

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Twenty years of research in place marketing and branding: a review of 63 systematic literature reviews

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Clements, F., Giovanardi, M. (2026). Twenty years of research in place marketing and branding: a review of 63 systematic literature reviews. JOURNAL OF PLACE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, 19(1), 26-54 [10.1108/jpmd-06-2025-0085].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/1046851> since: 2026-02-20

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1108/jpmd-06-2025-0085>

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (<https://cris.unibo.it/>).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

Twenty years of research in place marketing and branding: a review of 63 systematic literature reviews

Florida Clements and Massimo Giovanardi

Introduction

Over the last two decades or so, increasing scholarly attention has been devoted to marketing and branding as instruments for developing cities, regions and places in general as spatially-extended products (Giovanardi et al., 2018). If a focus on tourism has been established as a preferential angle, increasing interest has been directed to places as residential areas (Zenker et al., 2017) and attractors of firms or investments (Metaxas, 2010). To a large extent, this scholarly attention has reflected the growing investment in place marketing and branding within Europe, where place marketing and place brand management are understood to include but exceed destination marketing and branding (Boisen et al., 2018). On the one hand, we have witnessed a notable theoretical richness that resulted into a variety of conceptual and methodological perspectives at the intersection of management, sociology, geography, environmental psychology and media studies. On the other hand, the way in which this variety has been investigated and presented in academic outlets still presents some concerning symptoms. One of those symptoms is the increasing number of systematic literature reviews published on the subject and cognate domains every year, which during 2023 only reached the number of nine.

The present paper argues that the abundance of systematic reviews does not simply mirror the growing interest into such a popular research topic, or the fragmentation of the disciplinary knowledge characterising a specific area of knowledge creation practices (in our case, place marketing and branding). Furthermore, this proliferation of systematic reviews also points to an overarching malaise within contemporary academia, namely “the impression that the explosion of research publications very seldom results in something original and profoundly insightful” (Alvesson et al., 2017, p. 9). Conscious that a “radical move from

research for the sake of publishing to research that has something meaningful to say” (p. 27) is a very ambitious task, we sought to translate it into a study that would contribute to avoid or, more realistically, reduce duplication of efforts within place marketing and branding.

Thus, following the success of existing ‘reviews of reviews’ (e.g. Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019), we offer a comprehensive investigation of 63 systematic literature review articles that were published between 2002 and 2024. This endeavour would allow us to identify reiterated claims and unsolved issues, as well as to emphasise the most promising avenues that systematic literature-based inquiries have pursued within place marketing and branding. After a discussion of the “*discourse of systematic review*” (MacLure, 2005, p. 394, emphasis in original) and its rising influence in the contemporary marketised academia, we explain how place marketing and branding has become a recurrent object of systematic searches. Then, we present the review design and the main findings of our review of reviews. Finally, we discuss the main implications of the analysis, as well as some recommendations for “meaningful” (Alvesson et al., 2017) review-based inquiries in a future shaped by an increasing popularity of AI research tools.

Theoretical background

Systematic literature reviews have become a preferential device of knowledge production in contemporary management scholarship (Briner and Walshe, 2014). Undoubtedly, these can empower scholars in (re)evaluating expanding scientific domains through replicable research protocol and identifying fruitful directions. And yet, the emphasis on systematic literature reviewing has developed into a hegemonic discourse that celebrates the objectivity and rigour allegedly enhanced by protocols and guidelines (MacLure, 2005). Such a view is consistent with “international trends towards control and accountability in knowledge production” (MacLure, 2005, p. 394) and, it can be argued, disregards the role played by human choices in the act of designing and delivering *meaningful* reviews. Before contextualising this critique in the domain of place branding and marketing, it is fruitful to summarise the main characteristics that ideal review papers should exhibit in order to be considered meaningful.

Palmatier et al. (2018) offer a useful discussion of the most important standards that management review papers should possess. First, “a sufficient body of past research exists to make the integration and synthesis valuable – especially if extant research reveals theoretical inconsistencies or heterogeneity in its effects” (Palmatier et al., 2018, p. 2). Second, a review

that intends to advance “sufficient contribution” or, in other words, “uncover incremental insights” should be accurately executed, “with an appropriate literature collection and analysis techniques, sufficient breadth and depth of literature coverage” (ibidem). The third and most difficult standard remarks the requirement for a review paper to provide “significant new insights”, rather than simply describing past research. According to the authors, this is where most reviews fall short when researchers end up offering “only a mind-numbing recitation, without evident organization, synthesis, or critical evaluation” (Palmatier et al., 2018, p. 4).

Nobody could deny that any place branding and marketing review paper satisfy, almost by default, the first standard, as the domain’s eclecticism offer a fertile terrain for review-based investigations. The multi-disciplinarity of the subject and the variety of academic journals involved might explain why researchers have often felt appropriate to plan and submit review papers. Coming to the second standard, well-executed review papers have certainly come to the fore, orienting place branding and marketing researchers’ efforts across the last decade-and-a-half and generating rising citations. However, the rapidly growing number of review papers have largely investigated the very same literature. Clark and Wright (2009) warn that “more is being produced ... but the big impact papers remain elusive” (p. 6). This may result into overlappings that deserve urgent attention. Indeed, this is a concerning symptom not simply because of the quantity of papers produced, but also because of the quality of the work presented in these reviews, which may not always satisfy the third standard outlined by (Palmatier et al., 2018).

In line with similar efforts in tourism studies (Huang et al., 2023; Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019), the time has come to critically evaluate the systematic literature reviews produced so far in the eclectic area of place branding and marketing. The uncritical adoption of systematic procedures, in fact, may contribute to limiting, rather than empowering, newer generations of researchers and doctoral students while they plan original and useful investigations. We also contend that the simplistic positivistic posture behind systematic reviews is risky, because it could exacerbate the divide between positivist and interpretivist philosophical stances that coexist within place marketing and branding research (Ntounis et al., 2015). Consistently, the methodology section discusses our attempt to integrate elements of systematic reviewing with aspects of critical narrative reviewing.

Methodology

Research approach

This review adopts a configurative approach (Gough et al., 2012) that aims to explore the expansion of place branding and marketing knowledge until 2024 through published SLRs. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of place branding, a broad umbrella review appears to be an appropriate choice (Aromataris et al., 2015), which examines the different research avenues that scholars have been exploring. Consistent with this approach is the ontological and epistemological premise of this research, which can be positioned on the idealist side of the philosophy spectrum, thus exploring reality without looking for definitive answers (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009; Gough et al., 2019), conscious that both the reality explored and the knowledge presented are socially constructed. Notably, Berger and Luckmann, (1991) social constructionist philosophy provides the foundations where the “objective facticity” of numbers and qualitative data are used as the basis upon which to build “subjective meanings” and vice-versa. Furthermore, it is also fruitful to integrate this social constructionist posture with Barker et al., (2001) informed eclecticism paradigm, which presents a “sensible possibility” (Mendoza De Los Santos et al., 2022, p. 10307) in the case of exploring and evaluating a variety of SLRs coming from multiple research traditions.

This review provides a systematic map of the field based on the SLRs, which according to Gough et al., (2012) should serve three purposes: “(i) describing the nature of a research field; (ii) to inform the conduct of a synthesis; and (iii) to interpret the findings of a synthesis” (p.5). However, Aromataris et al., (2015) insist that it is not the role of the “umbrella review” to resynthesise the findings of the SLRs covered by the review. Rather, umbrella reviews must summarise their research synthesis, therefore this umbrella review whilst providing a systematic map of place branding field, it will summarise the research from the SLRs rather than synthesising them.

At the crux of SLRs is the adherence to a set of scientific methods in order to reduce the bias error (Littel et al., 2008). Whilst there are a number of methods for conducting SLRs (Grech and Eldawlatly, 2024; Tong et al., 2012), all of which coming from the medical sciences and containing rigorous checklists, the present study follow Aromataris et al., (2015) who recommend a six-step process as below:

1. formulation of research question;
2. establish the inclusion criteria;
3. conduct a structured search process and identification of the SLRs;
4. select the methods for the critical appraisal and analysis;

5. data extraction;
6. summary of the research synthesis.

Formulation of research questions

The authors of this research conducted several remote meetings in order to establish the premise of this review, by formulating the research questions (RQ) looking to be answered. The resulting RQs are: “How have the SLRs contributed to place branding and marketing?” “What are the unsolved issues and the promising avenues for systematic literature-based inquiries in place branding and marketing?”

Inclusion criteria

Once the research question was formulated, the inclusion and exclusion criteria was agreed. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of PB the inclusion criteria consisted of:

- a. SLRs relating to the branding and marketing of place or any other geographical forms, such as city, nation, destination.
- b. Despite the key words or usage of the term “Systematic review” the SLRs selected should explicitly show the number of empirical articles reviewed.
- c. SLRs written in English

The third inclusion criterium features one of the limitations of this study. Due to pragmatic constraints, it was not possible for the authors to include SLRs in other languages.

The search process

The search process started by initially identifying the keywords and their combinations using Boolean operator AND, as shown below:

systematic review AND place branding
systematic review AND city branding
systematic review AND place marketing
systematic review AND city marketing
systematic review AND nation branding
systematic review AND destination branding
systematic review AND destination marketing

Other Boolean operators such as OR or NOT were deemed inappropriate as they would expand the search unnecessarily to SLRs in other fields and empirical articles in the place branding field which were not SLRs. The search and selection process followed PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009) framework principles, as shown in Figure 1. Initial search in Google scholar in January 2024 brought back results in the range of hundreds of thousands for each of the key words. This search assisted in identifying the databases with the highest number of articles for the keywords. The databases explored further were Emerald, Science Direct and Springer Link. The initial screening in Google scholar involved SERP (Search Engine Results Page) depth between two and seven, whilst in the databases it was evident that besides the duplications with Google Scholar, after the first SERP the results were irrelevant to the search. This drastically reduced the number of records to be screened. In addition, snowballing through bibliometric search in some of the identified SLRs assisted in identifying some of the SLRs missed from the keyword search. Other than the search engines, no AI tools were used during this research. Both selection of articles and analysis were conducted manually.

The records within the relevant SERPs were screened by reading the titles of the articles. After this step only 665 articles were considered relevant for further reviewing. Further reading of the abstracts and skim reading identified 541 articles as ineligible, with the majority just including one literature-review chapter as entailed by the prescriptions of academic writing. Other articles were excluded despite being literature reviews, because their focus bore no relation to branding and marketing as applied to spatially-extended products (e.g. cities, nations). Rather, these articles dealt with issues such as application of Service Dominant Logic in tourism, returning visitors, different types/niche tourism specifics, events and other management issues. Furthermore, 5 additional relevant SLRs were identified through snowballing, bringing the number of SLRs for further reviewing to 78. Careful reading of these studies identified further 15 reviews which did not fulfil the inclusion criteria set above (further details in the Figure 1), leaving the number of SLRs eligible for this umbrella review to 63.

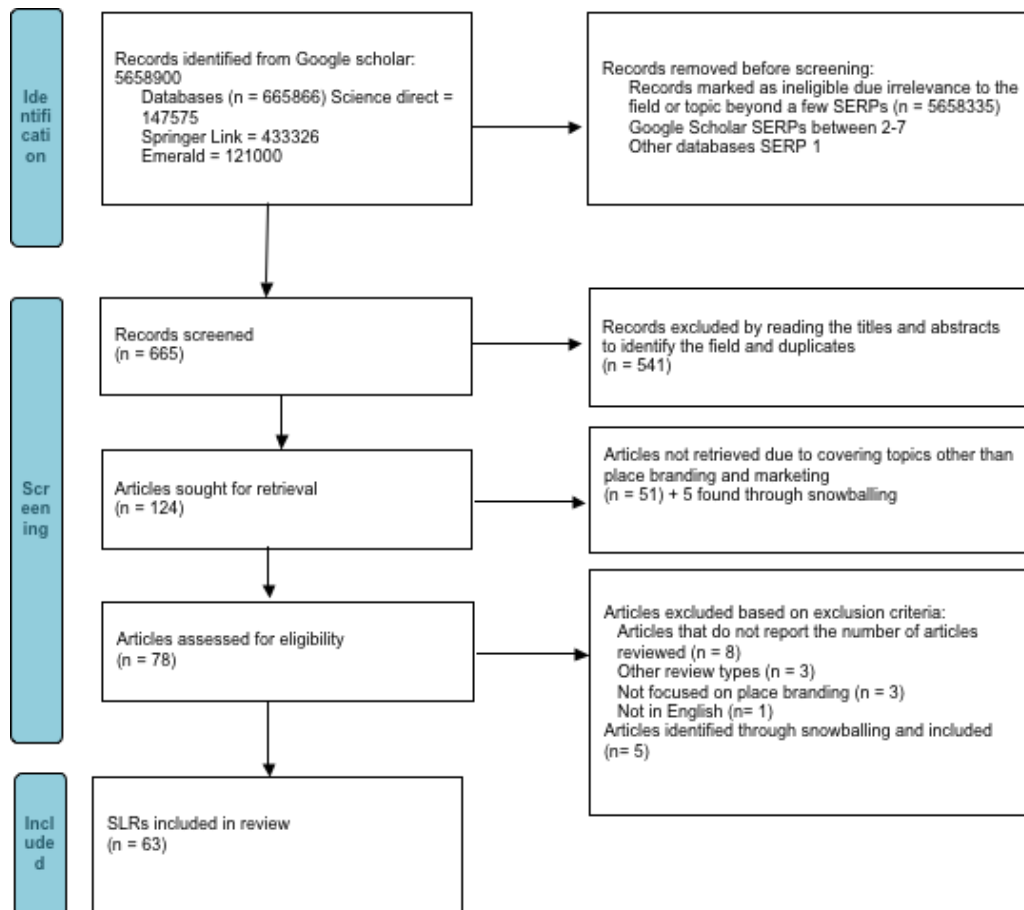


Figure 1: summary of the search process

Methods for the critical appraisal

The SLR corpus was first analysed using descriptive statistics and displaying the results through charts and tables. This analysis revealed basic features of the corpus, such as the distribution of SLR publications across time, the number of publications per journal (together with their ABS ranking) and the most influential themes addressed by SLRs. This paved the way for a detailed methodological assessment of the SLRs, which examined the appropriateness of methodological choices and their implementation within the selected SLRs (Aromataris et al., 2015). Lastly, a critical evaluation of SLRs' contribution is provided in narrative form. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods is a risky endeavour and thus required additional reflections.

One of the tools for conducting critical appraisal of the SLRs is Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework (WoE) which includes evaluation of SLRs under three main criteria: the relevance or the context of evidence, thus studies included in SLR are relevant in answering the review question, the review design and methodologies are appropriate for the question and the third criterium is execution of design or rigour in methodology application. Despite the criticism of systematic reviews using methods grounded in a positivistic foundation for evaluating qualitative research, Hammersley (2020) agrees that the relevance and methodological assessment of the qualitative research is necessary. Thus Gough's (2007) WoE combined with Aromataris et al.'s (2015) recommendations were to determine specific pre-established steps agreed by both researchers, where SLRs were evaluated based on the requirements below:

1. The review question or aim was clearly and explicitly stated;
2. The approach of the review, inclusion criteria and search strategy were appropriate for the review question;
3. Criteria for appraising studies appropriate
4. Rigour in execution of the methodology
5. The SLR's position in relation to knowledge and previous SLRs was evaluated through identifying whether previous SLRs were cited and in which manner, assigning a code from 0 to 3 as per the following categories: 0 = no previous relevant SLR work cited; 1= SLR work cited without an adequate discussion; 2= SLR work cited with a somehow adequate discussion; 3= SLR cited through an in-depth discussion.

The discussion of this fifth requirement acted as a catalyst for generating a more thorough discussion of the outcomes of the SLRs, which according to Palmatier et al., (2018) should derive significant contributions. Identifying how "significant contribution" looks like appears to be challenging. Gendron (2013) argues that "the concept of contribution is unstable, ambiguous, contradictory and relative" (p. 15) creating space for confusion, however this does not imply that "anything goes". Lucarelli et al., (2023) suggest four categories to classify contribution, namely "neglect spotting, confusion spotting, new context spotting, and assumption challenging" (p.7). Rather, inspired by Barker et al. (2001) informed eclecticism paradigm, authors opted for presenting discussion of the SLRs contribution in a narrative form, conscious of the role played by human intellectual choices during an act of interpretation (see MacLure, 2005). Some narrative elements are also

incorporated to enrich the illustration of the descriptive statistics, with the hope to combine the critical posture permeating Alvesson et al.'s (2017) approach while at the same time disclosing to the readers detailed information about the decisions undertaken by researchers.

Data extraction and discussion

This next section presents the fifth and sixth steps distilled by Aromataris et al., (2015) in the form of a Critical Appraisal.

Critical Appraisal of Systematic Literature Reviews

Describing the corpus

Figure 2 illustrates the evolution in number of all SLRs per year, with the exception of the work of forerunner (Pike, 2002), who published his influential SLR on destination image in 2002. The timeframe covered by Figure 2 begins in 2010. This was the time when Andrea Lucarelli and David Gertner began to carry out the desk-work research underpinning their respective publications (Gertner, 2011a, 2011b; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013). From 2010 onwards, the evolution in number of SLRs per year appears to be quite rapid. Except for 2015, no year ended without the release of at least one SLR, with a peak of nine SLRs published during 2023. Investigating the reasons behind the upsurge in SLRs between 2022 and 2023 is not the main goal of this study. However, tentative answers may include the increasing popularity of the domain, the growing number of AI tools available to researchers and, perhaps, the lack of mobility imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have forced scholars to increase the time dedicated to desk research between 2020 and 2021. To make sense of allegedly gap year of 2015, it could be argued that Acharya and Rahman's (2016) had been published as an online-first article in 2015, so no actual gap year can be witnessed.

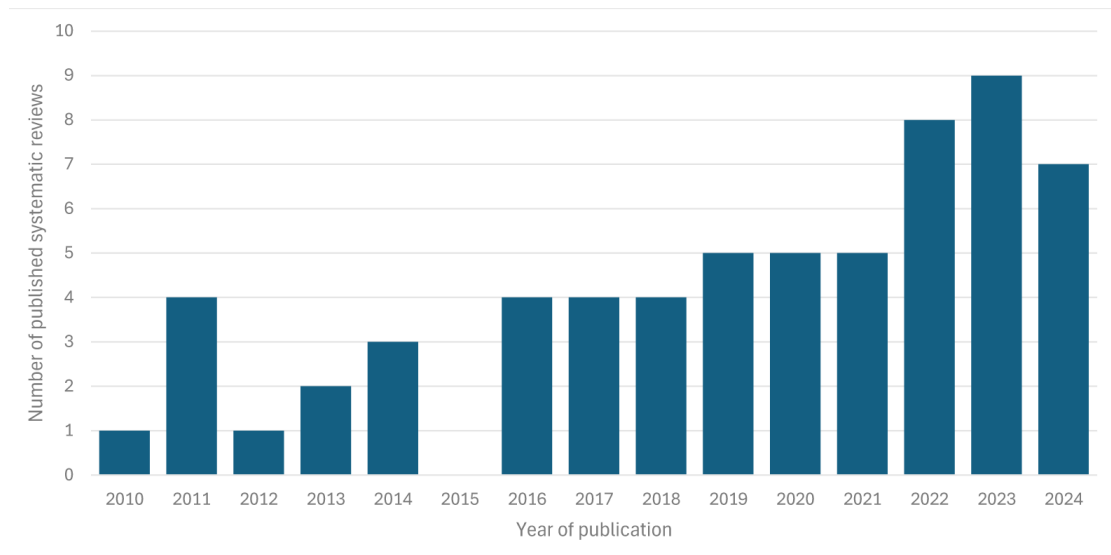


Figure 2: evolution in number of SLRs per year

Investigating the academic outlets where SLRs were published is also appropriate. Given the multidisciplinary nature of the domain scrutinised, it is not surprising to observe a quite fragmented distribution across journals in different sectors. Table 1 illustrates the number of SLRs publications per academic journal, together with their ABS ranking. Interesting reflections can be advanced by looking at those five academic journals that published the highest number of SLR items (four each): *Tourism Management* (ABS4), *Journal of Place Management and Development* (ABS2), *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* (ABS1), *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* and *Sustainability* (not listed). These five journals are characterised by different ABS ranks and varying editorial directions. *Tourism Management* is one of the leading journals for tourism scholars and published four SLRs on tourist destination and destination image. Relevant is to emphasise the last SLR item released in 2023 (Huang et al., 2023), which offers a review of existing reviews on tourism destination studies, therefore indicating the maturity reached within this specific research sub-domain of place-related studies. The eight items published overall in the two flagship journals of the place branding and marketing community (*Journal of Place Management and Development* and *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*) are unsurprisingly more varied in nature, spanning from city branding to place marketing and – as the following sections clarify – offering sometimes compelling angles such as methodologies, stakeholding and sustainability. More surprising is to find four SLRs items appearing in the *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* in the narrow timeframe 2016-2019 – one per

year, for four years in a row – including the extensive PhD work of Renaud Vuignier (2017). *Sustainability* also featured four SLRs. Finally, it is worth emphasising the three SLR items published in the *International Marketing Review* (ABS3), two of which devoting attention to country image and nation branding.

| ABS Ranking | Journal | N. of articles | References |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|--|
| ABS4 | <i>Tourism Management</i> | 4 | (Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020; Huang et al., 2023; Pike, 2002; Zhang et al., 2014) |
| | <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> | 1 | (Swain et al., 2023) |
| ABS3 | <i>International Marketing Review</i> | 3 | (Christofi et al., 2021; Hao et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2016) |
| | <i>European Management Review</i> | 1 | (Hanna et al., 2021) |
| ABS2 | <i>Journal of Place Management and Development</i> | 4 | (Cleave and Arku, 2017; Dupre, 2019; Golestaneh et al., 2022; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011) |
| | <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> | 1 | (Gertner, 2011a) |
| | <i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i> | 1 | (Oguztimur and Akturan, 2015) |
| | <i>Cities</i> | 1 | (Mohammadi Aydoghmish and Rafieian, 2022) |
| ABS1 | <i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i> | 4 | (Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Kumar and Panda, 2001; Lopes et al., 2018; Vuignier, 2017) |
| | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing and Management</i> | 3 | (Ávila-Robinson and Wakabayashi, 2018; Eletxigerra et al., 2018; Ruiz-Real et al., 2020) |
| | <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i> | 1 | (Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis, 2023) |
| | <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i> | 2 | (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019; Perkins et al., 2020) |
| | <i>Benchmarking</i> | 1 | (Montanari et al., 2020) |
| | <i>Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management</i> | 1 | (Stepchenkova and Mills, 2010) |
| | <i>Cogent Business and Management</i> | 1 | (Tijani et al., 2024) |
| NOT LISTED | <i>Sustainability</i> | 4 | (Górska-Warsewicz, 2020; López-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2019; Tran and Rudolf, 2022) |
| | <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> | 4 | (Aguilera-Cora et al., 2024; Chan and Marafa, 2013; Gertner, 2011b; Jones and Kubacki, 2014) |
| | Other academic outlets | 25 | e.g. (Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013a) |

Table 1: number of publications per academic journal (Authors' own work)

Thematic map of the literature

Those approaching the field for the first time would perhaps struggle with the complexities of constructs or perspectives characterising such a varied corpus and would even perhaps not completely understand the reasons why some papers were fit for inclusion. Thus, it seems appropriate to recall some seminal work to clarify the nature of the scholarly content at stake here. This content always sees a territorial unit (e.g. city, region, country etc.) becoming the object of conceptual treatment through the lens of marketing or branding. For example, branding becomes “location branding” when “countries, regions, cities and towns” (Hankinson, 2001) are examined as “spatially extended products” (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). In this context, due to the variety characterising both the territorial units and the type of treatment chosen by academic authors, it is possible to observe the sedimentation of preferential perspectives within determined disciplinary traditions. The thematic plurality characterising the corpus is represented in Figure 3, which illustrates the consolidation of systematic literature reviewing into different ‘families’ of studies, based on the themes investigated. Unsurprisingly, Figure 3 conveys the coexistence of neatly distinguishable conversations, confirming that scholars from various traditions and affiliations are concerned in publishing reviews that are consistent with determined publication patterns and targets (Seggie and Griffith, 2009).

The dashed line emphasises a conceptual boundary, which marks the border between a sub-corpus of 33 SLRs and more peripheral ones. With few exceptions (Perkins et al., 2020; Swain et al., 2024), authors interested in tourism or destination image (N=20) tend to disregard publications that investigate city/place branding and marketing. Instead, these latter families of SLRs tend to be more inclusive, often (but not necessarily) covering both marketing and branding and capturing key tourism-related studies. For example, Hanna et al., (2021) promote an explicit across-the-border investigation that cover “place and destination branding”. However, many of the most-cited destination and tourism image SLRs are often not detected within place-related SLRs, perhaps limiting the comprehension of visitor-related perspectives of places. Notable in this respect is Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) review on tourist behavioural intentions, which is rarely discussed in place or city branding reviews. Similarly, reviews on nation branding and related constructs (e.g. COO) seem to have

proceeded with some degree of autonomy, resulting into the release of a two-decades-of-research-titled SLR (Hao et al., 2021).

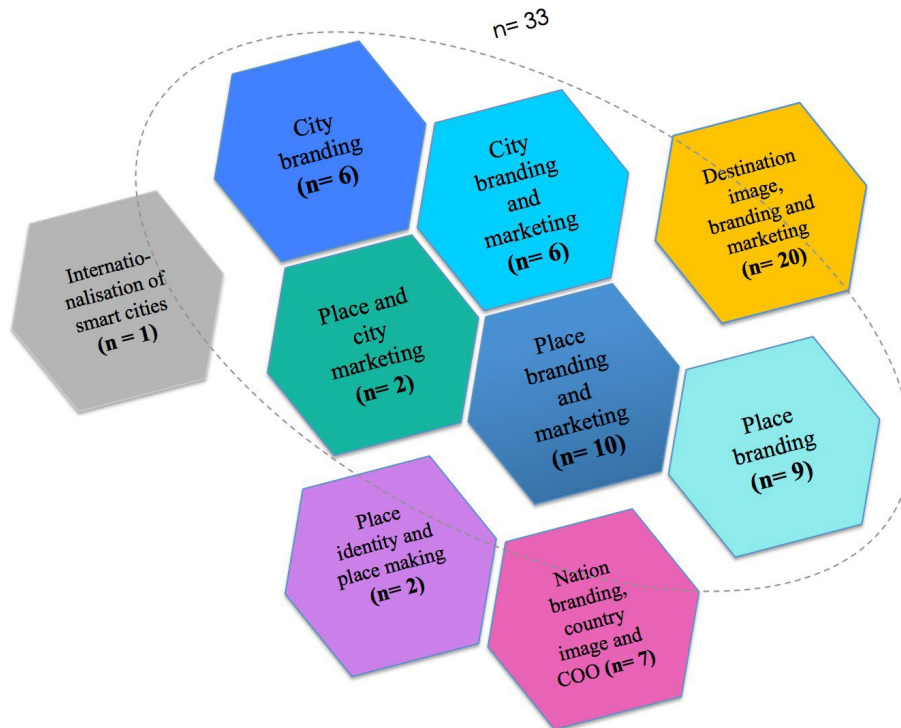


Figure 3: the main research sub-domains

In summary, despite the convergence of several SLRs towards the central term of “place” and the coalescence between marketing and branding, the systematic investigations of particular units of analysis or constructs – place branding, destination branding, country image or brand equity – are likely to be granted separate treatments by scholars. Table 2 completes this subsection by reporting the most cited systematic reviews for each research sub-domain displayed in Figure 3. Readers can find the details of the 63 SLRs selected in the Additional Materials section.

| Research sub-domain | Authors | Title | Year | Journal | Times cited |
|---|---------|--|------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Destination image, branding and marketing | Pike | Destination image analysis - A review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000. | 2002 | <i>Tourism Management</i> | 2162 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|------|---|-----|
| Nation branding, country image and COO | Kaneva | Nation branding: Toward an agenda for critical research | 2011 | <i>International Journal of Communication</i> | 867 |
| Place branding and marketing | Gertner | Unfolding and configuring two decades of research and publications on place marketing and place branding | 2011 | <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> | 362 |
| Place branding | Acharya and Rahman | Place branding research: a thematic review and future research agenda | 2016 | <i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i> | 171 |
| City branding and marketing | Lucarelli and Berg | City branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain | 2011 | <i>Journal of Place Management and Development</i> | 842 |
| City branding | Górska-Warsewicz | Factors determining city brand equity-A systematic literature review | 2020 | <i>Sustainability</i> | 53 |
| Place and city marketing | Eletxigerra et al. | Place marketing examined through a service-dominant logic lens: A review | 2018 | <i>Journal of Destination Marketing and Management</i> | 50 |
| Place identity and sense of place | Lengen and Kistemann | Sense of place and place identity: Review of neuroscientific evidence | 2012 | <i>Health and Place</i> | 216 |

Table 2: most cited systematic reviews for each research sub-domain (Authors' own work)

Evaluating research approach and procedure

SLRs were evaluated based on the requirements discussed in the Methodology section.

Formulation of research question. Aromataris et al., (2015) identify RQ as an important element of an SLR, because it highlights an issue for which there is no current solution (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) and it guides the review (Stern et al., 2014). RQs could be formulated as aims or as hypotheses to be tested (Mulrow, 1994; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). Therefore, CA aimed at identifying RQs, aims or hypotheses. In our corpus, half of the SLRs have no RQs, but they all have aim statements or hypotheses. Few SLRs appeared to be problematic because the formulation of the aims or objectives described the process rather than the purpose of the SLR.

Approach of the review, inclusion criteria and search strategy. Detailed description of the search process, with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria is a core element of the systematic review. According to Liberati et al., (2009) it reduces bias for selective outcomes, which could otherwise throw into question the very validity of the SLR (Torgerson, 2006). Crucially, 25% of the SLRs scrutinised missed either the inclusion/exclusion criteria or the illustration of the search process. With the current abundance of frameworks and guidelines for designing SLRs, it should become unacceptable to publish studies that omit what according to Petticrew and Roberts (2006) lies at the very core of this type of investigation.

Criteria for appraising studies. The criteria for appraising studies relates to two elements. First, the relevance of the studies included in the SLR to answer the RQ; second, CA of the studies, which examines the quality of the studies included, based on the appropriateness of the methodological choices and execution. Whilst the relevance of the studies included was evaluated using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, only 35% of the SLRs have performed Critical Analysis of some sort. After acknowledging the selection process, the majority of SLRs go straight in the discussion of the findings. Even in some of the SLRs that examine the methodologies, the examination is limited in the form of classification, rather than evaluation of their appropriateness or quality of application. Specifically, none of the bibliometric studies have conducted CA (perhaps, the sheer number of articles in some of them might have made the task nearly impossible). Despite classifications based on the number of citations or the ranking of the journals, the lack of CA implies that all studies included in the review are of similar quality and their findings/outcomes are taken at face value.

Rigour in the execution. Gough (2007) insists that “the processes of systematic reviewing are explicit methods for bringing together what we know and how we know it” (p. 7), and in order for this process to be reliable, the methods should be described and executed rigorously (Petticrew, 2006). The rigour in execution was evaluated by identifying whether the methods selected were appropriate for conducting the SLR and the findings were a product of the methods described in the methodology section. In SLRs where the methodology section provided a thorough description of the methods selected, it was evident that the selected methods were appropriate. Surprising is the fact that some of the SLRs did not mention the analysis method, probably taking it for granted or assuming that an SLR is all about classification and ranking of the articles and authors. In some of the cases the methods of analysis were stated but there was no description of the analytical process. Whilst findings

were clearly a product of the selected methods (when highlighted), the quality of the findings/outputs of the SLRs was disparate.

Position in relation to knowledge and previous SLRs. Most of SLRs were inadequately positioned in relation to previous knowledge in terms of existing systematic literature reviews. Few exceptions exist where available SLRs are first diligently discussed and then used as a backdrop to formulate the specific study's aim or RQ (e.g. Aguilera-Cora et al., 2024; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013; Huang et al., 2023). The stronger SLRs in this respect, such as Aguilera-Cora et al. (2024), provide a detailed account of existing systematic reviews dedicating a two-page section of their paper to this task. Instead, weaker SLRs in this respect tend to use foundational conceptual papers in their conclusions when they try to explain their findings to the readers, expressing the fatigue in clarifying what their study's actual contribution would be. This is particularly evident, for example, in Mohammadi Aydoghmish and Rafieian, (2022) review on city branding, which claims it confirms and corroborates what are basic findings from citing papers published in the same journal, *Cities*. The analysis of how SLRs position themselves in relation existing SLRs confirms the qualms about the scattered expansion of systematic reviews. Therefore, a more in-depth account is necessary to discuss how published systematic reviews deliver a contribution to knowledge or fail to do so (Palmatier et al., 2018).

Assessing the contribution of SLRs

The description of the corpus and the thematic map offered in Figure 3 have already clarified the eclectic and diverging directions undertaken by the 63 systematic reviews. For sure, this eclecticism has ensured a plurality of views and perspectives, the co-existence of which is inherent in the very nature of the “focal phenomenon” under scrutiny, namely the application of branding and marketing to spatially extended entities. The previous sections have also suggested that SLRs of some sub-domains are growing without always acknowledging the SLRs developed within other relevant sub-domains. An accurate reading of SLRs coded 0, 1 or even 2 in terms of their positioning in relation to previous SLRs reveal even more serious shortcomings, unmasking some of the practices through which inadequate knowledge creation practices have manifested in the literature (Alvesson et al., 2017).

First of all, some SLRs appear to be technically and methodologically well-executed, but they fall short when it comes to step 5, as they provide a limited or simplistic discussion of relevant existing systematic reviews. For example, Acharya and Rahman (2016) perform a

rigorous classification of existing place branding studies. And yet, it is not clear why they only provide a thorough summary of existing SLRs on city and place branding (Gertner, 2011a, 2011b; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013) in the final part of the findings, without acknowledging the very same studies earlier in the paper. Rather than extending by some years the publication period scrutinised by previous scholars, for example, authors could have compared the pre-2010 literature with more recent studies. The same common pitfall also affects popular publications, which could have been more meaningful research endeavours (Chan and Marafa, 2014; Oguztimur and Akturan, 2015; Swain et al., 2024; Vuignier, 2017). Furthermore, researchers could have been more consistent in replicating already adopted research procedures, thus increasing the comparability of findings across different papers.

Reading more deeply into the SLR coded with 0 or 1 in step 5, we realised that miscitations or opportunistic appropriation of previous SLRs are recurrent in the corpus. In some instances, this practice comes close to what could be considered as strawman arguments. In 2017, for example, Kasapi and Cela (2017) lament “little or no evidence regarding a thorough review of the destination branding literature from its inception to date, and more specifically about city branding” (p. 129). Two years later, the recurrent argument is still that “few all-encompassing literature reviews of place branding exist” (Ma et al., 2019). Thus, obvious is the remark that more rigour is necessary to prevent allegations of poor academic practice and to encourage young researchers interrogate extant literature more critically.

Table 4 offers a summary of the most frequently reiterated claims exhibited across the SLRs so far, distinguishing them into three types of unsolved issues. Authors often tend to present these claims as novel accounts, while on a closer examination these represent repetitions that other available SLRs had already brought to the fore. What is more, these reiterated claims continue to expose the same predictable set of issues, without necessarily contributing to address those issues meaningfully. In this sense, the reiteration contributes to maintain the issues as unsolved.

| Research aspect | Issues | References |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Theory | Variety of perspectives that may originate confusion and, thus require systematisation | e.g. Gertner (2011b); Lucarelli and Berg (2011); Andersson (2014) |
| Methodology | Prevalence of qualitative, descriptive and | e.g. Gertner (2011b); Lucarelli and Berg (2011); |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | usually single-case based studies | Chan and Marafa (2013) |
| Findings & implications | Increase of scholarly interest over recent years | Acharya and Rahman (2016); Vuignier (2017); Hanna et al (2021); Swain et. al (2024); |
| | Major emerging thematic areas, such as stakeholder studies | Glinska and Tomaszewska (2017); Perkins et al. (2020); Golestaneh at al. (2022) |
| Agenda for future research | Call for more longitudinal studies | e.g. Cleave and Arku (2017); Golestaneh et al. (2022); Swain et. al (2024) |
| | Call for an evolution towards more maturity (e.g. from “descriptive” to “normative stage”) | e.g. Gertner (2011b); Lucarelli and Brostrom (2013); Oguztimur and Akturan (2016) |

Table 3: reiterated claims and unsolved issues across available SLRs (Authors’ own work)

The persistence of these unresolved issues reflects a lack of focus on the “greater purpose” (Alvesson et al., 2017) of the research, to elaborate less obvious connections across domains instead of selling familiar academic products. As such, the prevalent posture characterising the corpus seems to resemble the cautious and predictable “miner’s path” described by Breslin and Gatrell (2020) in their attempt to discuss how literature reviews contribute to theory development.

Despite these criticisms, a number of SLRs appear to be both well-executed and meaningful in relation to SLRs available at the time of writing. Table 4 illustrates these notable reviews, which can be emphasised for their methodological accuracy and capacity to contribute to the literature meaningfully. The contributions of these SLRs, in fact, have propelled the field ahead and these outcomes have been achieved through rigorous methodological processes that confirm the validity and reliability of these contributions.

| Research sub-domain | Authors (year) | Title (journal) | Main contributions |
|---|--|---|--|
| Destination image, branding and marketing | Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) | Destination image and tourist behavioural intentions: A meta-analysis (<i>Tourism Management</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a detailed meta-analysis of a major dimension considered by consumer behavioural scholars in place branding and marketing • Substantiates crucial empirical contribution (e.g. destination image has the greatest impact on intention to recommend) |
| | Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) | Destination image: A meta-analysis of 2000-2007 research (<i>Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a very accurate evaluation of pre-2008 literature on destination image and the main assessment approaches • Reveals the lack of consensus on methodologies and emphasises the role of “nontraditional destinations” (e.g. theme parks) |
| Nation branding, country image and COO | Kaneva (2011) | Nation branding: Toward an agenda for critical research (<i>International Journal of Communication</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a powerful conceptual categorisation that distinguishes “technical-economic”, “political” and “cultural” approaches; • Promotes an explicit awareness for a critical theory agenda |
| Place branding and marketing | Gertner (2011) | Unfolding and configuring two decades of research and publications on place marketing and place branding (<i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrates the development of the literature through five effective statements, casting doubts on its overall scientific maturity • Criticises the theoretical fragmentation of the literature and its methodological deficiencies • Identifies a list of “notable articles” that is very practical for novice readers • Offers a unique meta-theoretical categorisation based on Burrell and Morgan’s model |
| | Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) | Problematizing place branding research: A meta-theoretical analysis of the literature (<i>Marketing Review</i>) | |
| | Vuignier (2017) | Place branding and place marketing 1976–2016: A multidisciplinary literature review (<i>International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive cataloguing of the literature offering the widest coverage available so far |
| Place branding | Aguilera-Cora, Fernández-Cavia and Codina (2024) | Place branding and sustainable development: a scoping review (<i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores the specific nexus between place branding and Sustainable Development Goals, thus linking our research domain to contemporary global trends in policy making |
| City branding and marketing | Lucarelli and Berg (2011) | City branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain (<i>Journal of Place Management and Development</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous critical appraisal of methodologies adopted in this sub-domain; • spells out three main perspectives (branding as production, appropriation and source of negative implications for the urban realm) • develops sharp calls for future research, most of which are still relevant (and unaddressed) nowadays, such as the invitation to go beyond single-case study projects |

Place and city marketing

Eletxigerra et al. (2018)

Place marketing examined through a service-dominant logic lens: A review (*Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*)

- Answers specific RQs addressing a very popular conceptual trend in place marketing
- promotes bridging between place marketing and tourism/destination studies

Table 4: notable SLRs for contribution and execution (Authors' own work)

Despite exhibiting methodological inadequacies, an additional set of SLRs appear to be particularly insightful as they encourage conceptual bridging between tourism perspectives and the study of urban (Guo, 2024; AlShaalan and Durugbo, 2024) or regional areas (Perkins et al., 2020) as objects of brand management. In the same direction is Hanna et al.'s (2021) attempt to investigate "place" and "destination" studies more holistically. Additional interesting and fruitful angles include methodology (Chan and Marafa, 2014) and the convergence between place branding and public relations (Robson, 2021). Equally compelling is the angle offered by the notable review of Aguilera-Cora et al. (2024), which looks at the nexus between place branding and sustainable development goals, thus linking our research domain to fashionable policy making trends. This set of notable SLRs tend to promote specific and situated, rather than general, systematic explorations. This emerges as a valuable direction for scholars interested in fine-tuning sharper and more focused research questions, rather indulging in unnecessary attempts to superficially discuss a rather predictable list of issues.

Conclusion

By investigating 63 systematic literature review articles published between 2002 and 2024, this study sought to evaluate the development of place marketing and branding literature, with the goal of emphasising unsolved issues and identifying promising avenues. The point of departure was the eclecticism and complexity of the domain, which has become fertile terrain for the proliferation of systematic literature reviews. Resonating with Alvesson et al.'s (2017) critical reflections against the tendency to produce pointless scholarly work in contemporary social sciences, the present paper has cast doubts on the "meaningfulness" of much of the systematic searching within place marketing and branding.

Regarding RQ1 (“How have the SLRs contributed to the place branding and marketing?”), it can be argued that the extent of their contribution is significantly disparate. While notable reviews have offered significant insights (see Table 3), the contribution of most systematic reviews appears to be minimal regardless the number of citations generated. Our findings revealed the existence of common pitfalls, such as a lack of clarity in articulating the inclusion criteria and the superficial or missing critical evaluation of the studies selected. Besides methodological accuracy, we also questioned the capacity to offer “*significant new insights*”, which is the most important standard for a literature review (Palmatier et al. 2018). Disregarding already published systematic reviews has emerged in this respect as a very worrying symptom, together with the peer-review process inability to detect and amend these inadequacies. The fact that the field’s progress has been relatively slow despite the excessive number of systematic reviews seems to point to what Alvesson et al. (2017) lament about the lack of meaningful research in today’s academia.

Responding to RQ2 (“What are the unsolved issues and the promising avenues for systematic literature-based inquiries in place branding?”) has enabled us to distinguish accounts that simply reiterate previous claims from more original and compelling contributions. Table 3 has summarised what are the key issues that still linger over in the field, despite their recurrent mentions in papers’ abstracts and conclusions. Theory, methodologies and even findings are still affected by some of these issues. Fortunately, a few notable attempts exist to move the field forward through well-calibrated systematic searches. Table 4 offers an examination of some reliable and interesting systematic reviews, which we want to further emphasise as positive benchmarks that propose conceptual bridging or investigate the progress of the literature when it comes to specific dimensions rather than ignoring or duplicating already available claims. However, they remain positive deviant cases while a technological shift is redefining dimensions of the academic publishing contexts.

Even though investigating the role of AI falls outside this paper’s main scope, some reflections warrant attention. It was evident that some of the SLRs scrutinised in this research relied on some AI tools, such as in the case of bibliometric analyses. Whilst it cannot be denied that AI tools are empowering human researchers in several forms, we raise the question whether soon the tasks of systematising, cataloguing and mapping knowledge should be left to these tools, mindful of Qureshi et al.’s (2023) qualm of “non-content experts using these tools” (p.1), generating results that might appear correct when they are not. Even though Pearson (2025) and Clark et al. (2025) suggest that AI is still a long way in replacing

human and conducting SLRs independently, it is vital to incorporate these critical questions in our research agendas.

It is not our intention to discourage researchers to produce systematic reviews, rather we invite colleagues and new PhD students to invest more time in fine-tuning more useful research inquiries. For example, rather than necessarily offsetting generic systematic reviews, it would be more fruitful to compare some of the existing ones (see Appendix 1 for the full list of the 63 SLRs) and then develop sharper research questions, so prevent duplication of efforts and limit the self-referential character of some academic practices (see Alvesson et al., 2017). In this respect, embarking on systematic review of European projects or business magazines' articles too could reveal findings that are useful to a wider set of stakeholders. Another suggestion for future research in place branding and marketing regards reviews of reviews. Two of the reviews detected by our study are already reviews of reviews (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2023), both in the area of tourism studies. We encourage other reviews of reviews being designed and delivered in the next years, further investigating the nexus between place branding or marketing and spatial disciplines that so far have appeared to be neglected, such as regional economics. Moreover, future systematic inquiries could possibly consider review papers published in languages other than English, thus promoting a more inclusive and critical mapping.

Appendix 1

Authors

Acharya, A., & Rahman, Z.
 Afshardoost, M., & Eshaghi, M. S.
 Aguilera-Cora, E., Fernández-Cavia, J., & Codina, L.
 AlShaalán, M. K., & Durugbo, C. M.
 Andersson, I.
 Asadzadeh, M., Vatankeh, S., & Aryankhesal, A.
 Ávila-Robinson, A., & Wakabayashi, N.
 Bujac, A. I.
 Chan, C. S., & Marafa, L. M.
 Christofi, M., Iaia, L., Marchesani, F., & Masciarelli, F.
 Cleave, E., & Arku, G.
 Dupre, K.
 Duque Oliva, E. J., Sánchez-Torres, J. A., & Sanabria Niño Eletxigerra, A., Barrutia, J. M., & Echebarria, C.
 Gertner, D.
 Gertner, D.
 Głinska, E., & Tomaszewska, E. J.
 Golestaneh, H., Guerreiro, M., Pinto, P., & Mosaddad, S. H.
 Górska-Warszewicz, H.
 Guo, X.
 G.I., Huang, Marion, K., IpKin Anthony, W., & Rob, L.
 Hama, S., Rowley, J., & Keegan, B.
 Hao, A. W., Paul, J., Trott, S., Guo, C., & Wu, H. H.
 Heidari, A., Yazdani, H. R., Saghaei, F., & Jalilvand, M. R.
 Jones, S., & Kubacki, K.
 Kaneva, N.
 Karikari, S., & Khan, O. J.
 Kasapi, I., & Cela, A.
 Kowaas, R., Cicilia Syamsia, J., & Mandagi, D. W.
 Kumar, N., & Panda, R. K.
 Lengen, C., & Kistemann, T.
 Lessa, P. W. B., & Ocke, M. A. de M.
 Lin, H. C., Han, X., Lyu, T., Ho, W. H., Xu, Y., Hsieh, T. C.,
 Lopes, C., Leitão, J., & Rengifo-Gallego, J.
 López-Rodríguez, C. E., Mora-Forero, J. A., & León-Gómez
 Lu, I. R., Heslop, L. A., Thomas, D. R., & Kwan, E.
 Lucarelli, A., & Berg, P. O.
 Lucarelli, A., & Brorström, S.
 Ma, W., Schraven, D., de Bruijne, M., de Jong, M., & Lu, H.
 Mior Shariffuddin, N. S., Azinuddin, M., Hanafah, M. H., &
 Mohammadi Aydoghmish, F., & Raheian, M.
 Montanari, M. G., Giraldi, J. de M. E., & Galina, S. V. R.
 Moreira, A. C., Pereira, C. R., Lopes, M. F., Calisto, R. A. R.
 Oguztur, S., & Akturan, U.
 Pahlevan-Sharif, S., Mura, P., & Wijesinghe, S. N. R.
 Perkins, R., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Arcodia, C.
 Pham, H. L., Pham, H. T., & Nguyen, T. T.
 Pike, S.
 Razpotnik Visković, N., & Logar, E.
 Robson, P.
 Rojas-Méndez, J. I., & Khoshnevis, M.
 Röl, S., & Sert, A. N.
 Ruiz-Real, J. L., Uribe-Toril, J., & Gázquez-Abad, J. C.
 Sanjaya, A. N., Purnomo, A., Maulana, F. I., Setiyati, E. A.,
 Sio, K. P., Fraser, B., & Fredline, L.
 Stepchenkova, S., & Mills, J. E.
 Suardi, W., Nurmandi, A., Mutiarin, D., Purnomo, E. P., Prit
 Sulistiowati, R., Yulianto, Y., Meliyana, M., Atika, D. B., &
 Swain, S., Jebarajakirthy, C., Sharma, B. K., Maseeh, H. I.,
 Tijani, A., Majeed, M., Ofori, K. S., & Abubakari, A.
 Tran, N. L., & Rudolf, W.
 Vuignier, R.
 Zhang, H., Fu, X., Cai, L. A., & Lu, L.

Year Title

2016 Place branding research: a thematic review and future research agenda
 2020 Destination image and tourist behavioural intentions: A meta-analysis
 2024 Place branding and sustainable development: a scoping review
 2024 City branding as innovation for tourism development: systematic review of literature from 2011 to 2023
 2014 Placing place branding: an analysis of an emerging research field in human geography
 2021 The main City Branding Dimensions in Health Tourism Development: A scoping review
 2018 Changes in the structures and directions of destination management and marketing research: A bibliometric m
 2016 Country-of-origin effect on brand perception-a systematic review of the literature from the last two decades
 2013 A review of place branding methodologies in the new millennium
 2021 Marketing innovation and internationalization in smart city development: a systematic review, framework and r
 2017 Putting a number on place: a systematic review of place branding influence
 2019 Trends and gaps in place-making in the context of urban development and tourism: 25 years of literature review
 2022 City brand evolution research and future agenda: bibliometric and science mapping analysis
 2018 Place marketing examined through a service-dominant logic lens: A review
 2011a A (tentative) meta-analysis of the place marketing and place branding literature
 2011b Unfolding and configuring two decades of research and publications on place marketing and place branding
 2017 Main areas of place branding scientific research-Bibliometric analysis
 2022 On the role of internal stakeholders in place branding
 2024 Factors determining city brand equity-A systematic literature review
 2023 Urban tourism destination image: a bibliometric visualization review
 2023 Tourism destination research from 2000 to 2020: A systematic narrative review in conjunction with bibliograph
 2021 Place and Destination Branding: A Review and Conceptual Mapping of the Domain
 2021 Two decades of research on nation branding: a review and future research agenda
 2018 The perspective of religious and spiritual tourism research: a systematic mapping study
 2014 Branding places with social problems: A systematic review (2000-2013)
 2011 Nation branding: Toward an agenda for critical research
 2022 Differentiating the Destination Branding Methods of Emerging Markets: A Systematic Review
 2017 Destination Branding: A Review of the City Branding Literature
 2023 The Antecedents of an Effective City Branding: A Comprehensive Systematic Review
 2019 Place branding and place marketing: a contemporary analysis of the literature and usage of terminology
 2012 Sense of place and place identity: Review of neuroscientific evidence
 2023 Exploring the relationship between Place Branding and Technology: A systematic review
 2020 Task-technology fit analysis of social media use for marketing in the tourism and hospitality industry: a system
 2018 Place branding: revealing the neglected role of agro food products
 2022 Strategic Development Associated with Branding in the Tourism Sector: Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic R
 2016 An examination of the status and evolution of country image research
 2011 City branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain
 2013 Problematising place branding research: A meta-theoretical analysis of the literature
 2019 Tracing the origins of place branding research: A bibliometric study of concepts in use (1980-2018)
 2023 A comprehensive review on tourism destination competitiveness (TDC) literature
 2022 Developing a comprehensive conceptual framework for city branding based on urban planning theory: Meta-syn
 2020 Relationship between country brand and internationalization: a literature review
 2023 Sustainable and Green City Brand. An Exploratory Review
 2015 Synthesis of City Branding Literature (1988-2014) as a Research Domain
 2019 A systematic review of systematic reviews in tourism
 2020 Understanding the contribution of stakeholder collaboration towards regional destination branding: A systemat
 2022 Value co-creation in branding: A systematic review from a tourism perspective
 2002 Destination image analysis - A review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000
 2022 Certification, labelling and branding in tourism research: systematic review
 2021 Public relations and place branding: Friend, foe or just ignored? A systematic review
 2023 Conceptualizing nation branding: the systematic literature review
 2020 The Role of Official Websites in Destination Branding: A Systematic Literature Review
 2023 Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges
 2023 A Systematic Review of Marketing in Smart City
 2021 A Contemporary systematic literature review of gastronomy tourism and destination image
 2010 Destination image: A meta-analysis of 2000-2007 research
 2023 A Historical Review for City Branding: Hyper Competition, Challenges, and Improvement Opportunities
 2023 The Combination of City Branding and Ecocity: A Critical Review of Opportunities and Challenges in Indonesia
 2024 Place Branding: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda
 2024 Country branding research: a decade's systematic review
 2022 Social Media and Destination Branding in Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature
 2017 Place branding & place marketing 1976-2016: A multidisciplinary literature review
 2014 Destination image and tourist loyalty: A meta-analysis

Appendix 1 - Full list of systematic literature reviews (Authors' own work)

References

- Acharya, A., and Rahman, Z. (2016). Place branding research: a thematic review and future research agenda. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 13(3), 289–317. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-015-0150-7>
- Afshardoost, M., and Eshaghi, M. S. (2020). Destination image and tourist behavioural intentions: A meta-analysis. *Tourism Management*, 81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104154>
- Aguilera-Cora, E., Fernández-Cavia, J., and Codina, L. (2024). Place branding and sustainable development: a scoping review. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-024-00338-5>

- AlShaalan, M. K., & Durugbo, C. M. (2024). City branding as innovation for tourism development: systematic review of literature from 2011 to 2023. *Management Review Quarterly*, 1-33.
- Alvesson, M., and Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problematization. *The Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 247–271. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>
- Aromataris, E., Fernandez, R., Godfrey, C. M., Holly, C., Khalil, H., and Tungpunkom, P. (2015). Summarizing systematic reviews: Methodological development, conduct and reporting of an umbrella review approach. *International Journal of Evidence-Based Healthcare*, 13(3), 132–140. <https://doi.org/10.1097/XEB.0000000000000055>
- Ávila-Robinson, A., and Wakabayashi, N. (2018). Changes in the structures and directions of destination management and marketing research: A bibliometric mapping study, 2005–2016. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 10, 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.06.005>
- Barker, A., Nancarrow, C., and Spackman, N. (2001). Informed eclecticism: a research paradigm for the twenty-first century. *International Journal of Market Research*, 43(1), 3–27.
- Barnett-Page, E., and Thomas, J. (2009). Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: A critical review. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-9-59>
- Berger, P. L., and Luckmann, T. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin (Original work published 1966).
- Boisen, M., Terlouw, K., Groote, P., and Couwenberg, O. (2018). Reframing place promotion, place marketing, and place branding - moving beyond conceptual confusion. *Cities*, 80(August 2017), 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.08.021>
- Breslin, D., Gatrell, C. and Bailey, K. (2020). Developing insights through reviews: reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the International Journal of Management Reviews. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 22(1), 3-9.
- Chan, C. S., and Marafa, L. M. (2013). A review of place branding methodologies in the new millennium. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 9(4), 236–253. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2013.17>
- Chan, C. S., and Marafa, L. M. (2014). Rebranding Hong Kong “Green”: the potential for connecting city branding with green resources. *World Leisure Journal*, 56(1), 62–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04419057.2013.876587>
- Christofi, M., Iaia, L., Marchesani, F., and Masciarelli, F. (2021). Marketing innovation and internationalization in smart city development: a systematic review, framework and

- research agenda. *International Marketing Review*, 38(5), 948–984.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2021-0027/FULL/XML>
- Clark, T., and Wright, M. (2009). So, farewell then. Reflections on editing the journal of management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(1), 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1467-6486.2008.00808.X>
- Clark Clark, J., Barton, B., Albarqouni, L., Byambasuren, O., Jowsey, T., Keogh, J., Liang, T., Moro, C., O’Neill, H., & Jones, M. (2025). Generative artificial intelligence use in evidence synthesis: A systematic review. *Research Synthesis Methods*, 16(4), 601–619. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rsm.2025.16>
- Cleave, E., and Arku, G. (2017). Putting a number on place: a systematic review of place branding influence. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 10(5), 425–446.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-02-2017-0015>
- Dupre, K. (2019). Trends and gaps in place-making in the context of urban development and tourism: 25 years of literature review. In *Journal of Place Management and Development* (Vol. 12, Issue 1, pp. 102–120). Emerald Group Holdings Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-07-2017-0072>
- Eletxigerra, A., Barrutia, J. M., and Echebarria, C. (2018). Place marketing examined through a service-dominant logic lens: A review. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 9, 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.11.002>
- Gendron, Y. (2013). Rethinking the concept of research contribution. *Comptabilite - Controle - Audit*, 19(3), 1–21.
- Gertner, D. (2011a). A (tentative) meta-analysis of the place marketing and place branding literature. *Journal of Brand Management*, 19(2), 112–131.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2011.13>
- Gertner, D. (2011b). Unfolding and configuring two decades of research and publications on place marketing and place branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 7(2), 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2011.7>
- Giovanardi, M., Kavaratzis, M., and Lichrou, M. (2018). Critical perspectives on place marketing. In *The Routledge Companion to Critical Marketing* (pp. 115–134). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315630526-7>
- Golestaneh, H., Guerreiro, M., Pinto, P., and Mosaddad, S. H. (2022). On the role of internal stakeholders in place branding. In *Journal of Place Management and Development* (Vol. 15, Issue 2, pp. 202–228). Emerald Group Holdings Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-05-2020-0041>
- Górska-Warsewicz, H. (2020). Factors determining city brand equity-A systematic literature review. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12(19). <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU12197858>
- Gough, D. (2007). Weight of Evidence: a framework for the appraisal of the quality and relevance of evidence. *Applied and Practice-Based Research.*, 22, 213–228.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520701296189>

- Gough, D., Thomas, J., and Oliver, S. (2012). Clarifying differences between review designs and methods. *Systematic Reviews*, 1(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-1-28/FIGURES/4>
- Gough, D., Thomas, J., and Oliver, S. (2019). Clarifying differences between reviews within evidence ecosystems. *Systematic Reviews*, 8(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/S13643-019-1089-2/FIGURES/3>
- Grech, V., and Eldawlatly, A. A. (2024). STROBE, CONSORT, PRISMA, MOOSE, STARD, SPIRIT, and other guidelines - Overview and application. *Saudi Journal of Anaesthesia*, 18(1), 137–141. https://doi.org/10.4103/sja.sja_545_23
- Guo, X. (2024). Urban tourism destination image: a bibliometric visualization review. In *Kybernetes*. Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-04-2023-0646>
- Hammersley, M. (2020). Reflections on the Methodological Approach of Systematic Reviews. In *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research: Methodology, Perspectives and Application* (pp. 23–39). Springer VS, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_2
- Hankinson, G. (2001). Location branding: A study of the branding practices of 12 English cities. *Journal of brand management*, 9(2), 127-142.
- Hanna, S., Rowley, J., and Keegan, B. (2021). Place and Destination Branding: A Review and Conceptual Mapping of the Domain. *European Management Review*, 18(2), 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12433>
- Hao, A. W., Paul, J., Trott, S., Guo, C., and Wu, H. H. (2021). Two decades of research on nation branding: a review and future research agenda. In *International Marketing Review* (Vol. 38, Issue 1, pp. 46–69). Emerald Group Holdings Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2019-0028>
- Huang, G. I., Marion, K., IpKin Anthony, W., and Rob, L. (2023). Tourism destination research from 2000 to 2020: A systematic narrative review in conjunction with bibliographic mapping analysis. In *Tourism Management* (Vol. 95). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104686>
- Jones, S., and Kubacki, K. (2014). Branding places with social problems: A systematic review (2000-2013). *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 10(3), 218–229. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2014.14>
- Kaneva, N. (2011). Nation branding: Toward an agenda for critical research. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 117–141. <https://doi.org/1932-8036/20110117>.
- Kasapi, I., and Cela, A. (2017). Destination Branding: A Review of the City Branding Literature. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(4), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mjss-2017-0012>
- Kumar, N., and Panda, R. K. (2001). Place branding and place marketing: a contemporary analysis of the literature and usage of terminology. *International Review on Public and*

Nonprofit Marketing, 16(2–4), 255–292. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S12208-019-00230-6>/METRICS

- Lengen, C., and Kistemann, T. (2012). Sense of place and place identity: Review of neuroscientific evidence. *Health and Place*, 18(5), 1162–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2012.01.012>
- Liberati, A., Altman, D. G., Tetzlaff, J., Mulrow, C., Gøtzsche, P. C., Ioannidis, J. P. A., Clarke, M., Devereaux, P. J., Kleijnen, J., and Moher, D. (2009). The PRISMA statement for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies that evaluate healthcare interventions: explanation and elaboration. *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, 339. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b2700>
- Lopes, C., Leitão, J., and Rengifo-Gallego, J. (2018). Place branding: revealing the neglected role of agro food products. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 15(4), 497–530. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-018-0211-9>
- López-Rodríguez, C. E., Mora-Forero, J. A., and León-Gómez, A. (2022). Strategic Development Associated with Branding in the Tourism Sector: Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Review of the Literature between the Years 2000 to 2022. In *Sustainability (Switzerland)* (Vol. 14, Issue 16). MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14169869>
- Lu, I. R. R., Heslop, L. A., Thomas, D. R., and Kwan, E. (2016). An examination of the status and evolution of country image research. *International Marketing Review*, 33(6), 825–850. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-03-2015-0036>
- Lucarelli, A., and Berg, P. O. (2011). City branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 4(1), 9–27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331111117133>
- Lucarelli, A., and Brorström, S. (2013a). Problematising place branding research: A meta-theoretical analysis of the literature. *The Marketing Review*, 13(1), 65–81. <https://doi.org/10.1362/146934713x13590250137826>
- Lucarelli, A., and Brorström, S. (2013b). Problematising place branding research: A meta-theoretical analysis of the literature. *The Marketing Review*, 13(1), 65–81. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17506200710779521>
- Lucarelli, A., Shahriar, H., Ulver, S., and Egan-Wyer, C. (2023). Research contributions in interpretivist marketing and consumer research studies: A kaleidoscopic framework. *Marketing Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231202430>
- Ma, W., Schraven, D., de Bruijne, M., de Jong, M., and Lu, H. (2019). Tracing the origins of place branding research: A bibliometric study of concepts in use (1980-2018). *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11112999>
- MacLure, M. (2005). “Clarity bordering on stupidity”: Where’s the quality in systematic review? *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(4), 393–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500131801>

- Mendoza De Los Santos, O. E., Riquelme Alcantar, L., and De Hoyos Bermea, A. (2022). Systematic Reviews And Their Epistemological Foundations: A Narrative Review Of The Literature. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8), 10298–10312. <http://journalppw.com>
- Metaxas, T. (2010). Cities Competition, Place Marketing And Economic Development In South Europe: The Barcelona Case As Fdi Destination. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 5(5(14)), 5–19. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/rom/terumm/v5y2010i14p5-19.html>
- Mohammadi Aydoghmish, F., and Rafieian, M. (2022). Developing a comprehensive conceptual framework for city branding based on urban planning theory: Meta-synthesis of the literature (1990–2020). *Cities*, 128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103731>
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., and Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>
- Montanari, M. G., Giraldi, J. de M. E., and Galina, S. V. R. (2020). Relationship between country brand and internationalization: a literature review. In *Benchmarking* (Vol. 27, Issue 7, pp. 2148–2165). Emerald Group Holdings Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-09-2018-0277>
- Mulrow, C. D. (1994). Systematic Reviews Rationale for systematic reviews. *British Medical Journal*, 309.
- Ntounis, N., Lloveras, J., and Parker, C. (2015). A review of epistemological issues and philosophical positions for the development of the theory in place marketing and place branding. *3rd Place Management and Branding Conference, Sustainability, Liveability and Connectivity*. <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/618952>
- Oguztimur, S., and Akturan, U. (2015). Synthesis of City Branding Literature (1988–2014) as a Research Domain. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 113(18), 357–372. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2054>
- Pahlevan-Sharif, S., Mura, P., and Wijesinghe, S. N. R. (2019). A systematic review of systematic reviews in tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 39, 158–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.04.001>
- Palmatier, R. W., Houston, M. B., and Hulland, J. (2018). Review articles: purpose, process, and structure. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 46(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-017-0563-4>
- Pearson, H. (2025). AI slashes time to produce gold-standard medical reviews — but sceptics urge caution. *Nature*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/D41586-025-01942-Y>;SUBJMETA=114,1305,308,631,648,692,697,706;KWRD=MACHINE+LEARNING,MEDICAL+RESEARCH,RESEARCH+DATA
- Perkins, R., Khoo-Lattimore, C., and Arcodia, C. (2020). Understanding the contribution of stakeholder collaboration towards regional destination branding: A systematic

- narrative literature review. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 43, 250–258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2020.04.008>
- Petticrew, M., and Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences A PRACTICAL GUIDE*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Pike, S. (2002). Destination image analysis - A review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000. *Tourism Management*, 23(5), 541–549. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(02\)00005-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(02)00005-5)
- Qureshi, R., Shaughnessy, D., Gill, K. A. R., Robinson, K. A., Li, T., & Agai, E. (2023). Are ChatGPT and large language models “the answer” to bringing us closer to systematic review automation? In *Systematic Reviews* (Vol. 12, Issue 1). BioMed Central Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-023-02243-z>
- Robson, P. (2021). Public relations and place branding: Friend, foe or just ignored? A systematic review. *Public Relations Review*, 47(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102096>
- Rojas-Méndez, J. I., and Khoshnevis, M. (2023). Conceptualizing nation branding: the systematic literature review. In *Journal of Product and Brand Management* (Vol. 32, Issue 1, pp. 107–123). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2021-3444>
- Ruiz-Real, J. L., Uribe-Toril, J., and Gázquez-Abad, J. C. (2020). Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100453>
- Seggie, S. H., and Griffith, D. A. (2009). What does it take to get promoted in marketing academia? Understanding exceptional publication productivity in the leading marketing journals. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(1), 122–132.
- Stepchenkova, S., and Mills, J. E. (2010). Destination image: A meta-analysis of 2000-2007 research. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 19(6), 575–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2010.493071>
- Stern, C., Jordan, Z., and McArthur, A. (2014). *SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS, Step by Step Developing the Review Question and Inclusion Criteria*. 114(4).
- Swain, S., Jebarajakirthy, C., Sharma, B. K., Maseeh, H. I., Agrawal, A., Shah, J., and Saha, R. (2024). Place Branding: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Travel Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231168620>
- Tijani, A., Majeed, M., Ofori, K. S., and Abubakari, A. (2024). Country branding research: a decade’s systematic review. *Cogent Business and Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2307640>
- Tong, A., Flemming, K., McInnes, E., Oliver, S., and Craig, J. (2012). Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research: ENTREQ. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-12-181>
- Torgerson, C. J. (2006). Publication bias: The achilles’ heel of systematic reviews? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2006.00332.x>

- Tran, N. L., and Rudolf, W. (2022). Social Media and Destination Branding in Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 14(20). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013528>
- Vuignier, R. (2017). Place branding and place marketing 1976–2016: A multidisciplinary literature review. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 14(4), 447–473. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-017-0181-3>
- Zenker, S., Braun, E., and Petersen, S. (2017). Branding the destination versus the place: The effects of brand complexity and identification for residents and visitors. *Tourism Management*, 58, 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.008>
- Zhang, H., Fu, X., Cai, L. A., and Lu, L. (2014). Destination image and tourist loyalty: A meta-analysis. *Tourism Management*, 40, 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.06.006>