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DESTINATION BRAND EQUITY RESEARCH FROM 2001 TO 2012

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The present study delves into a review of the destination brand equity literature published since 2001, aiming to offer tourism researchers a reference guide to the general context, corresponding methods, and focus of previous works. A multisource search resulted in the identification of 64 relevant papers. Content analysis using multiple classifier variables provides further insights into specific geographical, conceptual, and methodological aspects. Conclusions pertain to the multidimensional character of the construct, the methodology, and context in which destination brand performance has been developed. Destination brand equity appears as a rapidly conceived concept, borrowed from traditional (corporate/product) branding theory, while discussion on its definition and operationalization is still in progress and has yet to mature in a multidisciplinary context. As the first attempt to review destination brand equity within the top tourism and marketing journals and relevant search engines, the study may contribute to a comprehensive overview of the field. The outcomes offer marketing scholars an in-depth view of the concept, providing an overall insight on the various ways destination brands might be evaluated.

Key words: Review; Destination branding; Effectiveness; Brand equity; Brand performance

Introduction

Literature has only recently tackled the issue of destination brand metrics adopting a supply-side managerial view (e.g., Balakrishnan, 2008; Hankinson, 2007; Piha, Giannopoulos, & Avlonitis, 2010). In some cases, research incorporated different stakeholders and key players moving from the traditional tourist-oriented view to the local population's perspective (e.g., Zouganeli, Trihas, Antonaki, & Kladou, 2012). Other studies focus on the specific values and meanings (e.g., Gnoth, 2007) and resources (Tasci & Denizci, 2009) of destination branding in order to evaluate the brand performance and productivity, respectively. Nevertheless, a proliferation of tourism destination studies still follows a consumer-perceived image approach and examines the brand concept primarily from a demand-side perspective (e.g., Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

The concept of brand equity was actually applied to the research field of destination branding almost a decade ago (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). However, developments in the following years brought the concept closer to the completion of its five-dimensional synthesis (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014), as originally proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996). Considering the different approaches briefly discussed, the present work aims at delineating the knowledge areas pertaining to the extant literature of destination brand equity, extrapolated from the traditional branding principles. Thus, the study offers an in-depth view of the concept, uncovering critical terminology, methodology, and context-specific issues. The article begins with a short description of the relatively newly defined concept of destination brand equity. It continues with the methodological approach adopted, and the research findings that derive from a critical review of the relevant literature. Conclusions are finally discussed on the basis of key points summarized for destination policy makers (e.g., DMOs, National Tourism Organizations, etc.). Directions for further research are also identified so as to contribute to a contemporary and comprehensive overview of the specific research area.

A Nascent Field of Research

Brand equity is originally defined as

> a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a producer by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers. . . . Brand equity and customer value, in turn, provide value to the firm by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs, brand loyalty, prices/ margins, brand extensions, trade leverage, and competitive advantage. (Aaker, 1991, p. 15–17)

Brand equity assets may have the potential to add value for the firm by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs. Furthermore, brand equity attributes greater value to the firm by enhancing brand extensions and trade leverage, allowing higher margins, and creating a competitive advantage. Brand equity dimensions such as awareness, perceived quality, associations, and brand assets provide value to the firm by enhancing brand loyalty.

The concept of Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003) offers destination marketers a potential performance measure of the extent to which brand identity has successfully been positioned in the market (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). However, the predominance of literature on destination image overshadows any elementary steps toward the investigation of the indicators that may be used to evaluate a destination branding strategy. Alternatively, a plethora of studies account for destination image compared to the relatively few that investigate destination brand equity.

Literature review unveils the request for accountability (i.e., equity) in the destination branding context, which has partly been covered with the use of terms and notions from the traditional branding theory. Following this line of reasoning, tourism marketing scholars captured the term "destination brand equity," borrowed from the product and corporate branding literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) defines CBBE as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on the consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (p. 8). Keller's evaluation model encompasses two components: brand awareness (including brand recall and brand recognition) and brand image (a set of brand associations). Brand associations are conceptualized in terms of their characteristics by type (attributes, benefits, and attitudes), favorability, strength, and uniqueness. Keller (1993) alleges that CBBE occurs when the customer is aware of the brand and holds favorable, strong, and unique associations as well. Favorable attitudes may, in turn, lead to repeat buying behavior, which is an interpretative praxis of the already established notion of brand loyalty. Moreover, while investigating the brand equity construct, Aaker (1991) includes the assets and liabilities that add or detract value to a firm. Similarly, high levels of brand equity may result in increased sales, price premiums, customer loyalty (Aaker, 1991), lower costs (Keller, 1993), and purchase intent (Cobb-Walgren, Beal, & Donthu, 1995).

According to the seminal work made by Aaker (1991), brand equity measures are classified into five dimensions: 1) awareness, 2) associations/ image, 3) perceived quality, 4) loyalty, and 5) brand assets. Nevertheless, only the first four attributes are

included in the models assessing CBBE in the destination branding context (Konecnik Ruzzier, 2010; Konecnik Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2008), namely, awareness (destination name, characteristics), associations or image (perceived value, personality), perceived quality (perceived quality, leadership/popularity), and loyalty (price premium, satisfaction/loyalty). The fifth dimension (brand assets) is rarely included in the context of destination branding. In accordance with Pike (2010), when referring to products, the measurement of brand equity is an intangible balance sheet asset with key dependent variables, including future financial performance (H. Kim, Kim, & An, 2003) and market share (Mackay, 2001). Notwithstanding the view of intangibility, tourist performance (e.g., destination visitation) necessitates the customer-based character of brand equity in the tourism context (Gartner & Konecnik Ruzzier, 2011).

Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) pioneering works inspired a dearth of studies pertaining to the operationalization of destination brand equity. The steadily growing number of relevant exploratory studies shed more light on the field of destination branding, further contributing to its applicability and expansion. On the grounds that a comprehensive model has not yet appeared to enhance our understanding, interchangeable terms (i.e., measurement, evaluation, assessment, equity, performance) and diverse perspectives still exist. An analysis of the extant literature on the evaluation of destination brands would depict the key gaps in conceptual development of a nascent research field, the methodological approach followed in recent application, the terms attributed to the notion, and other descriptive characteristics of relevant studies. Thus, a broad review of the current body of knowledge steps out as necessary. The main questions, which are of interest, refer to the extent of the relevant literature, the issues explored or ignored in the main body of research, as well as future directions that may arise to grow knowledge in this particular field.

Methodology

The study seeks to provide further insight into tourists' evaluation of the place as a destination at the macrolevel, rather than focus on a specific tourism product or single service provision (i.e., hotel,

cultural event, conference) at the microlevel. For the purpose of the study, the developments in the recently conceived theoretical background of destination brand equity and the patterns of corresponding scholarly research can better be traced through the review of the international refereed journals available on relevant databases (editor-specific databases and search engines). The databases used for the review of the literature (e.g., Business Source Premier, Elsevier, Emerald, Heal-Link, JSTOR, Sage), as well as the search engines (i.e., Google scholar) and the reference lists in books identified, grant access to more than 4,000 journals. The multisource search resulted in a pool of papers (almost 9,500 academic papers, including duplicate records between databases) and yielded 64 articles published in academic journals that focus on the evaluation of destination brands. For the purpose of the study, the analysis covered the time period between the years 2001 and 2012; the starting date was determined in accordance with the publication of the first academic article published in the field. Following similar attempts of analyzing various research fields (e.g., Clark, 1990; Nakata & Huang, 2005; Papastathopoulou & Hultink, 2012), journal articles were content analyzed against multiple classifier variables that fall into three broad categories: methodological approach (focus of studies and research design), geographical dimension, and conceptual level (e.g., terminology used).

As shown in Figure 1, a comprehensive discussion among the authors and a review of previous studies resulted in the identification of relevant terms. The iterative and retrieval procedure (i.e., database search) started with developing a set of search concepts related to destination brand equity, specifically performance, measurement, assessment, evaluation, and effectiveness. These terms were used along with the concept of destination brand in different combinations, as entries in all searches (e.g., the search of the term "destination brand evaluation" in JSTOR produced 732 results, while the same entries returned 2,982 papers in Elsevier). In order to maintain consistency, the search process in various literature databases was conducted by one of the authors. An interrater reliability check was then conducted by the other two authors. The interrater reliability check and the content analysis revealed that most results appeared
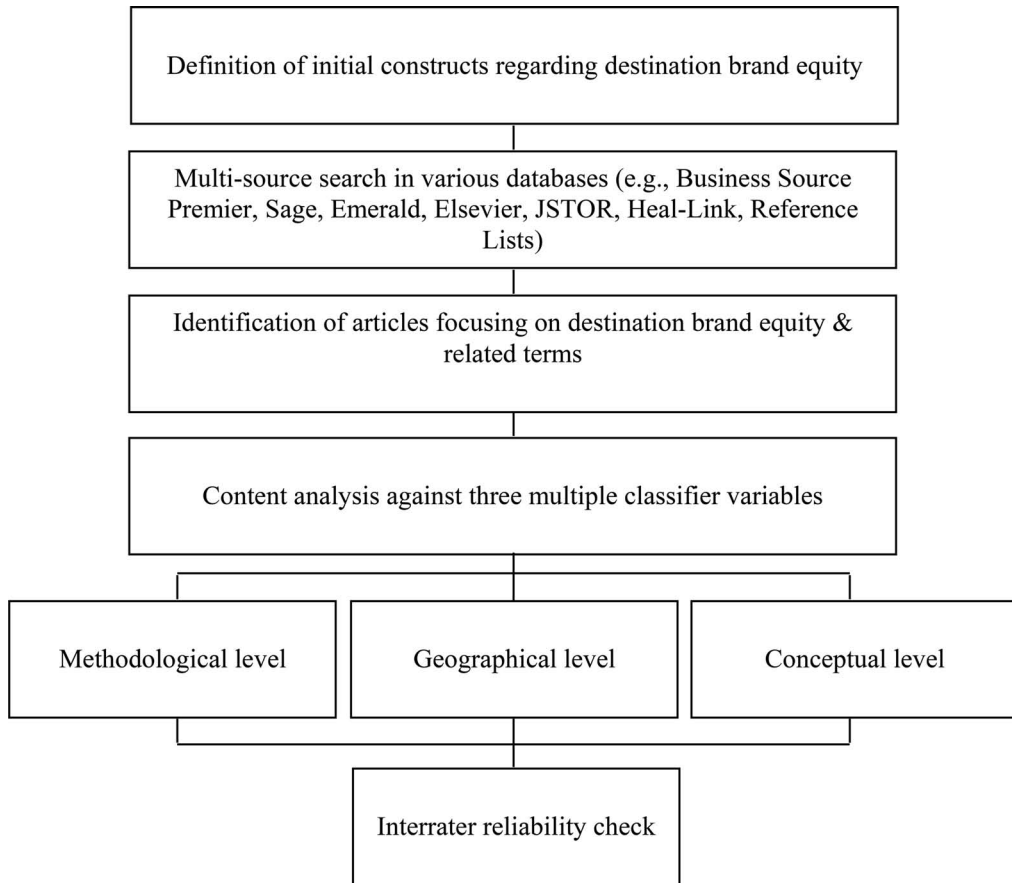
Figure 1. Methodological steps.

because the terms were merely included in the paper or the reference list, yet in many cases the research focus was on tourism products and services (not on places from a destination viewpoint) or not closely related to destination brand equity. Given the current status of research, next to the content analysis, a descriptive analysis was also considered necessary. Because the purpose of the analysis was to provide an assessment of the extant literature, findings related to general article characteristics (i.e., evolution of publications over time) are presented in the following section.

Research Findings

Content analysis resulted in 64 papers, which delve into the concept of brand equity (brand performance or related terms) and, thus, were included in the analysis. Table 1 includes all 64 papers from the review process and briefly portrays a classification on how the terms have been used in the literature throughout the years (2001–2012).

Splitting the 12 years of research in similar time periods would be a good starting point to analyze research findings against these intervals. Research on brand equity may date back almost a decade, yet more than half of the articles have been published within the last few years. In the first 6 years (2001–2006), no more than 12 articles were published. The progress in the field is clearly portrayed through an overall upward direction of the number of articles published (Fig. 2). The study did not yield a critical mass of papers in order to set the platform for chi-square analysis in search of significant differences in multiple classifier variables over time. Likewise, the major findings are summarized in the section

Table 1
Taxonomy of Terminology Used in the Literature

References	Destination Brand					
	Equity	Evaluation	Measurement	Assessment	Effectiveness	Performance
Aziz, Kefallonitis, and Friedman (2012); Ferns and Walls (2012); Gómez and Molina (2012); Dioko and Harill (2011); Haugland, Ness Bjørn-Ove Grønseth, and Aarstand (2011); Horng et al. (2012); Saraniemi (2011); Usakli and Baloglu (2011); Daye (2010); Kneesel, Baloglu, and Millar (2010); Mechinda et al. (2010); Pike et al. (2010); Saraniemi (2010); Marzano and Scott (2009); Wagner and Peters (2009); Li, Petrick, and Zhou (2008); Tasci and Kozak (2006); Chalip and Costa (2005); Pike (2005); Cai (2002); Locksin and Spawton (2001)						
Boo et al. (2009)						
Im, Kim, Elliot, and Han (2012)						
Myagmarsuren and Chen (2011); Tasci, Gartner, and Cavusgil (2007)						
Evangelista and Dioko (2011)						
Garcia, Gomez, and Molina (2012); Ban, Popa, and Silaghi (2011); Horng et al. (2012); Gartner and Konecnik Ruzzier (2011); Trembath et al. (2011); S.-H. Kim, Han, Holland, and Byon (2009); Konecnik Ruzzier and Ruzzier (2008); Konecnik Ruzzier and Gartner (2007); Konecnik Ruzzier (2006)						
Konecnik Ruzzier (2010); Sartori, Mottironi, and Antonioli Corigliano (2012); Jalilvand, Esfahani, and Samiei (2010)						
Pike and Mason (2011); Pike (2010); Pike (2009)						
Bianchi and Pike (2011); Pike and Scott (2009); Pike (2007)						
Dioko and So (2012); Hankinson (2012); Camarero et al. (2010)						
Flagestad and Hope (2001)						
Poria et al. (2011); Baker & Cameron (2008); Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005)						
Xing and Chalip (2006); Hankinson (2005)						
Morgan, Hastings, and Pritchard (2012)						
Henderson (2007)						
Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, and Mihalic (2012); D'Angella and Go (2009); Balakrishnan (2008)						
Hudson and Ritchie (2008)						
Yüksel and Yüksel (2001)						
Bornhorst, Ritchie, and Sheehan (2010)						
Murphy, Moscardo, and Benckendorff (2007); Park and Petrick (2006)						
Pereira, Correia, and Schutz (2012)						

below with the aid of the descriptive analysis (frequencies and mean) undertaken in continuation of the content analysis already mentioned.

As already discussed, the majority of the studies in the destination branding literature are replete with research promulgating the aspect of destination image; the latter was first introduced in the tourism field and hence it has been widely used. Going one step further, the present study proceeds to a review in order to address any knowledge gaps and common platforms of research in the emerging stream of evaluating destination brands, which dates back almost 10 years (2001–2012). This review annotates the literature in the subject area of three different levels: a) methodological, b) geographical, and c) conceptual.

Methodological Level

The first step of the analysis has been the identification of any pattern underlying the methodological approach adopted in the field. The authors
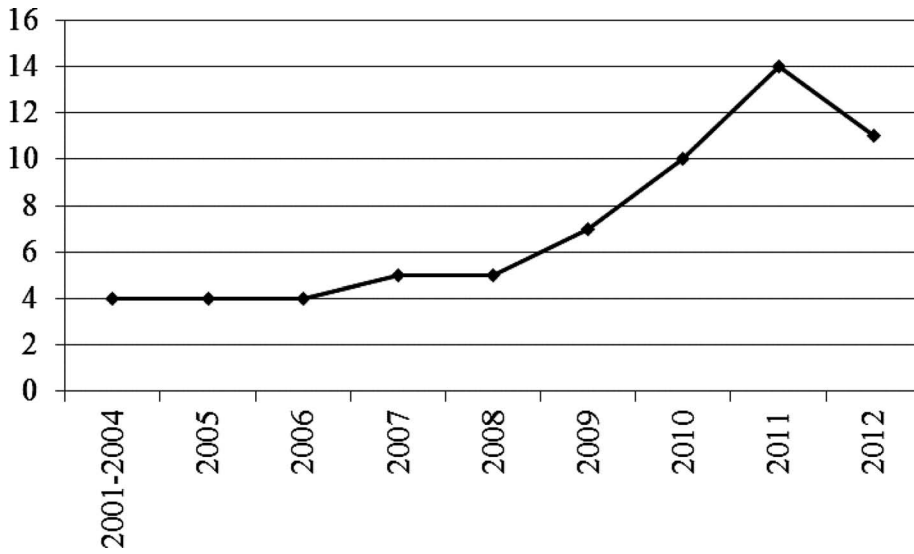
Figure 2. Number of destination brand equity-related articles (2001–2012).

searched into the relevant literature, elaborated on the papers that could contribute in the field of destination brand evaluation and categorized them in four categories, according to the methodological approach adopted and the statistical techniques utilized. In this section, the authors explore the focus of the studies (stakeholders involved/perspective adopted: i.e., supply side, demand side) and the research design (conceptual studies, empirical studies, etc.). More analytically, Table 2 describes the methodological approach followed by scholars who have contributed to the field of brand equity in the past 12 years of relevant research ($N = 64$). Based on the categorization proposed by Page and Schirr (2008), the vast majority of the papers (85.93% of them) follow an empirical approach (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed).

In the case of scale development, where mixed method research is also applied (e.g., Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012; Konecnik Ruzzier, 2010; Konecnik Ruzzier & Gartner, 2007), the authors also identified the characteristics that describe the empirical part of the research (i.e., scale validation and testing). Apart from purely conceptual papers (nine papers in total), Table 3 summarizes the results of the analysis considering the stakeholder groups on which empirical studies are focusing ($n = 55$). Only three papers adopt both the supply and the demand side. Demand-side studies refer either to tourists or to both tourists and local residents. However, growing research interest is identified in sampling potential travelers (residents considered as potential tourists) in many studies focusing on the

Table 2
Methodological Approach

Research Design	Frequencies ($N = 64$)	Percentage (%)
EQN	30	46.86
EQL	11	17.19
M	14	21.88
C/N	9	14.06

EQN, empirical-quantitative; EQL, empirical-qualitative; M, mixed; C/N, conceptual/normative.

Table 3
Research Perspective (Stakeholders Examined)

Stakeholders Group	Frequencies ($n = 55$)
Demand side	
Tourists and locals	3
Tourists	14
Potential tourists	17
Supply side	
Private and public	9
Public	8
Private	1
Demand and supply-side	3

demand side (17 out of 34 works). Because no clear evidence can always be detected, whether research incorporates international tourists, domestic tourists, or both, the relevant frequencies are not shown in the table.

Geographical Level

Furthermore, concentration of the academic work at the geographical level has been traced with the aid of the classification of the literature in five main geographical categories (Asia, Australia, Europe, Middle East, and North America). The majority of the studies largely satisfy the criterion of geographical coverage (Table 4), with the exception of three papers that fall into the sixth category (i.e., "international"), given the international character adopted. At this point, some methodological clarifications are necessary. The analysis on geographical level should not be confounded with specific destination or DMO; however, it is related to the geographical dimension of the place to which the research is mainly addressed. For example, the cases of research in Turkey and the Dutch Caribbean may better be comprehended on the grounds that the former is classified in the group of Asian countries, while the latter is put together with countries from the group of North America. The countries that fall under the geographical category of Middle East are consistent with the categorization used by the United Nations World Tourism Organization as well. There are only a few cases (four studies) where sampling procedure took place at a different location from the one to which the discussion and the results actually refer, according to the geographical classification made. Further analysis at a country level reveals 12 empirical studies that are based on samples from a different country from the one actually examined (i.e., students or potential tourists). In general, the discussion of seven papers is extended to basic theoretical understanding without any reference to geographically defined destination brands. Thus, the geographical allocation of 57 papers of the total sample is presented in detail in Table 4.

Conceptual Level

At a conceptual level, one of the first issues to be addressed is the parallel, albeit confusing, use of terms such as "brand" and "destination" as synonyms (e.g., Yüksel &Yüksel, 2001). Similarly, other researchers omit the term "brand" from their analysis and develop subsequent theories referring to destinations, places, or both (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008). Considering possible verbal differences, conceptual similarities are also identified; despite any confusion in the terminology used, most of the studies reflect the same theoretical blocks and enhance the literature with their findings. Based on that concession, the present study proceeds to the analysis of the findings as follows. Content analysis reveals that destination brand equity may be considered an umbrella construct expressed through the use of one of the six terms: equity, evaluation, effectiveness, performance, measurement, and assessment (Table 5). The table illuminates the recursive use of similar terms without any justification of use or similar clarification, but with significant overlaps. The six terms above are met 119 times in all 64 papers as synonyms, which implies that, in the majority of the studies, approximately two of these terms (mean: 1.86 times) have been used interchangeably. Although the use of more

Table 4

Geographical Allocation

	Frequencies ($n = 57$)	
	Empirical	Conceptual
Asia	13	–
Australia	10	1
Europe	18	1
Middle East	3	–
North America	8	–
International	3	–

Table 5

Terminology Used

Destination Brand	Frequencies ($n = 64$)	Percentage (%)
Equity	49	41.18
Evaluation	21	17.64
Measurement	10	8.40
Assessment	3	2.52
Effectiveness	16	13.45
Performance	20	16.81
Total	**119**	**100.00**

than one term does not necessarily render the concept applicable and comprehensive, Table 5 shows that destination brand equity is the most popular term in the field.

Although research in the field of CBBE derives from the works of Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991), the authors detect various approaches and emerging trends through a critical review of the articles. The CBBE model may also apply to DMO stakeholders, for which the financial measure of destination brands would be of little practical value (Pike, 2007) with only few exceptions of licensing opportunities (i.e., "I♥NY"). Competitive advantage and competitiveness, both also connected to other proprietary brand assets (Aaker, 1991), attract some interest (Mechinda, Serirat, Popaijit, Lertwannawit, & Anuwichanont, 2010; Pike et al., 2010; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001) in the literature of destination brand equity. Nevertheless, destination marketers have mostly been focusing on brand equity dimensions other than brand assets, on the grounds that financial evaluation is of little relevance if managers do not know how value is created from the customer's perspective and how to capitalize on it, in order to develop successful brand strategies (Keller, 1993). Hence, the dimensions they mostly focus on include awareness, image/associations, quality, and loyalty. However, instead of awareness, scholars lately tend to prefer the brand salience measure (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Pike, 2010), as "a representation of memory structure providing an indication of the breadth of linkages between destinations and cues present in the purchase and consumption environments" (Trembath, Romaniuk, & Lockshin, 2011, pp. 812–813). Regardless of the destination brand metrics in use, the domain of research in the discipline of destination brand equity reveals opportunities for further research that emerge as the field progresses. The key points of the study are briefly summarized and discussed in the following sections.

Discussion

In line with previous scholars (e.g., Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009), the vast majority of empirical papers currently uncover the exploratory character of the research field. Additionally, the potential for the research agenda in the years to come is high,

since the critical mass of studies elaborating on an integrated, empirically tested framework is practically nonexistent. In an attempt to create a reference guide with the constructs used and the main research streams existent in the field of destination brand equity, extant scholarly work has been carefully examined. Apart from the seminal works in the branding literature, widely known and agreed upon, no clear pattern is unveiled in order to map well with industry reality and needs. A matrix constructed in accordance with current work, analyzing the construct used into its dimensions, would lead to a complicated figure that would not add subsequent knowledge. Thus, research efforts should be further enhanced putting forward the concept of destination brand equity, not only some of its attributes (e.g., Hankinson, 2005; Tasci & Kozak, 2006).

Going one step forward to the analysis at a methodological level revealed that destination brands are mostly evaluated following a customer-side approach. In some cases, research follows destination branding developments (e.g., Piha et al., 2010; Zouganeli et al., 2012) and incorporates assessments from different stakeholders. An interesting part of this finding probably refers to the focus on potential rather than actual travelers, which is not followed by a comparison of pre- and postvisitation evaluations. However, developing pre- and postvisitation evaluation measures would provide, in fact, a more holistic assessment of the branding efforts.

Proceeding to the geographical allocation of the studies, Europe seems to be leading the research in destination brand equity. To date, no research has been applied to the private sector in the Asian tourism industry. Africa and South America have not attracted similar interest yet, despite their performance in the international tourism market (Pierret, 2011).

The 64-paper review demonstrates that borrowing models and interchangeable terms, complex linkages, and alternative notions are the main characteristics of the literature on destination brand equity. Efforts should be undertaken toward the direction of establishing the pillars for the new construct to be built upon. To date, the research area has borrowed principles from a previously developed theory, already grounded (product/corporate branding), offering some stimuli for future research directions (e.g., Park & Petrick, 2006).

Additionally, the most complete works on evaluating destination brands are those focusing on destination brand equity (e.g., Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik Ruzzier & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2009). Yet, some dimensions and constructs are examined in more depth than others and, quite often, the link between each other remains unexplored. A characteristic example is the construct of CBBE, which may actually offer a structured approach for DMOs to identify the extent to which brand identity and image are related, and may act as indicators of future market performance (Pike, 2007). The reason lies in the argument expressed by Hem and Iversen (2004) according to which, "image formation is not branding, albeit the former constitutes the core of the latter. Image building is one step closer, but a critical link is still missing, namely, brand identity. To advance destination image studies to the level of branding, the link needs to be established" (p. 86). Apart from brand identity and image, often handled as intertwined subconstructs, other measures are assessed as components of CBBE alike.

Conclusions

The review of 12 years of research in this field presented the extant undercurrents at three levels (geographical, methodological, and conceptual). The geographical allocation of current studies depicts the gaps that will, hopefully, close in different tourism destinations (mature or emerging destinations). In practice, the need to focus on destination branding strategies and their performance should be directly and positively related to the level of investments in the tourism sector. More studies and comparative analysis between different tourism destinations might trigger relevant research interest and contribute to a more concise understanding of destination brand performance. Furthermore, destination portfolio performance must be assessed against its components (subproducts), such as art exhibitions (Camarero, Garriod, & Vicente, 2010), culinary (Horng et al., 2012) or wine tourism (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001), and world heritage (Poria, Reichel, & Cohen, 2011).

A shift in the research pattern may be practically discerned. While destination marketers used to focus on specific dimensions, current research has shown that there is a move from stand-alone dimensions (e.g., image and loyalty) to more integrated constructs, such as destination brand equity. However, the evaluation of destination brands has yet to benefit from an enrichment of measurement models from the demand side with findings pertaining to identity, personality, organizational associations, and other characteristics stemming from Anholt's (2004) six-dimensional approach on place branding. Working toward the "match" between supply and demand, the measurement of brand equity might also incorporate brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014) and include future financial performance (H. Kim et al., 2003) and market share (Mackay, 2001). Going one step forward, and given the increasing importance of electronic word of mouth (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012), future studies also need to investigate the contribution of "smart destination" efforts to the destination brand as well as the impact of relevant applications, websites, and social media platforms on destination brand equity. Technology applications unveil new challenges in the use and monitoring of destination brand metrics, which can be combined with social media statistics, engagement rates, and level of interaction in terms of brand affection.

However, unlike products, places have their own dynamics. Tailor-made solutions cannot be delivered in the same way as in product branding. Tourism context imposes certain restrictions and makes theoretical assumptions disputable, especially in the case of sustainability, respect of the place authenticity, and potentials. Therefore, research focus should apply to the characteristics, attributes, and needs of each place as put forward not only from DMOs, business firms, and other stakeholders from the suppliers' point of view, but also from the permanent residents' perspective of the destination (locals).

To sum up, product and corporate branding theory has exerted particular influence on the field examined; a sophisticated approach is particularly missing on the issue in order to facilitate the development of subsequent constructs and the modeling of potential relationships. As the relevant literature grows, the level of sophistication may well be identified over the years against a number of variables (i.e., multiple classifier) and extend the work already done. Following the steps presented in Figure 1, the authors followed the methodological path that might, as well, lead to new updates

from the literature at any other given point in time (i.e., search engines such as Google Scholar may provide slightly different results, especially in the case of open access journals). In the years to come, literature should be closely monitored and reviewed in order to track the first models to be empirically assessed and better understand branding endeavors in the tourism destination context. Hitherto, through an iterative search, destination brand equity appears as a rapidly conceived concept directly transferred from the traditional branding theory, while the discussion on its definition and operationalization is still in progress and has yet to mature in a multidisciplinary context.

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