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## Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges

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### ABSTRACT

Destination branding is an important research area and a powerful instrument for building the positioning of tourist destinations. The main objective of this study is to analyze the state-of-the-art research of destination branding. A bibliometric and a fractional accounting network mapping analysis were conducted using the Web of Science and Scopus online databases. The research identifies trends focused along different lines: strategy, experience, customer-based brand equity, place attachment, destination loyalty, word-of mouth, and social media. Although there have been some research on destination branding, to date, there has been no in-depth analysis that addresses the trends in destination branding. This work therefore contributes to the existing research by showing the state-of-the-art of research on destination branding, identifying trends and proposing future research lines and topics.

### 1. Introduction

The term ‘destination’ has been defined in multiple ways. Leiper (1995, p. 87) claims that destinations are “places towards which people travel and there they choose to stay for a while in order to experience certain features or characteristics – a perceived attraction of some sort”. Buhalis (2000), however, argues that a destination can also be a perceptual concept, which consumers can interpret subjectively and that depends on several factors such as travel experience and purpose of the visit, in addition to psychographic and demographic characteristics. Thus, ‘destination’ is made up of both the physical space and the attractions of the place, and these elements are interpreted and valued by tourists in either a positive or negative way (Franzen & Bouwman, 2001). In the same vein, Vengesayi (2003) defines a destination as a combination of two factors: attractiveness and competitiveness. The first is seen as the destination’s ability to offer benefits and represents the attraction or pull factor for potential visitors, while the second is associated with its ability to provide a better experience than other destinations.

A destination is therefore not only characterized by its physical or natural characteristics (Shaw & Williams, 2004), but it is also a mix of products, facilities and services that together form the travel experience. A destination is a physical space or place where tourists or visitors spend time for business or leisure, and it must be equipped with the necessary tourist products, support services and management systems for the tourist activities carried out (UNWTO, 2007). Likewise, in this same

paper, the UNWTO argues that the following elements are highly influential in attracting tourists: accessibility; public and private amenities; attractions; human resources; image and character; and price. In addition, it states that destinations can be of different scales, such as a country, region, city, or an autonomous self-contained center. Regarding the temporal scope, Moilanen & Rainisto (2009) affirm that a destination can be everything that people visit for a one-day trip, a shorter stay or a longer holiday. The term ‘destination’ is understood from a purely tourism perspective (Govers & Go, 2009), while the term ‘place’ refers to a more holistic concept, not strictly related to tourism activities, and includes all economic activities and feelings that are related to it (Briciu, 2013). Thus, destination is the overall recurrent brand term used, since destination branding is the primary focus of place branding literature (Hankinson, 2005) and destination brand focuses only on tourism (Lodge, 2006). The term ‘destination’ is used predominantly in the tourism field and receives wide attention from the tourism scholars (e.g. Baker & Cameron, 2008; Cai, 2002; Ekinci, 2003; Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Pike, 2005; Pike & Page, 2014; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). A destination may include towns, cities or municipalities, other government provinces, or an island archipelago (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Kerr, 2006; Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & van Es, 2001). Moreover, the use of ‘destination’ as an umbrella branding concept for macro regions, such as countries and states to design an identity, is also contemplated in the literature (e.g. Crockett & Wood, 1999; Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Pechlaner, Raich, & Zehrer, 2007).

A destination is defined in terms of physical geographic boundaries

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and management systems, allowing it to compete with other locations or destinations (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011). Therefore, among other reasons, it is important to create and promote a brand for a destination that allows it to improve its positioning and to emphasize and its uniqueness. As argued by Pereira, Correia, and Schutz (2012), the process of creating a brand for a destination seems to be correlated with the desired preferred image of that destination, the experience of the destination, and the differentiation between destinations. Although the brand concept related to tourist destinations became a topic of interest in the late 1990s (Pike, 2004; Tasci and Kozak, 2006; Wagner & Peters, 2009), this field has gained increasing attention in recent decades (Me & Buhalis, 2019). Branding is “the process of defining a point of difference and organizational culture and communicating them internally and externally” (Mearns, 2007, p. 56), which helps the company to be competitive in the market. Understanding branding in this way, it is observed that it not only adds value for customers, but also for stakeholders and the company itself. In this sense, Aaker (1991) considers the brand’s role to be a consumer tool in their decision making; Armstrong and Kotler (2014) highlight that branding brings legal protection and help the company to segment its markets; and Keller and Kotler (2012) state that a successful branding strategy will create greater value for shareholders. ‘Brand’ can be used as a noun (a reference to entities such as people, places, things and ideas), or a verb (referring to processes) (Calder & Reagan, 2001). Thus, branding includes naming the product, targeting it, positioning it, and communicating its benefits (Pereira et al., 2012).

Until 30 years ago, branding research was mainly associated with physical goods (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Later, branding research also focused on the study of service brands (de Chernatony & Dall’Olmo, 1999), and corporate brands (Dowling, 2002; Gregory & Wiechmann, 1999). Some academics applied the branding theory developed by David Aaker and Kevin Keller to tourism destinations (e.g. Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010; Pike & Page, 2014). The methods used in brand management, traditionally applied to all types of goods and services, are now being applied to certain places as a marketing tool that positions and associates the tourist destination with desirable qualities as perceived by target audiences (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). According to Kemp, Childers, and Williams (2012), tourist destinations can also be branded (Kemp et al., 2012). However, there are peculiarities that differentiate a destination brand from the branding of other products or services as destinations possess some distinct attributes that traditional products and services did not (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998).

Transferring marketing techniques to cities, regions or countries entails several difficulties due to the peculiar nature of destinations as brands. It has even been argued that the branding process for destinations is more complex than that for consumer goods (Pike, 2005), since ‘destination’ can represent a multiplicity of autonomous service businesses, both public and private, and there is a lower level control over the brand experience (Hankinson, 2009). In addition, destination branding must provide different experiences to different tourists (Gartner, 2014). The complexities of developing a destination brand are related to the development of the experiential element and the understanding of the tourists’ decision-making process (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). Therefore, branding for tourist destinations must consider both hard factors (e.g. infrastructure, the economy, accessibility) and soft factors (e.g. environment, friendliness of local people, art, and cultural traditions and leisure activities) (Morgan et al., 2011). Branding contributes to developing a competitive advantage by creating associations between the named product and a wide range of attributes, which means that for consumers, the image of the destination is based not only on physical characteristics or services offered, but also on other intangible symbolic merits (Simoes & Dibb, 2001).

The application of the concept of branding to tourist destinations is recent (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). Research on destination branding is a nascent field and remains in its infancy (Konecnik, Antoncic, &

Ruzzier, 2014; Pike, 2009). The first academic conference on destination branding was in 1996 (Gnoth, 1998), although the term ‘destination branding’ started to gain visibility in the late 1990s (Oppermann, 2000), being strongly promoted by the Travel & Tourism Research Association Annual Conference in 1998, where it was the central topic (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Destination branding has evolved from several fields, including destination image and marketing, and it is a broader concept than marketing destination as it considers the overall image and reputation of the place. The concepts of destination branding and destination image have been debated in terms of their differences and similarities (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Cai (2002) was the first to distinguish destination brand identity development from image building. Destination image should be regarded as a pre-existing concept of destination branding (Pike, 2009), since one of the main goals of destination branding is to develop a positive destination image that positions and clearly differentiates one specific destination from others (Cai, 2002).

Branding enhances destination image (Blain et al., 2005) and destination image is a significant factor in determining visitor choice (Lee, O’Leary, & Hong, 2002). Therefore, the concept of destination branding has become popular in the field of tourism marketing (Boo et al., 2009; Hankinson, 2015), being one of the fastest growing in the destination marketing literature (Pike, 2009). Destination branding has emerged as a powerful instrument for the consolidation and promotion of tourist destinations, being currently one of the newest and most important research areas in this field (e.g. Cai, 2002; Konecnik, 2004; Morgan & Pritchard, 2002; Olins, 2002).

When it comes to defining destination branding, there no clarity or consistency in the literature (Nuttavuthisit, 2007; Park & Petrick, 2006) nor is there is a clear definition that academics and professionals can agree upon to define destination branding (Pike, 2009). However, what is evident is that the concept of destination branding goes far beyond a recognized name, distinctive logo, tagline, or symbol, since it is made up of a set of tangible and intangible aspects. Destination branding is a complex process that goes beyond simply developing slogans and symbols (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Keller (1993) and Aaker (1996) define destination branding as a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational, and strategic elements. All of these collectively generates a unique network of associations in the minds of consumers. Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) add the concept of ‘experience’ to the traditional role of identification and differentiation of a brand, thus highlighting the importance of the destination brand to transmit the promise of a memorable experience and, if possible, a unique experience not available anywhere else. A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination, but it must also convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination. Thus, the concept of visitor experience needs to be incorporated into the process of branding for tourism destinations (Berry, 1989).

According to Hankinson (2001), the following key factors affected the development of destination branding: organizational complexity and control, management of partnerships, product complexity, and measurement of success. The main objective of destination branding is to develop a consistent brand strategy that allows the destination to build a positive image and a strong positioning, to differentiate itself from its competitors (Cai, 2002). Morrison and Anderson (2002) suggest that destination branding is a way to communicate the unique identity of the destination by differentiating it from its competitors. Effective destination branding must seek differentiation through a unique selling proposition that is sustainable, believable, and relevant and that competitors cannot surpass (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002). Destination branding must distinguish a destination from others by means of numerous elements, both symbolic and experimental, that differentiate a destination, creating a unique brand (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). Ooi (2004) defines destination branding as the dynamic process of attracting the support and cooperation of different stakeholders so that the brand is accepted, communicated and manifested through official and unofficial

advertising and products. Freire (2005) suggests that destination branding is a complex process of identification, organization and coordination of all the variables that have an impact on the destination's image. Blain et al. (2005), based on a survey done by destination marketing organizations (DMOs), propose a more holistic approach to the concept of destination branding, including topics like identification, differentiation, experience, expectations, image, consolidation, and reinforcement. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) propose a dynamic process of destination branding that considers both demand-side and supply-side branding perspectives. Destination branding can be employed as a strategic instrument which provides economic, political, and cultural value (Balakrishnan, 2009) and, therefore, differentiation and positioning. Destination branding is the method of creating a unique identity for a destination that allows potential visitors to differentiate one destination from another (Graves & Skinner, 2009). Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) emphasize the importance of destination branding as a generator of competitive advantages through differentiation, incorporating numerous components ranging from promise to visitors to creating a unique association for a destination. Destination branding can be also be used for communicating the competitive advantages of the tourist destination (Björner, 2013), in order that the activities offered can be distinguished from other competitors in the same field (Pike & Page, 2014).

Although there has been some research on destination branding based on literature to date, none of them analyzes the research trends in destination branding in any depth (Table 1). Rather, they address specific topics within this line of research. Skinner (2008) makes a thematic review of the literature, but mainly focuses on reflecting the differences in marketing and individual branding places and whole nations, due to the lack of consensus about what kind of marketing or branding applies to places. Park, Cai, and Lehto (2009) develop a review of theoretical constructs of inter-organizational collaboration process, in order to explain the nature of collaborative branding for destinations. Concurrently, Tasci & Gartner (2009) suggested a comprehensive research with both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess brand elements and provide a practical framework for destination authorities. Key issues in destination branding have also been studied through literature reviews

**Table 1**  
Research on destination branding based on literature reviews.

References	Main contribution
Skinner (2008)	To identify differences in marketing of individual branding places and entire nations.
Park et al. (2009)	To know the nature of collaborative branding for destinations.
Tasci & Gartner (2009)	To assess brand elements and provide a practical framework for destination authorities.
Nangru et al. (2012)	To identify what differentiates destination branding from the branding of a product or a service.
Pike and Page (2014)	To understand to what extent the Destination Marketing Organization is responsible for the competitiveness of the destination.
Kumar and Nayak (2014)	To define the meaning and conceptualization of destination personality.
Pike (2015)	To analyze how to monitor destination branding performance over time.
Kladou et al. (2015)	To analyze destination branding equity and the ways it might be evaluated.
Asseraf and Shoham (2017)	To know the role of the drivers of consumer affinity, reinforcing the performance of foreign products, destination branding and tourism.
Mukherjee et al. (2018)	To identify the key variables for measuring the quality of tourism destination in emerging markets.
Baptista and Matos (2018)	To show the evolution of destination image within the evolution of destination branding from a consumer behavior perspective.
This study	To show the state of the art of research on destination branding, identifying trends and proposing future research lines and topics.

and case studies on this issue (Nangru, Rustagi, Makhija, Nafees, & Krishnan, 2012), to identify what differentiates destination branding from the branding of a product or a service.

Pike and Page (2014) present the first narrative analysis of the areas of research within the destination marketing field, but the research is focused on DMOs as a way of understating the extent to which they are responsible for the competitiveness of the destination. Thus, this paper has an explicit focus on the core marketing role of DMOs. Kumar and Nayak (2014) make the first attempt to define the meaning and conceptualization of destination personality based on an extensive literature review. Pike (2015) analyzes how to monitor destination branding performance over time by reporting the results of four studies tracking brand performance of a competitive set of five destinations, between 2003 and 2012.

Kladou, Giannopoulos, and Mavragani (2015) delve into a review of the destination brand equity literature published since 2001 by identifying 64 papers and providing overall insight on the ways destination branding might be evaluated. Following a literature review of recent research on affinity, Asseraf and Shoham (2017) investigate the role of the drivers of consumer affinity and, by enhancing it, reinforcing the performance of foreign products, destination branding and tourism. By means of a literature review, Mukherjee, Adhikari, and Datta (2018) focus on identifying the key variables for measuring the quality of tourism destination in emerging markets. Baptista and Matos (2018) carry out a narrative literature review to frame the evolution of destination image within the evolution of destination branding from a consumer behavior perspective.

Given all the above, it is important to understand the evolution of scientific production on destination branding, as well as the main topics covered and the main trends in research. This work represents a contribution by showing the state of the art of research on destination branding, identifying trends and proposing future research lines and topics.

To achieve this goal, a bibliometric analysis was developed, since it permits the evaluation of knowledge on a particular subject and measure the scientific influence of research and journals (Bouyssou & Marchant, 2011). For said purpose, this paper has the following structure. First, the methodology is explained, based on a bibliometric study of the two most influent databases. Second, results are presented in different subsections, to know the most influential countries on destination branding, the annual evolution of publications, the most relevant journals, authors, institutions supporting research and trends. Finally, in the conclusions section, future lines of research are proposed.

## 2. Methodology

In order to evaluate scientific activity, analyze the state of the art of destination branding, and identify the main research trends of this topic, a systematic bibliometric analysis of the literature was developed. This methodology is fairly widespread for this type of research and has been carried out successfully in numerous recent articles (e.g. Leung, Sun, & Bai, 2017; Sánchez, Del Río, & García, 2017). This bibliometric analysis generates a structured knowledge about destination branding and makes predictions about future research. A methodology of five stages was carried out for the bibliometric analysis (Brereton, Kitchenham, Budgen, Turner, & Khalil, 2007; Osareh, 1996): definition of search criteria, selection of databases, adjustment of research criteria, export of final data, and analysis and discussion of results.

As destination branding is the topic analyzed in this research, articles containing 'destination branding' were searched in the title, abstract, or keywords, from the first published document in the databases to 2018. The collection of scientific works in bibliographic databases uses bibliometrics to determine the scientific activity on specific topics. The following step was to select relevant publications from scientific citation indexing databases. It was decided to use two databases to avoid some of the restrictions of using only one database. Thus, the research identified

the publications in two scientific platforms: the Web of Science by Clarivate Analytics (WoS) core collection and the Scopus online database. Both databases are multidisciplinary, containing different kind of scientific documents, such as articles, books, conference papers, reviews, and other documents (Bakkalbasi, Bauer, Glover, & Wang, 2006; Garfield, 1955). In addition, both databases are of proven quality and are valuable sources of data on citations and abstracts of peer-reviewed research literature (Van Raan, 2014). WoS and Scopus are also the most widespread databases in different scientific fields, being frequently used for searching academic literature (e.g. Goodman & Deis, 2005; Guz & Rushchitsky, 2009; Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril, Gázquez-Abad, & de Pablo Valenciano, 2019). In addition, VOSviewer was used to construct co-citation and keyword network maps (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Preliminary results identified a total of 311 documents in WoS and 362 in Scopus. In subsequent filters used to refine the results, documents published in 2019 were eliminated and the selection was filtered to only include articles in order to improve the analysis and guarantee the quality of the publications. The WoS core collection database includes numerous Journal Citation Indexes, including the Science Citation Index Expanded, the Social Sciences Citation Index and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index, in addition to the Conference Proceedings Citation Indexes (Science; Social Science & Humanities), the Book Citation Index (Science, and Social Sciences & Humanities), and the Emerging Sources Citation Index. For this reason, it was considered appropriate to keep book series in this research, since they contain articles and have a factor impact index in Scopus (e.g. Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice). In addition, the WoS core collection database also includes articles published in emerging sources (e.g. Tourism Analysis, International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, Journal of Place Management and Development). Thus, after applying the aforementioned filters, the final results comprised 253 articles in WoS, and 293 in Scopus. According to the filter used, there were 196 articles that appeared in both databases.

In this research, the bibliometric indicators used to distinguish the scientific production were, the total number of references (citations) and frequency: h-index, and averages (Hirsch, 2005). Finally, the journal's impact factor on the Journal Citation Report (JCR) and the Scimago Journal Ranking (SJR) were used.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Most influential countries

The ranking of the most influential countries is led by the US, followed by the UK (Table 2), both in terms of volume of publications and citations, followed by Australia, which is one of the most studied countries in this field, and also, as will be seen later, has a large number of universities and institutions working on destination branding. These

countries are followed by Spain in fourth place. With regards to the number of articles published, China and Italy are also among the most prominent countries.

From the country ranking, a clear hegemony of English-speaking countries is evident. Some countries where tourism is a prominent sector also occupy a relevant position. The top five countries according to the number of tourists received in 2017 (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2018) is as follows: France (86.9 million), Spain (81.8 million), US (76.9 million), China (60.7 million), and Italy (58.3 million). Four out of the five countries that occupy the top five in number of annual tourists are also in the top ten ranking of most prolific countries according to the number of publications on destination branding. The importance and significance of the tourism sector in the Spanish economy is noteworthy (OECD, 2018), as it directly or indirectly contributes 11.1% of GDP, only closely followed by Portugal (9.2%) and Mexico (8.6%). Given the importance of the tourism sector in France, it is remarkable that it is not among the most influential countries in research on destination branding. It also draws attention to the non-existence of Latin American countries in this research ranking on destination branding.

With regards to the h-index, once again, the US, the UK and Australia lead the ranking in both the WoS and Scopus databases. Finally, regarding the average number of citations per article, Canada (38.54 in Scopus) joins these three countries, mainly due to just one paper, 'Destination branding: Insights and practices from destination management organizations', published in the *Journal of Travel Research*, in 2005, which has 341 citations (Blain et al., 2005).

The information on the most influential countries in this topic is useful for researchers in several aspects, including the identification of possible biases in destination branding research and active working groups.

From the results obtained in this research, it can be pointed out that there is a correlation between the research on destination branding and the countries where tourism has a greater impact, expressed in number of visitors, with the exception of France, perhaps caused by the fact that the dissemination of research results is generally carried out through French journals (in French), not always indexed in WoS or Scopus. The role of the main countries of the European Mediterranean basin and southern Europe is also remarkable.

Nevertheless, it is striking that some countries with less tourist traffic also appear prominently in the ranking, which leads us to think that the development of relevant research work on destination branding by countries is not exclusively due to the weight of tourism (even this being a very relevant factor), but also due to the number of tourism faculties and research centers existing in the country.

**Table 2**  
Ranking of countries in relation to the number of articles, citations and h-index.

Country	WoS				SCOPUS			
	Articles (A)	Citations (C)	C/A (average)	h-index	Articles (A)	Citations (C)	C/A (average)	h-index
US	50	1672	33.44	18	68	1980	29.12	20
UK	40	1216	30.40	17	49	1819	37.12	19
Australia	31	889	24.03	15	39	1473	37.77	19
Spain	20	105	5.25	4	25	150	6.00	6
China	12	62	5.17	5	12	30	2.50	3
Italy	11	53	4.82	3	15	114	7.60	6
Portugal	10	43	4.30	3	8	71	8.88	4
India	10	37	3.70	3	14	23	1.64	3
Denmark	9	148	16.44	5	10	255	25.50	5
Canada	8	119	13.22	3	13	501	38.54	5
Finland	9	93	10.33	5	11	120	10.91	6
Greece	9	66	7.33	4	13	81	6.23	5
Sweden	8	22	2.75	3	8	61	7.63	4



### 3.2. Annual scientific production per year

The first paper related to destination branding included in Scopus database, is ‘Mood marketing - The new destination branding strategy: A case study of “Wales” the brand’, by Pritchard and Morgan, published in 1998 in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998). This research discusses the role of branding in destination marketing, evaluating whether destinations can be branded in the same way as other kind of products. They identify the development of an emotional relationship between destinations and consumers, which they call ‘spiritual marketing’, and conclude that this initiative is an effective and efficient way to solve some of the problems of destination marketers. With regards to WoS, the first paper included within it, is ‘Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales?’, by Pritchard and Morgan, published in 2001, in *Tourism Management* (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). The article is also included in the Scopus database and focuses on the development of a critical analysis of tourist representations through an investigation of destination branding strategies.

The publication of scientific research on destination branding is small during the first years of the 21st century, with a slight increase as of 2007 (Fig. 1). It was not until 2009 when there was a significant jump in the number of publications, 21 according to WoS; 24 according to Scopus. Since then, despite some ups and downs, the number of annual articles on destination branding has increased and stabilizes around 30, with 2014 being the year with the highest number of publications (38 in WoS; 36 on Scopus).

Scopus presents a higher cumulative number of citations than WoS (Fig. 2), although with a homogeneous evolution, which corroborates that the scientific production is similar in both databases. Scopus reaches its highest values in 2011 (814), 2006 (734), and 2009 (699). Meanwhile, WoS has its highest number of citations in 2011 (713), and 2014 (512).

From the data obtained, it can be concluded that the temporal evolution of the volume of publications is especially significant, showing how the interest of the scientific community in this topic has experienced constant growth. The sawtooth trend that can be seen from 2008 (Fig. 2) may be caused by the economic fluctuations caused by the financial crisis from that year, which resulted in discontinued funding for research projects, in addition to other external factors. The deepening of the causes of this evolution could be the object of study in future investigations, opening up a new and interesting line of research.

### 3.3. Most influential journals

Destination branding is a quite specific topic, so articles regarding

this issue are usually published in journals specialized in the tourism knowledge area. However, the papers are distributed in several journals, and not just concentrated in just a few (Tables 3 and 4). The *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* leads in terms of volume of publications on destination branding in both databases, with 20 articles in WoS and 21 in Scopus. Other journals with a relevant number of articles include: *Tourism Analysis* (WoS, 14; Scopus, 14), *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* (WoS, 12; Scopus, 17), *International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research* (WoS, 13; Scopus, 14) and *Tourism Management* (WoS, 12; Scopus, 13).

There are three journals with a greater number of citations, *Tourism Management* (WoS, 1014; Scopus, 1126), *Journal of Travel Research* (Scopus, 940), and *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (Scopus, 752). Regarding the average number of citations per article, several journals can be highlighted: *Tourism Management* (WoS, 1014 citations; Scopus, 1126), *Journal of Travel Research* (Scopus, 940), and *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (Scopus, 752). *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* and *Journal of Vacation Marketing* have the highest h-index (11) in Scopus, followed by *Tourist Management* (10), which also leads the ranking in WoS (10).

When focusing the analysis on the average number of citations per article, two journals stand out: *Tourism Management* (WoS, 84.5; Scopus, 86.62) and *Journal of Travel Research* (Scopus, 94). Table 5 shows the top five publications according to the number of citations in WoS. Three of the five most cited articles have been published in *Tourism Management*: ‘A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image’ (Qu et al., 2011) with 236 citations; ‘Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales?’ (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001) with 145 citations; and ‘Destination Marketing Organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature’ (Pike & Page, 2014) with 132 citations. The ranking in WoS is led by ‘Cooperative branding for rural destinations’ (Cai, 2002) with 342 citations, published in *Annals of Tourism Research*, followed by ‘Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places’ (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006) with 260 citations, published in *Journal of Business Research*. Focusing on Scopus, the research of Cai (2002), published in *Annals of Tourism Research*, is the article with a higher number of citations (398). *Journal of Travel Research* places two of its articles in the top five of the most cited: ‘Destination branding: Insights and practices from destination management organizations’ (Blain et al., 2005) with 341 citations; and ‘Destination personality: An application of brand personality to tourism destinations’ (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006) with 243 citations.

Knowing which are the most influential and relevant journals, as well as the most cited articles and the topics they address, allows researchers to identify the most appropriate channel to show the results of their

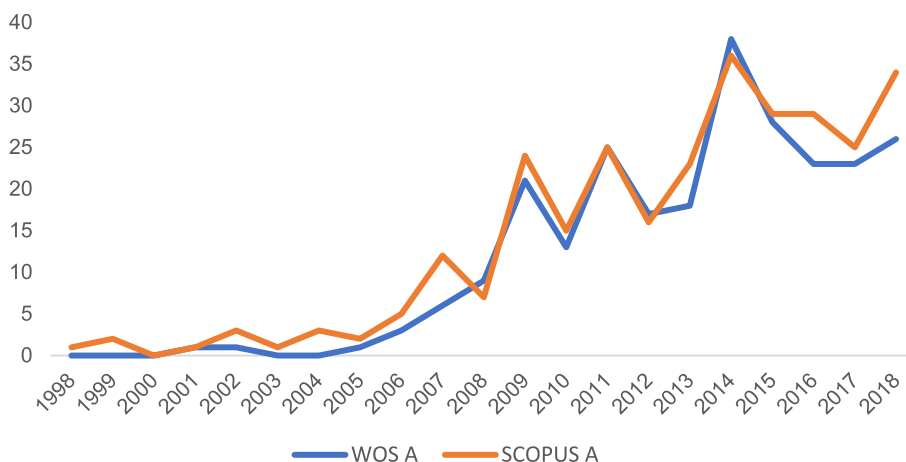


Fig. 1. Evolution in the number of articles per year.

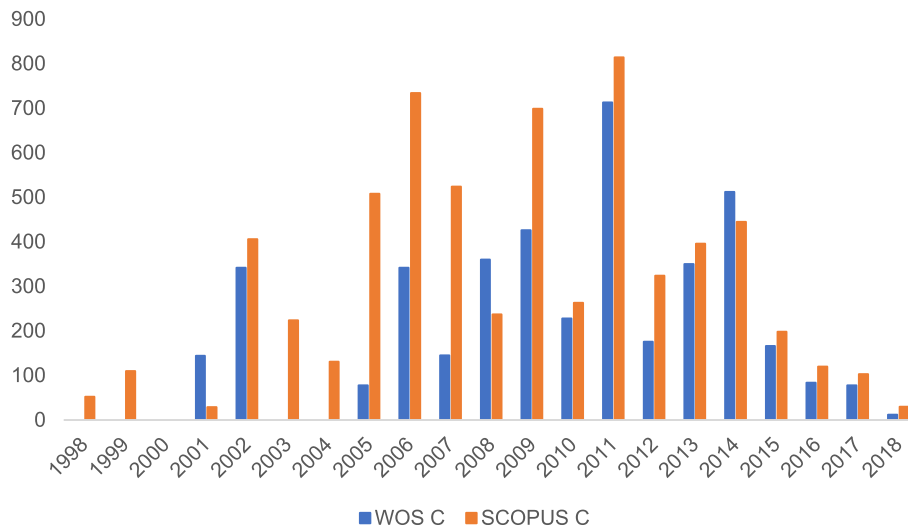


Fig. 2. Evolution of citations per year.

**Table 3**  
Journals and impact factor (WoS).

Journal	IF	A	C	C/A	h-i
1 Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	3.667 (Q1)	20	111	5.55	5
2 Tourism Analysis	–	14	147	10.50	7
3 Int. Journal of Culture, Tourism & Hospitality Res.	–	13	109	8.38	5
4 Tourism Management	5.921 (Q1)	12	1014	84.50	10
5 Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	1.975 (Q3)	12	153	12.75	7
6 Place Branding & Public Diplomacy	–	12	219	18.25	6
7 Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice	–	10	42	4.20	4
8 International Journal of Tourism Research	2.449 (Q2)	9	209	23.22	6
9 Journal of Place Management & Development	–	6	119	19.83	4

IF: Impact factor; A: total number of articles; C: Total number of citations; C/A: average of citations per article; h-i: H index.

research and disseminate it conveniently.

The main conclusion reached is that the leading journal in term of the number of published articles is the *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, a reflection of the interest shown in these topics. Also of note, in terms of the number of citations, is the journal *Tourism Management*. Researchers in this broad field of destination branding should keep both journals in mind. As can be seen from the results obtained, journals with a focus on marketing predominate, which is reasonable, given that the term ‘branding’ is strongly linked to this area of knowledge. In other words, destination branding papers are published in tourism-related journals, but especially in those related to tourism marketing.

Moreover, of the five papers with the highest number of citations (Table 5), only one of them is focused on a specific destination, Wales. The remainder address more conceptual topics on destination branding, such as: cooperative branding, an application of branding theories to tourism places, a model of destination branding considering image, and destination marketing of DMOs. Therefore, the central themes of the most cited articles (both in WoS and Scopus) do not refer to specific places or destinations, but to general theoretical aspects of destination branding, which then serve as a conceptual framework for papers focused on specific places.

**Table 4**  
Journals and impact factor (Scopus).

Journal	IF	A	C	C/A	h-i
1 Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	1.15 (Q1)	21	137	6.52	7
2 Journal of Vacation Marketing	0.87 (Q1)	17	752	44.24	11
3 Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	0.94 (Q1)	17	411	24.18	11
4 Int. Journal of Culture, Tourism & Hospitality Res.	0.34 (Q2)	14	165	11.79	6
5 Tourism Analysis	0.47 (Q2)	14	160	11.43	7
6 Tourism Management	3.03 (Q1)	13	1126	86.62	10
7 Bridging Tourism Theory & Practice	0.13 (Q4)	13	43	3.31	4
8 Journal of Travel Research	2.82 (Q1)	10	940	94.00	9
9 Place Branding & Public Diplomacy	0.30 (Q3)	10	124	12.40	5
10 International Journal of Tourism Research	1.32 (Q1)	9	225	25.00	6
11 Tourism	0.21 (Q4)	8	59	7.38	4

IF: Impact factor; A: total number of articles; C: Total number of citations; C/A: average of citations per article; h-i: H index.

### 3.4. Most relevant authors and cited references

Pike, at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, is the most influential author in destination branding, with 12 articles (WoS and Scopus), as well as the highest number of citations in WoS (344) and Scopus (626), and the highest h-index in both databases (WoS, 7; Scopus, 9) (Tables 6 and 7). Other relevant authors with a high number of citations in Scopus are: Ekinci (596), at the University of Portsmouth (UK); Cai (480), at Purdue University (US); and Baloglu (242), at the University of Nevada (US).

According to the average number of citations per article in Scopus, there are four outstanding academic authors: Ekinci (198.67), Cai (68.57), Baloglu (60.50), and Pike (52.17). Ekinci is the second most cited author albeit with only three papers. This is mainly due to the high number of citations of two of these articles. The most cited article is ‘Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places’ (Hosany et al., 2006) with 301 citations, published in *Journal of Business Research*, which investigates the

**Table 5**  
Top five articles (WoS).

	Article title/Journal	Author	Year	IF	C
1	Cooperative branding for rural destinations. <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	Cai, L.A.	2002	5.086 (Q1)	342
2	Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>	Hosany, S., Ekinici, Y., Uysal, M.	2006	2.509 (Q2)	260
3	A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. <i>Tourism Management</i>	Qu, H., Kim, L. H., Im, H.H.	2011	5.921 (Q1)	236
4	Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales? <i>Tourism Management</i>	Pritchard, A; Morgan, N.J.	2001	5.921 (Q1)	145
5	Destination Marketing Organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. <i>Tourism Management</i>	Pike, S.; Page, S.J.	2014	5.921 (Q1)	132

IF: Impact factor; C: Total number of citations.

**Table 6**  
Most prolific authors (WoS).

	Author	Affiliation	Article (A)	Citations (C)	C/A (average)	h-i
1	Pike, S.	QUT, Mkt, Brisbane (Australia)	12	344	28.67	7
2	Kladou, S.	Sheffield Hallam University (UK)	6	62	10.33	4
3	Baloglu, S.	University of Nevada (US)	5	220	4.00	3
4	Cai, L.A.	Purdue University (US)	5	72	14.40	4
5	Bianchi, C.	Univ. Adolfo Ibanez, Sch Business (Chile)	4	151	37.75	4
6	Lehto, X. Y.	Purdue University (US)	4	59	14.75	4
7	Bjork, P.	Hanken Sch. Econ., Dept Mktg, Vaasa (Finland)	4	43	10.75	3
8	Tasci, A.	University of Central Florida (US)	4	42	10.50	4
9	Chen, N.	University of Canterbury (New Zealand)	4	39	9.75	3
10	Dioko L.	Inst. Tourism Studies, Macau (Peoples R. China)	4	24	6.00	3

relationship between destination image and destination personality, concluding that both are related concepts.

The second most cited article is 'Destination personality: An application of brand personality to tourism destinations' (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006) with 243 citations, published in *Journal of Travel Research*. This work analyzes whether tourists ascribed personality traits to tourism destinations, finding a 3-dimensional perception of destination personality: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality.

Cai has an article with 398 citation, 'Cooperative branding for rural destinations' (Cai, 2002), published in *Annals of Tourism Research*, which proposes a conceptual model of destination branding, suggesting that cooperative branding results in a consistent attributes-based image across multiple rural communities.

**Table 7**  
Most prolific authors (Scopus).

	Author	Affiliation	Article (A)	Citations (C)	C/A (average)	h-i
1	Pike, S.	QUT, Mkt, Brisbane (Australia)	12	626	52.17	9
2	Cai, L.A.	Purdue University (US)	7	480	68.57	5
3	Kladou, S.	Sheffield Hallam Univ. (UK)	6	77	12.83	5
4	Baloglu, S.	University of Nevada (US)	4	242	60.50	3
5	Bianchi, C.	Univ. Adolfo Ibanez, Sch. Bus. (Chile)	4	177	44.25	4
6	Lehto, X.Y.	Purdue University (US)	4	68	17.00	4
7	Bjork, P.	Hanken Sch. Econ, Dept Mkt (Finland)	4	55	13.75	4
8	Fernández-Cavia, J.	Universitat Pompeu Fabra, (Spain)	4	17	4.25	3
9	Chigora, F.	University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe)	4	0	0.00	0
10	Ekinici, Y.	University of Portsmouth (UK)	3	596	198.67	3

The most cited article about destination branding, with 149 citations, was written by Baloglu, entitled 'Brand personality of tourist destinations: An application of self-congruity theory' (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), published in *Tourism Management*. This research examines the relationships between destination personality, self-congruity, and tourist's behavioral intentions, concluding that self-congruity is a partial mediator in the relationship between destination personality and tourist's behavioral intentions.

Two of the 12 articles of Pike about destination branding have more than 100 citations. One of these, 'Tourism destination branding complexity' (Pike, 2005) with 168 citations, published in *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, proposes enhancing the understanding of the complex challenges inherent in the development of tourism destination brand slogans. The other article, 'Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations' (Pike, 2009) with 143 citations, published in *Tourism Management*, carries out a review of destination branding literature (1998–2007), and identifies some research gaps and opportunities, such as examining the extent to which brand positioning campaigns have been successful in enhancing brand equity.

The resulting data about authors is considered significant for several reasons. In the case of the most prolific author, Pike, his publications are also among the most cited articles and thus regarded as highly relevant in this field of study. Indeed, several of the aforementioned authors are also regarded to be benchmarks in destination branding research and of particular interest for future research.

A closer analysis of the professional profile of the five most cited authors in destination branding, that they all closely linked to the subject or faculty of marketing in their respective universities. In addition, they hold different positions closely related to the tourism sector and, in several cases, have previous experience in the tourism industry. This is an important fact, since it provides researchers with very practical knowledge of the sector and, in addition, their ability to access a greater volume of public and private data could be greater. For instance, Pike has spent 20 years working in the tourism industry, primarily with DMOs, and is a member of the Australian Marketing Institute. Baloglu has a varied background in the industry, including restaurants, hotels,

resort clubs and travel agencies and is on the editorial boards of more than ten hospitality and tourism journals. Cai has also served as travel and tourism industry expert to the World Economic Forum and he is director and Associate Dean at Purdue Tourism & Hospitality Research Center. Bianchi has experience as a marketing manager in various companies. This prior professional experience could be of great relevance to develop impactful quality research.

In relation to the principal lines of research and publications on destination branding from these top authors, several research streams can be identified. An analysis of their publications which the highest number of citations, we find that Prof. Pike primarily focuses on tourism, destination marketing and on the relevant challenges faced by tourism marketers. Thus, among his most cited research we find topics such as: destination image analysis; destination positioning analysis; DMOs; destination marketing; tourism destination branding complexity; destination brand positions; consumer-based brand equity for destinations; and destination positioning opportunities using personal values. The research interest of Bianchi is focused on marketing and tourism. She has also collaborated in several high impact publications with Pike. Among her most cited works on destination branding, the following could be highlighted: ‘Consumer-based brand equity for Australia as a long-haul tourism destination in an emerging market’, and ‘Investigating attitudes towards three South American destinations in an emerging long haul market using a model of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE)’. The research interests of Kladou include place branding, cultural tourism, tourism and hospitality marketing, mainly focused on: destination brand equity; an online marketing approach to destination image; and the role of brand elements in destination branding. With regards to Baloglu, his research interests include hospitality and tourism marketing, international travel and tourism, and research methods. Some of his main publications are related to models of destination image formation, customer-based brand equity applied to multiple destinations; or market segments. He has also published relevant research on topics such as: affective images of tourism destinations; dimensions of customer loyalty; and brand personality of tourist destinations. In addition to his these more theoretical models, his research also focuses on specific destinations such as the countries around the Mediterranean (Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Italy). LCai pioneered the cooperative branding model for rural destinations. His research is focused on branding, rural tourism and China market. Among the topics on which he has published, the following can be highlighted: Cooperative branding for rural destinations; Destination image and tourist loyalty; Travel motivations and destination choice; and Food as a form of destination identity: A tourism destination brand perspective.

### 3.5. Institutions supporting research

There are several public and private institutions promoting research on destination branding. Table 8 shows the most relevant universities according to the number of articles published on this topic. There is a predominance of universities in the US and Australia, followed by European universities. Specifically, the top ten in the WoS database consists of four universities from the US, three from Australia and three from Europe, while in Scopus, there are four European universities, three from Australia, two from the US and one from Macao (China).

Among the most important universities in destination branding research is The Queensland University of Technology (QUT), a public research university located in Brisbane, Australia. Its research on tourism depends mainly on the Department of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, at *QUT Business School*. QUT has the highest h-index on WoS (7) and Scopus (8), as well as the largest number of published articles on destination branding.

Purdue University, a public research university located in Indiana (US), develops the online Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management. *University of Surrey* (UK) leads the ranking of citations (629). It has a specific faculty for studies related to tourism, the Faculty

**Table 8**  
Principal institutions promoting research on destination branding.

WOS R	Affiliation	Article (A)	Citations (C)	C/A (average)	h-i
1	Queensland University of Technology (AU)	12	344	28.67	7
2	Purdue University (US)	9	469	52.11	5
3	University of Surrey (UK)	8	378	47.25	5
4	Nevada System of Higher Education (US)	5	219	43.80	3
5	University of Queensland (AU)	5	162	32.40	4
6	University of Ljubljana (SI)	5	73	14.6	4
7	University of South Carolina (US)	5	65	13.00	3
8	Griffith University (AU)	5	16	3.20	2
9	Copenhagen Business School (DK)	4	66	16.50	3
10	State University System of Florida (US)	4	42	10.05	3
<b>SCOPUS</b>					
1	Purdue University (US)	10	543	54.30	6
2	Queensland University of Technology (AU)	10	483	48.30	8
3	University of Surrey (UK)	8	629	78.63	6
4	University Pompeu Fabra Barcelona (ES)	7	22	3.14	4
5	University of Queensland (AU)	6	320	53.33	5
6	Griffith University (AU)	6	18	3.00	2
7	Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK)	5	337	67.40	5
8	Copenhagen Business School (DK)	5	152	30.40	3
9	University of South Carolina (US)	5	66	13.20	3
10	Institute for Tourism Studies, Macao (CN)	5	32	6.40	3

R: Ranking; h-i: Hirsch index; AU: Australia; SI: Slovenia; ES: Spain; DK: Denmark; China: CN.

of School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and is ranked second for hospitality, leisure, recreation, and tourism in the Complete University Guide 2019. The research lines on tourism are mainly focused on advances in destination branding, visitor satisfaction, innovation, revenue management, and risk and disaster impacts.

The University of Queensland (UQ) is an Australian public research university. UQ Business School is the only university in Australia to be certified by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The university organizes the Master of Tourism, Hotel and Event Management. The main research lines focused on tourism are: Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Tourism and Information Technologies, Visitor Studies, and Tourism Workforce Development.

Griffith University (GIFT) is a public research university in South East Queensland, Australia, ranked amongst the top three institutions globally for tourism research. Studies in Tourism are carried out by the Griffith Business School, Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management. In addition, the university manages the Griffith Institute for Tourism, whose research incorporates the triple bottom line concept: economy, individuals and environment. Its main strategic research areas are: hospitality and events management, sustainable tourism, tourism modelling and trends, and visitor experience design and evaluation.

The importance of identifying the most prolific institutions consists in understanding which research centers or institutions are most associated with the topic studied. It is interesting to know the specialized postgraduate studies that these institutions offer, since they crucial in developing lines of research associated with destination branding.

The main institutions promoting research on destination branding







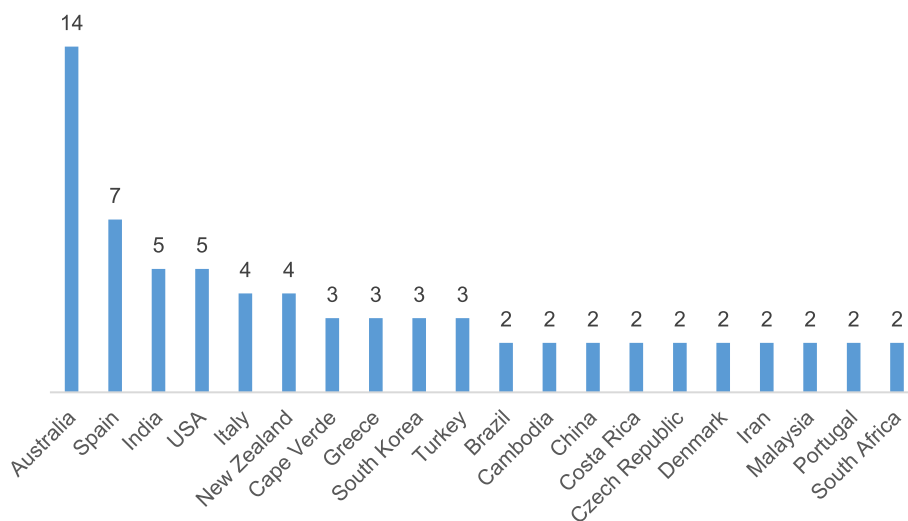


Fig. 6. Number of articles on destination branding focused on a specific country (WoS).

articles, followed by Barcelona (Spain), Las Vegas (US) and Macao (China), with two articles each. Some notable cities are also missing from the research on destination branding, including Paris, New York City, Hong Kong, or Kuala Lumpur, to name just a few of the many city destinations which are usually at the top of international rankings (e.g. [Euromonitor International \(2018\)](#) - Top 100 City Destinations 2018; [MasterCard's Global Destination Cities Index \(2018\)](#)).

#### 4. Conclusions

Although the academic interest in destination branding is relatively recent, given that the first paper included in Scopus database related to this topic was published in 1998, the scientific production on destination branding enjoyed significant growth from 2009 and reached its peak in 2014. The ups and downs in scientific production on destination branding from 2008 could be due to economic fluctuations, which are likely to lead to decreased funding for research projects. Going deeper into these aspects could open interesting investigations and discussions. With reference to the number of articles published, the US, the UK, and Australia are the most influential countries in destination branding research, followed by Spain, China and Italy. This means that in those countries where tourism are highly relevant sectors, the volume of scientific production on destination branding is also high. However, the absence of a more prominent role of France is notable, given the importance of tourism for this country which leads international statistics in the number of annual visitors received (89.4 million, in 2018). In contrast, several countries in which the tourism sector has a lower economic impact, are also among the more highly ranked destinations in terms of destination branding research. Thus, the presence of tourism faculties and research centers in a country can be very relevant in the promotion of research on destination branding. There are several public and private institutions promoting research on destination branding, mainly universities in the US and Australia, followed by some located in Europe. Some of the most relevant universities in the field of destination branding research are: Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Purdue University, University of Surrey, Griffith University (GIFT), and University of Queensland (UQ). One of the most important characteristics of these institutions is that they have specific research center and tourism faculties, including tourism studies at undergraduate and graduate levels. This is evidence shows that promoting research on destination branding is not transitory research focus but, rather, arises as a consequence of intense previous work to facilitate the conditions for it.

It is also important to discern which journals have a prominent place in research on this topic, since they are an important factor of the

knowledge base. Articles dealing with destination branding are usually published in journals specializing in tourism and/or marketing, unsurprising, given that the term 'branding' is linked to this area of knowledge. The *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* leads the ranking in terms of the number of articles published about destination branding. Other relevant journals on this topic are: *Tourism Management*, *Tourism Analysis*, *International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research*, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice*, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, and *Annals of Tourism Research*. Most of the content in the top publications on destination branding is related to conceptual topics, rather than the analysis of specific destinations, therefore constituting an important reference for the conceptual framework focused on destination branding. *Business, Management and Accounting* with 250 articles and *Social Sciences* with 138 articles, are the areas where research on destination branding is most meaningful in terms of the number of publications. However, there are other subject areas that are gaining in importance with relation to destination branding research, such as: Environmental Science (19), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (11), Earth and Planetary Sciences (7), Arts and Humanities (5), Computer Science (5), Agricultural and Biological Sciences (4), Decision Sciences (4), Engineering (4), Energy (3), Health Professions (1), Materials Science (1), Mathematics (1), Nursing (1), and Psychology (1), according to the nomenclature used by Scopus, evidence that destination branding also has an important multidisciplinary character.

By using a fractional counting method to analyze the co-occurrence of authors' keywords, this research has identified seven distinct clusters, where the main topics are: destination branding, destination image, image, model, tourism, loyalty, and satisfaction. The main contribution of this work is to not only to show the state of the art of research on destination branding, but also identify trends and propose some upcoming lines of research which could be relevant to academia. Research and trends are focused along different lines, such as: social media, destination loyalty, word-of mouth, place attachment, experience, customer-based brand equity, and strategy. Therefore, the different stages in destination branding management are included in these trends, which should be developed by academic research.

To begin with, it is important to highlight brand management as a strategic component of management, which should be planned in the medium and long term. At present, brand development models that do not place the customer at the centre of the strategy are not considered; that is, brand equity is from customer's perspective. Therefore, it is essential to understand which models could be considered best practice when managing destination branding, and to what extent models of



brand development developed in other sectors can be extrapolated, both from an economic and psychological point of view.

On the other hand, and based on our findings about the most important and recent lines of research on destination branding, in order for the destinations to achieve high customer-based brand equity, highly valuing the creation of experiences for customers can be a powerful instrument, since they are increasingly looking for greater commitment and involvement with the brand in general, and with tourist destinations in particular. Many tourists not only want to learn about what the tourist destination offers, but also actively participate in the values transmitted by it. Knowing which experiences obtain the best results to achieve these goals is another challenge for researchers.

Destination loyalty also appears as one of the outstanding trends in destination branding research as increasing customers loyalty to tourist destinations is very important. Thus, the manner in which the most suitable strategic positioning for each tourist destination is developed must be understood in order to differentiate one destination from another and thus offer a tourism product based on authenticity. Likewise, the analysis of the consequences of loyalty and notoriety of the destination may be another line for future research.

There is growing interest on the part of academics in the use of digital strategies and tools to promote destinations. Thus, word-of-mouth and social media play a key role in destination branding promotion. Further research on these topics will improve the relationship with current and potential clients. In addition, new opportunities in research on destination branding focused on specific places, such as France, almost all Latin America, and relevant cities such as Paris, New York City, or Hong Kong, have been also found.

Finally, apart from the previous suggestions, our findings also show the importance of collaboration between different areas of knowledge as one of the main trends in research on destination branding. Interdisciplinary research can address specific problems from different points of view and suggest solutions to them. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the interaction between disciplines such as marketing and computing, through the application of new processes and technologies such as social media, big data, data mining of emotions, artificial intelligence, or augmented reality. It is also important to link these studies with relevant elements of the economy, highlighting local development or entrepreneurship related to new market opportunities. Consideration of the environment in research on destination branding is and will remain an important field of study.

Bibliometric analysis is mainly focused on quantitative issues. However, it is not uncommon to find some authors with a limited number of articles but who are very influential in specific areas or topics. Thus, this research also includes measures with qualitative features and standardized metrics, such as the h-index or the number of citations, to also include such authors in the analysis. Nevertheless, this research is not exempt from certain limitations, some of which may be the focus of future research. First, in addition to using WoS and Scopus, other quantitative and/or qualitative tools or databases could be also utilized in future studies. Second, this work focuses on scientific articles, so it could also be of interest to extend to other types of documents (e.g. proceedings, books). Third, given the growing interest in destination branding in multiple areas of knowledge, future research could focus on this topic as applied to specific fields. Finally, there is an active discussion in the literature about the use of different terms related to destinations. This research has focused on the concept of 'destination branding'. However, future research could contemplate other concepts related to destination management (e.g. destination image or destination personality). In addition, other terms that include broader concepts of tourism, such as 'place branding', could be analyzed.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**José Luis Ruiz-Real:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - review & editing. **Juan Uribe-Toril:** Conceptualization,

Methodology, Investigation, Writing - review & editing. **Juan Carlos Gázquez-Abad:** Supervision.

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