

## A Bibliometric Analysis of Destination Image Research Using VOSviewer

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i7/11050>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i7/11050

**Published Date:** 30 July 2024

### Abstract

Destination image has become one of the most popular topics in tourism research. Previous studies conducted literature reviews on destination image from different perspectives. Through a systematic literature review, one can understand the current status, knowledge structure and trends in the field of tourism destination image research. In this study, the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) were used as data source, and VOSviewer was used to analyze the destination image research from 2002 to 2021. The researchers analyzed the year of publication, number of articles, highly cited documents, authors, and keywords in this field. The result shows: (1) The literature in the field of destination image is increasing; (2) The 11.7% of journals published 65.1% of the total number of articles; (3) "Tourism Management" is the leader of publications, followed by "Journal of Travel Research" and "Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing"; (4) According to the documents and citations, the United States of America is the leading country in this field, followed by Spain and China; (5) Several prolific authors concentrate a significant portion of the research; (6) The relationship between destination image and tourists' satisfaction and behavior intention is the focus of current research. The study will provide destination image researchers with a reference guide to the context, methods and focus of previous studies.

**Keywords:** Bibliometric Analysis, Destination Image, Vosviewer.

### Introduction

Due to the intangible nature and the inseparability of production and consumption, tourism image has become more important than tangible resources (Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2021). The significance of destination image lies in the fact that it can influence tourists' behavior in many ways (Azeez, 2021). Therefore, understanding destination image is essential for predicting tourists' behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015) and effectively positioning in the tourism market (Iordanova & Stylidis, 2019a).

The importance of destination image has been extensively studied over the past four decades (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). Several scholars have contributed to this field since the year of 2002. For instance, Pike (2002) reviewed 142 destination image publications published between 1973 and 2000. Following this study, Pike (2007) conducted a review of 120 destination image articles published between 2001 and 2007. These two documents help scholars understand the evolution of destination image research over the past thirty-five years. Similarly, Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 152 articles on destination image published between 2000 and 2007, summarizing the state of destination image research and exploring new methods for evaluating it. Nghiễm-Phú (2014) reviewed 177 articles published between 2008 and 2012, discussing perceived image and projected image separately. Zhang et al. (2014) and Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) respectively measured the relationship between destination image components and behavioural intentions through a meta-analysis. Yilmaz and Yilmaz (2020) published a literature review on pre-and post-trip antecedents of destination image, which included 47 papers between 1999 and 2019.

Despite extensive research, bibliometric studies related to destination image publications are still scarce. However, a systematic literature review related to this field would help researchers assess the progression of knowledge and the prospects for theoretical development. Moreover, it would provide a reference guide to the context, methods, and focus of previous studies (Pike, 2002). Compared with traditional literature review methods, bibliometric methods have obvious advantages in comprehensive analysis (Nguyen et al., 2023). The bibliometric literature review method can analyze many datasets collected from a research field (Weingart, 2005). In addition, researchers can process data entirely using computers, making the process faster, easier, and more efficient (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, it is necessary to conduct further research utilizing bibliometric indicators. The findings of this study will provide a valuable reference for scholars, especially those who are new to the field, and even tourism professionals and DMOs who are interested in and aim to contribute to the promotion of destination image.

Destination image is a sophisticated and complex construct (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Akgün et al., 2020) In order to provide a bibliometric perspective on destination image research, this study intended to address the following questions:

- (1) What are the main streams of research in destination image literature?
- (2) What are the gaps in current research?
- (3) What are the research trends in destination image research in the future?

This means identifying trends and other relevant indicators by surveying the articles published on Scopus and Web of Science platforms, with subsequent data analysis and visualization using the VOSviewer program. The content analysis of recent publications intends to identify research status, gaps, and research opportunities in the field of destination image.

### **Related and Background Work**

Destination image (DI) is the key factor for destinations to compete in the globalized

competitive world (King et al., 2015; Mano & da Costa, 2015). Destination image plays an important role in tourists' decision-making, on-site experience, and future behavior (e.g., Beerli & Martín, 2004; Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2009; Melón et al., 2021; Kim, 2018). Therefore, understanding the image of a tourism destination is essential for tourist management and destination marketing (Bui et al., 2021). Iordanova and Styliadis (2019b) stated that an in-depth study of destination image and its determinants can help a destination effectively position itself in the tourist market and reinforce travelers' preferences for that destination (Lin et al., 2007).

In the tourism context, scholars have conceptually defined DI in several ways, yet there is no consensus (Josiassen et al., 2016). That's because "there are almost as many definitions of image as scholars devoted to its conceptualization" (Gallarza et al., 2002). Each definition actually defines a particular aspect of the destination image instead of accounting for all of its components (Tasci et al., 2007). The most accepted definition of destination image is from Crompton (1979). In the research, Crompton (1979), defined destination image as "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (P18). Another highlighted definition was proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), who regarded destination image as "An individual's mental representation of knowledge, feelings, and global impressions about a destination" (P870). According to Stylos et al (2017), destination image is "Sets of impressions, ideas, expectations and emotional thoughts tourists maintain of a place" (P9).

The analysis on destination image can be summarized into several ways. Echtner and Ritchie (1991), tried to conceptualize destination image through a three-dimensional framework, namely, attribute-holistic, functional-psychological, and common-unique. In 1994, Gartner further conceptualized the process of destination image formation. According to Gartner (1994), destination image consists of three components: cognitive, affective and conative image. Cognitive image can be viewed as beliefs and attitudes toward a destination. The affective component of image is related to the motivations for selecting a destination. Based on the cognitive and affective components, conative image refers to behavioural intentions. Gartner (1994), focuses particularly on the information sources and their significant influence overall process of image formation, which offers a useful framework for explaining image formation. Another highly accepted model was proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). In their study, destination image was divided into cognitive, affective, and global image. Based on the model proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), Beerli and Martín (2004), further developed and empirically validated a model to explain the formation of destination image. In the model, Beerli and Martín (2004), analysed the different components of perceived image and the influencing factors in the process of destination image formation. The components of perceived image can be divided into cognitive image, affective image, and overall image. The above research lays a theoretical foundation for this study.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to explore the state of destination image research, including current research hotspots, research gaps and research trends. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to review existing research relevant to current research interests.

Figure 3.1 depicts the selection process of articles for the literature review.

Utilizing two electronic databases, Scopus and Web of Science, this study conducted a comprehensive literature review on destination image. The articles were retrieved from 2.20.2022 to 2.25.2022 (in Harbin). According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the concept of destination image is vague and incomplete. Since each definition is actually defining a particular aspect of destination image (Tasci et al., 2007). In this case, based on the research questions and the purpose, the following strings were identified: destination image, brand image, country image, perceived image, cognitive image, affective image. The search mainly focused on existing literature on destination image mapping, in the data extraction phase, 2,650 and 4,274 articles were extracted from the two databases, respectively, according to the following criteria:

- a) Narrowed the subject areas to Business Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Decision Sciences, Psychology field.
- b) The search span was from 2002 to 2021. All articles before 2002, and after 2021 were excluded from the search.
- c) Only articles were included in the study. All reviews, conference papers, book chapters were excluded.
- d) The articles must be published in English.
- e) Select keywords related to the image of the destination.

Next, the data from the two databases were merged to remove duplicates. The remaining articles were carefully checked by examining their titles and abstracts, and any articles are not related to destination image in the tourism context were excluded. At this stage, 1,545 articles were retained. Furthermore, to ensure the quality of the selected articles, a method of full-text screening for eligibility was performed by checking the outcomes and

methods of the individual articles. 481 articles were excluded because the original text was not available or the content was not relevant to tourist destination. 1,064 articles were ultimately retained in this stage, which were believed to provide readers with different views on the research topic (

Figure 3.1). According to Rogers et al. (2020), in bibliometric analysis, samples of 1000 papers provide a good guide to relative (but not absolute) institutional citation performance.

In the research, VOSviewer software1.6.18, which was developed by Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands, was used for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks (Liu et al., 2022). It enables the user to build co-occurrence maps for various categories, including authors, scientific collaborations (relationships), subjects, geographical origins, institutional distributions, citations. Therefore, bibliometric analysis can facilitate the discovery of information underlying the published articles on a certain subject (Liao et al., 2018).

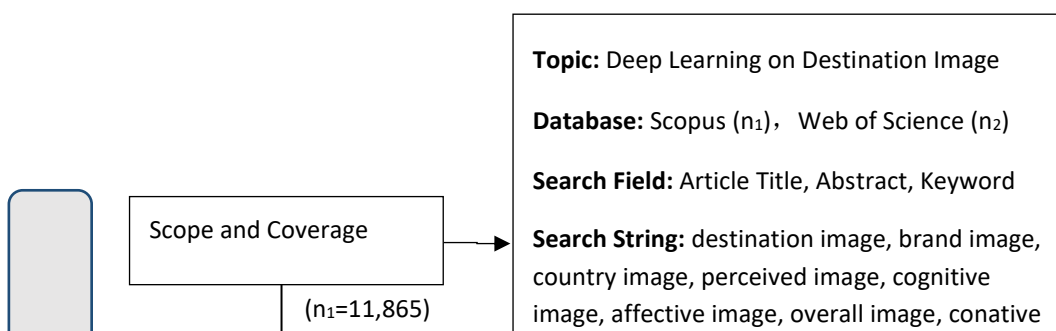


Figure 3.1 Four-step Process for this Systematic Literature Review

## **Results**

### *1 Descriptive Analysis*

After screening, this study contains a total of 1,064 articles consistent with the research objective.

Figure 4.1 depicts the number of articles published by year. Obviously, except for a slight decline in 2008, 2014 and 2019, this topic showed an upward trend in other years,

increasing from 7 articles in 2002 to 160 in 2021, indicating that scholars' interest in this field continued to grow (

Figure 4.1). From the perspective of mean total citations, the highest number of citations occurred in 2002, while the lowest were the articles published in 2021. This is understandable, as it is due to the relatively short period of publication for the most recent literature (Zakaria et al., 2021).

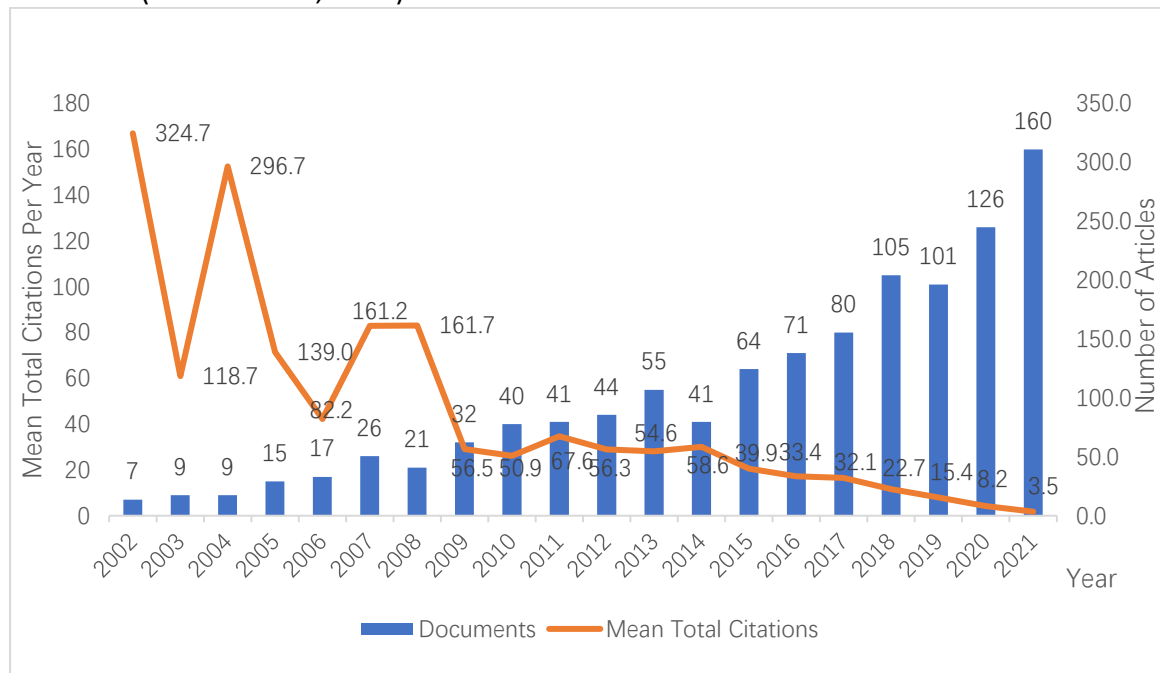


Figure 4.1 The Number of Articles and Mean Total Citations per Year (2002-2021) (n=1,064)

**Analysis of Journals**

According to e-database search results analysis, the selected 1,064 articles were published by 228 journals.

Table 0.1 lists the top 20 journals ranked by number of publications. It can be concluded from

Table 0.1, the journal with the most articles on destination image is Tourism Management (n=74), corresponding to 7.0% of the entire sample. Followed by the Journal of Travel Research (n=58), equivalent to 5.45% of the total sample. Moreover, the Journal of

Travel and Tourism Marketing (n=50), Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research (n=43) and Journal of Destination Marketing and Management (n=42). The top 20 journals published a total of 608 articles, accounting for 57.1% of the total sample. However, the other 208 journals (91.2%) published 456 articles (accounting for 42.9% of the entire sample). The total citations of these 228 journals from 2002 to 2021 were 43,648, and the citations of the top 20 journals were 36,030, accounting for 82.5% of the total citations. This analysis helps scholars understand the importance of relevant journals in this field.

*Table 0.1  
Number of Articles Published by Journals (Top 20 Publication Sources are Listed)*

Rank	Title Source	Number of Articles	Citations	Impact Factor (2020)	Total Link Strength
1	Tourism Management	74	12,790	10.967	2,410
2	Journal of Travel Research	58	5,810	10.982	1,361
3	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	50	2,377	7.564	905
4	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	43	819	3.677	558
5	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	42	1,491	6.952	670
6	Sustainability (Switzerland)	41	367	3.251	480
7	International Journal of Tourism Research	37	1,174	3.791	578
8	CURRENT ISSUES IN TOURISM	36	802	7.430	429
9	Journal of Vacation Marketing	36	1,180	3.525	461
10	Annals of Tourism Research	25	5,710	9.011	1,234
11	Tourism Analysis	25	362	--	168
12	Anatolia	21	369	--	251
13	Tourism Management Perspectives	19	456	6.586	267
14	European Journal of Tourism Research	16	190	--	255
15	Tourism Review	16	278	5.947	199
16	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	16	963	5.161	346
17	International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	16	286	--	214
18	International Journal of Tourism Cities	13	124	--	158
19	Journal of China Tourism Research	12	118	--	133
20	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	12	364	5.959	134
<b>Total</b>		<b>608</b>	<b>36,030</b>		

Note: Impact factors based on the 2020 Journal Citation Reports 2020 from Clarivate Analytics

Figure 0.2 presents the journal citation network of 44 journals with a minimum of 5 occurrences. The network grouped the 44 prominent journals into 10 clusters (Figure 0.2).





standardized. For example, “behaviour intention”, and “behavioral intention” should be unified as “behavior intention”. Additionally, meaningless keywords such as “emerald publishing limited” and “i.e.” were removed. This function is implemented using the “thesaurus file” feature in VOSviewer. Then a minimum number of occurrences of a term is 15 times, with a binary counting method. In total, 330 keywords meet the threshold. For each of the 330 terms, a relevance score will be calculated. Based on this score, the most relevant terms will be selected. The default choice is to select 60% of the most relevant terms. Therefore, the number of terms to be selected is 197. The minimum cluster size is set to six.

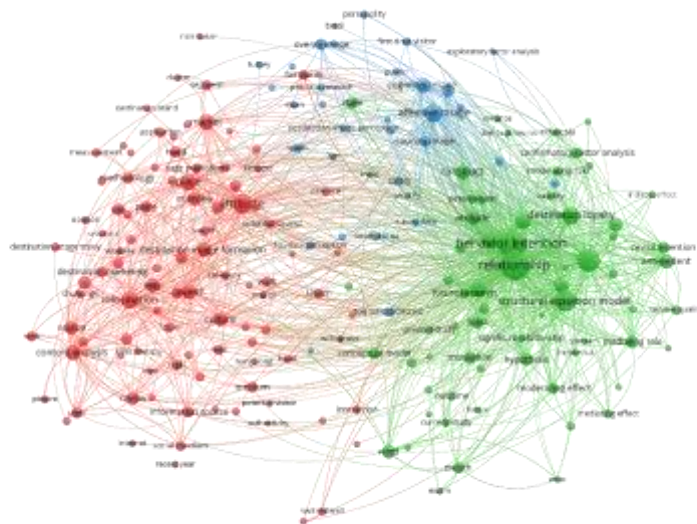
Table 0.2 shows the top 20 keywords. The most frequently occurring keywords are “relationship” (299), “behavior intention” (289), followed by “satisfaction” (192), “structural equation model” (158), and “attribute” (136).

*Table 0.2*  
*Top 20 Popular Keywords of the Selected Articles*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
1	relationship	299	0.60
2	behavior intention	289	0.63
3	satisfaction	192	1.20
4	structural equation model	158	1.03
5	attribute	136	0.49
6	affective image	119	0.31
7	destination loyalty	116	1.04
8	information	107	1.28
9	place	99	0.80
10	international visitor	99	0.50
11	content analysis	91	2.86
12	market	89	0.65
13	variable	89	0.63

Rank	Keyword	Occurrences	Relevance
14	quality	89	0.56
15	construct	82	0.43
16	cognitive image	81	0.41
17	positive effect	76	0.89
18	culture	76	0.78
19	attitude	75	0.46
20	destination image formation	74	0.86

In addition to extracting the most frequently used keywords within the articles, VOSviewer generates a cluster map of keywords. Figure 0.3 shows the frequency of the occurrence of keywords that have been used more than 10 times. As shown in Figure 0.3, the keywords are grouped into three clusters. Similar keywords are grouped and colored similarly. The closer the distance, the stronger the correlation. For instance, the keywords “relationship”, “behavior intention”, and “satisfaction”, are clustered in the same colour because they are frequently used together in the same research.



VOSviewer

Figure 0.3 Network Visualization of the Co-occurrence of Keywords

According to Figure 0.3, the current research field can be divided into three clusters. The core keyword of the first cluster (red) is “information”, and the other keywords include those related to destination image studies in the context of social media. The top keyword of the second cluster (green) is “relationship”, with other keywords related to the antecedent and consequence of destination image. The third Cluster (blue) contains the phrases “cognitive image” and “affective image” (

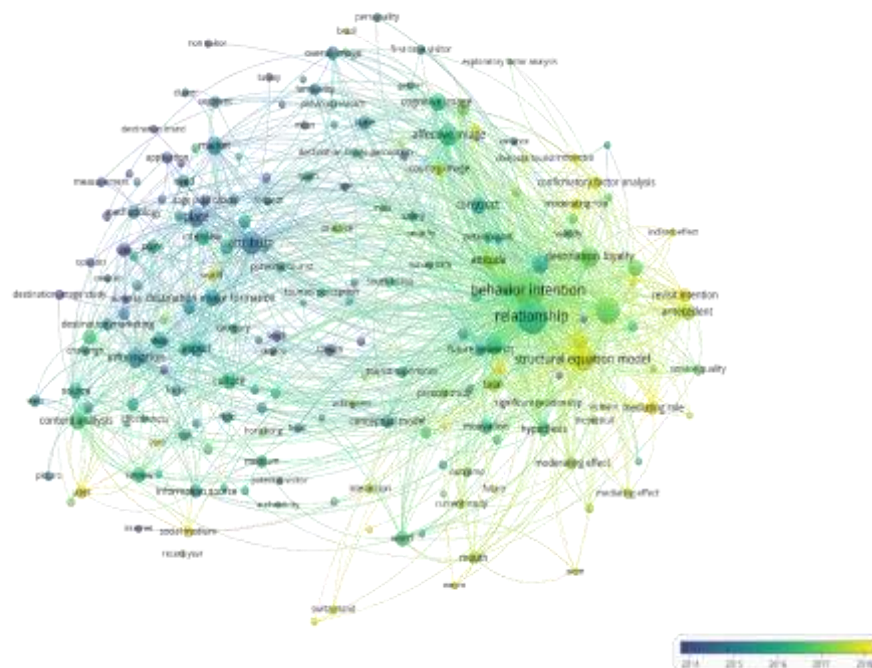
Table 0.3).

Table 0.3

Grouping of Studies Based on the Co-occurrence of Keywords

Rank	No. of items	Related keywords	Name of the clusters
1 (red)	98	<b>Core keywords:</b> attribute, information <b>Other keywords:</b> source, content analysis, destination image formation, industry	Image formation and structure
2 (green)	66	<b>Core keywords:</b> relationship, behaviour intention <b>Other keywords:</b> satisfaction, destination loyalty, variable, construct, structural equation model	The relationship between destination image and tourist behaviour
3 (blue)	33	<b>Core keywords:</b> cognitive image, affective image <b>Other keywords:</b> overall image, tourist experience, country image	Conceptualization and measurement

In Figure 0.4, an overlay visualization is shown in terms of keywords. It is evident that the keywords shown in Figure 0.4 represent significant research areas. The colour of articles is determined by the publication year. Light green and yellow (the highest scores) indicate that numerous studies were published after 2017. Therefore, cluster 2 represents the research hotspot in this field. Keywords such as “user”, “photo”, and “social media” in cluster 1 are relatively new research points. Additionally, countries/regions such as “Vietnam” and “Switzerland” are currently popular case studies in destination image research.



**Figure 0.4 Overlay Visualization of the Co-occurrence of Keywords****Analysis of Geography**

The countries of origin of the authors in the published articles indicate that the topic of destination image is very widespread. According to the analysis results of VOSviewer, the total sample of 1,064 articles was spread across 205 nations/regions.

Table 0.4 displays the top 20 countries/regions in this field. The United States ranks first with 217 articles, followed by Spain and China, with 114 published articles each. The United Kingdom (n=102) and Australia (n=89) rank fourth and fifth respectively.

*Table 0.4*  
*Top 20 Publications in by Country/Region (2002-2021)*

Rank	Country/Region	Number of Documents	Citations	Rank	Country/Region	Number of Documents	Citations
1	United States	217	14,354	11	Portugal	37	889
2	Spain	114	7,335	12	Indonesia	36	146
3	China	114	3,249	13	Macau	30	525
4	United Kingdom	102	4,531	14	New Zealand	28	3,124
5	Australia	89	3,902	15	Canada	27	1,524
6	South Korea	77	3,641	16	Greece	26	828
7	Taiwan	70	4,134	17	South Africa	26	731
8	Malaysia	63	862	18	India	25	313
9	Hong Kong	49	1,398	19	France	18	1,607
10	Turkey	46	1,289	20	Austria	17	920

In addition, Figure 0.5 shows a network-mapping chart of citations per country from 2002 to 2021. The chart displays 46 countries with at least five publications on this topic. The size of the nodes of each country/region indicates the number of publications, while the lines and distances between the nodes indicate the citations of the articles published. The United States, China, the UK, Spain, and Australia are the main hubs with many connections to other countries, as seen in Figure 0.5.

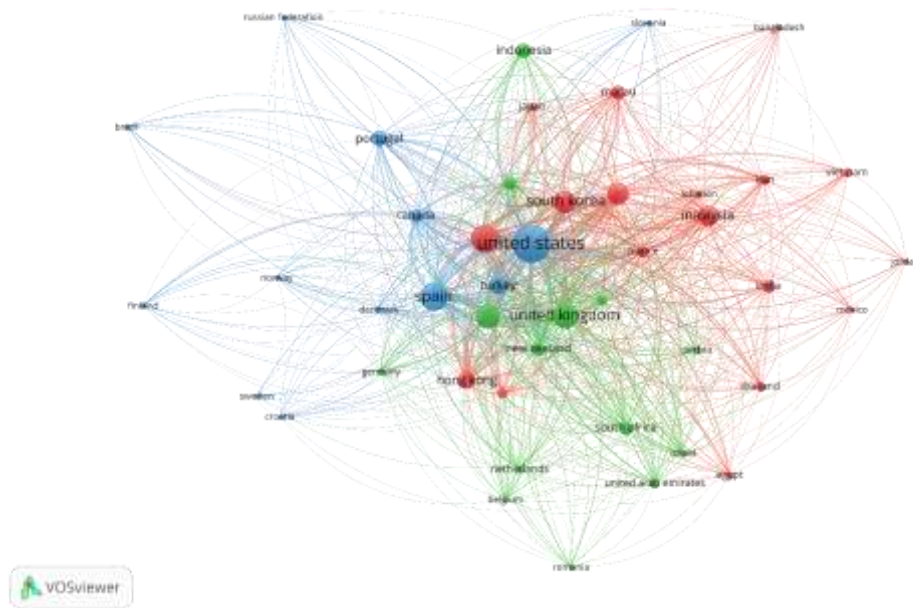


Figure 0.5 Network Visualization Map of Citations by Country

**Analysis of Authors**

As it is shown in Table 0.5, Stylidis D. had published the most articles in this discipline, with 19 articles. Tasci D.A. holds the second position with 14 published documents. Stepchenkova S., Pike S., and Prayag G., ranked third through fifth positions, with 13, 12 and 11 articles, respectively.

Table 0.5

Top 20 Authors with the Most Published Articles

Rank	Author	No. of Documents	Citations	Rank	Author	No. of Documents	Citations
1	Stylidis D.	19	865	11	Morrison A.M.	9	1,027
2	Tasci D.A.	14	623	12	Lee C.-K.	9	695
3	Stepchenkova S.	13	1,088	13	Qu H.	7	1,940
4	Pike S.	12	1,409	14	Cai L. A.	7	1,266
5	Prayag G.	11	1,578	15	Kaplanidou K.	7	506
6	Chen C.-C.	11	364	16	Wang Y.	7	327
7	Lin Y.-H	11	355	17	Pan S.	7	299
8	Ryan C.	10	1,918	18	Law R.	7	116
9	Li X.	10	498	19	Li Y.	7	72
10	Kim S.	10	305	20	Petrack J. F.	6	250

Figure 0.6 illustrates the network of authors' bibliographic coupling, which occurs when two authors cite the same third author in their individual articles. The minimum number of documents required for an author to be included is three, and 142 of the 1,958 authors met this threshold. The authors are grouped into five clusters. As shown in Figure 0.6, two of these clusters (green and red) are particularly prominent. Stylidis D. is represented by the most significant node, indicating that Stylidis D. has the highest occurrence of this citation type. In addition, Tasci D.A., Stepchenkova S., and Prayag G. and Pike S. have high occurrence within the green cluster. Chen C.-C. and Lin Y.-H are the authors with the highest occurrence in the yellow cluster.

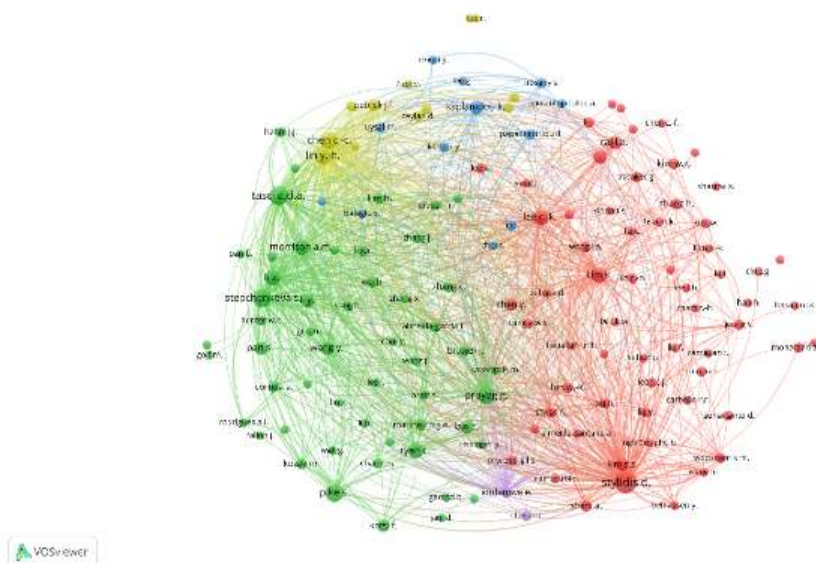


Figure 0.6 Bibliographic Coupling of Authors

### Analysis of Citations

The 20 most cited papers from the e-database are shown in

Table 0.6. According to the results, the most cited paper is by Chi and Qu (2008), with 1,199 citations. Their research proposed a model with seven hypotheses to examine the relationship between destination image, visitor attributes, overall satisfaction, and destination loyalty. Subsequently, the article by Beerli and Martín (2004) was cited 1,192 times. They developed and empirically validated a model explaining the various aspects that influenced tourists' pre- and post-visit perceptions and evaluations of a destination. The research by Chen and Tsai (2007) also explores the relationship between destination image and behavioral intentions. The total number of citations for these 20 articles is 12,161, which accounts for 27.9% of the total number of citations of 1,064 articles. Moreover, the 20 most cited papers were primarily published in *Tourism Management* (n=9), *Annals of Tourism Research* (n=6), and *Journal of Travel Research* (n=4). The publication of these papers is of

great significance in determining the research direction in this field. The 20 most frequently cited papers have an average of 608.1 citations (a range from 328 to 1,199), and the publication years are between 2002 to 2017. Out of the 20 articles, the earliest citations were from 2002, including a literature review, a conceptual framework, and an article on the co-branding of rural tourism destinations. The most recent reference was published in 2017, involving the relationships between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend, revealing the most recent research topics.

*Table 0.6*  
*The Number of Citations to the Articles (Top 20 are Listed)*

Rank	Authors	Title	Title Source	Cited by
1	Chi and Qu (2008)	Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach	Tourism Management	1,199
2	Beerli and Martín (2004)	Factors influencing destination image	Annals of Tourism Research	1,192
3	Chen and Tsai (2007)	How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions?	Tourism Management	1,182
4	Gallarza et al. (2002)	Destination image: Towards a conceptual framework	Annals of Tourism Research	919
5	Pike (2002)	Destination image analysis - A review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000	Tourism Management	633
6	Prayag and Ryan (2012)	Antecedents of tourists' loyalty to Mauritius: The role and influence of destination image, place attachment, personal involvement, and satisfaction	Journal of Travel Research	628
7	Cai (2002)	Cooperative branding for rural destinations	Annals of Tourism Research	557
8	Pike and Ryan (2004)	Destination positioning analysis through a comparison of cognitive, affective, and conative perceptions	Journal of Travel Research	556
9	Qu et al. (2011)	A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image	Tourism Management	529
10	del Bosque and Martín (2008)	Tourist satisfaction - A cognitive-affective model	Annals of Tourism Research	513
11	Beerli and	Tourists' characteristics and the	Tourism	511



Rank	Authors	Title	Title Source	Cited by
	Martín (2004)	perceived image of tourist destinations: A quantitative analysis - A case study of Lanzarote, Spain	Management	
12	Kim and Richardson (2003)	Motion picture impacts on destination images	Annals of Tourism Research	491
13	Zhang et al. (2014)	Destination image and tourist loyalty: A meta-analysis	Tourism Management	484
14	Choi et al. (2007)	Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites	Tourism Management	448
15	San Martín and Del Bosque (2008)	Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation	Tourism Management	444
16	Hosany et al. (2006)	Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places	Journal of Business Research	433
17	Ekinci and Hosany (2006)	Destination personality: An application of brand personality to tourism destinations	Journal of Travel Research	389
18	Lee et al. (2005)	Korea's destination image formed by the 2002 World Cup	Annals of Tourism Research	373
19	Castro et al. (2007)	The influence of market heterogeneity on the relationship between a destination's image and tourists' future behaviour	Tourism Management	352
20	Prayag et al. (2017)	Understanding the Relationships between Tourists' Emotional Experiences, Perceived Overall Image, Satisfaction, and Intention to Recommend	Journal of Travel Research	328

### Content Qualitative Analysis

The main purpose of content analysis is to gain an in-depth understanding of the scope and direction of destination image research, and to identify research gaps. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of tourism destination image, some publications include more than one topic. The destination image formation process is complex, intertwining with several other constructs (Tasci et al., 2007). Therefore, conducting a literature review on

destination image is challenging. After reviewing relevant literature, Ragab et al. (2019) found that research on destination image mainly focuses on four aspects: conceptualization and operationalization, structure and components, measurement scales and dimensions, and antecedents and consequences of the destination image. According to

Table 0.3, in this research, all articles are categorized into three clusters based on keywords, with each cluster representing a distinct field of destination research.

### **Conceptualization and Measurement**

Although Echtner and Ritchie (1991), and Beerli and Martín (2004), have already contributed important insights regarding destination image, the constructs and their components are still not clearly defined in the literature (Tasci et al., 2007).

For example, destination image is often referred to as perception and conceptualized as three measurement constructs: knowledge (cognition about the destination), attitude (affect toward the destination), and travel intention (Tessitore et al., 2014). However, Kotsi et al (2018), focused on the destination brand image, while Styliadis et al (2014) explored the role of residents' place image in shaping their support for tourism growth. In other research, Deng and Li (2018), addressed the pronounced gap between projected (cognitive elements) and received images (affective image) by assisting DMOs with photo content selection. Instead of using the term "destination image", Lee and Lee (2009), applied the concept of "destination attributes" and proposed 36 items for these attributes. Chen et al (2016), operationalized cognitive image as a combination of both destination quality and destination uniqueness, representing the common and unique features of cognitive image, respectively.

For different research purposes, scholars have focused on different components of destination image. For example, some scholars pay attention to either cognitive image (Chen & Phou, 2013; Lalicic et al., 2021; Park & Nicolau, 2019) or affective image (Lee et al., 2008; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). Other scholars conceptualize the destination image as a dimension that includes cognitive and affective components to explore the relationship with other factors (Assaker & O'Connor, 2020; Kim, 2018). However, most studies regard the destination image as a two-dimensional (Choi et al., 2018; Krey et al., 2021; Tung et al., 2017) or three-dimensional (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018; Molinillo et al., 2018; Styliadis et al., 2017) construct. Whether destination image is regarded as a multi-dimensional or uni-dimensional construct depends on the objective of the study (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Similarly, visit, revisit, and recommend intentions can be operationalized as the notion of behavioral intention or tourist loyalty. Some studies use the term "conative image" (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Stylos et al., 2017; Stylos et al., 2016), which has the similar meaning.

In the tourism context, structured and unstructured methodologies are regarded as the primary tools for measuring destination image (Bui et al., 2021; Gallarza et al., 2002). In structured measurement methods, data is obtained through standardized closed-ended survey questions (Kock et al., 2016), which are relatively simple to obtain. The structured methodology enables the capturing of the common component of destination image (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). However, closed-ended questions can make it challenging to extract information embedded in a person's mind (Li et al., 2021). According to Jenkins (1999), the attributes of the measurement may vary from destination to destination. However, the

list of common attributes from previous literature is believed to represent the characteristics of universal value for all tourist destinations (Chung et al., 2015). Additionally, the attribute lists proposed by different researchers might be incomplete or omit crucial destination characteristics (Tasci et al., 2007). Therefore, inappropriate TDI measuring attribute selection may not capture all aspects of TDI (Bui et al., 2021). There are considerable differences between the attributes proposed by different scholars in their studies and the number of items derived from these attributes. In a multi-attribute method, the tourism image is assessed through a series of attributes using a Likert scale or semantic differential scale (Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2009).

In contrast to structured methods, participants are free to express their personal opinions about the destination in an unstructured method, such as in-depth interviews, open-ended questions, or content analysis. For example, after reviewing relevant literature, Han et al (2019), conducted a series of in-depth interviews to discover possible halal-friendly attributes and potential key aspects of halal-friendly destinations. Marques et al (2021), applied content analysis to create lists of unique characteristics that were used to measure perceptions of unique image in questionnaires. Open-ended questions are also formulated for assessing holistic and unique features of the destination (Chung et al., 2015; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). However, unstructured methods may mean that measurements depend on details and quality of responses that cannot be controlled (Bui et al., 2021).

To operationalize the multicomponent image concept, Echtner and Ritchie (1991), suggest using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In recent years, research methods combining qualitative and quantitative instruments have become more common (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008). The first stage identifies destination attributes connected with the destination or study samples using unstructured approaches. Then the experiential dimensions identified in the qualitative research will serve as a foundation for the development of quantitative research measurement instruments (Shi et al., 2019).

Analyzing the keywords of 1,064 papers reveals that “structural equation model” is the most frequently used analytic approach in destination image studies. It represents the mainstream of research methodology in this discipline.

### **The Relationship between Destination Image and Tourist Behavior**

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) divided the formation process of the destination into two stages: static and dynamic. The first type is usually examined by the relationship between image and tourist behaviour (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). Different types of images are formed during specific stages of the tourist experience (Prayag et al., 2017): pre-visit, during-visit, and post-visit (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). At the pre-trip stage, destination image positively influences intention to visit (Molinillo et al., 2018) and expectation (Wang et al., 2016). During the trip, destination image is essential to tourists’ on-site experience (Chi & Qu, 2008; Lin & Kuo, 2018), involvement (Lu et al., 2015; Martín-Santana et al., 2017). After the trip, destination image strongly influences the behavioral intentions, including re-visit intention (Assaker & O’Connor, 2020; Kim, 2018), intention to recommend (Stylidis et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2016), satisfaction (Marques et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2017), loyalty (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018; Lv et al., 2020), familiarity (Sun et al., 2013) and place attachment (Loureiro et al., 2021; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). However, the majority of research focuses on tourists’ post-visit image perceptions and their relationship with post-trip evaluations (Prayag et al., 2017). Because a better understanding of destination image is an

essential component of marketing strategy that captures and increases tourist loyalty.

### Image Formation and Structure

The second type of destination image formation process is dynamic, which is related to the influence on the structure and formation of destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Beerli and Martín (2004) proposed that personal factors (e.g., motivations, vacation experiences, and socio-demographic) can affect the perception and evaluation of destination image. San Martín and Del Bosque (2008) argued that psychological factors (e.g., motivation and cultural values) could influence an individual's image perception prior to traveling to a tourist destination. Wang et al. (2016) confirmed that travel motivation could affect tourists' cognitive image, and this effect is more obvious for men than for women. In terms of tourism motivation, novelty-seeking has a beneficial effect on destination image of both potential and repeat tourists (Maghrifani et al., 2021).

In terms of travel experience, tourists' cultural and authentic tourism experiences are proven to be positively related to their cognitive and affective perceptions of destination image (Shi et al., 2019). Memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) significantly boosted the formation of favorable destination image (Kim, 2018). Tourists' emotional experiences serve as antecedents of perceived overall image and satisfaction evaluations (Prayag et al., 2017).

Beerli and Martín (2004) observed that, in addition to previous travel experience (primary sources of information); secondary sources (tourist brochures, mass media, travel agency staff, and the Internet) influence the formation of pre-visit perceptions of destination. Lin and Kuo (2018) proposed that the type of travel arrangement mediates the unique image formation perceived by different groups. When tourists utilize both travel agencies and the Internet as information sources, the image of the destination is worse than when they use travel agencies alone (Frías et al., 2008).

The development of Internet technology has changed the way in which individuals obtain information, and brought new technologies and methodologies to tourism research. According to the "2022 Global Digital Overview Report" published by *We Are Social & Hootsuite* recently, the number of global social media users has reached 4.62 billion, while the number of Internet users worldwide has reached 4.95 billion. It is evident that the Internet has become a vital component of people's lives. As a new marketing communication channel, the Internet has definitely changed the landscape of tourism marketing (Li et al., 2009), as well as tourists' decision-making processes and behaviours (Xu et al., 2021).

Due to the fact that DMOs may customize the information and interact directly with tourists (Molinillo et al., 2018), the perception of cues induced from online travel media will affect tourists' judgment of the credibility of information. This in turn influences tourists' behavior and destination image (Choi et al., 2018). The process of image formation and visit intention may change based on the platform visitors use (Molinillo et al., 2018). These variations can largely be explained by the different communication objectives and targeted audiences of the various web information sources (Choi et al., 2007). Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) indicated that different websites, reflecting both supplier-and user-generated content, combined to form an information source construct.

The majority of authors agree on the significance of the Internet as a source of travel information (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015). As a source of big data, user-generated content has provided a great opportunity for researchers to overcome the limitations of traditional methodologies (Bui et al., 2021).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### *Conclusions*

This study aims to evaluate and visualize research on destination image in the context of tourism. A total of 1,064 articles originating from Scopus and WoS were analysed. The outcome provides an analysis of the current state and major trends in this field over the past 20 years. Moreover, it helps to identify research gaps and future trends.

Based on the analysis of leading journals, authors, keywords, and countries, the following conclusions can be deduced:

- (1) The literature in the field of destination image is increasing.
- (2) The 11.7% of journals published 65.1% of the total articles.
- (3) The “Tourism Management” is the leader of publications, followed by “Journal of Travel Research” and “Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing”.
- (4) According to the documents and citations, the United States of America is the leading country in this field, followed by Spain and China.
- (5) Several prolific authors (e.g., Styliadis D., Tasci D.A., Stepchenkova S., et al.) concentrate a significant portion of the research.
- (6) Revealed by the network analysis, the relationship between destination image and tourists’ satisfaction and behavior intention is the focus of current research.

In this study, the results of the statistical analysis and the co-cited articles, authors and keywords answered the following three research questions:

- (1) What are the main streams of research in the destination image literature?

In recent years, a lot of attention has been focused on destination image research. The determination of research main streams is helpful to help relevant researchers choose their own research directions of interest. According to the analysis of co-occurrence of keywords, the results show that there are three main streams in this field, namely, conceptualization and measurement of destination image; the relationship between destination image and other constructs, especially satisfaction and tourist behavior; and destination image formation and structure.

- (2) What are the gaps in current research?

The authors identify knowledge gaps in tourism destination image based on scientific mapping and analytical results. First, although there are three topic categories in the research of destination, it is clear that the research on the third topic (conceptualization and measurement) is significantly weaker (see Figure 0.3). In particular, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the conceptual definition of DI. According to the analysis of geography, countries with more destination image research results are the United States, Spain, China, and the United Kingdom, so most of the cases are about these countries. The case of destination image is relatively lack of diversity.

- (3) What are the research trends in destination image research in the future?

The analysis of current research hotspots reflects the research trend in this field in the future. According to the overlay visualization of the co-occurrence of keywords, current research hotspots mainly focus on studying the relationship between tourist destinations and other factors, for example, revisit intention, word-of-mouth, eWOM, the mediating role or moderating role of some constructs (e.g. travel risks, travel constraints). In terms of research methods, structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis still dominate the field. It is worth noting that memorable tourism experience has begun to attract the attention of scholars, and becomes a topic worthy of future study.

**Theoretical Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore an overview of destination image theory and application, which was achieved by conducting the bibliometric analysis of documents from Scopus and WoS. The research makes the following contributions to the field. First, this study attempted to use VOSviewer to conduct bibliometric analysis of destination image, which may display research structures and trends visually compared to traditional literature reviews. Second, the research was conducted utilizing 1,064 articles on destination image from 2002 to 2021, providing a comprehensive overview of destination image research. Therefore, this study provides advice for people who are new to this field or intend to perform extensive research in this area, since they can understand the knowledge structure of this field through objective data analysis from a large number of publications. Furthermore, the results of the thematic analysis will allow scholars to identify potential trends in the field, such as “user-generated content”. In addition, reliable data from visual analysis can help scholars identify credible sources of references to contribute to theoretical development in the field.

**Practical Implications**

Moreover, the findings of the study will benefit DMOs and policy makers. On the one hand, this study summarizes the concept, structure and measurement methods of destination image, which can help relevant managers design a plan to measure a specific destination image according to their needs, and then understand the current situation and gap of destination image in that place. On the other hand, the research on the relationship between destination image and related structures in this study is helpful for DMOs to identify the antecedents, consequences and influencing factors of the formation of destination image, so as to adopt targeted strategies to enhance destination image. Furthermore, the confirmation of current and future research hotspots (e.g. the influence of mediating role/effect of perceived risks, perceived constraints; studying destination Image using user-generated content) in visualization research will also play a positive role in promoting the targeted development of experiential tourism products and the adoption of new marketing models for tourism destination managers.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This research has both practical and theoretical applications, but it also has certain limits. First, the database was surveyed using only Scopus and WoS, despite the fact that these two databases contain the vast majority of research publications on destination image. Other databases may contain articles relevant to this topic. Second, this study only analysed articles and did not consider conference papers, reviews, books, etc. In future research, such important research results may be considered for inclusion. Third, some papers were excluded from the formal analysis due to unavailability of the full text. These studies are likely to contain meaningful data of this field. Fourth, this study only contains English-language publications, and research in other languages needs to be explored in the future. Fifth, only one analysis software, VOSviewer, was used in this study, and there would inevitably be deviations in the results. To address the shortcomings of VOSviewer, future studies should investigate analyzing data using an alternative program. In addition, this study explored a bibliometric analysis of all destination image literature. Consideration should be given in the future to conducting studies on particular facets of destination image. For example, the dynamic/static formation of destination image; the relationship between destination image

and other constructs. Finally, since the analysis process is based on the subjective judgment of the authors, certain factors may have been overlooked.

Suggestions for future research directions:

a) Conclusion can be drawn from VOSviewer's analysis: Research on satisfaction is a crucial aspect in destination image research. However, Kim (2018) confirmed that satisfaction has a relatively weak degree of influence compared to MTE. MTE is the most important determinant of future behavior (Kim, 2018). According to the analysis results of VOSviewer, memorable tourism experience appeared 12 times in the keyword co-occurrence. The average publication year is 2019. This indicates that this is a relatively new research field. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of memorable tourism experiences, destination image, and their impact on tourist behavior is a contribution to tourism research.

b) According to the overlay visualization, the influence of mediating role/effect is attracting an increasing number of academics' attention. For example, destination image's mediating role between perceived risks, perceived constraints, and behavioral intention (Nazir et al., 2021). Notably, due to the development of network information, social media, user-generated data, and electronic word-of-mouth have begun to attract the attention of scholars, which will become the focus of future research.

c) In the big data era, online tourist destination image has played a crucial role in the construction of destination image (Qi & Chen, 2019). The user-generated content explosion is generating a paradigm change in research (Marine, 2019). Travelers may add statements to their reviews that are relevant to the travel experience but inconsistent with the DMO brand image (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). Moreover, researchers can access this information for free via social media, eliminating the need for surveys or interviews to get users' opinions (Marine, 2019). Therefore, online travel reviews have been extensively used in tourism research (Guo et al., 2021), serving as an essential data source for destination image formation (Aitieva et al., 2021). Future research can further explore the role and impact of new technologies in the formation of destination image, and utilize new technology to compensate for the limitations of conventional research methodologies.

d) Cooperation between countries needs to be strengthened. Furthermore, the samples and research backgrounds are mostly concentrated in the United States, Spain, China, and other countries or regions. Future cross-cultural research with samples from different populations should be conducted (Kim, 2018).

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