamic atmosphere that encourages innovation and enterprise, Seoul combines modernity with its rich history. Seoul's unique identity is rooted in this combination, which focuses the city's commitment to technical growth while respecting its rich cultural heritage.

Seoul's place branding approach targets a varied audience, reflecting the city's multifaceted offers. Young professionals are lured to Seoul's global reputation for research and development, as seen by its booming startup scene. Tourists are drawn to the city's compelling mix of modernism and history, which includes historical and cultural experiences as well as contemporary attractions. Seoul's business-friendly

environment and economic prospects entice investors, cementing the city's status as a leading global metropolis.

Seoul uses a variety of communication platforms to strengthen its place branding. Traditional media, such as television and print, operate alongside an advanced digital approach. The Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) uses its website and social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and KakaoTalk, to provide real-time, interactive information distribution. The emphasis on citizen connection via the "Communication 123" platform enhances transparency and community participation.

The launch of Seoul's Metaverse Seoul project represents a significant shift in the city's branding strategy. This ground-breaking effort expands Seoul's identity into the digital domain by providing virtual experiences and events that are consistent with the city's place branding aspirations. The metaverse project intends to create a virtual Seoul, allowing worldwide audiences to explore renowned monuments, cultural events, and daily activities. By combining digital twins and extended reality, Seoul sees a future in which citizens may use their avatars to access public services, seek assistance, and participate in commercial and cultural activities.

The Metaverse Seoul project complements Seoul's place branding ambitions by increasing access to the city's cultural diversity and offering new chances for interaction. The virtual experiences provided transcend geographical boundaries, allowing visitors from all over the world to immerse themselves in Seoul's distinct attractions.

The Metaverse Seoul project directly aligns with Seoul's place branding goals by: *i) **Enhancing innovation*** - Seoul's embrace of the metaverse puts it as a pioneer in adopting new technology and cultivating a creative culture; *ii) **Showcasing cultural heritage*** - the virtual recreation of the city can provide immersive experiences of prominent monuments and cultural events, enhancing understanding and appreciation of Seoul's distinct heritage; *iii) **Promoting citizen participation*** - the

project's goal is to build interactive areas for citizens within the metaverse, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement with the city's progress.

The potential benefits of Seoul's metaverse approach are enormous. Virtual tourist experiences, cultural events, and immersive learning possibilities help to increase global accessibility and involvement. The economic potential of the metaverse may be seen in the creation of digital goods and services, which open up new business opportunities and virtual jobs. Furthermore, fostering a thriving metaverse community and driving innovation requires strong partnerships and collaborations.

Metaverse Seoul offers unique experiences that complement Seoul's existing brand image through: *i) **Virtual tourism*** - visitors can visit prominent monuments and cultural institutions from all over the world, increasing access to Seoul's attractions and broadening its reach; *ii) **Interactive cultural events*** - virtual events provide new methods for experiencing Seoul's lively cultural scene, reaching a larger audience and encouraging cultural exchange; *iii) **Enhanced citizen engagement*** - interactive platforms in the metaverse can help citizens and local leaders communicate and collaborate more effectively, generating a sense of inclusivity and community.

Dubai, a city known for its futuristic innovation and rich cultural heritage, has methodically planned its "Definitely Dubai" place branding campaign. This strategy goes beyond traditional tourism promotion to present Dubai as a global hub for commerce, innovation, and cross-cultural exchange. At its core, Dubai's brand identity is defined by ideals such as grandeur, cutting-edge development, openness, and acceptance. The city strategically promotes multiple themes for different audiences, including luxury tourists, business travelers, cultural enthusiasts, and families. Dubai connects its audience with a combination of traditional and digital communication channels, including social media platforms, an official website, and big events like the Dubai World Expo. This multi-channel strategy enables a thorough and dynamic manifestation of Dubai's brand, promoting openness and community participation.

Dubai's venture into the metaverse is distinguished by a unique decentralized method that differs from the centralized platform model used by other cities. The "Dubai Metaverse Strategy," which was launched in late 2021, emphasizes collaboration and diversity within the metaverse. Dubai envisions a metaverse powered by machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI) simulations, with an emphasis on digital twins, extended reality (XR), and real-time data streams. This decentralized plan is based on building a digital economy, which uses blockchain technology to safeguard transactions and ownership in the virtual environment. Dubai fosters partnerships and collaborations between the public and private sectors, as well as academic institutions, to promote innovation and responsible metaverse growth.

Dubai's decentralized metaverse strategy aligns with its place branding goals by: *i) **Enhancing Innovation*** - embracing the metaverse as a decentralized entity establishes Dubai as a pathfinder in the adoption and integration of new technology, maintaining its reputation as a forward-thinking global leader; *ii) **Showcasing Cultural Heritage*** - the metaverse creates a virtual Dubai that provides immersive experiences of renowned landmarks and cultural events, boosting worldwide awareness and appreciation of Dubai's rich legacy; *iii) **Promoting Citizen Participation*** - the strategy aims to establish interactive metaverse spaces, empowering citizens to actively engage with the city's virtual realm, and contributing to Dubai's narrative and progress.

Dubai's metaverse strategy offers unique experiences that complement Dubai's existing brand image, through: *i) **Virtual Tourism*** - the metaverse makes Dubai's prominent landmarks and attractions available to a worldwide audience, democratizing access and broadening the city's reach; *ii) **Digital Goods and Services:*** Dubai actively supports the growth of a virtual economy within the metaverse, creating opportunities for businesses specializing in blockchain technology and metaverse-related services. This fosters economic growth and job creation; *iii) **Partnerships and Collaborations:*** By encouraging collaborations between various

stakeholders, Dubai's metaverse strategy establishes a thriving metaverse community, accelerating innovation and knowledge exchange.

Cross-case Analysis: Seoul and Dubai

Seoul and Dubai, while reflecting different cultural and geographical contexts, have a common thread in their purposeful use of place branding and admission into the metaverse. Both cities have implemented extensive place branding plans that incorporate innovation, cultural history, and global connectedness. Seoul presents itself as a dynamic hub of technology growth, seamlessly integrating history and contemporary, whereas Dubai capitalizes on grandeur and technical innovation, cultivating a global reputation for luxury and cross-cultural exchange.

The strategies adopted by the two cities present several similarities, namely: *i) **Innovation and Technology*** - Seoul and Dubai prioritize innovation and technical improvement in their place branding. Seoul's devotion to research and development complements Dubai's focus on cutting-edge development, placing them as global leaders in technical innovation; *ii) **Diverse Target Audience*** - both cities use a diversified strategy, catering to different target demographics; *iii) **Multi-channel Communication*** - Seoul and Dubai use a blend of traditional and digital communication methods to reach a varied audience. Social media platforms, official websites, and multinational cooperation are essential instruments for increasing transparency and community participation; *iv) **Citizen Participation*** - both cities prioritize citizen participation and engagement. Seoul's "Communication 123" platform and Dubai's emphasis on interactive metaverse spaces both demonstrate a dedication to diversity and community engagement.

On the other hand, there are important differences in what regards to: i) Brand Essence - while Seoul's brand essence revolves around the harmonious integration of tradition and innovation, Dubai focuses on luxury, modernity, and global business prominence; ii) and **the Metaverse Approach** - Metaverse Seoul leans towards enhancing cultural diversity and citizen engagement through virtual experiences. In contrast, Dubai's decentralized metaverse strategy focuses on fostering a digital economy, leveraging blockchain and decentralized technologies for economic growth and job creation.

Key Findings: Leveraging Place Branding in the Metaverse

In exploring the convergence of place branding strategies and the metaverse, Seoul and Dubai stand out as examples of cities navigating the digital landscape to strengthen their worldwide visibility. The adoption of a metaverse strategy enabled the development of their city brands along with the creation of new social, cultural, economic and scientific opportunities, that can be summarized as follows:

1. Enhanced Reach and Engagement:

- Seoul and Dubai use the metaverse to promote worldwide accessibility and engagement with their distinctive offerings.
- Virtual tourism and interactive cultural events offer immersive experiences that cross geographical boundaries and reach a larger audience.

2. Multifaceted Brand Expression:

- The metaverse serves as an extension of the city branding by highlighting cultural heritage, innovation, and economic opportunities.

3. Economic Opportunities:

- Dubai's decentralized metaverse strategy focuses explicitly on fostering a digital economy, creating opportunities for businesses and job creation within the virtual realm.
- Both cities recognize the economic potential of the metaverse, with Seoul exploring digital goods and services and Dubai actively supporting the growth of a virtual economy.

4. Collaboration and Innovation:

- Seoul and Dubai encourage collaboration and innovation in the metaverse. Partnerships with technology companies, research centers, and global collaborations demonstrate their dedication to building a thriving metaverse community.

5. Addressing Challenges:

- Seoul and Dubai acknowledge the challenges associated with the metaverse, including digital inequality, data privacy, and responsible development.
- Regulatory frameworks and security measures are recognized as essential components to address challenges and ensure ethical metaverse growth.

5. Conclusions

This study addressed the transformative effects of digital strategies on city branding in the metaverse. Using Seoul and Dubai as case studies, the investigation highlighted how cities might use the metaverse to create a dynamic union of cultural history, technological advancement, and economic potential within the virtual world.

The findings support the concept of dynamic city branding, in which cities adjust their strategies to current trends. Seoul and Dubai exemplify this strategy perfectly by leveraging the metaverse to magnify their unique brand identities. The virtual sphere extends their city dynamic, allowing them to effortlessly combine cultural heritage, innovative technology, and economic activity.

In line with theoretical frameworks emphasizing innovation in place branding (Zenker & Braun, 2017; Anholt, 2007), Seoul and Dubai strategically promote themselves as pioneers in the use of metaverse technology. Seoul's focus on research and development is consistent with its aim to being a global leader in technical innovation (Hanna & Rowley, 2011), while Dubai's decentralized metaverse approach demonstrates its commitment to building a digital economy (Dubai Future Foundation, 2023).

Community participation and collaboration, as emphasized by Anholt (2007) and Zenker and Braun (2017), are reflected in Seoul and Dubai's respective metaverse objectives. Both cities have interactive metaverse areas, reflecting the theoretical position on the significance of community interaction in effective place branding. The metaverse transforms into a collaborative canvas where residents actively interact with the virtual reality, contributing to the narrative and progress of their unique cities. Global cooperation, as recommended by Hanna and Rowley (2011) and Zenker and Braun (2017), strengthens Seoul and Dubai's commitment to developing thriving metaverse communities.

As we conclude, the exploration of Seoul and Dubai's metaverse strategies shows digital spaces' transformative capacity to shape the city branding. This study not only demonstrates the practical application of theoretical frameworks, but it also highlights cities' extraordinary adaptability in our increasingly digitized world.

The metaverse, appears as a thriving virtual space where cities redefine their global presence, engage diverse audiences, and foster innovative, inclusive communities. Hence, leaving us with a final thought on the imperative of embracing innovation in place branding to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape.

6. Managerial implications

The managerial implications of this research are substantial for urban administrators, politicians, and marketers navigating the intricate terrain of metaverse-mediated city identity construction.

To proactively improve worldwide accessibility and participation, city stakeholders should collaborate on the development of immersive virtual tourism experiences and interactive cultural events in the metaverse. This strategic engagement is critical in addressing the obstacles associated with transcending geographical boundaries in the virtual space.

City brand managers can benefit from this new landscape by effortlessly incorporating the metaverse into their current branding efforts. This integration is centered on key strengths such as cultural inheritance, technological innovation, and economic potential in the virtual environment. In addition to these fundamental considerations, the metaverse offers exciting possibilities for city brand managers. The creation of immersive virtual experiences that highlight cultural attractions, historical monuments, and unique services can improve worldwide accessibility and brand exposure. Metaverse platforms offer strategic audience engagement initiatives, allowing for deeper interactions with a wide range of demographics. Furthermore, using the metaverse can effectively express a city's commitment to innovation, luring technologically inclined individuals. Economic prospects in the metaverse stem from the creation and selling of digital goods and services, which promotes entrepreneurship and virtual employment opportunities. Finally, establishing a thriving metaverse community through local and worldwide partnerships promotes innovation and brand engagement, ultimately reinforcing a city's global brand identity by cultivating a strong and distinct virtual presence.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the valuable insights gained by analyzing metaverse strategies in Seoul and Dubai, it is critical to acknowledge several limitations that may affect the generalizability and depth of the findings.

One limitation of this study is the dynamic nature of the metaverse landscape. The field is continually changing, and new developments may have occurred since the data-gathering period. To address this, future research should use a longitudinal approach, documenting metaverse approaches and their consequences over an extended period.

The analysis is primarily qualitative, relying on case study methodology and content analysis. While this approach provides detailed insights, quantitative assessments could supplement the findings by providing a greater understanding of the influence of metaverse tactics on key performance factors.

Data availability and access to internal strategies present challenges in comprehensive case study analysis. Additional research could address this restriction by collaborating with cities or using more publicly available data. In addition, interviews with key stakeholders may provide nuanced insights on metaverse strategy implementation and outcomes.

Furthermore, the ethical implications of metaverse techniques require additional consideration. As cities move into virtual worlds, privacy, digital equity, and the socio-cultural implications of immersive experiences become increasingly important. Future research should explore these ethical issues to help politicians and city officials plan responsible metaverse growth.

In conclusion, while this study gives useful insights into Seoul and Dubai's metaverse initiatives, acknowledging its limits highlights the need for further

research. Future research should use a variety of approaches, explore a wider range of cities, and delve into the changing ethical landscape of metaverse development to ensure a comprehensive knowledge of its consequences for urban environments.

I would like to acknowledge that during the writing process of the dissertation the use of artificial intelligence (e.g. Grammarly; Gemini;) for sentence creation and stylistics. The assistance of this technology did not involve the creation or data analyses. It merely served as a tool to improve the flow and clarity of my writing.

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