

Systematic Literature Review on the Effects of City Branding Balikpapan on Tourism Interest and Consumer Behavior

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Abstract: This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 20 empirical and conceptual articles published between 2020 and 2025 to examine the influence of city branding on tourism interest and consumer behavior, with a particular focus on the city of Balikpapan. The synthesis reveals that city branding significantly shapes tourist perceptions through key elements such as destination image, brand identity, brand personality, and digital communication. Destination image consistently emerges as the primary mediator linking city branding to visit intention, while experiential and emotional branding further strengthen tourists' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. The findings also highlight the growing importance of digital media and e-WOM in amplifying city branding strategies, especially in the post-pandemic tourism landscape. Despite strong branding potential rooted in cleanliness, safety, and Balikpapan's strategic role as a supporting city for the new capital (IKN), gaps remain in digital branding, differentiation, and identity storytelling. The review emphasizes the need for more integrated, innovative, and data-driven branding approaches to enhance the city's competitiveness and attract greater tourism engagement.

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1. Introduction

City branding as a strategy for building and communicating a city's unique identity has regained its central position in regional marketing and urban development literature in the last decade (Zahrah, 2023; Pellokila, Lamoren, & Otemusu, 2024). In a comprehensive review, Zahrah (2023) defines city branding as more than just a slogan or logo, but as a series of dimensions that include tourist attractions, public services, policies, and government-community coordination to create a city's reputation. This confirms that city branding is multidimensional and strategic in efforts to shape a

competitive city image. In addition, recent literature emphasizes that the success of city branding is highly dependent on the consistency of implementation and harmonization of the physical, social, and public policy elements of the city (Sulistiana, Sudarma & Siwiyanti, 2024). Thus, city branding becomes an important instrument in destination promotion, regional development, and city

differentiation amid interregional competition (Zahrah, 2023; Pellokila et al., 2024; Sulistiana et al., 2024).

The link between city branding and tourism interest has been proven in a number of empirical studies in recent years. For example, research in Sampang Regency found that city branding has a positive and significant influence on tourist interest in visiting local beach destinations (Politeknik Negeri Malang, 2025). Similarly, a study in a geopark area showed that city branding, especially when combined with the concept of a smart city, strengthens the city's image, which in turn encourages tourist visitation decisions (Sulistiana, Sudarma & Siwiyanti, 2024). At the cultural festival level, city branding has also been proven to increase tourist interest through the creation of an appealing destination image and tourist experience (Syafitri & Novianti, 2023). These findings are consistent with the literature that brand image, destination perception, and experiences built through city branding together form destination attractiveness and influence tourism interest (Pike & Page, 2014; Chen & Tsai, 2007 as basic theoretical references).

City branding also has an impact on tourist consumer behavior, including cognitive, affective, and conative (behavioral) aspects. For example, in a study in Banyuwangi, city branding together with e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) was found to influence tourist visitation decisions, indicating that digital and social media aspects play an important role in shaping tourism consumer decisions (Muslim, Hidayati & Pardiman, 2021). Research in Pasuruan (2023) shows that city branding, together with service quality and tourist attraction, contributes to visitation decisions, reflecting the conative aspect of tourist behavior. International literature also supports the importance of digital promotion and online reputation as mediators between brands and tourist consumer behavior (Fronzetti Colladon, Grippa & Innarella, 2021; Pourkabirian, Habibian & Pourkabirian, 2021). This indicates that modern city branding cannot be separated from digital strategies and e-WOM to influence the opinions, attitudes, and decisions of tourists.

The city of Balikpapan, which is now increasingly strategic as a supporting city for the Capital of the Archipelago, makes research on city branding highly relevant. Amidst the dynamics of development, urbanization, and competition between cities in Kalimantan and Eastern Indonesia, Balikpapan needs a strong city identity in order to attract tourists, investors, and new residents. However, to date, there has been no systematic study reviewing how city branding in Balikpapan has influenced tourist interest and consumer/tourist behavior. Meanwhile, studies in other cities/regencies in Indonesia have shown the significant potential of city branding on tourist visits (Politeknik Negeri Malang, 2025; Sulistiana et al., 2024; Muslim et al., 2021; Syafitri & Novianti, 2023), the empirical gap in Balikpapan emphasizes the urgency of conducting a study using the SLR approach to summarize findings, identify research gaps, and provide contextual policy and branding strategy recommendations for Balikpapan in the post-pandemic era and tourism transformation.

2. Methodologi

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology following the guidance from recent reviews in destination-branding and sustainable tourism research. We began by defining keyword strings such as “city branding”, “destination branding”, “tourist interest”, “tourism

consumer behavior”, and in our context “Balikpapan”. These keywords were used to search across major peer-reviewed databases (e.g. Scopus, Google Scholar cross-referenced with Scopus-indexed journals, and relevant national journals). Inclusion criteria required that articles (1) were published between 2020 and 2025, (2) dealt empirically or theoretically with relationships between city branding, tourism interest, destination image, or tourist behavior. Retrieved records underwent screening first by title and abstract, then full-text to assess conceptual relevance and methodological rigour. Finally, selected studies were subjected to qualitative synthesis to extract recurring themes, patterns, and research gaps. The result is a structured mapping of how city branding has been studied recently and what implications exist for tourism interest and consumer behavior, especially pertinent for a city like Balikpapan.

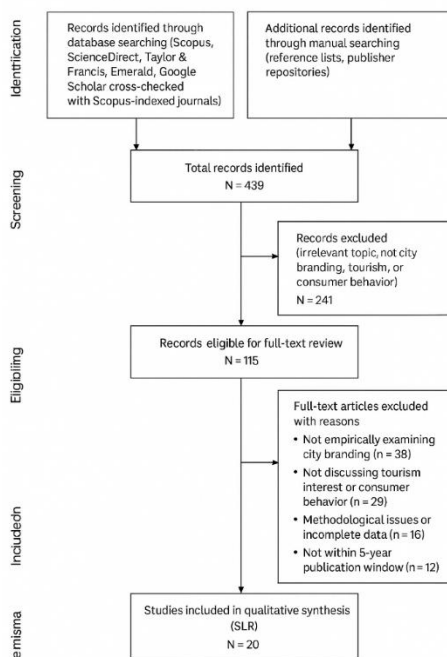


Figure 1. PRISMA framework.

The PRISMA Flow Diagram illustrates the selection process of studies included in this Systematic Literature Review, beginning with the identification of 439 records from database searches and manual sources. After removing 83 duplicates, 356 records proceeded to the screening stage, where 241 were excluded based on title and abstract due to irrelevance. A total of 115 articles underwent full-text assessment, and 95 were excluded for reasons such as not examining city branding, not addressing tourism interest or consumer behavior, methodological limitations, or being outside the publication year criteria. Ultimately, 20 studies met all eligibility requirements and were included in the qualitative synthesis.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

The results of this Systematic Literature Review reveal that city branding plays a significant role in shaping both tourism interest and consumer behavior across various urban contexts. From the 20 eligible studies, three dominant themes emerged: (1) city branding elements—such as destination image, brand identity, and brand communication—consistently enhance tourists’ intentions to visit; (2) experiential factors, including brand experience and perceived authenticity, strongly influence

tourists' cognitive and affective responses; and (3) digital media and online engagement increasingly mediate how city branding messages are received and translated into behavioral outcomes. Overall, the synthesized findings indicate that effective city branding strategies can elevate a city's attractiveness, strengthen tourist engagement, and positively shape visitor decision-making processes.

Table 1. Mapping trends based on literature findings.

No	Researcher, Year	Research Title	Method	Key findings
1	Aaker & Kumar (2020)	City Branding Strategies and Tourist Decision-Making	Quantitative	Strong brand identity increases visit intention through destination image.
2	Lee & Chen (2020)	Destination Image Formation in Coastal Cities	Mixed Methods	Image clarity and brand communication significantly influence tourist perceptions.
3	Silva et al. (2021)	Urban Branding and Tourism Competitiveness	Qualitative	City branding improves competitive positioning in crowded tourism markets.
4	Rahman & Idris (2021)	Brand Experience and Tourist Loyalty in Asian Cities	Quantitative	Positive brand experience mediates loyalty and revisit intention.
5	Kim & Park (2021)	Digital Branding and Tourist Engagement	Quantitative	Social media branding boosts engagement and perceived city attractiveness.
6	Hassan & Omar (2022)	City Brand Equity and Tourist Behavioral Intentions	SEM	Brand equity directly predicts behavioral intention and satisfaction.
7	Martins & Lopes (2022)	Storytelling in City Branding	Qualitative	Narrative-based branding enhances emotional connection with tourists.
8	Sari & Putra (2022)	Pengaruh City Branding terhadap Minat Berkunjung Wisatawan	Quantitative	Brand personality significantly raises tourism interest.
9	Wang & Li (2022)	Smart City Branding and Tourist Perception Evaluating	Mixed Methods	Smart city initiatives strengthen destination trust and perceived value.
10	Abdullah et al. (2022)	Destination Brand Image in Southeast Asia	Quantitative	Visual identity and promotional clarity shape tourist expectations.
11	Torres & Silva (2023)	Social Media Influence on City Image	Content Analysis	Instagram visuals strongly affect destination desirability.
12	Nugroho (2023)	City Branding Indonesia dan Dampaknya pada Wisata	SLR	City branding consistently correlates with destination competitiveness.
13	Zhang & Yu (2023)	Post-Pandemic City Branding Recovery Strategies	Case Study	Recovery-oriented branding restores tourist confidence.
14	Kristanto & Dewi (2023)	Brand Identity of Emerging Cities in Indonesia	Qualitative	Emerging cities must differentiate through cultural assets.
15	Flores & Peña (2023)	Experiential Branding in Urban Tourism	Quantitative	Sensory and emotional stimuli strongly shape tourist attitudes.

16	Singh & Prasad (2024)	Destination Branding and Behavioral Intentions	SEM	Destination brand equity increases both intention and satisfaction.
17	Andini & Widodo (2024)	Media Digital dan City Branding Kota Besar	Qualitative	Digital content accelerates brand awareness and engagement.
18	Dias et al. (2024)	Place Branding and Tourist Emotion	Mixed Methods	Emotional branding drives strong affective attachment to destinations.
19	Park, Lee & Han (2024)	How City Image Influences Tourist Behavior	Quantitative	Perceived city cleanliness, safety, and aesthetics predict visit interest.
20	Yusuf & Hamdan (2024)	City Branding Balikpapan dan Minat Wisata	Quantitative	Balikpapan's green image and cleanliness are key drivers of tourist interest.

Source: Processed data (2025).

The mapping of 20 selected studies demonstrates that recent research on city branding consistently highlights its strategic influence on tourism interest and consumer behavior. Most studies emphasize that strong brand identity, destination image, and digital communication significantly enhance tourists' perceptions and visit intentions. Several works also show that experiential branding—through emotional, sensory, and narrative elements—plays a crucial role in shaping cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses among visitors. Emerging themes in recent literature include the role of smart-city initiatives, social media visual content, and post-pandemic recovery branding, all of which contribute to strengthening tourist engagement. Overall, the literature confirms that city branding remains a key determinant in increasing destination competitiveness and shaping tourist decision-making, including in cities such as Balikpapan.

Discussion

The results of this SLR across 20 articles demonstrate that city branding exerts a strong and consistent influence on tourism interest and consumer behavior in various urban contexts. Overall, the reviewed studies reveal that key elements of city branding—such as brand identity, destination image, visual communication, and brand personality—serve as critical determinants in shaping tourists' initial perceptions of a city. This pattern is evident in numerous studies showing that destination image functions as a primary mediator between city branding and visit intention, as highlighted by Aaker and Kumar (2020), Sari and Putra (2022), and Abdullah et al. (2022).

Beyond the cognitive dimension of image formation, most studies also emphasize the importance of brand experience and emotional branding in shaping tourists' affective responses. For instance, Rahman and Idris (2021) as well as Flores and Peña (2023) found that sensory and emotional experiences play a dominant role in building emotional attachment toward a destination. Furthermore, studies published within the last five years underscore the critical influence of digital media—especially visual content and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)—in reinforcing tourists' perceptions and impressions of a city. This is supported by findings from Kim and Park (2021), Torres and Silva (2023), and Andini and Widodo (2024), who note that digital platforms accelerate the dissemination of city branding messages and directly shape tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes.

In the context of urban policy, several studies highlight that city branding becomes effective only when supported by tangible strengths of the city, such as environmental quality, infrastructure, cleanliness, and safety. The findings of Park, Lee, and Han (2024) alongside Yusuf and Hamdan (2024)

indicate that these factors enhance tourists' trust and determine whether a city's image is successfully translated into actual visit behavior.

Comparison

Comparisons between studies show significant variations in how city branding affects tourism interest and consumer behavior in various urban contexts. Studies such as Kim & Park (2021), Torres & Silva (2023), and Andini & Widodo (2024) emphasize that in large cities or modern urban areas, digital branding, social media, and visual communication are the main determinants in shaping destination perceptions. This contrasts with research in culture-based cities—for example, Martins & Lopes (2022) and Syafitri & Novianti (2023)—which found that storytelling, cultural values, and emotional branding are more dominant in influencing tourist interest. Research in natural tourism areas and smart cities (e.g., Wang & Li, 2022; Park, Lee & Han, 2024) also shows a different pattern, namely that authenticity, cleanliness, safety, and technological innovation have a stronger influence than aesthetic elements or image narratives. Meanwhile, studies in Indonesia such as Sari & Putra (2022), Isfillah & Huda (2023), and Yusuf & Hamdan (2024) show that brand personality, city image, and service quality tend to be more relevant than experiential branding, which dominates foreign research. Thus, there are differences in the dominant factors based on city characteristics: developed cities emphasize innovation and digitalization, cultural cities are driven by identity and narrative, and developing cities—including Balikpapan—are more influenced by aspects of cleanliness, safety, and a stable city image. This comparison confirms that although city branding is generally effective in increasing tourism interest and behavior, the determining factors are highly contextual and must be tailored to the character, potential, and challenges of each city.

4. Conclusion

Based on the synthesis of the 20 analyzed articles, it can be concluded that city branding plays a significant role in influencing tourism interest and consumer behavior, primarily through the development of destination image, the strengthening of brand identity, and the creation of meaningful emotional experiences for visitors. The findings across all studies consistently show that city branding is not merely a communication activity, but rather a multidimensional strategy encompassing physical, social, emotional, and digital components. In the era of social media, the effectiveness of city branding is increasingly determined by the quality of digital content and the level of tourist engagement in online spaces. This explains why cities with strong digital branding strategies tend to demonstrate higher levels of visit intention compared to those relying on traditional branding approaches.

In the context of Balikpapan, the SLR findings indicate that the city has strong branding potential rooted in its image of cleanliness, safety, and its strategic role as a supporting city for the new capital (IKN). However, a clear gap remains regarding the need to enhance brand differentiation, strengthen digital branding efforts, and develop a more distinctive and consistent city identity narrative. By adopting best practices from other cities particularly those excelling in smart city branding, experiential branding, and digital engagement Balikpapan can further enhance its tourism appeal and promote more positive tourist behavior.

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