

*Review Paper*

## **Agenda Setting in Destination Branding: A Systematic Review**

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**Abstract:** Tourism is an ever-changing economic activity, and destination images can be established and improved through branding. A positive brand image has always been something that all destinations strive for, as it is a key element in attracting tourists and developing tourism. Destination management organisations (DMOs) can achieve the goal of communicating the destination brand by setting the policy agenda and promoting the media agenda. In this study, we conducted a systematic review of 26 publications that were finally selected in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, focusing on the volume and types of publications, annual publication level, distribution of regions, methodology characteristics and distribution of sources. We summarized 5 main research themes, which are (1) mega-events and destination brand image (2) digital transformation in destination branding (3) citizen engagement in destination branding (4) politicization of destination branding (5) theoretical frameworks for destination branding. The findings indicate that research on agenda setting in destination branding has generally shown an upward trend, but at a slow pace. Asia, Europe, and North America have the most publications, which is closely linked to the relatively advanced economies and tourism in these regions. Some research patterns and trends are also outlined at the end.

**Keywords:** Destination branding; city branding destination image; agenda-setting; systematic literature review

### **Introduction**

Today, competition occurs not only between companies and products but also between destinations as tourism products (Kaleji et al., 2017). At this point, the importance of destination branding comes to the fore. Every destination can be considered a brand because it has distinctive features and differences that set it apart from other places (Jeon & Yang, 2021). Branding efforts vary from one destination to another. In today's globalised tourism market, destinations worldwide are actively shaping and promoting their unique brand image to attract more tourists, new residents, investors and other stakeholders. Destination branding serves as the foundation of a marketing strategy and is a vital tool for the tourism industry. It defines how a destination is perceived by potential visitors and other stakeholders, emphasizing its distinct qualities and appeal (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Destination branding is more than a slogan or logo, it takes a comprehensive approach that includes building infrastructure, promoting culture, involving stakeholders, and using effective communication strategies.

The key to successful destination branding is the influence of the media. The media is critical in shaping public perception and influencing visitor behaviour through its coverage of destinations (Femenia-Serra et al., 2019). The media effect works on multiple levels. First, the media influences public perception by setting the agenda to highlight specific destination attributes or events (Schweinsberg et al., 2017). By emphasizing certain aspects, such as safety, historical culture, or natural beauty, the media can shape visitors' expectations

and influence their decisions. Second, how the media presents information about a destination can greatly influence its image (Fong et al., 2017). Positive narratives, such as highlighting cultural richness, hospitality, or sustainability, can enhance a destination's attractiveness. In contrast, negative frames and narratives, such as those focusing on crime, political instability or environmental issues, can deter potential tourists (Humphreys, 2010; Kapuscinski, 2014; Jahari et al., 2023).

It follows that an important element closely related to destination branding is the concept of agenda-setting. The Agenda-setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw, argues that the media both shape and filter the reality in which we live (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As a core concept in media and communication studies, it highlights how the media can shape public perception and discussions by choosing and emphasizing certain issues (Samani et al., 2015). Undoubtedly, in the era of new media, the Internet and social networks have greatly changed how communication occurs. In this context, the importance of the media agenda is still undeniable.

Bringing these two perspectives together, destination branding can be understood not only as a marketing strategy but also as a communicative process in which certain attributes of a place are repeatedly highlighted and reinforced through media agendas. Agenda-setting theory thus provides a theoretical framework for explaining how branding messages move from strategic communication efforts into the public sphere, shaping what potential tourists consider salient when evaluating destinations. In other words, while destination branding identifies what a place wants to be known for, agenda-setting explains how these messages gain visibility, attention, and resonance among audiences. This conceptual linkage allows for a more integrated understanding of how media-driven narratives influence destination image formation and, ultimately, tourist decision-making.

In recent years, although researchers have examined specific aspects of destination branding or agenda-setting (McCombs & Guo, 2014; Anjomrouz et al., 2021; Pasquinelli et al., 2022; Cheng, 2024), overall research on their connections is limited and lacks a systematic overview. This research gap not only limits academics' in-depth understanding of destination branding development but also affects the design and delivery of related tourism policies and marketing strategies.

This systematic review aims to fill this research gap by comprehensively reviewing the development history, current status and evolution trend of destination brands through in-depth analysis and summary of the existing academic literature. The insights from this study are invaluable to policymakers, travel marketers, and researchers on destination brands. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide new perspectives and insights into understanding destination branding by reviewing the literature on how destinations use agenda-setting to build or improve their brand image. Specifically, the following research questions will be answered:

1. RQ1. What is the current state of agenda-setting in destination branding research, and what conceptual or methodological gaps can be identified?
2. RQ2. Which disciplinary areas and publication outlets have most strongly contributed to agenda-setting in destination branding research, and where do inconsistencies remain?
3. RQ3. What are the main research themes that have emerged in studies on agenda-setting in destination branding, and how do these themes highlight the relationships between the two concepts?
4. RQ4. What research trends can be observed in the integration of agenda-setting into destination branding, particularly in new media context?

## Materials and Method

Unlike traditional literature reviews, which typically rely on the authors' expertise, systematic literature review (SLR) approaches the review process as a scientific method. By applying principles of empirical research, SLR aims to enhance transparency and replicability, and minimize potential biases in the review process (Azarian et al., 2023). SLR is a method for synthesizing scientific evidence to address a specific research question in a clear and reproducible manner. It aims to include all relevant published evidence on the topic and evaluate the quality of each piece of them (Lame, 2019). To comprehensively determine which studies

will be included in the review by using a variety of acceptance and rejection criteria, and to synthesize the information contained in these studies (Siddaway et al., 2019).

After identifying the topic of this systematic review, we identified the databases in which the studies were scanned. This literature review was conducted in journals scanned in the Web of Science and Scopus databases. The 2 databases are generally accepted internationally and are the largest abstract and citation databases with comprehensive global coverage (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). This ensures the best quality of safety when selecting, reviewing and evaluating academic literature. Moreover, this systematic review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2010).

*Development of the Systematic Literature Review*

In this section, the screening methods employed are described in detail. Firstly, search for keywords such as branding image, city image, city branding, destination branding, and agenda-setting in the title, abstract, and keyword. The search was conducted in April 2025. The overall number of articles set in the agenda setting in the destination branding that can be searched is small. In order to maximize the sample size to cover valid articles, no date range is set when searching. Table 1 shows the search queries used and the results in the databases.

Table 1. Searching queries on databases and the results

Database	Searching Query	Number of Result
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“brand* image” OR “city image” OR “city brand*” OR “destination image” OR “destination brand*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“agenda-setting” OR “media agenda” OR “framing” OR “media narrative”)	76
Web of Science	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“brand* image” OR “city image” OR “city brand*” OR “destination image” OR “destination brand*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“agenda-setting” OR “media agenda” OR “framing” OR “media narrative”)	66

There were 66 and 76 records found in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, respectively. The search results were exported as RIS files and then imported into the Zotero software. We manually removed 41 duplicate records before performing the screening. In addition, 1 record was retracted by the publisher so we removed it as well. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for these records are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the systematic review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
The title appears only once	Duplicate records in the database.
Journal papers	Books, book chapters, thesis, conference papers
Papers written in English	Papers NOT written in English
Full papers are available	Full papers NOT available
Studies associated with the topic of destination branding, city branding, and agenda-setting.	Studies irrelevance to the topic of destination branding, city branding and agenda-setting

Secondly, according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, we removed 29 records that were not journal papers (e.g. books, book chapters, thesis, conference papers, etc.). One of the other criteria used in deciding which records to include was language, and the study was conducted on studies written in English, so 16 records that were not written in English were removed. At the same time, 11 records for which the full text could not be obtained were removed. Finally, by reading the articles in full text, we removed 18 records that were all focused only on destination branding or destination image rather than the topic of agenda setting

in destination branding. A total of 26 records were ultimately included in this systematic review. Figure 1 shows the selection process and the final number of studies.

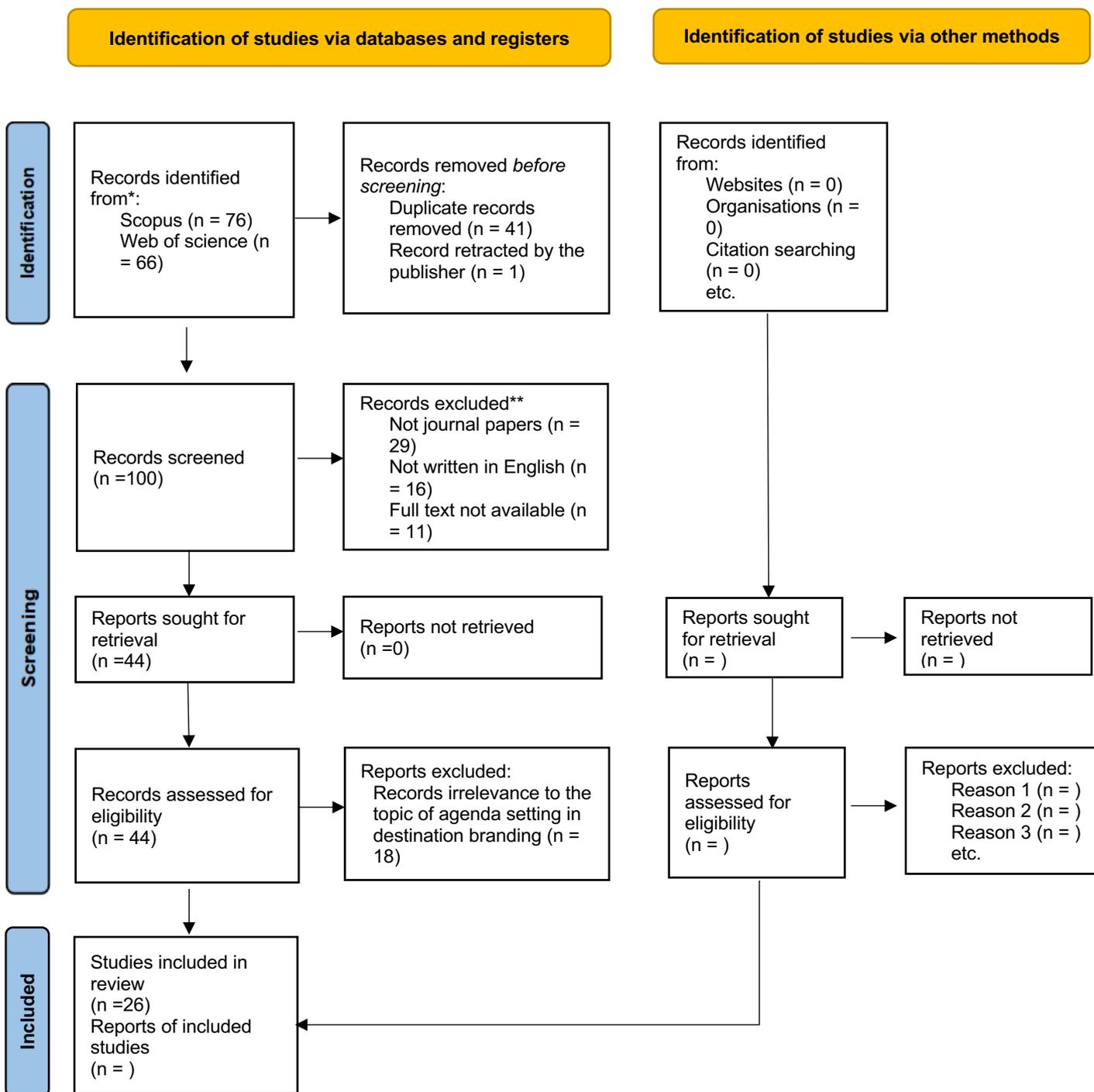


Figure 1. Literature selection process guided by the PRISMA

### The Findings

This part presents a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the included articles, including the volume and types, the distribution of sources, annual publication level, distribution of regions, and we also analysed the methodology characteristics of the selected articles and the main research themes, and reported the research patterns and trends in this field.

*Volume and types*

There were 26 publications selected for this review, all of which were English-written journal articles. The articles cover empirical papers (e.g., surveys/questionnaires, interviews, content analysis, etc.), conceptual papers, and other types of papers (Figure 2). Among them, empirical papers accounted for the highest proportion reaching 80.8% (21), conceptual articles accounted for 11.5% (3) and other types of papers accounted for 7.7% (2). While this distribution reflects the applied orientation of the field, it also reveals that theoretical or conceptual development remains relatively underexplored. The dominance of empirical studies suggests that most research focuses on describing cases or testing limited phenomena, but there is insufficient effort to advance theoretical frameworks or engage in interdisciplinary integration between tourism, communication, and media studies.

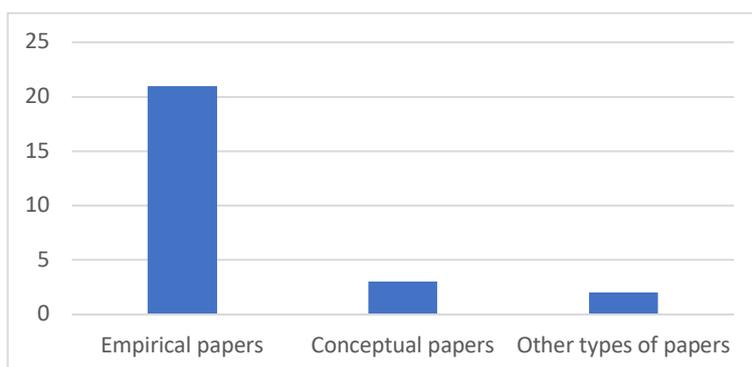


Figure 2. Types of the selected articles

*Annual publication level*

The articles included were published over a large time span, from 2007 to 2024, covering nearly two decades of research (Figure 3). This time span not only reflects the longevity of research in the field but also provides a rich historical context and evolution trace. Although the research spans a considerable period, the overall growth rate has been limited, exhibiting a fragmented rather than sustained rapid development trend. This lack of continuity constrains the ability to evaluate how agenda-setting and destination branding research has matured as a coherent field.

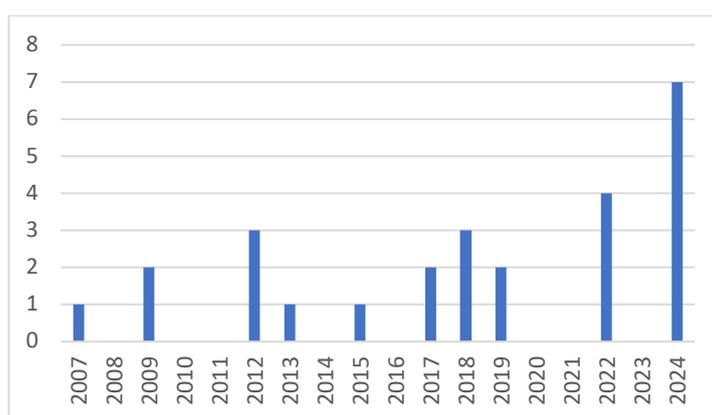


Figure 3. The number of articles published from 2007 to 2024

*Distribution of regions*

Destination branding is a tourism-related concept that focuses on promoting geographic locations. Figure 4 shows the distribution of article regions across the major continents. It can be seen that Asia has the highest number of publications with 17 articles. Among the Asian countries, China has the most publications. This is followed by Europe (5) and North America (2). There are also South America (1) and Australia (1), which have relatively few publications. While this distribution suggests that research activity in Asia has been

particularly visible in this field, it should be interpreted with caution, as it may also reflect database coverage, language bias, or sampling limitations rather than a definitive indication of regional research capacity or emphasis.

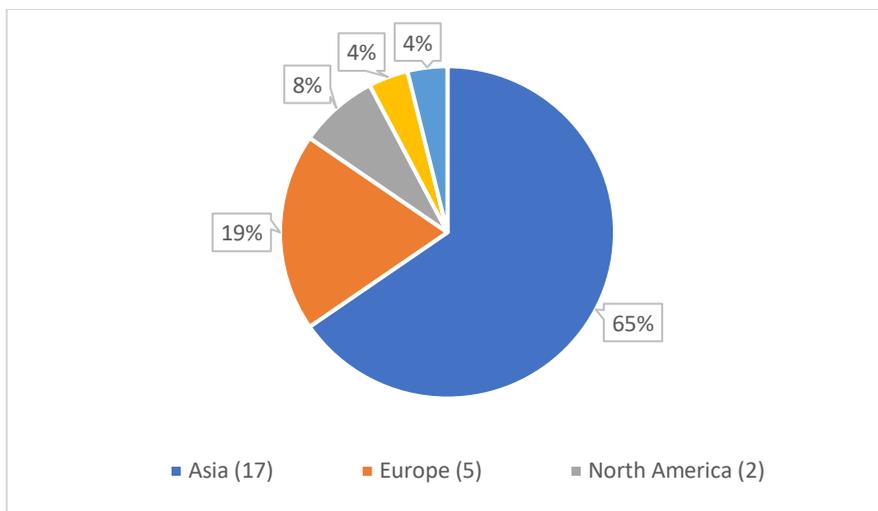


Figure 4. Distribution of regions in selected articles

*Methodology characteristics*

The selected articles employ a variety of methods to achieve the research objectives. Qualitative methods (13) such as semi-structured interviews and content analysis are considered to be the most popular research methods in these articles. This was followed by quantitative methods (6) and mixed methods (2). Some articles comment and review on theories or concepts (5) (Figure 5). The diversity of research methods reflects the multifaceted nature of destination brand research. This enables researchers to utilize the strengths of different methods to address complex research questions. Nonetheless, the methodological landscape remains fragmented. Qualitative research dominates the field, while large-scale quantitative designs and experimental approaches are relatively rare. Mixed-methods studies account for only a small share, limiting opportunities for triangulation and cross-validation. Furthermore, many studies remain descriptive in nature, with limited attention to causal inference or rigorous hypothesis testing. This indicates a need for more methodologically innovative research that can bridge qualitative insights with quantitative rigor.

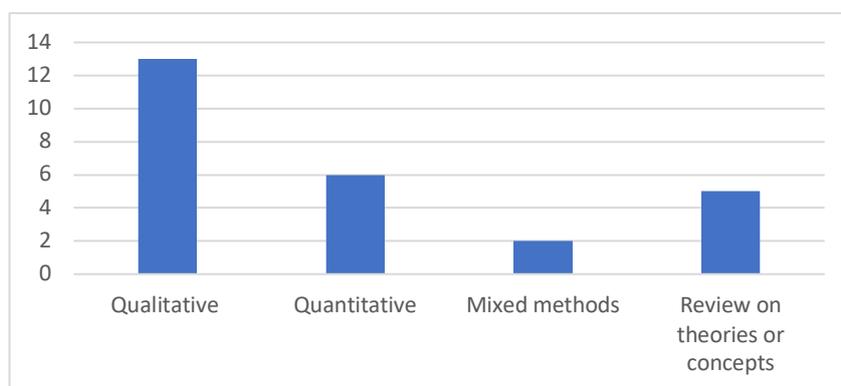


Figure 5. Different research methods used in the articles

### *Distribution of sources*

The articles were published in journals covering a wide range of areas, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of destination branding and agenda-setting research. Figure 6 shows the proportion of journals in each area.

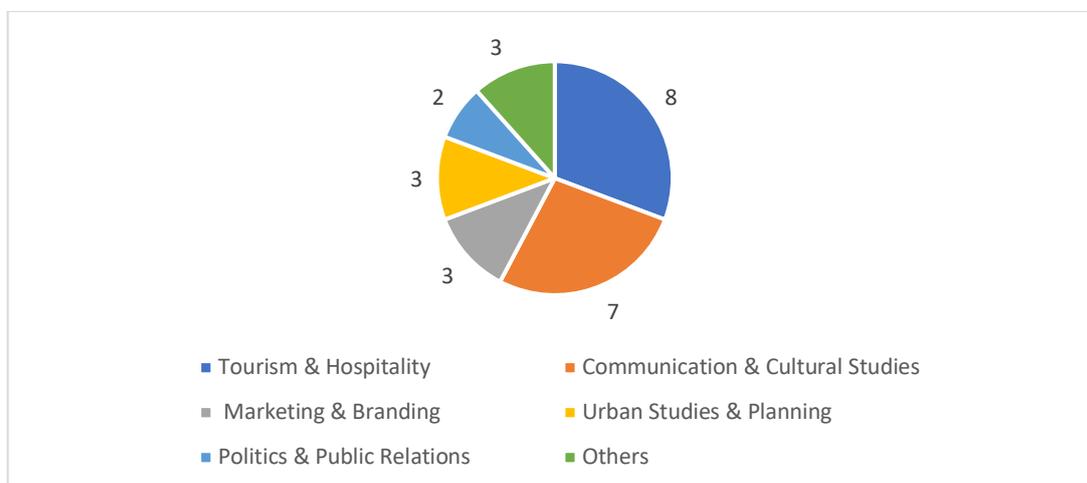


Figure 6. Discipline areas covered by the journals

Some of the most representative areas include Tourism and Hospitality. Tourism and Hospitality emerges as the most dominant area, with eight articles, which is expected given that destination branding primarily focuses on attracting tourists and promoting tourism. Example of journals in this area include *Tourism Management*, *Journal of China Tourism Research*, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*. This is followed by Communication and Cultural Studies with seven articles. Representative journals in this area include *Journalism*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *International Journal of Digital Communication and Analog Signals*, *International Journal of Sport Communication*. Marketing and Branding accounts for three articles, reflecting scholarly interest in brand strategy, consumer behaviour, and market research, particularly in destination and management contexts, with examples including the *European Journal of Marketing and Destination Brands*. Urban Studies and Planning also contributes three articles, focusing on urban development, placemaking, and the impacts of events and policies on cities, as seen in journals such as *City, Culture and Society*, *Cities*, and the *Journal of Chinese Architecture and Urbanism*. Finally, Politics and Public Relations, with two articles, reflects the growing recognition that place branding is closely intertwined with political considerations and public policy, with relevant publications including *Political Studies for Change* and *Public Relations Review*.

It also includes a number of other related areas, such as Economics & Commerce (1), Architecture & Civil Engineering (1) and Sustainability (1). Tourism and hospitality management dominate the field, but this may lead to research becoming overly focused on “tourist attractions” while neglecting broader media, political, and social issues. Communication studies make significant contributions, yet interdisciplinary integration with tourism studies remains limited, with most research still operating in silos. For instance, while communication studies often emphasize agenda-setting processes, tourism journals tend to frame the issue through marketing logics, with limited theoretical integration. This indicates a need for more systematic interdisciplinary work that bridges disciplinary silos and establishes a more unified conceptual foundation.

### *Major research themes*

By reading the title, abstract, keywords, and full text of each article, and after repeated discussions, we summarized 5 main research themes from these 26 articles (Figure 7). There are 7 articles focusing on mega-events (26.9%), 6 on citizen engagement (23.1%), 6 on politicisation (23.1%), 4 on digital transformation (15.4%), and finally 3 on theoretical frameworks (11.5%).

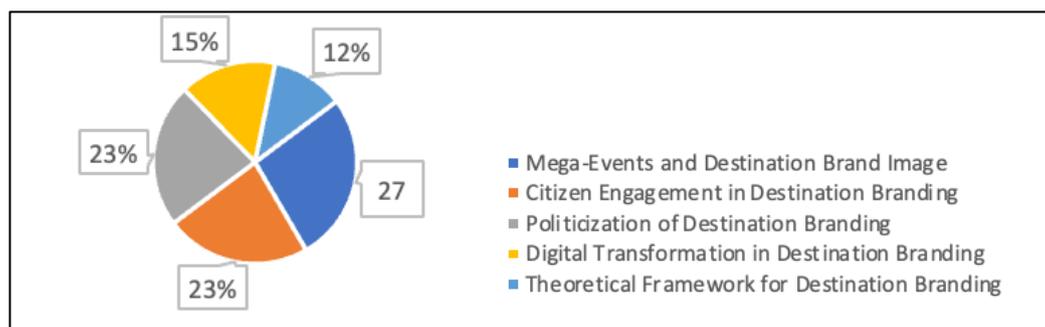


Figure 7. Distribution of the main research themes

Mega-events and destination brand image theme looks at the media's role in shaping the image of the city during the event. Many studies have investigated how cities use events, especially large-scale events such as the Olympics and World Expos, to boost their international profile and attract tourists and investment, and have analysed how media coverage shapes events, host cities, and participating countries (Liu & Chen, 2007; Xue et al., 2012; Tan & Ma, 2013; Kolotouchkina, 2018). The study highlights the agenda-setting capacity of the media. Extensive media coverage of an event can influence public perceptions of the host city, even among those who have not directly experienced the event. A study of the 2009 World Games in Kaohsiung found that international media coverage significantly boosted the city's visibility and placed it on the global media agenda (Tan & Ma, 2013). Even so, their impact can be short-lived and require sustained effort to maintain a positive image.

For citizen engagement in destination branding, this theme highlights the transition from a top-down, government-centred way of branding to a more inclusive and cooperative model. Citizens are not only passive recipients of the city brand message but also active participants in shaping the city image and identity. They have valuable local knowledge, experience, and perspectives that can enrich the brand narrative and help create a more realistic brand identity (Hereźniak, 2017). Actively engaging citizens and involving residents as brand ambassadors has many benefits for city branding, such as enhancing brand identity and a sense of community ownership (Conway et al., 2012). When citizens are engaged in the branding process, they are more likely to support and promote the city brand, leading to greater recognition and a stronger sense of community pride. At the same time, citizen engagement helps identify potential negative impacts in the branding process and develop strategies to reduce those impacts. While citizen engagement has many advantages, studies also acknowledge potential challenges (Gao & Galina, 2024; B. Zhang et al., 2024).

For politicization of destination branding, branding can be influenced by government agendas, political ideologies, and power dynamics, which in turn can affect political dynamics. City branding is often driven or heavily influenced by government agencies, due to the great power and resources that governments have in shaping and promoting a particular image of the city to attract investment, tourism and to strengthen their own political position. The case study of Chongli, one of the venues for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing, reveals that the government agenda plays a vital role in shaping the city's branding narrative (Peng et al., 2022). The agenda prioritizes themes such as economic development, ice and snow sports and tourism and national pride, aligning with national political goals.

The analysis of Tokyo's bid for the 2020 Olympics highlights how city branding is intertwined with nationalist sentiment and Japan's strategic use of the event to promote its global image (Kolotouchkina, 2018). This connection is also hinted at in the analysis of the Harbin Ice and Snow Festival (Wang, 2024). In addition, the government's use of short video platforms such as Douyin (TikTok) to promote festivals internationally has helped to shape the global perception of China as a lively and culturally rich country (Geng & Zhou, 2022). In some cases, governments can use branding campaigns to project a positive image that is different from the reality. Malaysia's experience in the 1MDB financial scandal has shown that negative international media coverage can seriously damage a country's image, prompting governments to take counterattacks and public relations actions to reduce reputation damage (Ven, 2018).

Digital transformation in destination branding (DMOs) are increasingly recognizing the need to adapt to the digital environment and use online platforms and social media to engage with audiences. This shift is driven by the popularity of digital technologies, the changing media consumption habits of audiences, and the need to reach a wider audience beyond traditional media. In the digital age, it is vital to build vibrant online communities around city brands. This includes creating dedicated online platforms, social media groups, and interactive forums where residents, visitors, and other stakeholders can connect with each other, share experiences, and contribute to the city's narrative (Kurniawan, 2022; Gao & Galina, 2024; Xiaoyu, 2024).

Cities can develop a feeling of belonging, gather valuable feedback, and expand positive word-of-mouth communications by promoting online engagement. Research also points to the importance of producing high-quality digital storytelling to shape a destination brand and resonate with online audiences (Wang, 2024). Known for its snow festivals, Harbin has effectively used Douyin(TikTok) and other platforms to share destination stories and build a strong brand image of the winter wonderland (Kong & Chen, 2018; Gao & Galina, 2024). Relying on virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology, it brings online snow and ice experiences to users on social media. Studies also found that the East Java city and regency governments, as the leading bodies of Malang DMOs, have joined in setting the agenda for digital marketing of tourism products (Kurniawan, 2022).

#### *Theoretical framework for destination branding*

Researchers have used concepts from marketing, public relations, politics and urban planning to develop theoretical frameworks and models related to city/destination branding. Although they do not provide a unified theory, these frameworks provide valuable tools for analysing and evaluating destination branding practices in different contexts. City brands are not just created by governments or marketing agencies, they are the result of the interaction and perception of various stakeholders, including residents, businesses, tourists and media, which is called Network Branding (Hankinson, 2004). When the brand co-creation framework is applied to city branding, it shows that residents, businesses, and tourists are not passive recipients of brand information, but active participants in shaping the city's image and identity (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

The ATLAS model, which stands for Asking, Thinking, Listening, Acting and Speaking, and represents the circular process of brand development and management (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021) was used to analyse city branding in Chongqing (B. Zhang et al., 2024). One framework that considers city branding as a public policy and recognizes that it is closely linked to government agendas and the pursuit of the public interest (Potapovs, 2024). Taken together, these 5 themes demonstrate how destination set the agenda to address issues of visibility, participation, political influence, and media power. However, tensions remain over who controls these narratives—governments, citizens, or medias—and how enduring their impact can be. This highlights the need for more integrative frameworks that display the agenda setting dynamics in destination branding practices.

#### **Research Patterns and Trends**

After analysing the selected articles, we identified several different research patterns and trends, which not only reveal the current state of research but also provide some references for future research.

#### *The growing importance of digital platforms in destination branding*

It has been highlighted that there is a clear shift in destination image and brand perception from traditional media like newspapers and television to digital platforms like websites and social medias (Kurniawan, 2022; Gao & Galina, 2024; Xiaoyu, 2024). Social media like TikTok, Instagram and others are increasingly focusing on user-generated content as it provides natural reach and authenticity (Geng & Zhou, 2022; Chaerunnisa & Parsono, 2024). Big data is becoming increasingly important in understanding audience engagement, optimizing content strategies and promoting city branding campaigns.

### *Citizen engagement and co-creation in destination branding*

Traditional destination branding often relied on top-down approaches, but there is increasing recognition of the importance of citizen engagement and co-creation in developing authentic and sustainable brand images (Hereźniak, 2017; Dedic & Golem, 2021; Pham et al., 2022). City managers are beginning to empower citizens as brand ambassadors, encouraging them to share their experiences and contribute to the city's narrative (Kong & Chen, 2018). What's more, collaborative platforms and citizen-led initiatives can be used to collect ideas, foster dialogue and co-create city branding strategies (Pînzaru, 2012; Gao & Galina, 2024).

### *The interaction of culture, heritage and identity in destination branding*

DMOs are increasingly focusing on the use of storytelling and narrative to create an emotional connection with their audience and to present the city's culture and character (Xue et al., 2012; Y. Zhang, 2024; Xiaoyu, 2024). Researchers continue to emphasize the importance of using a destination's unique culture, heritage and identity to build a brand (Liu & Chen, 2007; Pînzaru, 2012; Ma & Cao, 2019). And, emphasize the need to maintain authenticity and demonstrate the diversity of destination identity (Goldberg-Miller, 2019; Xiaoyu, 2024). Across these trends, a common thread is the transformation of agenda-setting in the digital era. Unlike traditional media, where agendas were largely controlled by elite actors, new media platforms create more participatory and decentralized spaces where citizens, influencers, and algorithms all shape what becomes visible in destination branding.

## **Discussion**

This review provides an in-depth look at research findings on agenda-setting in destination branding. Over the past two decades, publications have been relatively scarce and have grown at a slow pace. Nevertheless, they still provide us with a comprehensive landscape of research in this field. The findings of this study are of great implications to both the tourism industry and academia as they raise awareness of the importance of destination and city branding. Two issues are worth noting and discussing. The first is citizen engagement. It highlights that city branding is moving from a top-down, government-led approach to a more collaborative model where residents become co-creators of city brands. Research in Harbin reveals how digital platforms such as TikTok facilitate networks of interaction between residents, tourists and social media influencers (Gao & Galina, 2024). The study of Fatima Mansions highlights the role of community engagement in changing negative media coverage and achieving urban regeneration (Conway et al., 2012).

In Bandung, the city's public relations strategy emphasizes weekly discussions to identify what resonates with the audience. This suggests that the city is moving towards understanding and responding to the interests and preferences of its citizens when it comes to shaping the online image (Chaerunnisa & Parsono, 2024). Although many studies confirm the growing importance of citizen engagement, research in Chongqing suggests that such engagement may be influenced and constrained by local political structures. In socialist countries like China, for example, although non-government stakeholders are involved in city branding activities, their engagement tends to take place through officially affiliated organisations. And that such engagement is often follows a top-down, government-led approach. This raises questions about the balance between governmental influence in a given context and real citizen co-creation in city branding (B. Zhang et al., 2024).

The second is the media effect. Research on the Draft Royal Sydney Botanic Gardens suggests that the news media has the ability to lead community discussions during the public planning process (Schweinsberg et al., 2017). The study of the media framing of the Vancouver and Calgary Olympics demonstrates how different media narratives shape public perceptions and influence referendum outcomes (Monaghan & Rocha, 2022). Compared with traditional media, new media plays a key role in shaping the destination brand image. It's found that digital platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter are reshaping the landscape of city branding by facilitating direct interaction between cities and their audiences. The case of Harbin illustrates how these platforms are contributing to the city's image by driving resident-led narratives and enabling residents to participate in brand co-creation (Gao & Galina, 2024).

New media platforms provide a cost-effective way for cities to reach global audiences. They also provide online channels for displaying and promoting the city's creative products (Xiaoyu, 2024). For DMOs and policymakers especially in the Global South, these findings are relevant, as low-cost digital platforms can help compensate for limited budgets and infrastructure, allowing destinations to highlight distinctive cultural or ecological assets and gain visibility in the global tourism market. However, information imbalances and misinformation need to be considered (Xiaoyu, 2024). Sometimes, the development of digital technologies can result in a digital divide. The rapid access and distribution of information across multiple platforms can easily lead to the involvement of misinformation. City managers must address the challenges of authenticity, visibility and the complexity of content management.

In general, the insufficient number of studies focusing on agenda setting in destination branding in non-Western contexts highlights a key area for future research. Further research is needed on how cultural, political, and economic factors influence the conceptualization and practice of destination and city branding outside of the mainstream Western paradigm. In China, for example, government influence plays an important role. In this review, only 2 publications originated from the Global South (Indonesia and Australia), while the remaining 24 were produced in the Global North. This imbalance reflects a broader trend in the field, where Northern perspectives dominate the academic discourse. Global South contributions, though limited, provide valuable insights into city public relations branding strategy and sustainable management of protected areas. A more balanced representation between North and South would enrich the theoretical landscape of agenda setting in destination branding and ensure that strategies are informed by diverse socio-cultural realities.

## Conclusion

This study aims to provide a systematic review of research on destination branding from an agenda-setting perspective. We studied 26 articles from almost 20 years and analysed the current state of publication, including the Volume and types, distribution of sources, annual publication level, and distribution of regions. We also analysed the methodology characteristics of the selected articles and the main research themes, and revealed research patterns and trends in this field. The volume of publications has increased considerably in recent years. Empirical research dominates these publications, demonstrating the growing emphasis on evidence-based approaches to understanding the dynamics of destination branding. The interdisciplinary nature of the field is also evident, with articles published in journals across multiple disciplines. In terms of publication regions, Asia, Europe and North America are the regions with the largest contributions. Methodology trends tend to favour qualitative approaches, such as interviews and content analysis. There are 5 main research themes, which are mega-events, digital transformation, citizen engagement, politicization, and theoretical framework.

Despite the many advantages of this review, there are some limitations. This may exclude relevant papers due to set inclusion and exclusion criteria. Firstly, the inclusion of additional keywords such as place branding, place marketing might help us get a more comprehensive publication. Secondly, only journal papers were considered in our review, the conference papers, book chapters, and dissertations may also provide valuable clues for future research. In addition, the relatively small sample size of the reviewed studies may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the analysis process involved in this study led to rather qualitative results, and a more quantitative approach could be considered in future studies. Overall, destination branding and agenda setting is evolving into a dynamic and multifaceted space. This study provides valuable insights into the current state of destination brand research and identifies key directions for future exploration. Research trends highlight the need for more detailed and complex approaches to destination/city branding that integrate digital strategy, citizen engagement, cultural heritage and media agendas.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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