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An Overview of Marketing Strategies for City Brand Communication in the Context of Globalisation: An Analysis of Effective Paths to Enhance a City's International Image

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In an increasingly globalized world, city branding has become a critical strategy for enhancing a city's international reputation, competitiveness, and economic growth. This study adopts a qualitative, systematic literature review approach, employing the PRISMA framework to identify and analyze relevant studies on city branding and marketing strategies. Seven studies were selected for analysis, focusing on key aspects such as digital communication, stakeholder engagement, governance, and sectoral specialization. The findings reveal that digital tools, particularly social media, play a transformative role in amplifying global visibility and fostering stakeholder interaction. Further, brand equity, governance and sectoral specialization are key characteristics in how cities should formulate effective city branding strategies. International reputation, investment and the perception of the level of sustainability and innovation all increase through city branding efforts. Nevertheless, some challenges, including stakeholder alignment and long-term sustainability, may be worth exploring further. It provides valuable lessons for policymakers and practitioners doing branding of cities, urging for multi-dimensional strategies that incorporate digital tools, governance and cultural identity for global competitiveness. **Keywords:** City Branding, Marketing Strategies, Global Competitiveness, Digital Communication, Stakeholder Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, cities are increasingly competing against each other to get resources like investment, talent, and tourism. Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009) reported that city branding is essential for this competition, putting cities in the position to develop a unique image that is attractive and speaks to their presence on the global stage. City branding strategies, however, are not only about promoting a city's unique attributes, and as such, the brand must reflect the multi-faceted identity of its residents and institutions; they are effective when they engage stakeholders. Chan and Tsun (2024) also assert that in order for a city to brand successfully, the place brand equity building process needs to be structured consisting of using cultural, economic and social dimensions. The control of all these factors can be attained by cities strategically, leading to international reputation and global positioning.

Problem Statement

In the age of globalization, cities increasingly struggle to compete for investment, talent and tourism. Nevertheless, most cities have difficulty conveying their distinctivities and values to the rest of the world. However, in spite of the increasing importance of city branding, different marketing routes generally yield a fragmented and non-consistent set of messages. The objective of this study is to fill the gap left in understanding effective marketing approaches used in a city's communications that would help a city improve its global image and overall competitiveness.

Study Objectives

1. To study the influence of city branding efforts on improving a city's international image and competitiveness.

2. To analyze the role of marketing strategies in enhancing city brand communication within the context of globalization.

Significance of the Study

In a context wherein city branding is essential in a globalized world, wherein cities seek economic, cultural and social advantage, this study is particularly important. The research examines how cities have successfully applied marketing strategies in order to communicate their brand and questions how a city can enhance its international image as a means to attract investment, talent and tourism. These findings will be useful to inform policymakers, urban planners and marketing professionals with practical tips on how to collaborate to build strong branding efforts that make sense in local markets, and sense in global ones. Finally, the study ends with building stronger, more competitive cities in the international arena.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing Strategies for Effective City Brand Communication

In a time of globalized interrelation, cities use various marketing tools to achieve a good grasp on the market and the branding of the city as a whole. Pedeliento and Kavaratzis (2019) indicates that city branding has moved from traditional promotional activities to a broader field of practice, combining the features of identity, culture and values within the marketing strategy. It is a reflection of increased awareness that a city's brand must connect with global targets and local ones to endure long-term success.

Moreover, the city brand communication effectiveness largely depends on the integration of multiple tools, like digital media campaigns, public relations and cultural events so that a seamless story is built. Anholt (2010) points out that the use of such tools strategically can greatly increase the visibility and attractiveness of a city on the global stage. By rewriting their tag line to highlight their cultural diversity and the city's vibrant arts scene, Melbourne, Australia, created such a rebrand that Australia's capital of creativity now serves as a go to for tourism and boosts the city's economy.

Additionally, a city's brand is in many ways shaped by stakeholder engagement. Zenker and Braun (2017) state that it allows people living in the area, businesses and visitors to actively participate in the process and thereby act as owners of the brand. Aligning the city's messaging to the lived experiences and aspirations of its community, this participatory approach makes the brand more relatable and impactful. To conclude, city brand communication should combine innovative ways to disseminate messages about a city's identity and to foster a positive image abroad.

Impact of City Branding on International Image and Competitiveness

In the sense of the globalized era, cities are eager to improve their international image and competitiveness by way of strategic branding initiatives. Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019) argue that a good city brand is an essential resource that allows the city to attract investment, skilled labour and tourism by projecting a distinguished identity and a positive reputation. There are few cities in the world the same, so cities compete for attention in an increasingly global marketplace, and city branding is the way to differentiate them as preferred locations for economic and cultural engagement.

As Wan and Li (2024) as the factor fostering city branding recognize digital platforms, social media has been integrated into branding strategies to increase visibility and broaden its global reach. Cities using these tools, they argue, can invite more people into the conversation and foster meaningful connections. In this case, Vilnius, Lithuania, successfully launched the "Vilnius TechFusion" campaign to market its strong tech ecosystem and

position itself as a place for innovation and talent, and was extremely successful in doing so by getting international press attention and even being called a 'hub' for tech.

In addition, the economic advantage reaped from city branding is not the only benefit. Effective branding elevates pride and loyalty of residents while improving city competitiveness, argues Zenker and Braun (2017). As a model, "I Amsterdam" campaigns spotlight cultural richness and inclusivity and bring in millions of tourists, with emphasis on economic growth. Finally, strategic city branding helps improve a city's international and competitive image based on its unique strengths, stakeholders' engagement, and innovative communication tools.

Evolution of City Branding in the Context of Globalization

In the globalization context, city branding has developed from simple promotional activities to full strategies to communicate a city's identity, culture and values. City branding is a strategic process whereby cities are awarded their competitive stake in attracting residents, investors, and tourists (Dinnie, 2010). This evolution represents an increasing need to establish differentiation through a sustained city narrative in a more challenging, ever more competitive, global market. With the start of a 'brand city' initiative, Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019) stated that a strong city brand is now a necessary requisite to attract economic resources and talent, and generate pride among residents. For example, Helsinki's 'Helsinki Smart Region' initiative shows how branding can support targets at the global level, such as sustainability and innovation. Helsinki has positioned itself as a smart city hub to bolster its international image and local economic growth, while adding to resilience.

Additionally, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) also highlight the role of the role of stakeholder's involvement in the formation of city brands. However, to make their own claims of effective city branding, they insist that cities should involve both their residents and their businesses as well as local governments in order to maintain authenticity and match up with the lived experience of cities. Participatory approaches do not just make brands stronger or more relatable, but they also cement trust and engagement in the brand stakeholders. City branding has intensified in the digital age and impacts are felt further and further. Wan and Li (2024) noted that cities could deliver messages directly to global audiences via social media and digital platforms, therefore increasing engagement, visibility and awareness. Finally, the globalization era has forged the evolution of city branding in the sense that a city with a unique identity and competitive edges needs to be promoted through an integrated and stakeholder determined strategy, which is in alignment with the global trends for the city to be competitive on the world stage.

Theoretical Framework: Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon

According to Simon Anholt's theoretical framework known as Nation Brand Hexagon (NBH) of six core dimensions that shape the way a place is perceived on an international level (nation, city, or region), nation, city, or region. They are exports; governance; investment and immigration; culture and heritage; people; and tourism. The interplay of these dimensions is the product that determines the image of a city and a city's ability to attract tourists, businesses, talent and investments (Matiza, 2017). The six dimensions of Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon are depicted in **Figure 1** as a representation of the composite elements comprising the bedrock of place branding. The figure shows the shaded areas representing the potential balance (or emphasis) that a city might put on the different dimensions. For instance, cities can be talented in culture and heritage, or investment and immigration, depending on their leadership's selection of goals and branding priorities. The example of this visualization highlights the need to approach city branding efforts strategically and integrated.

The importance of the NBH to this study is clear: it offers a comprehensive lens through which cities' marketing strategies in constructing their international image can be analyzed. While Zenker and Braun (2017) note that cities can only use specific attributes and align them with the expectations of global stakeholders for effective city branding, a variety of views exist regarding many of the traits of the most successful city brands. Each dimension of the NBH plays a role in shaping perceptions: Such as culture and heritage features of a city's history and traditions and investment and immigration showcase how it ticks when it comes to economic vitality and openness to talent.

An important example is Dubai, which purposefully and positively focused its branding towards investment and immigration as relates to its designation as a global business hub, but at the same time, towards tourism through luxury experiences and modern infrastructure (Al-Sufyani, 2021). Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019) posit that successful city branding all but cease to exist if these dimensions do not exist in a state of balanced equilibrium; they are being balanced in order to create a united image that will resonate with several target audiences. Finally, **Figure 1** also shows that Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon is multidimensional, and cities need to position themselves to concentrate across all of these six elements in order for their branding efforts to be effective. With the use of this framework, cities can enrich their global competitiveness and promote sustainable economic and social development.
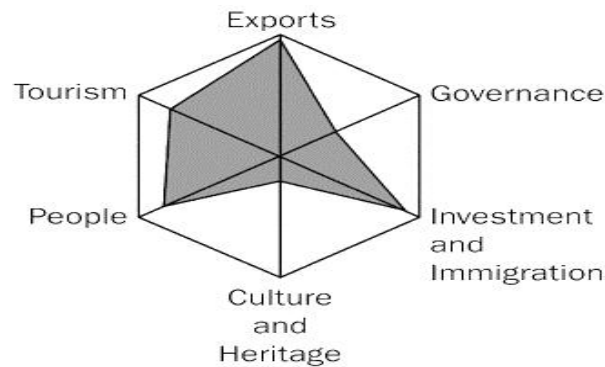
Figure 1. Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon Framework for Place Branding [Source: Anholt (2006)]

Literature Gap

Although relevant research on city branding is reviewed, there is a gap in the systematic fusion of theoretical knowledge for the deepest synthesis of current research on effective strategies to improve the city's international visibility. This research explores the current state of research on fragmented case studies, and the gaps that remain in understanding trends and common frameworks across all global cities. In addition, established cities, rather than emerging urban centres are often studied, especially in developing regions. Additionally, there is little research on modern branding tools (digital media and stakeholder collaboration) to influence global competitiveness. They need to be understood in a more structured form through a systematic literature review to identify these research gaps and to consolidate the findings in order to provide a better understanding of city branding strategy and its long-term impact on the city's global positioning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research methods are covered. As defined by Creswell (2018), quantitative research is a type of research science that uses numerical data, and statistical analysis to map out relationships of variables. In contrast, qualitative research explores phenomena through in depth textual data, for example, document analysis, case studies, and interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both methods are combined with a mixed-method approach in order to enhance our understanding (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

A qualitative research approach was used for this study. Within a globalization framework, the role of marketing strategies in communication of city brands was examined through a systematic literature review (SLR). It was deemed appropriate to use a qualitative approach as it facilitates a structure for aggregating, evaluating, and synthesising existing evidence reducing bias (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). This approach is relevant to the research objectives of the investigation of the effectiveness of the branding strategies, the effects of such strategies on improving the image of a city in the international context, and the gaps in the literature on city branding.

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to collect, evaluate, and synthesize secondary data relevant to city branding strategies in a globalized context. The SLR method is systematic, rigorous, and replicable, enabling comprehensive coverage of relevant studies while identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge (Tranfield et al., 2003). This approach ensures transparency and reliability while allowing for the critical analysis of evidence, which is essential for achieving the research objectives. The study specifically focused on city brand communication strategies, their role in enhancing international competitiveness, and key factors that contribute to their success.

Data Collection

A systematic approach was used to retrieve and analyze the secondary data from academic databases to ensure the collection of high quality secondary data. The strategy was to develop a strong keyword strategy, implement Boolean operators, and clearly define inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Keyword Strategy

A well-defined keyword strategy, brings in relevant studies. The keywords focused on four core concepts: city branding, globalization, international competitiveness and marketing strategies. It also included synonyms and related terms for coverage. The relevance of search results was refined iteratively (Al-Zubidy & Carver, 2019). The Keywords used in this study is given below in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Keywords

Category	Keywords
Core Concept	City branding, city brand communication, place branding
Globalization Context	Global city branding, international competitiveness
Marketing Strategies	Marketing communication strategies, branding tools, stakeholder engagement
Impact	Global image, city competitiveness, urban identity

Boolean Operators

Boolean operators were used to combine search terms, exclude irrelevant results, and increase search precision. Examples of Boolean expressions include in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Boolean Operator

Boolean Operator
"City branding" AND "marketing strategies" AND "globalization"
"City brand communication" OR "place branding" AND "international competitiveness"
"Global city branding" AND "stakeholder engagement" NOT "country branding"

Databases

To ensure the diversity and credibility of the data, seven academic databases were utilized. A total of 120 studies were retrieved, as shown in **Table 3,** bar chart (**Figure 2**) as well as in the Pie chart (**Figure 3**).

Table 3. Databases

Database	Papers Retrieved	Justification
Scopus	30	Covers interdisciplinary research
Web of Science	25	Focuses on high-impact, peer-reviewed journals
Google Scholar	20	Includes broader and grey literature
ProQuest	15	Accesses diverse studies across disciplines
Springer Link	10	Features scholarly books and journals
Elsevier	10	Provides reliable, high-quality academic content
JSTOR	10	Includes historical and theoretical studies
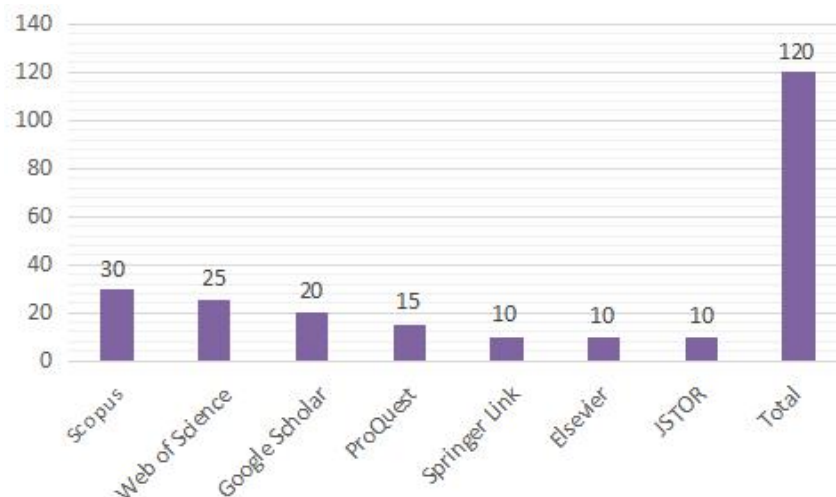
Figure 2. Papers Selected from Different Databases (Bar Chart)
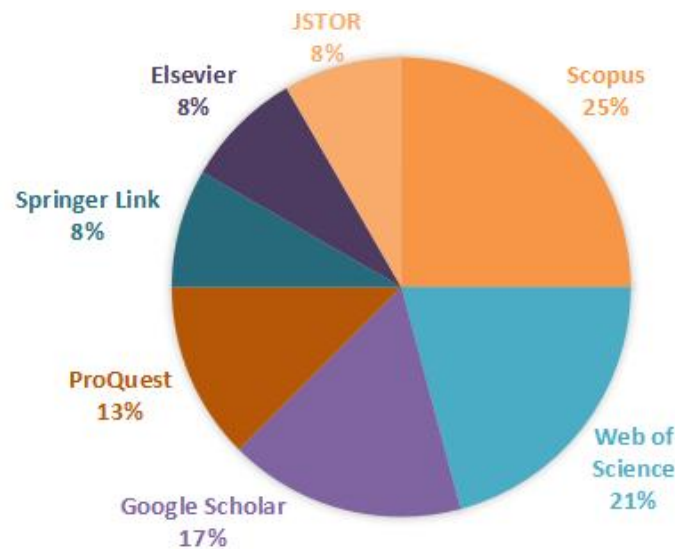
Figure 3. Paper Retrieved from Different Databases (Pie Chart)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A clear set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied to ensure the relevance and quality of selected studies. The Inclusion and Exclusion criteria for this study is given below in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Inclusion and Exclusion

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Timeframe	Articles published between 2013–2024	Articles outside this range
Language	English-language studies	Non-English studies
Peer Review	Peer-reviewed articles	Non-peer-reviewed works
Focus Area	Studies on city branding and globalization strategies	Studies on unrelated topics
Accessibility	Full-text articles available	Abstract-only studies or inaccessible works

Data Analysis

The data for this study was analyzed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Through this, the themes regarding the city branding strategies, international competitiveness and global communication were identified. Through thematic analysis, patterns within the selected studies were synthesized systematically to provide greater depth of understanding of how the city markets itself to international audiences to improve its circumstances in international image and positioning. The PRISMA framing was applied to ensure structured and transparent study selection. It gave a straightforward and reproducible treatment of how to report the stages of data selection and analysis. As illustrated in **Figure 4**, the thematic analysis followed seven key steps:

1. Familiarization with the data: Reading and comprehending the selected literature in depth.

2. Generating initial codes: Highlighting key concepts and ideas across the studies.

3. Searching for themes: Grouping the codes to identify broader themes aligned with the research objectives.

4. Reviewing themes: Refining and ensuring the themes' relevance to the study's focus.

5. Defining and naming themes: Assigning clear and descriptive names to each identified theme.

6. Classifying themes: Organizing the themes based on their connection to city branding strategies and their impact on international competitiveness.

7. Producing the final report: Synthesizing the findings into a cohesive narrative to address the research objectives.

Figure 4 below shows that these steps gave a systematic and rigorous way to analyze data. A structured approach of this kind guaranteed that categorization and interpretation of recurring patterns across the studies was done with consistency, transparency, and accuracy. However, the analysis contributed meaningfully toward understanding the key role of city branding strategies in enhancing the global image and competitiveness of a city.
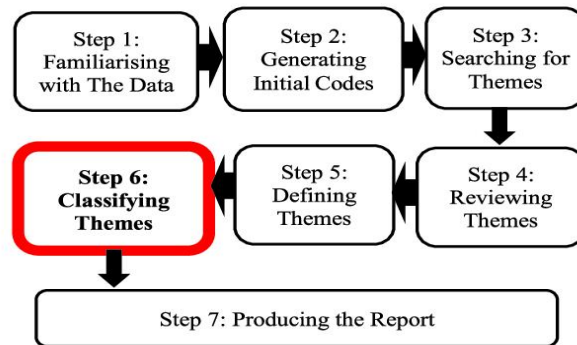
Figure 4. Thematic Analysis Steps [Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-seven-steps-in-the-Thematic-Analysis_fig2_352234410]

PRISMA Framework

The PRISMA framework guided the study selection process, ensuring systematic, transparent, and replicable reporting of the findings. As illustrated in **Figure 5**, an initial search across academic databases retrieved 120 publications. During the identification stage, 20 duplicate publications were removed, resulting in 100 studies for screening. In the screening stage, 50 publications were excluded due to language restrictions, publication year (pre-2015), or irrelevance to the research focus. This process left 50 studies for retrieval. Out of these, 10 publications could not be retrieved in full text, leaving 40 studies to be assessed for eligibility. In the eligibility stage, 30 studies were excluded: 18 for insufficient methodological rigor and 15 for lacking relevance to the research focus. This rigorous filtering process resulted in 7 high-quality studies being included in the final review for qualitative synthesis and analysis. This systematic process ensured that only the most relevant, credible, and methodologically sound studies were selected to address the research objectives.
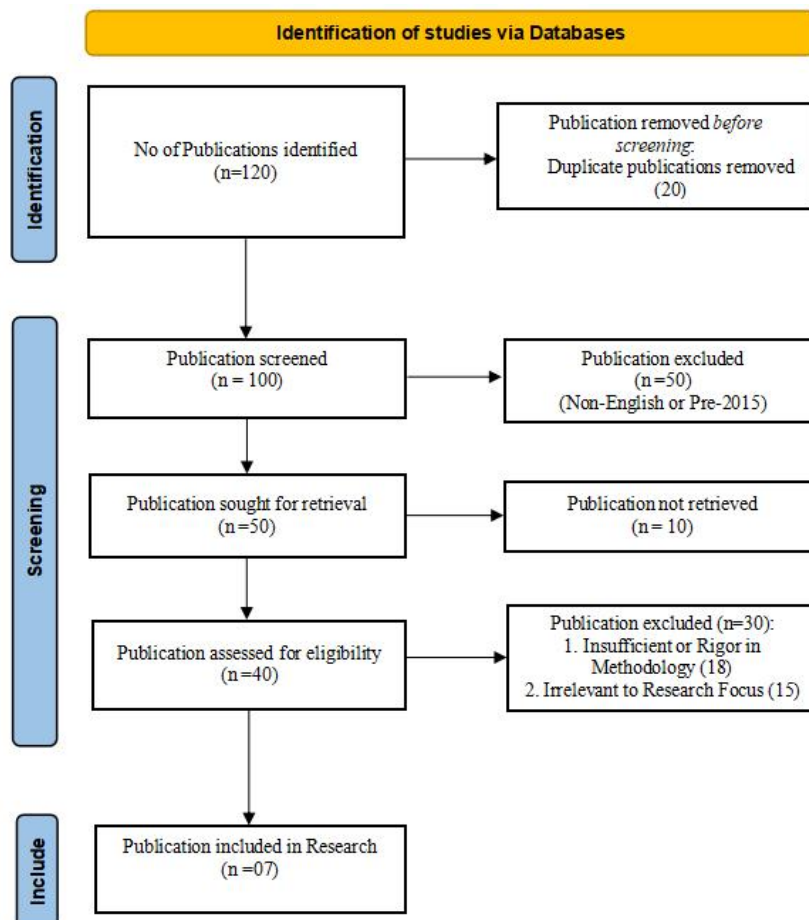
Figure 5. PRISMA Flow Chart

Ethical Considerations

An ethical review of secondary data analysis was followed in the study. All original works were properly attributed and cited and no copyright was infringed. The findings and contexts of the reviewed studies were also taken care of to avoid misrepresenation. The research process was maintained for transparency, objectivity and accuracy (Arifin, 2018).

RESULTS

Overview

The analysis discusses seven articles that investigate the impact of brand marketing on the city brand communication process during globalization and the effect of city branding on improving the city's international image and city market competitiveness. Research objectives, methodologies and findings of the selected studies are collected to serve as useful information on cities' strategic approaches to developing strong global city brands. What they concentrate on is regards of the important parts of digital communication; stakeholder engagement; urban governance and tourism promotion. These challenges and opportunities for a city's branding are explored in this dissertation using the city as the basis for investigating how marketing and branding can enhance a city's global visibility, competitiveness, and long-term reputation.

Publications Selected for Analysis

The publications selected for this study is given in **Table 5** below.

Table 5. Selected Publications

Sr. No.	Author/Publication Date	Title	Research Objectives	Methodology	Findings
1	Wan and Li (2024)	Navigating the digital age: City branding in the era of social media and digital transformation	To analyze the role of social media and digital tools in city branding strategies.	Qualitative analysis of city branding practices focusing on digital communication strategies.	Social media significantly enhances city brand communication, improving global visibility and audience engagement.
2	Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019)	Strengthening the city's reputation in the age of cities: An insight into the city branding phenomenon	To examine city branding strategies and their role in enhancing urban reputation.	Systematic literature review focusing on city branding theories and practices.	Effective city branding improves a city's competitiveness and strengthens its reputation in the global market.
3	Mariutti and Giraldi (2020)	Branding cities, regions, and countries: The roadmap of place brand equity	To explore the development of place brand equity and its impact on city branding.	Case study analysis of city, regional, and national branding strategies.	Developing brand equity enhances the attractiveness of cities to investors, tourists, and residents.
4	Anttiroiko (2014)	International city branding: Attraction imperative, specialization and new urban brand analytics	To analyze the role of city branding in attracting investment and talent globally.	Review of urban branding strategies and new analytical approaches.	Cities specializing in key sectors and emphasizing unique features attract investment and talent more effectively.
5	Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2021)	Rethinking place branding from a political perspective: Urban governance, public diplomacy, and sustainable policymaking	To examine place branding in the context of urban governance and sustainable policymaking.	Content analysis of political branding and urban governance frameworks.	Place branding integrated with governance and sustainability promotes long-term competitiveness and cultural identity.

Sr. No.	Author/Publication Date	Title	Research Objectives	Methodology	Findings
6	Young (2012)	City branding and urban tourism: A case study of Seoul and Taipei	To study the role of city branding in urban tourism development.	Case study of branding initiatives in Seoul and Taipei.	City branding efforts effectively boosted tourism, improved international image, and promoted urban economic growth.
7	D. J. Lee and Lee (2017)	City brand competitiveness: Exploring structural relationships among factors	To identify factors influencing city brand competitiveness.	Quantitative analysis of relationships among city brand equity components.	Strong city brand competitiveness depends on brand loyalty, cultural identity, and economic development initiatives.

Theme 1: Role of Marketing Strategies in Enhancing City Brand Communication

Three studies are carried out (Wan & Li, 2024; Mariutti & Giraldi, 2020; Anttiroiko, 2014) to demonstrate that marketing strategies are important in city brand communication in the context of globalization. According to Wan and Li (2024), digital tools like social media have transformed the potential of cities to create a new global presence and communicate directly with diverse audiences around the globe. Developing brand equity through well planned communication strategies is a key point for Mariuttini and Giraldi (2020) that helps to bring the company's two stakeholders (investors, tourists and residents) together. In parallel, Anttiroiko (2014) emphasizes the decisive impact of sectoral specialization when cities use their individual cultural, technological or economic edge over their peers to position themselves worldwide.

All three studies emphasize marketing strategies giving a distinct focus. In contrast, Wan and Li stress the significance of digital platforms, while Mariutti and Giraldi look into the ways in which brand equity is developed, and Anttiroiko describes sectoral specialization as their findings and comparison is given in **Table 6**. Studies together show that city brand communication can be enhanced when effective marketing strategies are based on a city's strengths and its global positioning.

Table 6. Role of Marketing Strategies in Enhancing City Brand Communication

Study	Findings	Comparison
Wan and Li (2024)	Digital tools, particularly social media, enhance city visibility and interactive branding.	Focuses on leveraging technology for global communication.
Mariutti and Giraldi (2020)	Building place brand equity through strategic communication attracts global stakeholders.	Emphasizes the role of communication in developing brand equity.
Anttiroiko (2014)	Sectoral specialization (e.g., culture, tech) strengthens global branding strategies.	Highlights how focusing on unique strengths differentiates cities in a competitive global market.

In alignment with Objective 1, these findings emphasize that innovative marketing strategies be it through digital platforms, strategic brand equity, or sectoral focus are crucial for effectively communicating a city's unique identity in a globalized world.

Theme 2: Influence of City Branding Efforts on International Image and Competitiveness

Three other studies (Shirvani Dastgerdi & De Luca, 2019, Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2021, Young, 2012) extend that city branding impacts a city's international image and competitiveness. In their study, Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019) noted that reinforced city branding can boost a city's reputation, and it will lead to a desirable environment for businesses, investors and knowledgeable people. De San Eugenio and Ginesta (2021) take a governance perspective and emphasise that sustainable policies and stakeholder engagement affect the development of a strong international city brand. Young (2012) provides examples of Seoul and Taipei as branding initiatives, which successfully raise urban tourism and bring better global image and economic development.

The emphasis of all three studies is how to improve a city's international competitiveness, with their emphasis on achieving this being somewhat different. Reputation building (Shirvani Dastgerdai and De Luca), sustainable governance (Ginesta and de San Eugenio) or urban tourism (Young) are stated by them as factors, which are important for international visibility. Together, these findings tell us how city branding changes global positioning in many and conflicting ways. The findings and comparison is given in **Table 7** below.

Table 7. Influence of City Branding Efforts on International Image and Competitiveness

Study	Findings	Comparison
Shirvani Dastgerdi and De Luca (2019)	City branding enhances a city's reputation, attracting businesses and professionals.	Focuses on reputation building to improve global competitiveness.
Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2021)	Sustainable policies and governance contribute to building a long-lasting, competitive brand.	Emphasizes the role of governance and policy integration in city branding.
Young (2012)	Branding efforts boosted urban tourism in Seoul and Taipei, improving international visibility.	Focuses on urban tourism as a driver for strengthening global image and economic growth.

In relation to Objective 2, these findings highlight that city branding efforts contribute to improving international competitiveness by enhancing reputation, promoting sustainable policies, and leveraging tourism as a strategic tool for global positioning.

Theme 3: Factors Contributing to Effective City Branding Strategies

There are three studies (D. J. Lee & Lee, 2017; Ginesta & de San Eugenio, 2021; Anttiroiko, 2014) that identify key factors for an effective urban branding strategy. D. J. Lee and Lee (2017) studied the structural relationships between city brand equity, loyalty as well as cultural identity to the extent to which a city brand is strong and sustainable. Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2021) suggest that governance, stakeholder engagement and sustainable policymaking are key to successful branding in the long term. As a city achieving its differentiation and competitiveness on the global stage, sectoral specialization, whether through the specialization of a city as being a technology hub or a cultural capital, is an important part of the process, according to Anttiroiko (2014).

However, each of the three studies talks about factors for effective branding differently. According to D. J. Lee and Lee (1995), Ginesta and de San Eugenio (1999), and Anttiroiko (1998), the governance and sustainability structuration needs to be differentiated based on brand equity and cultural identity. Together, these studies collectively explain to us what exactly makes city branding work. However, the findings and comparison is given in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Factors Contributing to Effective City Branding Strategies

Study	Findings	Comparison
D. J. Lee and Lee (2017)	City brand equity, loyalty, and cultural identity are essential for sustainable branding.	Focuses on building structural brand equity to ensure long-term city branding success.
Ginesta and de San Eugenio (2021)	Governance, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement ensure competitiveness and success.	Highlights the role of governance and collaboration ineffective place branding.
Anttiroiko (2014)	Cities can leverage sectoral specialization (e.g., tech or culture) to achieve global success.	Focuses on sectoral focus to differentiate city brands in a competitive global market.

These findings address Objectives 1 and 2, demonstrating that effective city branding strategies depend on critical factors such as brand equity, governance, and specialization. Together, these elements ensure cities can successfully communicate their identity and enhance global competitiveness.

DISCUSSION

The selected study's findings the information on how marketing strategies help city branding and enhance globalization competitiveness. The findings are contextualised within existing literature through this discussion,

identifying gaps and contributing to theory and practice.

Moreover, the role of marketing strategies in city brand communication is considered a critical theme. Social media and digital tools in general, have changed the way cities have been negotiating and amplifying their visibility on a global scale. Dinnie (2021) notes that digital platforms assist with the furtherance of the global presence and closeness to the target audiences through direct communication. According to Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), social media empowers cities to co-create real, original brand stories with stakeholders and thereby enhance engagement. Additionally, emerging brand equity is engaging investors, tourists and residents. According to Hanna and Rowley (2015), neither do external stakeholders draw to brand equity, but the same concept builds up internal initiative trust through civic pride. According to Papadopoulos (2021), building a unique, credible identity based on aligning branding strategies with a city's cultural and economic assets creates a unique, credible identity that resonates globally.

Another growth trend is sectoral specialization, where cities hone their strengths in specific cultural, technological, economic spheres. Gospodini (2020) shows that cities that develop expertise in green technologies or creative industries are able to increase their competitive advantages by serving the needs of specific global markets. Like Evans (2020), cultural planning is a strategic tool for generating symbolic capital, and helps cities police their borders in the global order. The results of these findings imply that marketing strategies are efficient in the light of multidimensional aspects but in terms of digital communications, brand equity and specialism. Nevertheless, little has been written about the problem of managing diverse stakeholder expectations, or the challenge of maintaining consistent messaging (Crane & Glozer, 2016). These gaps need to be resolved further and city branding strategies improved.

Another central theme is the influence on a city's global image and its competitiveness. City branding initiatives increase a city's attractiveness as businesses and skilled professionals align to live and work. According to Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) who argue that cohesive brand narratives help to improve international perception and enhance appeal to investors and cultural audiences. As promoted by Björner (2018), branding plays an important role in envisaging livability, sustainability and innovation, and hence global competitiveness. Additionally, sustainable governance should be integrated within efforts to brand the organization itself as sustainable, a point illustrated by Boström, Jönsson, Lockie, Mol, and Oosterveer (2015), who show that sustainable governance practises which attend to concerns of environmental and social equity contribute to long term branding success. For cohesive branding efforts, collaborative governance frameworks around such frameworks that involve public and private stakeholders are essential.

City branding also greatly relies on tourism. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2020) research that urban tourism helps a city become more visible and accelerate the economic development. Tourism-based branding has been successful in cities such as Barcelona and Amsterdam in supporting cultural identity and stimulating economic development. Yet the danger is relying too much on the tourism, because this could lead to a situation of credal commodification of cultural identities and sustainability debates. Taken together, these findings suggest that city branding indeed helps to enhance competitiveness, yet existing studies tend to underestimate its sustainability over the long term, especially in the light of such cross cutting world problems as climate change and economic upheavals.

Brand equity, cultural identity, governance are key factors for successful city branding. In a crowded global market, Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, and Salonika (2017) underline that cultural city identity expresses authenticity and so contributes to a city's unique differentiation. According to Popp and Woratschek (2017), brand loyalty serves a purpose and as a result has a guarantee that positive word of mouth will be created. Ranta (2021) also emphasizes governance frameworks and sectoral specialisation, which enable cities to target their branding objectives towards the needs of stakeholders in order to attract global talent and investment. While these studies are good starting points, they still leave important areas for future research such as balancing stakeholder priorities and response to external shocks.

CONCLUSION

City branding has become a strategic need for cities to fight for the competing resources: investment, talents, and tourism, within the globalization context. The purpose of this study was to look at how to enhance city brand communication through marketing strategies and how city branding aids a city's international image and competitiveness. By outlining these objectives, research focuses on the critical burst of investment in cohesive and innovative marketing strategies that cities need in order to become globally competitive, attractive destinations.

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology was used to gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from

relevant studies related to city branding strategies. Secondary data were analyzed using a rigorous and structured approach from high quality academic sources from seven databases. It created the possibility for a transparent and complete analysis, reliable and an identification of recurring themes and gaps in the city branding research. The results from the thematic analysis provided valuable insights into how marketing strategies and stakeholder engagement, governance and technological developments combined cross border promotion of city brands.

The Study findings strongly imply that digital tools including social media in marketing are leading how cities communicate their brand. Cities can use the tools to talk to their global audiences in real time, telling compelling real stories with the objective of increased audience visibility and participation. Digital platforms can present a city with a unique set of attributes and development potential that can be used as foundation for a city brand image that is compelling, and therefore, relatable. As with recent work showing how we turn to digital transformation in city branding as a means to reach wide audiences and effectively tell our stories, this is consistent.

Additionally, the study shows that city branding projects entail a significant influence on international image and competitiveness of cities that helps cities position themselves as modern economic, social, and cultural epicentres. Brand initiatives add segment pull and create civic pride and stakeholder loyalty while supplementing international perceptions. City branding is shown to be successful in cities that have successfully integrated tourism, cultural planning and innovation strategies in order to stimulate economic development and the global city reputation. However, the findings also identify a need for sustainable governance and participatory approaches to achieve long-term success in delivering stakeholder expectations and global challenges. Overall, it can be concluded that successful city branding builds on strategic, integrated marketing, sectoral specialization and stakeholder engagement, and sustainable governance.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data from selected studies, which may not fully capture the dynamic and evolving nature of city branding strategies in different contexts. The focus on a limited number of publications might exclude other valuable perspectives and emerging trends in the field. Additionally, most of the analyzed studies emphasize successful cases, potentially overlooking failures or challenges in city branding efforts. There is also a lack of primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys with key stakeholders, which could provide richer, context-specific insights. Future research should address these gaps for a more comprehensive understanding.

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