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Review

Building a Sustainable Future: Challenges, Opportunities, and Innovative Strategies for Destination Branding in Tourism

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Abstract: The current sustainability concerns affect visitors' behavior and competitiveness of destinations. For these reasons, the destinations need sustainable and innovative branding to address sustainability concerns, stand out in a competitive market, meet changing visitor preferences, and ensure long-term competitiveness in a dynamic global environment. In this regard, identifying and understanding challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies are critically important. An integrative literature review method was employed using the Scopus database. The study identified major challenges, such as growing environmental concerns, the dynamic advancement of new technologies and artificial intelligence, health and safety concerns, diversity and inclusion, economic and geopolitical uncertainties, local community engagement, and competitive markets. Conversely, responsible tourism, the digital landscape, wellness and health, cultural festivals and events, accessibility and inclusivity, creative industries, and authenticity have been identified as future tourism branding opportunities. Based on the literature insights, the paper provides readers with essential information and advances the field of tourism and hospitality as it identifies challenges, opportunities, and innovative branding strategies in the industry. Furthermore, this work contributes to existing literature and proposes future research agendas.

Keywords: branding; tourism branding; destination branding; responsible tourism; integrative literature review

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1. Introduction

In a world saturated with travel options (Kamruzzaman et al. 2020), tourism destinations are under pressure to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Leal et al. 2022). Moreover, the dynamic worldwide circumstances (Escobar-Farfán et al. 2024), including intense competition, digital disruptions, geopolitical, uncertain economic situations, sustainability issues, and health and safety concerns, impact how visitors perceive and feel about destinations (Romagosa 2020; Aldao et al. 2021). Therefore, in such a competitive and sophisticated world, the success of tourism destination lies in a strong brand (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020; Hanna et al. 2021) that highlights its unique selling proposition and connects with potential tourists (Greaves and Skinner 2010).

The ability of destinations to attract visitors who resonate with their values and offerings, create desirable images in the minds of travelers, foster a sense of loyalty among visitors, encourage tourists to become brand ambassadors and recommend destinations to others, and achieve environmental, social, and economic sustainability requirements lies in the quality of branding built by tourism destinations (Aaker 2012; Hanna et al. 2021). According to Ryan (1991), the relationship between tourism and branding is interdependent, as branding significantly impacts travelers' perception and experience of a destination

(Ritchie and Ritchie 1998). In the meantime, tourism serves as a means through which the image of a destination's brand is conveyed and brought into well-being (Hudson and Ritchie 2009).

Strong tourism branding has the potential to contribute to sustainable tourism (Hudson and Ritchie 2009), particularly by creating distinct and appealing tourism destinations that promote responsible and sustainable tourism (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020). Tourism branding entails creating and promoting a distinctive, appealing, and identifiable image that embodies the destination's personality, culture, attractions, and attractiveness to prospective travelers (Cai et al. 2009). Tourism branding provides revenue generation opportunities for organizations operating in the tourism sector (Faraji et al. 2021), including those in the transportation and hospitality industries, while also providing them with the responsibility of building their brand image (Qu et al. 2011). For instance, a powerful tourism brand may raise revenue by enticing local and foreign visitors with the destination's distinct attractiveness (Anjomrouz et al. 2021).

In the same way, tourism branding may enhance a destination's cultural richness and diversity, facilitating cultural interchange and supporting responsible and sustainable tourism development (Phung and Nguyen 2023; Woodland and Acott 2007). Moreover, it serves to distinguish destinations, convey values, lure investment and collaboration, involve local communities, benefit the local economy, support the preservation and sustainable growth of destinations, attract mindful travelers, and establish visitor expectations (Rahman et al. 2022; Chigora and Katsande 2021; Anjomrouz et al. 2021; Yang et al. 2020; Kumar 2018). Therefore, tourism branding has attracted interest in academic literature and, particularly, destination branding has emerged as an important research area in the context of tourism. Although tourism branding has a noticeable significance, there is a theoretically grounded literature gap, and no previous publication has comprehensively reviewed it, particularly regarding tourism branding challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies for destination branding in tourism. Also, little attention has been paid to tourism branding where the industry is being researched and applied.

Researchers appreciate prior literature though highlight different objectives. As stated in Table 1, despite existing studies on destination branding in the literature, none of them comprehensively examined the challenges, opportunities, and strategies for building sustainable branding destinations. Instead, they emphasize different purposes within this area of the study. Ruiz-Real et al. (2020) conducted a systematic literature review focused on the state-of-the-art research of destination branding to identify trends in destination branding and propose the future agenda. Skinner (2021) adopted a critical marketing stance to explore the relationship between place branding and two recent crises in the tourism industry: overtourism and COVID-19 crises. The paper conceptualized the cyclical process of rebuilding from crises and coping with success.

Hanna et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review with the aim of enhancing knowledge, theory, and practices in place and destination branding literature without a specific date limitation in order to cover the literature of place and branding destinations since its inception. Bastidas-Manzano et al. (2021) carried out a comprehensive review of 258 articles published from 2013–2019 using a bibliometric approach to provide an overview of past, present, and future of smart tourism destinations. Tran and Rudolf (2022) synthesized the contribution of scholars within the field of place branding and social media from 2011–2021 to explore current inquiry and propose an agenda for future research. Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024) delve into a bibliometric mapping analysis of destination branding identity by identifying 295 studies published in the Scopus database between 1995 and 2022.

In light of the aforementioned studies, it is crucial to comprehend the challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies in building sustainable destination branding. Thus, using an integrative literature review our research aims to fill this gap. Therefore, this article serves as the preliminary attempt to provide an in-depth review of tourism branding opportunities, challenges, and strategies for sustainable destination branding, as well

as to provide new perspectives on tourism branding, thereby contributing to the body of literature.

Table 1. Previous literature.

Author	Title	Purpose	Primary Studies Included
Ruiz-Real et al. (2020).	Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges.	To analyze the state-of-the-art research of destination branding.	1998–2018
(Skinner 2021)	Place branding-the challenges of getting it right: coping with success and rebuilding from crises	Provide a warning about place-branding strategies that are implemented in a post-pandemic world.	No date limits
(Hanna et al. 2021)	Place and destination branding: a review and conceptual mapping of the domain	To contribute to the development of theory and practices in place and destination branding.	No date limits
(Bastidas-Manzano et al. 2021)	The past, present, and future of smart tourism destinations: a bibliometric analysis	To fill gaps and contribute to smart tourism destination literature.	2013–2019
(Tran and Rudolf 2022)	Social media and destination branding in tourism: A systematic review of literature	Synthesize the contribution of scholars within the field, explore current lines, and propose avenues for future research.	2011–2021
(Escobar-Farfán et al. 2024)	Destination brand identity: challenge, opportunities, and future research agenda.	Provide a scholarly contribution by conducting a bibliometric mapping analysis.	1995–2022
The current study	Building a sustainable Future: challenges, opportunities, and innovative Strategies for destination branding in tourism.	Emphasize building sustainable destination branding in tourism.	2019–2024

Source: Created by authors.

This work is organized as follows. Initially, the literature review on branding, destination, and destination branding is explained. Secondly, the methodology is clearly defined. Thirdly, the results are presented in different subsections. Fourthly, the discussions are highlighted in various subsections, and lastly, the conclusion, implications, limitations, and potential future research directions are given.

2. Literature Review

To comprehend the concept of destination branding, it is essential to examine the notion of a brand and destination separately, which frames the whole idea of this study. Branding is defined as a sign, term, logo, name, design, symbol, or a combination of them, intended to distinguish the goods or services from competitors (Wood 2000; Aaker 2009). It is all about creating differences between products or services (Kotler and Keller 2012). Mearns (2007) highlights branding as a point of difference, which assists the organization to be competitive in the market. It is a crucial marketing strategy used by cities, regions, countries, or governments, and even specific attractions, tourism boards, and businesses in the travel and hospitality industries, to differentiate the destination, attract target audiences, establish a positive perception, increase visitor numbers, promote cultural exchange, enhance destination management, and foster economic growth (Scott et al. 2011). Thus, the term brand can serve as a noun, representing entities such as places, people, goods, services, and ideas (Stern 2006; Kasapi and Cela 2017).

On the other hand, a destination is a place people travel to for recreational and leisure activities, business, or other purposes (Murphy et al. 2000). It encompasses various tangible and intangible components to represent it (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020). For instance, it contains

tangible elements such as attractions (forests, wildlife, mountains, beaches, landscapes, and climate), accessibility (roads and transportation system), amenities (accommodation, restaurants, and shops), cultural heritage (historical sites, museums, art galleries, monuments, traditional architecture, and archaeological sites), and tourist facilities (theme parks, amusement parks, and zoos) (Buhalis 2000; Smith 1994). Similarly, it includes various intangible attributes such as culture (traditions, local customs, language, arts, and crafts), reputation, hospitality, and personal experiences (Madafuri 2018; Xu 2010).

When it comes to the concept of destination branding, there is no clear or consistent definition that scholars have agreed on. However, it is evident that the notion of destination branding goes far beyond a symbol, name, or logo (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020). Destination branding is defined as "a name, symbol, wordmark, logo, or other design that both identifies and differentiate the destination; conveys a memorable experiences that is uniquely associated with the destination; and consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experiences" (Ritchie and Ritchie 1998, p. 17). Moreover, the most cited and well-known definition of "brand destination" is the one revised and proposed by Blain et al. (2005). According to the authors, destination branding is defined as "the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, wordmark, or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiate a destination; (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitors and the destination; (4) that reduce consumer search cost and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice" (Blain et al. 2005).

Thus, destination branding is basically a holistic marketing strategy used to promote and create a unique personality for destinations that positively influences visitors. In an increasingly competitive landscape and the dynamic world circumstances (Garanti et al. 2024), destinations must be branded and offer a concept that positively impacts the environmental, social, and economic dimension for a sustainable future (Agapito et al. 2023; De Bruyn et al. 2023; Liasidou et al. 2022). Sustainable branding addresses the practical aspect of destination branding by applying more comprehensive viewpoints on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (Nascimento and Loureiro 2024). Moreover, building sustainable destination branding undoubtedly contributes to sustainable tourism and sustainable development goals (Aziz and Niazi 2024; Bowen and Sotomayor 2022). Thus, tourism branding needs to build destinations that create a dynamic environment which attracts not only potential visitors but preserves the environmental, economic, and social–cultural aspects of the destinations. In this regard, identifying and understanding challenges, opportunities, and innovative branding strategies for future tourism destinations are critically important. Due to such significance, the researchers were motivated to review the current topic which will contribute to the existing literature.

3. Materials and Methods

Consistent with the present research, the researchers adopted the integrative literature review approach because it aligns most effectively with the objectives of the research, which were not to encompass all issued and archived materials across all databases pertaining to tourism branding and branding destinations but rather to synthesize the existing and future tourism branding challenges and opportunities in the tourism industry. An integrative research review is defined as "a summary of past research by drawing overall findings and conclusions from several studies" (Broome 2000, p. 234). The integrative literature review approach provides a comprehensive and integrated synthesis of existing literature (Daley et al. 2010; Fain 2016).

Additionally, it is effective and useful to generate new perspectives and provides a more varied and in-depth understanding of the topic at hand (Russell 2005). Hence, guided by the integrative review steps proposed by Russell (2005), the researchers conducted the current review in five main phases, namely, problem formulation, literature search

or data collection, data evaluation, analysis of data and interpretation, and discussion (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Integrative literature review flowchart: created by authors.

3.1. Problem Formulation

The problem identification and the formulation of the review's main purpose allowed us to define the scope of the paper and data collection efforts (Sauve-Ciencewicki et al. 2018). Consequently, the scope and intent of the study were determined by developing research questions such as: what are the key challenges, opportunities, and strategies for the future of tourism branding? Specifically, the scope was determined by establishing specific research questions, shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Research questions.

No	Research Question
Q1	What are the potential existing and future challenges in tourism branding?
Q2	What potential opportunities exist for future tourism branding?
Q3	What are the strategies for managing future tourism branding challenges?

Source: Created by authors.

3.2. Literature Search and Database

A rigorous search process and identifying relevant research are crucial yet time-consuming parts of a literature review. Accordingly, the researchers established the search terms, selected the databases, and specified the categories of publications incorporated in this investigation. The search criteria were developed concretely with the research question to find as many research papers as possible that were qualified to answer the research questions. Given the extensive body of literature on tourism branding that encompasses various areas such as country branding, city branding, halal tourism branding, sports tourism branding, eco-tourism branding, cultural tourism branding, and heritage tourism branding, it could potentially be difficult to determine appropriate search keywords. Since the focus of our review is on tourism branding, we distinguished these two keywords (i.e., tourism branding and destination branding) as the principal keywords and keywords synonymous with them. Thus, the first keywords that the researchers used as selection criteria in the "topic of the research" included several terms. As shown in Table 3, four alternative combinations of keywords were used to conduct searches on the Scopus database. The Scopus database was chosen as the source of information (articles) due to its broader coverage of quality academic work and ease of access with a university subscription account.

Table 3. Combination of Search keywords.

Source	String
Scopus	(Future destination branding opportunities AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2024) OR (Future tourism branding opportunities AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2024) OR (Future tourism branding challenges AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2024) OR (Future destination branding challenges AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2024) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Branding") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD,"Tourism"))

Source: Created by authors.

In the beginning, the combination of these keywords generated a total of 598 results. These incorporated various languages and diverse categories of articles, including conference papers, reviews, journal articles, books, book chapters, and editorials. Nevertheless, in this review, the analysis was restricted to journal articles, reviews, conference papers, and book chapters. We recognize that incorporating various types of publications, including books and editorials, would have yielded a more comprehensive analysis of the topic. Still, we assert that scholarly articles published in journals are highly persuasive, since Scopus indexed journals are often considered significant platforms for the production, dissemination, and evaluation of high-quality scholarly information. Thus, after further filtering the search results based on publication type, we were left with 243.

3.3. Data Evaluation

This step focused on the evaluation of relevant articles for further analysis. The evaluation of data involves assessing the quality and relevance of the articles through specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Sizo et al. 2018). Thus, we established the inclusion and exclusion criteria for further analysis. The applied criteria for inclusion/exclusion were as follows: (1) the paper must address topics concerning tourism/destination branding,

tourism branding opportunities, tourism branding challenges, (2) documents published in English only from 2019 to 2023, (3) open access journal articles and final publications (not articles in press). After further reducing the results based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 170 articles were left. Nevertheless, there were cases in which the abstract was irrelevant to the current study. Consequently, we proceeded to another phase, where the details of the entire study were examined. Finally, following an in-depth inspection of these 170 articles, 152 pertinent research papers were chosen for the review. The articles were first imported into a Microsoft Excel sheet for sorting and categorizing and then imported to VOS viewer 2023 software for content analysis of data. The meta-data contain title, author, year, publication type, abstract, and keywords.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Key Areas Identified

This section contains a detailed summary and content analysis of 152 papers. The selected papers have been examined to provide crucial insights into the challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies for destination branding. As shown in Table 4, the main challenges and opportunities were identified in the studies, emphasizing tourism and destination branding. The result shows that among the 152 papers published from 2019–2023, growing environmental concerns, advancement of technology and artificial intelligence, health and safety concerns, diversity and inclusion, economic and geopolitical uncertainty, community engagement, and competitive markets have been identified as the main challenges in the future and existing tourism branding. On the other hand, sustainable and responsible tourism, the digital landscape, wellness and health, cultural festivals and creative industries, accessibility and inclusivity, and cultural exchange and authenticity have been identified as opportunities.

Table 4. Key challenges and opportunities identified.

	Key Areas Identified
Challenges	Growing environmental concerns Technology and artificial intelligence Health and safety concerns Diversity and inclusion Economic and geopolitical uncertainty Local community engagement and competitive markets
Opportunities	Sustainable and responsible tourism Digital landscape Wellness and health Cultural festivals and creative industries Accessibility and inclusivity Cultural exchange and authenticity

4.2. Publications by Year

Figure 2 illustrates the trends in Scopus publications on tourism and destination branding. The graph illustrates a consistent increase in publications on tourism and destination branding over the past five years. The number of publications rose from 9 in 2019 to 15 in 2020. A significant increase in tourism and destination branding publications has been observed between 2021 and 2023, indicating a substantial growth in interest and discussion within this research area.

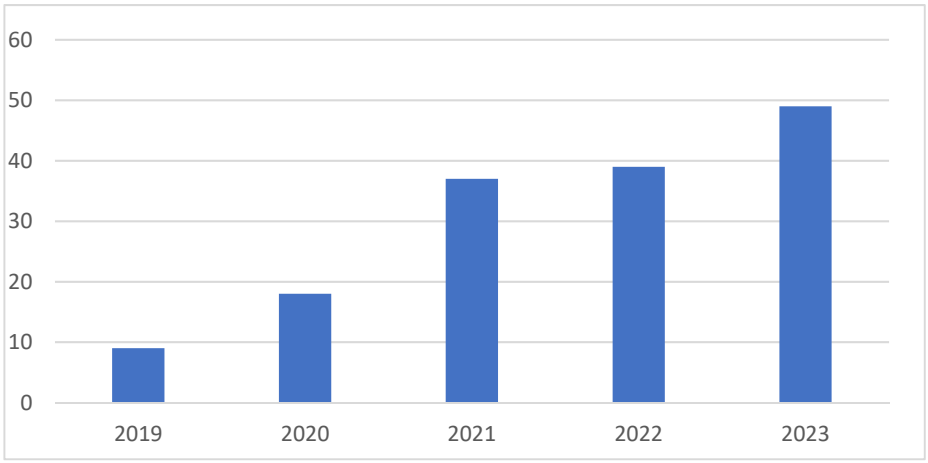

Figure 2. Publications by year.

4.3. Type and Document Sources

To obtain a more comprehensive assessment of tourism branding challenges and opportunities, the researchers acknowledged that including all different types of sources is crucial. Therefore, in this review, journal articles, review papers, book chapters, and conference papers have been included. Figure 3 displays that the majority of papers used for this analysis are articles which cover 61% (93 papers), followed by review papers at 15% (23 papers), book chapters at 14% (21 papers), and conferences at 10% (15 papers). Table 5 shows that 38 sources of articles were used for this study, and 72 were published in *Sustainability*, *Tourism Review*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, and *Annals of Tourism Research*.

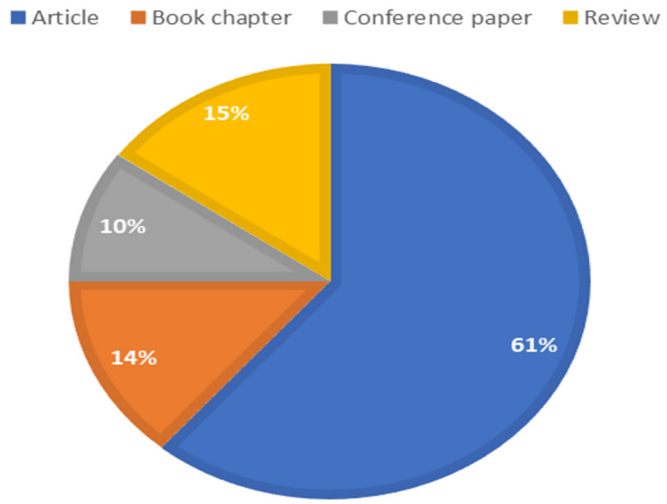

Figure 3. Publication type.

Table 5. Source and number of studies.

Source Title	Number of Studies
Sustainability	27
Tourism Review	22
Current Issues in Tourism	15
Annals of Tourism Research	11
E3S Web of Conferences	8

Table 5. *Cont.*

Source Title	Number of Studies
Springer international publishing	6
African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	6
Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites	5
Tourism Management Perspective	4
International Journal of Tourism Research	3
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	3
Journal of Place Management and Development	3
Journal of Travel Research	3
Springer Nature	2
Emerald Handbook of Destination Recovery in Tourism and Hospitality	2
Tourism Economics	2
Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management	2
Journal of Tourism and Development	2
Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	2
Tourism Geographies	2
Administrative Sciences	2
Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality	2
Cultural Heritage and Tourism in Africa	2
Destination marketing and branding	2
Enlightening Tourism	1
Handbook of Customer Engagement in Tourism Marketing	1
International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	1
International Journal of Healthcare Management	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	1
International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics	1
International Journal of Tourism Cities	1
International Journal of Tourism Policy	1
Investigaciones Turisticas	1
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism insights	1
Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism	1
Journal of Product and Brand Management	1
Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies	1
Emerald Handbook of ICT in Tourism and Hospitality	1

4.4. Keyword Analysis

To categorize the current cluster and most repeated terms in tourism branding, co-occurrence of authors' keywords was established as a minimum number of 5 for 2038 keywords using a full counting method. As shown in Figure 4, a total of ten groups were discovered. Cluster 1 (twelve items) includes corporate social responsibility, COVID-19, destination branding, digital marketing, loyalty, pandemic, resilience, rural tourism, smart tourism, stakeholders, sustainable tourism, and wine tourism. Cluster 2 (nine items) includes advertising, brand, brand equity, brand management, branding, destination marketing, image, place branding, and social media marketing. Cluster 3 (six items) includes customer engagement, event, hospitality, innovation, tourist destination, and word of mouth. Cluster 4 (six items) includes co-creation, competitiveness, destination, destination management, heritage, and social media.

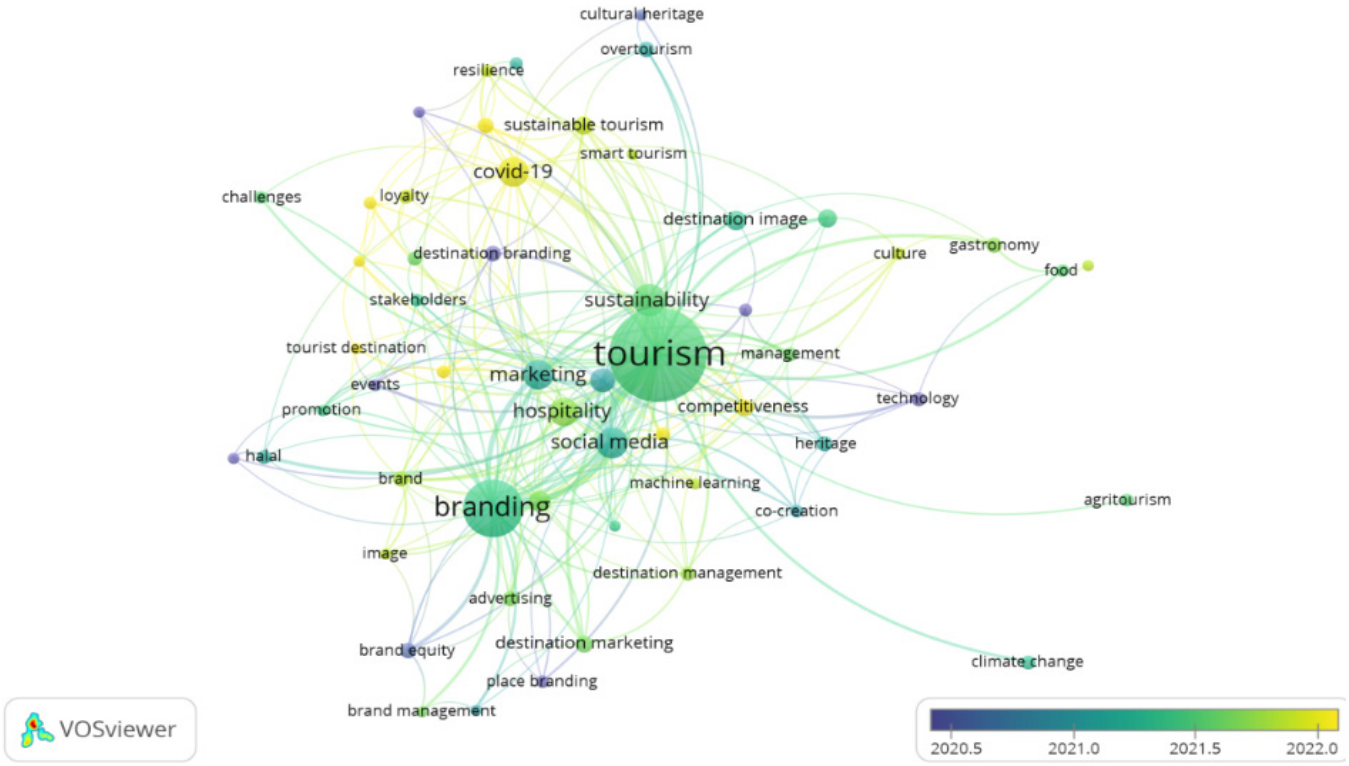

Figure 4. Keyword analysis and network of linked keywords.

Cluster 5 (six items) includes culture, food, gastronomy tourism, gastronomic, sustainable development, and technology. Cluster 6 (six items) includes big data, destination image, machine learning, management, marketing, and tourism management. Cluster 7 (three items) includes agrotourism, climate change, and tourism. Cluster 8 (three items) includes halal, halal tourism, and promotion. Cluster 9 (three items) includes cultural heritage, overtourism, and sustainability. Cluster 10 (one item) includes challenges. As shown in Figure 4, tourism and branding were among the most repeatedly occurring keywords used by the studies reviewed. However, the investigation revealed that the term "tourism branding" is not employed as a keyword in the review paper. Perhaps this is a result of the semantic similarity between destination branding, which is particularly applied to the destination. It is crucial to emphasize that tourism branding encompasses a broader scope than destination branding.

5. Discussion

5.1. Major Tourism Branding Challenges

5.1.1. Growing Environmental Concern

Global warming and subsequent climate change have led to a substantial decline in biodiversity and the degradation of natural habitats, resulting in harmful effects on aquatic life and ecosystem disruption (Reid et al. 2019). Likewise, it has placed mounting pressure on the tourism industry to embrace sustainable tourism practices to mitigate the adverse effects while fostering beneficial economic and social outcomes (Markose et al. 2022). To achieve sustainable tourism, a significant change in focus toward promoting sustainability, implementing initiatives that prioritize ecological awareness, and adopting responsible practices may be necessary (Chen et al. 2020). Moreover, raising ecological concerns can impact on how tourism is branded. For instance, brands that prioritize and emphasize initiatives aimed at minimizing ecological footprints and carbon emissions likely appeal to a growing segment of visitors who prioritize responsible tourism and environmental conservation. Hence, tourism branding initiatives that integrate eco-friendly strategies and demonstrate commitment to eco-certification are crucial (Nowacki et al. 2021).

Furthermore, tourism destinations must distinguish themselves by adopting advanced eco-technology, providing educational opportunities and ecologically friendly communication and offering unique environmental experiences (Zhu et al. 2023). Additionally, prominent destinations have already faced challenges related to overtourism (Zarhari et al. 2023), which can detrimentally place a significant demand on natural resources and impact the quality of tourist experiences (Linggarwati and Yamin 2023; Azinuddin et al. 2022; Mihalic and Kuščer 2021). Therefore, it is imperative for branding experts to focus on promoting less-visited regions and employing measures for crowd management to reduce the negative impact of tourism on indigenous people and their environments (Gülşen et al. 2021).

5.1.2. Technology and Artificial Intelligence

The rapid improvement of new technologies and the ongoing progression of artificial intelligence are apparent (Goralski and Tan 2020). Technological advancements enable users to be engrossed in realistic previews of numerous destinations, providing prospective visitors with a glimpse of what might be anticipated (Filieri et al. 2021; Kirtil and Aşkun 2021). Thus, it is crucial to stay up-to-date on the ongoing advancements and trends in the field to comprehend and adjust to the evolving algorithms and platforms, including AI-driven marketing, AI-powered customer service virtual assistants, augmented reality, virtual reality, and chatbots (Tussyadiah 2020; Jabeen et al. 2021). On the other hand, in the dynamic and ever-changing realm of technology, numerous obstacles arise for tourism sectors, notably smaller enterprises with constrained resources, as they strive to remain current and allocate investments towards these innovations. The financial burden associated with adopting and continuously integrating state-of-the-art technology can be a substantial obstacle (Tamvada et al. 2022), particularly for enterprises operating within fiercely competitive industries (Horváth and Szabó 2019).

5.1.3. Health and Safety Concerns

Health and safety issues play a crucial role in the tourism industry, influencing the perceptions and interactions of travelers with a place or a specific brand (Peña et al. 2023). They considerably influence the overall tourist experience and frequently emerge as a critical determinant in travelers' decision-making processes (Perić and Mandarić 2020). In particular, the COVID-19 epidemic has further amplified the prominence of health and safety considerations (Vaishar and Šťastná 2020), which has compelled the tourism sector to reassess its strategies and processes, placing greater emphasis on the adoption of stringent health measures in order to adjust to the new normal (Toker and Emir 2023). Likewise, travelers endeavor to exhibit an increased inclination towards obtaining a sense of security regarding the preservation of their physical well-being throughout their trips (Chigora and Katsande 2021).

Establishing and upholding high standards for health and safety not only builds trust with existing customers but also attracts tourists (Rahman et al. 2022). Brands that consistently implement and clearly communicate their safety initiatives build trust and credibility with their target audiences (Bui 2022). Also, favorable encounters with health and safety precautions have a long-lasting effect and frequently boost customer loyalty and satisfaction because visitors recognize and value the extra care taken to protect their well-being (Pongsakornrungsilp et al. 2021). Hence, brands that actively communicate their endeavors to meet or exceed health regulations not only appeal to customers who prioritize safety (Mekhum and Sriupayo 2020) but also attain a competitive advantage in attracting and keeping safety-conscious individuals who travel (Raza et al. 2023).

5.1.4. Diversity and Inclusion

In interconnected global environments where the need for genuine representation has grown, tourism branding confronts revolutionary challenges posed by diversity and inclusion (Ritchie and Ritchie 1998). The challenge might intensely impact how tourism

businesses establish their identities, including how they advertise their products or services and portray cultures, genders, and ethnicities to interact with clients worldwide (Tran et al. 2019). Another complex challenge arises from the workforce dynamics and the diverse demographics of the audience. Therefore, tourism businesses must customize branding strategies to cater to and connect various workforce dynamics and demographics with unique preferences to attain authentic representation while overcoming stereotypes (Higgins Desbiolles 2020).

Furthermore, ensuring inclusivity in services and experiences is a significant hurdle. For example, faults in cultural understanding can lead to failures in public relations and damage a brand's reputation. Hence, tourism organizations must design brands that welcome people with disabilities and different cultural and religious needs and travelers of all backgrounds (Darcy et al. 2020). Tourism businesses that create inclusive branding experiences will likely stand out in an increasingly competitive tourism landscape (Ritchie and Ritchie 1998).

5.1.5. Economic and Geopolitical Uncertainty

Economic instability and geopolitical tensions impact how tourism businesses promote tourism products, position themselves, and deal with global uncertainty (Mathapati et al. 2023). For instance, economic unpredictability can interrupt long-term planning and investment in tourism branding projects, making it difficult for tourism businesses to maintain consistent messages and experiences for visitors (Doğan et al. 2022). Moreover, it directly affects visitors' purchasing power and affordability (Gözgör and Ongan 2016), which leads to alterations in tourists' travel patterns and requires tourism organizations to adjust their branding strategies and products during economic downturns (Nguyen et al. 2022).

Similarly, geopolitical instability and security issues have the potential to disrupt travel trends and significantly harm the brand reputation of destinations and market presence, particularly if they are linked to the impacted destinations (Shaikh et al. 2022). In addition, such issues can impact travel convenience, destination preferences, and changes in visa restrictions (Lee et al. 2020). In order to address these matters, a sophisticated balance to implement robust branding strategies to uphold a favorable brand image and create travel experiences is required.

5.1.6. Community Engagement and Competitive Market

To achieve sustainable tourism branding, developing and interacting with various local groups can be challenging (McAlexander et al. 2002), especially when tourists' interests do not align with the norm and culture of the local community (Pedeliento and Kavaratzis 2019). To overcome such challenges, local customs and norms need to be understood and preserved and community members need to be included in the tourism branding development process (Tøttenborg et al. 2022). Moreover, the highly competitive marketplace and the growth of online travel agents have intensified competition by emphasizing the importance of brand distinctiveness (Ye et al. 2017; Tao 2022). Hence, tourism organizations require striking a balance between indigenous community culture and commercial goals by prioritizing unique selling factors and creating memorable experiences.

5.2. Tourism Branding Opportunities

5.2.1. Responsible and Sustainable Tourism

The emphasis on responsible and sustainable tourism offers significant tourism branding opportunities (Boutros and Muhammad 2022). For instance, tourists are increasingly choosing brands based on sustainability efforts and care about environmental and social implications (Çalişkan et al. 2019). This shows that brands that place an emphasis on sustainability can draw eco-conscious visitors and boost brand recognition (Ahmad et al. 2023). Furthermore, sustainable tourism practices promote collaboration with environmental groups, local communities, and eco-friendly travelers (Bhatta and Joshi 2023; Kaner 2021). Therefore, tourism organizations need to genuinely incorporate responsible and

sustainable tourism initiatives into their businesses as a policy to improve the quality of destinations (Mathew et al. 2024). Additionally, to differentiate themselves in competitive tourism business, integrating sustainable tourism branding and meeting the changing demands of travelers are crucial (Çalişkan et al. 2019).

5.2.2. The Digital Landscape

The advancement of digital environments provides tremendous prospects for enhancing tourism branding to research a global audience and engage directly with customers (Sofiko Tevdoradze and Nino Bakradze 2023; Balatska et al. 2022). Digital marketing technologies and social media platforms allow tourism organizations to promote and share their brand with potential customers, build community around their brand, and transform their branding strategies to meet evolving travel demands (Aman and Papp-Váry 2022). Likewise, through artificial intelligence data analytics, online travel agencies and booking platforms empower tourism branding to expand and customize their offerings to suit various preferences (Varsha et al. 2021). Moreover, content creation and digital storytelling enable tourism brands to create brand recognition, spread knowledge, and establish their brand reputation (Halkiopoulos et al. 2023).

5.2.3. Wellness and Health

Increasing traveler emphasis and changing tourist behavior regarding wellness and health, both in terms of mental and physical well-being, can notably benefit the future of tourism branding (Küçükkambak 2023; Santos et al. 2023). Brands that offer holistic wellness experiences, such as nature-centric excursions, spa retreats, fitness resorts, and yoga centers, can utilize health-conscious travelers who desire a harmonious equilibrium between personal development and recreation (Liao et al. 2023). Similarly, brands that promote mental health programs and organic food can take advantage of this to improve customer satisfaction and retention by meeting their desires (Santos et al. 2023). Furthermore, integrating technology into wellness tourism presents new branding opportunities by expanding services beyond physical locations (Panyadee et al. 2023). Consequently, tourism branding must align with health values to provide authentic and unique experiences that cater to diverse wellness needs (Dimova and Velikova 2022).

5.2.4. Creative Industries and Cultural Festivals

Numerous cultural festivals, including religious events, food fairs, gastronomy, arts, traditions, and heritage via concerts, provide visitors with genuine cultural interactions (Kulshreshtha et al. 2023). Participating in and sponsoring such festivals attaches audiences to local cultures and allows brands to reach new markets (Keskin et al. 2023). Moreover, participating in cultural festivals can enhance brand reputation and loyalty by showing appreciation for local cultures and making a good impression on travelers (Ezeuduji 2023). Also, incorporating creative industries into tourism branding may enhance economic growth and support local communities by promoting local talent, empowering artists, and enriching cultural vibrancy (Prasiasa et al. 2023; Jovičić et al. 2019). Thus, successful brands must build alliances and appreciate the cultural and artistic work of the local community while embracing diversity.

5.2.5. Accessibility and Inclusivity

Utilizing the value of accessibility and inclusiveness could potentially entice a diverse array of visitors with disabilities (Leiras and Eusébio 2023). Brands may encourage brand loyalty among travelers who prioritize accessible and inclusive services (Machado 2020). By creating an accessible and inclusive branding image, tourism branding can effectively appeal to tourists who prioritize equitable access (Machado 2020), uphold inclusive values, and promote favorable experiences (Bertolini et al. 2023). Furthermore, encouraging diversity and inclusivity can lead to cooperation with government authorities and organizations, which increases brand reach and legitimacy.

5.2.6. Cultural Exchange and Authenticity

Travelers are increasingly interested in immersive experiences that connect them with local cultures (Tian et al. 2020). Therefore, tourism brands must distinguish themselves in the market by placing higher value on cultural exchange and authenticity through the provision of meaningful encounters. Authenticity in tourism promotes trust, trustworthiness, and loyalty among clients, as travelers are cautious of fake experiences (Gao 2023). Furthermore, by partnering with local communities and organizations, brands can build relationships, contribute to the socio-economic development of sustainable culture, and establish a reputation as responsible and community-focused (Poort et al. 2021). However, ensuring authenticity requires understanding local customs and values and balancing commercial interests with cultural integrity (Tussyadiah 2020). Successful tourism branding relies on brands that integrate local customs and traditions, respect cultural heritage, and navigate challenges while benefiting from diverse cultural exchanges (Rickly 2022).

6. Conclusions and Implications

Most of the literatures reviewed mentioned the importance of sustainability (Çalişkan et al. 2019; Foroudi and Palazzo 2021; Boutros and Muhammad 2022; Liasidou et al. 2022; Markose et al. 2022; Aman et al. 2023; Agapito et al. 2023; Aziz and Niazi 2024; Garanti et al. 2024), an important concept that provides a pathway for a thriving future for all (Brundtland 1985). Sustainability is all about finding a balance between economic development, social equity, and environmental protection to create a better future for everyone (Kuhlman and Farrington 2010). Similarly, this study employs an integrative literature review to highlight challenges, opportunities, and strategies in building sustainable destination branding in tourism. We used 152 studies out of 598 papers over the past five years (2019–2023).

The findings reveal several challenges and opportunities for integrating and building sustainable destination branding in tourism (see Table 1). Furthermore, the study suggests innovative strategies such as prioritizing and emphasizing initiatives aimed at minimizing ecological footprints and carbon emission, implementing strategies that prioritize ecological awareness, adopting advanced eco-technology and artificial intelligence, integrating local customs and traditions, partnering with local communities and organizations, encouraging diversity and inclusivity, creating an accessible and inclusive branding image, incorporating and appreciating creative industries and artistic work, integrating holistic wellness experiences and mental health programs, and establishing high standards for health and safety concerns for sustainable tourism branding.

Incorporating these strategies into tourism branding could offer a competitive advantage and a win–win situation as it enhances both businesses and attracts potential visitors, as well as providing more meaningful and responsible travel experiences. Additionally, it could provide a variety of benefits, including enhanced brand image and reputations, stronger community relationships, reduced environmental impact, support for local communities, and a way forward for sustainable tourism destinations. Sustainable tourism destinations are those that strive to balance visitors' needs with the well-being of local communities and environments. According to this definition, destinations are sustainable when they fulfill three dimensions of sustainability: environmental sustainability (the destinations have protected and preserved natural and cultural heritage); economic sustainability (the destinations are building stable and profitable economies for the long term); and social sustainability (the destinations are creating equitable and thriving societies).

This study can significantly contribute to both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this study makes significant contributions to tourism branding, particularly by enhancing knowledge and developing robust tourism branding models from a sustainability perspective. To this end, this study identifies major tourism branding challenges and opportunities and provides an extensive overview of the key areas contributing to the literature on building sustainable tourism branding. Several previous models have been developed from various perspectives, such as from a stakeholder perspective (García et al. 2012), destination branding image perspective (Qu et al. 2011), ecological

perspective (Mastika and Nimran 2020), destination brand equity perspective (Gomez et al. 2015), and customer-based perspective (Chekalina et al. 2018; Dedeoğlu et al. 2019; Rahman et al. 2021). The current academic discourse on tourism branding must expand to encompass all aspects of sustainability dimensions (environmental, economic, and socio-cultural). The tourism branding concept must be strengthened with a sustainability-oriented perspective. The current study endorses the work of (Zouganeli et al. 2012), who state that the concept of sustainability should be incorporated into the way that a destination is managed and promoted sustainably. Therefore, we suggested that future tourism branding models should embrace sustainability aspects.

From a practical point of view, this study helps better understand the contribution of sustainable tourism branding. For instance, the results are an opportunity for tourism managers and stakeholders to build and promote unique aspects of destinations by integrating sustainability concepts into their destination branding. Another practical contribution is that this study draws the attention of policymakers to a crucial and timely issue to consider in transition toward sustainable development goals.

7. Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Despite its significant contributions, this study has some limitations. First, this integrative literature review is based on journal articles and reviews that were available in a single database (i.e., Scopus), and the studies published in other scholarly databases were omitted. Therefore, we cannot assert that this study encompassed all the scientific literature and archived material that has been published across all scholarly databases on tourism and destination branding. Second, this study may not have employed an extensive list of search keywords, despite the consideration of numerous relevant search terms. We acknowledge that destination branding is represented using several terms, some of which may have been overlooked in our study. Third, only peer-reviewed articles published in English were considered in this study. Including peer-reviewed studies published in other languages could have provided a much more comprehensive overview. Therefore, future studies should overcome these drawbacks.

This study proposes a thorough research agenda for future scholars in tourism branding. It highlights the challenges of including sustainability in tourism branding, as it is an increasingly prioritized aspect for contemporary tourists, as well as the application of new technologies and artificial intelligence in tourism branding.

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