

Reviewing The Role of Destination Brand Identity in Sustainable Tourism Destinations

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism has become a central theme in destination development worldwide, driven by increasing awareness of tourism's environmental, social, and cultural impacts. Within this context, Destination Brand Identity (DBI) plays a crucial role in shaping tourist perceptions and enhancing the long-term competitiveness of destinations. This study presents a systematic literature review using a qualitative approach aimed at examining the contribution of DBI to sustainable tourism destinations. A total of 20 peer-reviewed articles published over the past decade were critically analyzed, focusing on five core themes: (1) DBI dimensions that support sustainability; (2) the role of DBI in enhancing destination sustainability; (3) the integration of DBI with sustainable branding practices; (4) community engagement and local representation in DBI formation; and (5) methodological developments in DBI and sustainable tourism studies. The findings are expected to enrich the academic discourse on DBI and provide practical insights for sustainable destination management.

Keywords: Destination Brand Identity, Destination Branding, Sustainable Tourism Destination, Sustainable Destination.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a key focus in destination development worldwide, driven by increasing awareness of the ecological, social, and cultural consequences of tourism activities. This concept emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between the needs of visitors, the tourism sector, the natural environment, and host communities. Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that carefully manages present and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, while considering the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. In recent decades, research on sustainable tourism development has expanded, centering on achieving a balance among three key factors: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects (Eslami et al., 2019; Lee & Jan, 2019).

Similarly, Destination Brand Identity is essential in shaping tourists' perceptions and differentiating one destination from another within an increasingly competitive tourism market. Destination Brand Identity encompasses elements such as destination image, service quality, destination personality, brand awareness, and cultural identity (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Tsaour et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2020). As an intangible resource, Destination Brand Identity directly contributes to tourist trust and loyalty, which in turn influences revisit intentions and sustainable tourism behavior (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024; Hosany et al., 2006).

However, despite the expanding body of literature on Destination Brand Identity and destination sustainability, the conceptual and empirical links between Destination Brand Identity and Sustainable Tourism Destinations have yet to be systematically examined. Multiple studies indicate that a strong Destination Brand Identity positively influences tourist satisfaction, loyalty, recommendation intentions, and perceptions of a destination's sustainability (Chiang & Chen, 2023; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Miličević et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2020), but these findings are scattered across various contexts and have not been comprehensively synthesized. Furthermore, approaches to measuring Destination Brand Identity dimensions and sustainability indicators vary depending on the geographic context, methodology, and theoretical approach used.

In their 2023 study, (Ngarbingan et al., 2023) emphasize the importance of fully leveraging and promoting a tourist destination's potential. Further development of local cultural aspects and digital-based services to maintain relevance with the young market is recommended in the study by (Susanto & Satrya, 2023). The study by (Mohanty et al., 2020) Discusses the Gastronomy Trilogy, which illustrates the close interconnection between food, culture, and tourism as the foundation of modern destination marketing. Food represents culture while serving as a tourist attraction, culture provides meaning to food and tourism activities, and tourism acts as a platform to promote both in an integrated manner.

These studies collectively emphasize that maximizing destination promotion, enhancing local cultural elements, integrating digital-based services, and leveraging the synergy between food, culture, and tourism are essential strategies for attracting and engaging diverse market segments, including younger travelers. In this context, a strong Destination Brand Identity serves as the unifying framework that communicates these unique attributes cultural richness, gastronomic appeal, and innovative services, thereby reinforcing the destination's image, fostering visitor loyalty, and ultimately contributing to the long-term sustainability of the tourism destination.

Furthermore, global trends such as digitalization, green tourism, and demands for social responsibility are driving significant changes in Destination Brand Identity. Therefore, a deeper understanding is needed of how destination brand identity, within the framework of values, culture, symbols, and narratives, can promote the achievement of sustainable

destinations. Furthermore, with tourists' increasing reliance on digital and social media in shaping their perceptions and travel decisions, the link between destination image dimensions and sustainable destination performance is becoming increasingly relevant for systematic study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past decade, research on Destination Brand Identity (DBI) within the context of sustainable tourism has grown significantly, emphasizing the link between place branding and long-term sustainability strategies. DBI is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing visual (logos, symbols, slogans), cognitive (service quality, destination image), and affective (personality, emotional connection) elements that influence tourist perceptions and behavior (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021; Garanti et al., 2024; Tsaor et al., 2016).

Studies by (Chiwariidzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024), for example, demonstrate how DBI positively influences tourist loyalty and revisit intentions through strengthening destination image and credibility. Other scholars emphasize the integration of sustainability themes into destination brand narratives, asserting that environmental and cultural symbols enhance brand authenticity (Bruin et al., 2024; Moreira et al., 2023). Community involvement is also recognized as a critical component, contributing to inclusive branding and enhanced stakeholder ownership (Amani, 2023; Chigora et al., 2020).

The methodologies employed in these studies range from visual content analysis and semiotics (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021) to advanced quantitative techniques for analyzing the relationships between DBI dimensions and sustainable destination indicators (Çela et al., 2022; Garanti et al., 2024). This methodological diversity highlights the interdisciplinary character of DBI research and its significance for tourism marketing, sustainability, and destination management.

RESEARCH METHOD

To carry out a systematic literature review, researchers typically follow a structured protocol that includes clearly defining the research problem, identifying key research gaps, and specifying the tools and methods for data collection and extraction. This literature review was written based on the guidelines (Randolph, 2009) for writing qualitative literature reviews using the phenomenological method. The literature review analysis begins by defining the phenomenon to be studied, which in this study is limited to phenomena related to Destination Brand Identity and Sustainable Destinations.

After defining the phenomenon under study, a data search was carried out using the Scopus database. Scopus was chosen as the data source for this literature review because of its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature. It has also been widely used by other researchers for conducting systematic analyses. The search was conducted exclusively in English, using the following keywords: "Destination Brand Identity", "Destination Brand", "Sustainable Tourism Destination", and "Sustainable Tourism", limited to publications from 2015 to 2024.

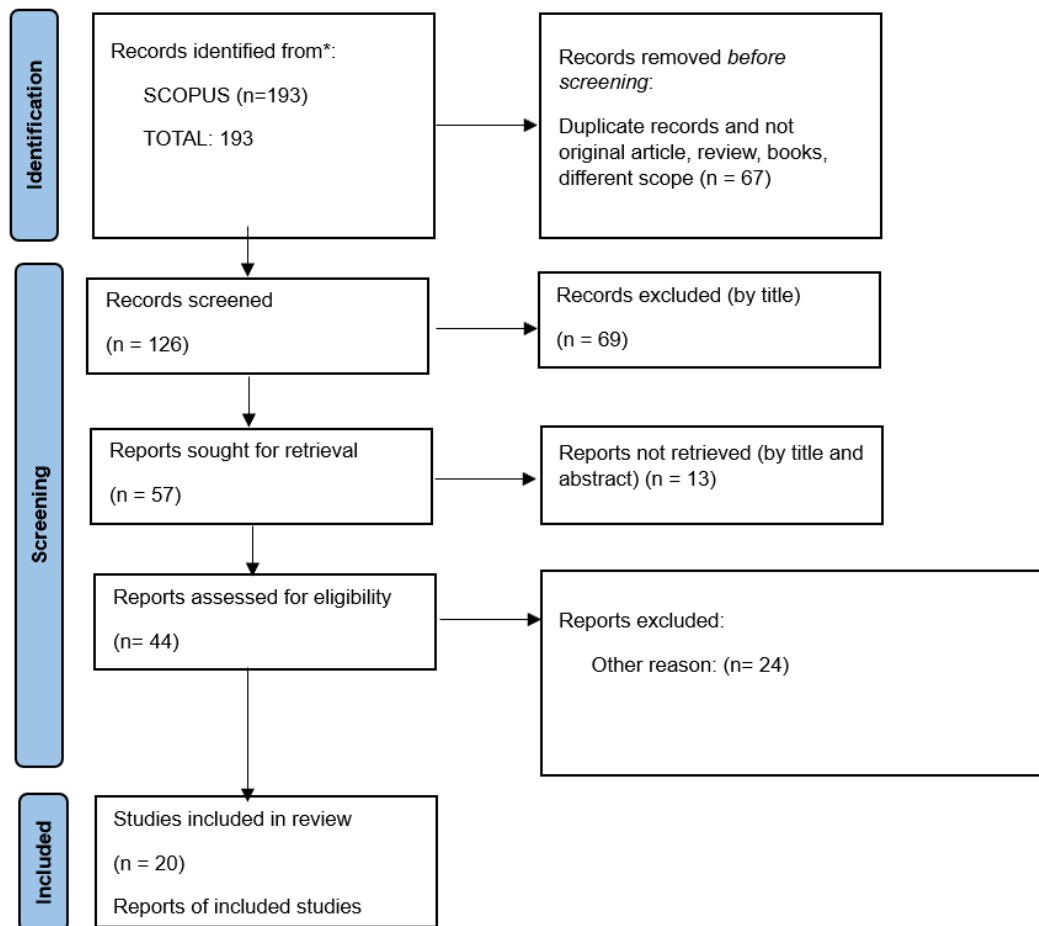
A total of 193 articles were obtained, which were then sorted using the following criteria:

- 1) Scientific journal articles (peer-reviewed);
- 2) Empirical and conceptual studies focusing on Destination Brand Identity or Sustainable Destinations;
- 3) Articles written in English;

At the conclusion of this phase, 126 primary studies were screened, and following the cleaning process, only 20 were retained for the data extraction stage. Articles excluded were those

that : (1) Articles with an irrelevant study focus, for example, only discussing brand awareness without an identity context, or research discussing tourism alone without a context for brand identity or destination sustainability; (2) Excluded document types (conference proceedings, editorials, book reviews, book chapters, policy reports, working papers); and (3) Articles with inadequate abstracts or no full-text abstracts.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



The next step was to search for the terms within article titles, abstracts, and keywords. The selected articles were then thoroughly reviewed, and the relevant studies were categorized based on the criteria defined in this research. This study was narrowed down to the context of Destination Brand Identity and Sustainable Destinations, with five themes identified after reading the articles. These themes include :

- 1) Dimensions of Destination Brand Identity that Support Sustainability: Focusing on how each dimension of DBI contributes to sustainability values;
- 2) The Role of DBI in Enhancing Destination Sustainability: How destination brand identity creates destination sustainability;
- 3) Integration of Destination Brand Identity with Sustainable Branding Practices: How Destination Brand Identity is used to communicate sustainability commitments to tourists;
- 4) Community Engagement and Local Representation in Destination Brand Identity: The role of local identity, culture, and community values in shaping Destination Brand Identity; and
- 5) Methodological Developments in the Study of Destination Brand Identity and Sustainable Tourism Destinations.

RESULTS

In this section, we present the results of the reviewed articles, highlighting the research area of each study (Table 1) and the research methodologies employed (Table 2).

Table 1. Distribution of 20 Papers by Research Area

Research Area	Number of Studies	Percentage
Destination/City Branding	10	50.00
Sustainability & Branding	7	35.00
Community Engagement & Branding	2	10.00
Branding & Movies	1	5.00

Source: Author

Table 2. Distribution of 20 Papers by Methodology

Methodology	Number of Studies	Percentage
Qualitative Data Analysis	9	45.00
Mixed Method	4	20.00
Quantitative Data Analysis	4	20.00
Integrative Review	1	5.00
Exploratory Review	1	5.00
Systematic Review	1	5.00

Source: Author

To keep the review relevant and current, we present a summary of the publication years covered in this study. As shown in Table 3, the selected studies span from 2015 to 2024, enabling a focus on the most up-to-date research.

Table 3. Distribution of 20 Papers by Themes

Authors	Dates	Themes
Pasquinelli et al.	2021	Reconfigure the brand proposition to a sustainable tourism model
Scott	2020	Environmental, geopolitical, and branding aspects of New Zealand's space tourism development
Pencarelli et al.	2016	Social media's role in promoting sustainable tourism and responsible travel
Adamus-Matuszynska	2021	Destination social responsibility's impact on tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable tourism
Alam et al.	2022	Destination brand identity, perceived quality, and tourist behavioral intentions in sustainable tourism
Moreira et al.	2023	Social media engagement's impact on destination image, visit intention, and sustainable tourism promotion
Winit et al.	2023	Green products and sustainable practices' impact on consumer behavior, satisfaction, and environmental responsibility in tourism
Garanti et al.	2024	Corporate social responsibility's influence on destination competitiveness and sustainable development
Koumara-Tsitsou & Karachalis	2021	Destination image, tourist satisfaction, and loyalty in the framework of sustainable tourism.

Chigora et al.	2020	Social media influencers' role in destination image, travel intentions, and sustainable tourism promotion
Ushakov et al.	2018	Destination branding as a strategic tool for promoting sustainable tourism development.
Vahabian et al.	2021	Urban branding components with a focus on tourism dimensions
Bruin et al.	2024	Visual destination branding's role in balancing sustainability tensions and redefining identity
Li & Cheng	2022	Tea packaging redesign as a link between destination branding and private tea brands for sustainable tourism development
Huerta-Viso et al.	2024	Sustainable film-induced tourism
Schmudde	2019	Sustainable development of small European cities through cross-sector tourism collaboration
Amani	2023	Political leadership's influence on residents' support as destination brand ambassadors through public trust in inclusive branding
Cela et al.	2022	Unified sustainable tourism brand identity for the Western Balkans via regional collaboration using the TBL framework to boost Mediterranean competitiveness
Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo	2024	Destination brand equity, tourist behavior, and sustainable tourism development
Jupriono et al.	2024	Communication-Driven Framework (CORE) for sustainable mangrove tourism branding

Source: Author

By concentrating on studies published in the past decade, we were able to capture the most current developments, trends, and perspectives in the field, which is crucial for producing well-substantiated conclusions and recommendations. As illustrated in Figure 1, the annual number of publications on destination brand identity within the context of sustainable tourism destinations showed a steady upward trend from 2021 to 2024, highlighting the growing academic interest in this emerging area of research.

Figure 1. Distributions Papers by Years

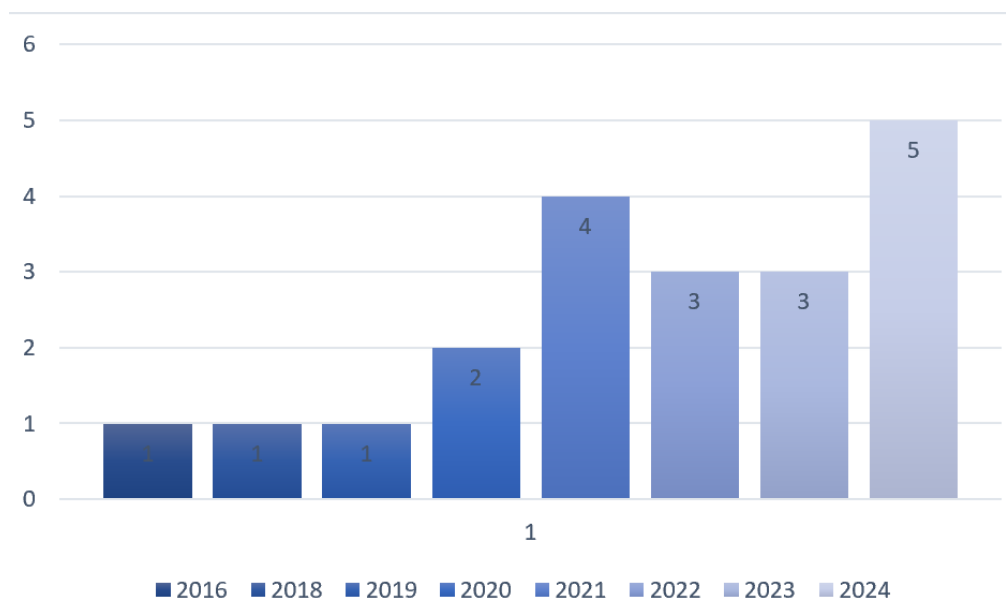


Table 4 summarizes the 20 papers on destination brand identity in the context of sustainable tourism destinations, published across 14 indexed journals. Almost all of the selected studies were drawn from high-impact journals to meet our inclusion criteria.

Table 3. Distribution of 20 Papers by Journal

Journals	Number of Studies	Percentage
Sustainability	6	30.00
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2	10.00
Anatolia	1	5.00
Transformations in Business and Economics	1	5.00
Cuadernos De Gestion	1	5.00
Place Branding and Public Diplomacy	1	5.00
African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure	1	5.00
Espacios	1	5.00
Shock and Vibration	1	5.00
Wit Transactions on Ecology and the Environment	1	5.00
Cogent Social Sciences	1	5.00
Enlightening Tourism	1	5.00
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	1	5.00
Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology	1	5.00

Source: Author

Among the 20 papers reviewed, six were published in Sustainability (a Q2 Scopus-indexed journal) and two appeared in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism (a Q1 Scopus-indexed journal). The rest of the studies were published in well-regarded journals specializing in tourism and hospitality. Overall, the findings reveal that most of the studies were featured in journals emphasizing sustainability and environmental issues, such as Sustainability and the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, underscoring the strong link between destination brand identity and sustainable tourism destination themes.

DISCUSSION

Destination Brand Identity Dimensions that Support Sustainability

A synthesis of several scientific articles indicates that Destination Brand Identity serves not only as a visual communication tool and marketing strategy but also as a means of conveying the destination's sustainable values to tourists and other stakeholders. According to Adamus-matuszyńska et al., (2021) Destination brand identity is shaped through a blend of visual and verbal elements, such as names, symbols, logos, and slogans, crafted to express character, local values, and the promise of a distinctive tourism experience. These elements also enhance emotional bonds with visitors, jointly fostering a positive destination image and shaping consumer decisions.

Research by Adamus-matuszyńska et al. (2021) highlights three main categories within the dimensions of tourism sustainability: economic, ecological, and cultural sustainability. Within the economic dimension, destination identity reflects support for local businesses, promotion of ethical practices, product diversification, and training or certification programs. The

ecological dimension is reflected in visual symbols depicting ecosystems, biological resources, and environmentally friendly practices. Meanwhile, the cultural dimension is evident in the use of symbolic representations that reflect the historical heritage, traditions, and values of local communities.

Furthermore, (Garanti et al., 2024) expands on this concept by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to Destination Brand Identity, namely through collective symbolism encompassing geographic settings, modern infrastructure, community activities, and daily cultural customs. This demonstrates that a destination's identity is formed not only through visual design but also through the dynamic interaction between local communities and the physical and symbolic spaces they inhabit.

(Bruin et al., 2024) argue that the values and attributes showcased in a destination's visual identity should embody social responsibility and balance the interests of tourists, local communities, and ecosystem sustainability. Such representation not only enhances the destination's brand image but also enriches tourists' perceptions of its authenticity and ethical commitment.

Additionally, (Çela et al., 2022) propose that understanding Destination Brand Identity can be strengthened through brand identity models such as the Brand Identity Prism and the Vision and Culture Model. Vision and Culture Model (covers brand position, vision, culture, relationships, brand personality, brand presentation) and Brand Identity Prism by Kapferer (covers physicality, personality, culture, relationships, customer reflection, self-image).

The Role of Destination Brand Identity (DBI) in Enhancing Destination Sustainability

Destination Brand Identity (DBI) serves a strategic function in advancing sustainable tourism development through several key channels, one of which is establishing strong differentiation and a distinct appeal for the destination. A consistently designed destination brand identity can strengthen market recognition of the destination, differentiate it from competitors, and clarify the meaning and core values it conveys to tourists (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021). Destination Brand Identity helps destinations differentiate themselves from competitors through a positive image (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021; Chigora et al., 2020). This stimulates recognition, strengthens differentiation, and makes key ideas and meanings easily accessible (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021). Destinations promoted as sustainable and socially responsible can attract potential tourists (Garanti et al., 2024).

A well-designed and consistently maintained destination brand identity not only enhances the destination's image but also plays a vital role in building tourist trust and encouraging long-term loyalty. (Garanti et al., 2024) discovered that a strong destination brand identity directly affects destination image, trust, value, and tourist loyalty. They further suggest that sustainable branding initiatives can motivate tourists to return and share positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Environmentally conscious travelers are attracted to destinations with strong positive brand associations with sustainability attributes (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024; Garanti et al., 2024).

Destinations with a strong brand identity linked to positive values such as sustainability and social ethics have significant potential to shape tourist behavior. Research by (Garanti et al., 2024) shows that strong brand associations with sustainability attributes can lead tourists to engage in more responsible behavior, including choosing environmentally friendly tourism activities and showing a preference for products and services managed by local businesses. Meanwhile, (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024) highlight the critical role of brand awareness in influencing tourists' decision-making processes. The higher the level of familiarity with a destination that prioritizes sustainable practices, the more likely tourists are to choose that destination over alternatives that lack a clear sustainability image.

One of the strategic contributions of Destination Brand Identity to sustainable tourism destinations lies in its capacity to build and enhance the destination's reputation and image. (Moreira et al., 2023) stated that the utilization of green resources and the integration of sustainability principles into destination management significantly improve the quality of the urban environment and strengthen positive perceptions of the destination. This, in turn, generates added value for both tourists and local communities. Authentic integration of sustainability into branding can enhance a destination's image and competitive position (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024). A good brand reputation, built through consistent positive experiences and responsible environmental practices, significantly promotes sustainable tourism (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024).

In the context of developing a Destination Brand Identity that supports sustainability, the involvement of local stakeholders, especially host communities, plays a crucial role. A consistent destination visual identity, such as a local logo and symbols, not only strengthens brand recognition in the target market but also serves as a means of connecting the destination with the local community (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021). This recognition fosters a sense of ownership, pride, and active participation in shaping the destination's narrative.

Furthermore, (Amani, 2023) emphasizes that local leadership also plays a strategic role in shaping resident behavior. When local leaders encourage residents to become brand ambassadors, they foster active participation in authentic and impactful brand communications. This engagement not only enhances brand credibility but also fosters social cohesion that strengthens the destination's long-term sustainability.

One of the strategic contributions of Destination Brand Identity (DBI) to destination sustainability is its ability to create economic opportunities that have a broad impact on local communities. Consistently developed DBI can increase the visibility and attractiveness of a destination, thereby driving increased tourist visits and regional income, particularly in developing regions (Alam et al., 2022). Furthermore, brand differentiation through value-oriented attributes such as exclusivity, environmental friendliness, and health has been shown to attract middle to upper-class tourists who are highly aware of sustainability issues (Ushakov et al., 2018). Tourism plays a multifaceted role in linking climate change, development, and nation-building, offering the potential to enhance destinations' capacity to coexist harmoniously with both nature and society (Bruin et al., 2024).

Integrating Destination Brand Identity with Sustainable Branding Practices

Strengthening destination brand identity through an approach that integrates sustainability principles is a crucial foundation for building a destination image that is not only visually appealing but also authentic and socially and environmentally responsible. Research by (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024) and (Garanti et al., 2024) emphasizes the need for a holistic approach, where sustainability elements are positioned not as an add-on, but as the core of the destination branding strategy. This integration involves embedding sustainability values into the brand identity, encompassing authentic storytelling, preservation of local culture and the environment, and active community participation in brand development and implementation. This strategy aims to ensure that messages communicated through brand elements such as slogans, symbols, and digital campaigns truly reflect the destination's actual practices and commitment to sustainability (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024).

Recent literature classifies sustainable destination branding approaches into three main streams: green branding, sustainable branding, and slow city (cittaslow) branding (Moreira et al., 2023). Each of these streams has a distinct focus and scope in addressing the need for sustainability in destination brand management. Green branding emphasizes the representation of the natural environment and ecological elements in brand identity strategies;

sustainable branding takes a more holistic approach than green branding, incorporating economic and social dimensions into destination brand identity; and cittaslow branding, or slow city branding, is rooted in the slow living movement and focuses on improving local quality of life, preserving traditions, and resisting global homogenization.

Public policy is a crucial instrument in shaping and strengthening a city or destination's position as a green and sustainable entity. According to (Moreira et al., 2023) this policy not only governs and manages environmental and infrastructure aspects but also serves a symbolic and strategic function in shaping the destination brand's perception and identity among both domestic and international stakeholders.

One key to successfully building a Destination Brand Identity that supports sustainability is the destination's ability to convey an authentic message about its commitment to the environment and sustainable values. As noted by (Moreira et al., 2023), a strong and honest association with environmental issues is an essential differentiating element in creating a unique and credible destination image, while also distinguishing it from competitors. Additionally, communication and information technology, along with UNESCO Natural and Cultural Heritage designations, are key elements in developing a sustainable brand (Garanti et al., 2024).

Film-induced tourism has emerged as a destination branding strategy that attracts visitors through visual exposure while also supporting the destination's sustainability. As explained by (Huerta-Viso et al., 2024), this approach offers multidimensional benefits, particularly in diversifying tourism offerings and addressing the seasonal challenges often faced by many destinations.

Global tourism trends reveal a notable shift from mass tourism toward more personalized, authentic, and sustainable travel experiences. This transition necessitates that tourist destinations proactively incorporate sustainability values comprehensively into both their branding and operational strategies (Garanti et al., 2024). (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024) argue that sustainability-oriented destination branding can influence tourist preferences, encourage more ethical travel choices, and create long-term impacts on the social, economic, and ecological balance of the destination.

To develop a sustainable destination branding strategy, the CORE (Communication-Oriented Revitalization Enhancement) approach offers an integrated conceptual framework between communication theory and destination revitalization practices. This aims not only to increase tourist visits but also to strengthen local community engagement and promote environmental sustainability (Jupriono et al., 2024).

Community Engagement and Local Representation in Destination Brand Identity

A fundamental element in developing a sustainable Destination Brand Identity (DBI) is active community engagement and the authentic representation of local identity. In recent years, destination branding approaches have undergone a significant shift from a top-down and financial-centric model to a more participatory and inclusive approach. (Koumara-Tsitsou & Karachalis, 2021) emphasize that sustainable destination branding practices must position local communities as central actors, not simply objects of marketing narratives. Furthermore, the role of residents as brand ambassadors is a crucial dimension of community engagement in branding strategies. (Amani, 2023) states that residents, through their behavior and narratives, actively shape tourists' perceptions of a destination.

The community-based sustainable destination brand equity model developed by (Chigora et al., 2020) emphasizes the crucial role of household activities such as the provision of local food and beverages, residential aesthetics, and distinctive clothing styles as elements that

shape a destination's brand image. Furthermore, direct services such as tour guides and transportation provided by residents are also seen as key contributors to strengthening community engagement and authentically enriching tourist experiences.

Within destination branding, residents serve a strategic role as brand ambassadors. According to (Amani, 2023), they are internal stakeholders with an implicit responsibility to authentically represent the destination's core values and identity. Feedback and recommendations provided by residents to tourists are often perceived as credible and genuine, thus having a powerful impact on strengthening brand perception. This form of engagement is not only cost-effective and efficient, but also considered a low-bias and highly effective brand communication channel for reaching potential tourists through interpersonal communication.

Inclusive leadership in the context of sustainable tourism is seen as a key element in fostering active and meaningful local community involvement in the destination development process. Referring to the Chengdu Declaration on Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (Amani, 2023) highlights that local community engagement should be promoted through an inclusive, participatory, and collaborative approach. In this regard, political leadership plays a strategic role in creating an ecosystem that supports citizen participation as co-creators of value in the destination branding process. Visionary and participatory leaders are expected to serve as role models by demonstrating sustainable values through their actions and fostering community ownership and pride in the destination's identity.

Methodological Developments in Destination Brand Identity and Sustainable Tourism Destination Studies.

Research on destination brand identity within the context of sustainable tourism reveals a rising trend toward multidisciplinary approaches and the adoption of increasingly diverse research methods. One widely used method is content analysis, particularly to examine visual and verbal promotional elements such as logos, slogans, and identity symbols. This type of research utilizes frequency analysis and thematic coding to evaluate how sustainability aspects are communicated through a destination's visual identity (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021; Pasquinelli et al., 2021). In this context, symbols of nature and cultural heritage are a dominant focus.

Semiotics and visual analysis methodologies are also used to explore the symbolic and connotative dimensions of brand identity elements. This approach helps explain how the meaning of sustainability is visually constructed through branding design (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021). With the increasing focus on literature synthesis, the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach has become a widely adopted method. SLR allows for mapping dominant themes, analyzing trends, and identifying research gaps in the topics of destination branding and sustainability (Garanti et al., 2024; Moreira et al., 2023).

In addition to qualitative methods, there is a growing use of advanced quantitative techniques to empirically test hypothesized relationships (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024). Meanwhile, in-depth interviews with key informants have become an important technique for gathering contextual insights from key actors, as demonstrated in a study by (Çela et al., 2022).

Contextual case studies, both single and comparative, are also widely used in the literature. For example, studies in Poland (Adamus-matuszyńska et al., 2021), Bangkok (Ushakov et al. 2018), and Greenland (Bruin et al., 2024) provide in-depth insights into the implementation of sustainability-based destination brand identity strategies in different socio-cultural environments.

Emerging themes in recent studies include topics such as brand loyalty, brand equity, destination image, and tourist behavioral intentions in a sustainable context. (Winit et al., 2023). After 2019, there was a significant surge in publications linking destination branding to sustainability values. Future research directions recommended by (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024; Garanti et al., 2024) include: (1) Longitudinal studies to track the development of destination brand identity and its effects on tourist behavior; (2) Exploring the role of digital technology and social media in strengthening sustainable destination identity; and (3) A mixed approach that combines the perspectives of tourists and residents to create a more authentic and inclusive branding narrative (Chiwaridzo & Chiwaridzo, 2024; Garanti et al., 2024). Meanwhile, what is recommended by Jupriono et al. (2024) is the development of branding performance indicators based on digital technology and data to measure the success of sustainability strategies in destination brand management.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that Destination Brand Identity plays a central role in promoting the sustainability of tourism destinations, serving as a differentiation tool, a means of communicating values, and a sustainable development strategy. Various dimensions of Destination Brand Identity, such as image, awareness, personality, quality, and culture, significantly contribute to shaping tourist perceptions of a destination and encouraging more responsible tourism behavior.

Consistently, a synthesis of 20 scientific articles demonstrates that a destination brand identity designed with sustainability in mind can enhance destination appeal, build trust, and strengthen tourist loyalty. Destination Brand Identity has also been shown to strengthen a destination's reputation and create economic opportunities for local communities, particularly when designed with the community as an active actor during the branding process.

The integration of Destination Brand Identity and sustainable branding practices requires a holistic and authentic approach, encompassing not only visual communication but also the substance of the destination's values. Elements such as cultural symbols, sustainability narratives, inclusive leadership, and the role of residents as brand ambassadors are key to building a sustainable and highly competitive destination brand.

Methodologically, this study reveals that research on Destination Brand Identity within the context of sustainable tourism has advanced into a multidisciplinary field, employing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Nevertheless, several research gaps persist, including the scarcity of longitudinal studies, the limited investigation of digital technology's role in shaping Destination Brand Identity, and the insufficient integration of both tourist and local community perspectives.

Therefore, this research not only reinforces Destination Brand Identity as a strategic asset for sustainable tourism development but also creates valuable opportunities to develop more inclusive and long-term approaches, methods, and practices for managing destination identity.

LIMITATION

This study presents several limitations. First, the review is restricted to Scopus-indexed articles published between 2012 and 2024, potentially excluding relevant insights from non-indexed sources or gray literature. Second, although a systematic review approach was followed, the thematic synthesis remains qualitative and may be subject to interpretation bias. Third, the geographic focus of the reviewed articles leans heavily toward Asia and Europe, limiting the generalizability of findings across all global destinations. Lastly, a lack of

longitudinal studies in the existing literature constrains our understanding of how DBI evolves and its dynamic contribution to sustainability.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The author declares that no potential conflicts of interest exist concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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