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Tracing the Origins of Place Branding Research: A Bibliometric Study of Concepts in Use (1980–2018)

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Abstract: Place branding is seriously studied in various academic disciplines. Its impact on strategic development plays a vital role in processes of sustainable urban transformation. Place branding originated in tourism management and over time its research focus spilled over and evolved in environmental science, urban studies and public administration. Scholars and policy makers are currently faced with a myriad of concepts in place branding research, which show considerable overlap but should be carefully distinguished from each other. To increase our understanding of this body of research, this article observes a strong pattern of the concepts in use, in their references to location types (i.e., urban, city, destination, place) and broadcasting activities (branding, marketing, promotion). It builds on this observation by collecting studies from the Scopus database by location type and broadcasting activities (LT–BA) reference pairs and systematically analysing and reviewing these from 1980 to 2018. A total of 2665 articles and reviews were identified and analysed based on (1) occurrences per reference pair, (2) co-occurrences per reference pair, and (3) co-occurrences for each reference pair with other concepts. On that basis, the origin and evolution of the research field including multiple reference pairs in use is explored and described.

Keywords: place branding; place marketing; place promotion; conceptual development; bibliometric analysis; Scopus

1. Introduction

In recent decades, global economic development and rapid urbanization have intensified the competition between countries, regions, and cities to attract public resources, policy support, a talented workforce, and private investment [1]. This phenomenon contributed to and stimulated the development of a discipline, which is currently known under the terms city branding or place branding. Place branding and its meaning have evolved considerably over the last 40 years [2–4] expanding in both breadth and focus. Sub-concepts such as regional branding, city branding, and to a less extent, town branding developed, each focusing on a different spatial scale [5]. Place branding is currently a broad, multi-disciplinary research domain which covers a large variety of topics and disciplines, including urban planning, marketing, public policy and sociology [6]. State-of-the-art knowledge about place branding as a concept is still fragmented and poorly understood [6–8].

Apart from its scientific development, place branding has also become a particularly popular governance strategy for local governments who seek to create better environmental, social and economic conditions [9–11]. Branding is considered as a key instrument to overcome challenges that many cities face from pollution, regional disparity, and a vulnerable economy. This requires that sustainable transformation considers such aspects as industrial structure, demographic composition, and infrastructure systems [12]. As a result, many local decision makers try to introduce place- branding concepts into their sustainable transformation process. Consequently, place branding is considered an essential tool to respond to sustainability challenges, to maintain a good reputation and to maintain their attractiveness to investors, companies, and a talented workforce [13]. Place branding combines with other policy instruments to both achieve sustainable development goals and increase economic growth. Specifically, a successful place branding strategy can bring about the transformation from a negative reputation to a positive one from a sustainable development perspective [12,14]. However, cities also employ place branding in different ways. Nowadays, many cities brand themselves with attractive labels, such as eco city, smart city and so on. Some use these brands simply try to greenwash their image, rather than engage in substantial changes [15]. Others simply use advertising and events to promote their name, focusing on city marketing rather than engaging in the development and implementation of potentially disruptive and far-reaching policies in pursuit of the alluring goals of city branding. As a result of these developments, both scholars and practitioners face difficulties, having to cope with concepts and terms that have overlapping meanings. Few all-encompassing literature reviews of place branding exist [1,16,17], although some scholars offer descriptions of concepts in place branding [18,19]. Within these overviews important insights with regard to the explanation of place branding research and its evolution can be found. For example, the difference between the definitions of city marketing and city branding is explained [7,16,20] and so is the development from place marketing to place branding from a marketing perspective [21]. However, the majority of reviews are embedded within specific scientific disciplines. Consequently, studies which make use of these overviews seldom comprehensively explain the conceptual distinction between various strands of place branding research, nor do they fully address its conceptual evolution [7]. A systematic relational analysis which traces the theoretical development of the place branding research domain is currently lacking [22,23]. This knowledge gap presents the starting point for this research which aims to explain the (evolution of) concepts in the place branding research domain. Understanding and distinguishing the various concepts in use in place- branding research provides academic researchers a fuller perspective on the evolution of place branding as a research discipline. Policy-makers will gain clarity and understand better which governance mechanisms match which goals.

This study presents a systematic review of the place branding literature from 1980 until 2018 to obtain an in-depth understanding of its evolution, its various concepts and their relationships. The review is based upon quantitative and qualitative analysis and summarizes the various research topics which featured in place branding research. Throughout this period various concepts and terms were used interchangeably, such as urban branding, city marketing and place branding [6,21]. Similarly, urban areas were called cities, towns or conurbations [5].

An initial survey of the place branding literature identifies popular and, thus, frequently used key terms to identify their conceptual focus, such as place branding [16,21,23–30], city branding [12,31–43], city marketing [37,44–46], destination marketing [47–50], destination promotion [47,48], and urban branding [51,52]. These referencing terms distinguish a part that refers to a location type (destination, place, city and urban) and a broadcasting activity (branding, marketing, promotion). This study counts and systematically analyzes the application of different key terms and their subsequent conceptual focus in the place- branding literature as a combination of 'location type and broadcasting activity' (or LT–BA). The analysis reflects on the use of multiple concepts in the place branding field ranging from practice-oriented research towards more systematic theory building and worldwide practical implementation.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 explains the bibliometric method that was used to analyse the literature dataset in more detail, and describes the data collection methods and research

tools that were applied. Section 3 describes the results of various bibliometric analyses and shows the evolution of place-branding research over time, in terms of numbers of publications, subject categories, and the relationship between different concepts. Section 4 explains the conceptual evolution over time based on Section 3 and classifies and analyses the keywords based on the dimensions location-type and broadcasting-activity. Section 5 wraps up this article with key insights that can be derived from this article, as well as the implications of the findings.

2. Research Design, Methodology and Data Collection

To obtain insight into the place- branding literature, a desk literature study was conducted as the primary method to collect data. We derived key lessons from de Jong et al. (2015) [9] for this article's methodology. Figure 1 shows the specific research framework in this article. In order to capture systematically all research on place branding, we searched for articles in the database with varying combinations of location type and broadcasting activity. Location types (LT) typically refer to a spatial label as the first word in the key conceptual terms that are used in place branding research, for example to city, urban, destination or place. Broadcasting activities (BA) typically refer to a verb which specifies a particular type of communicating or broadcasting of a message, like branding, marketing or promotion. We consistently refer to these combinations as location type and broadcasting activity reference pairs, or LT–BA reference pairs.

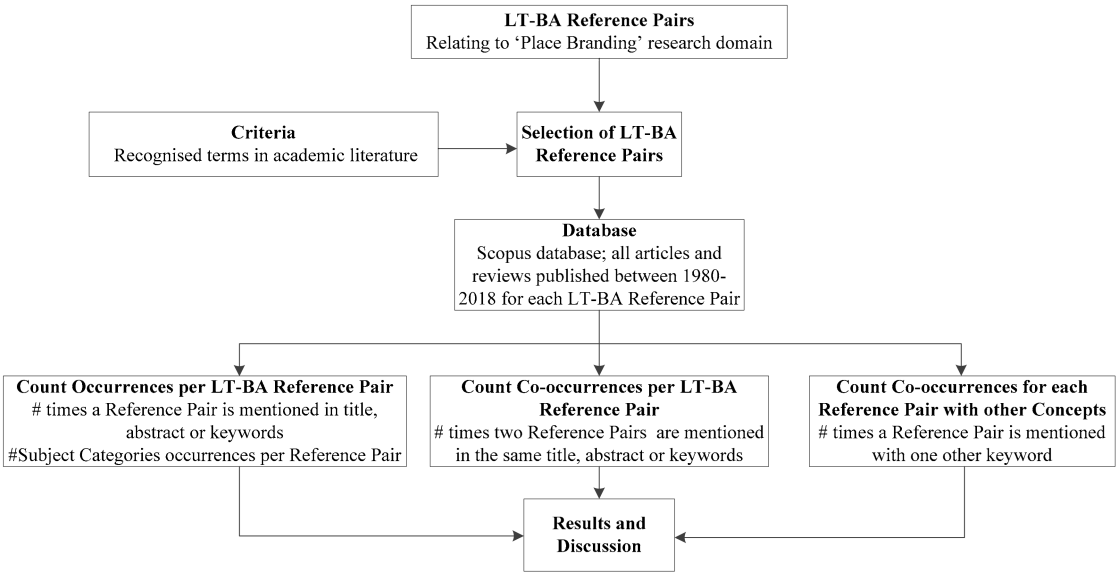

Figure 1. Research framework (inspired by [9]).

One could argue and criticize the selection and focus of our meta-review based on LT–BA reference pairs. Surely an analysis based on another classification of pairs and in particular a larger number of pairs would have provided a more complete perspective on the place branding body of research? However, we selected the most frequently used terms combinations of location type and broadcasting activity to identify the literature in the place branding research domain. We assume these to be recognised terms in academic literature. In total, we identified 12 LT–BA reference pairs. This approach enables us to investigate any possible combination of pairs of the selected location types and broadcasting activities. We collected the data with the following search query:

> TITLE-ABS-KEY ("*place branding*" OR "*place brand*" OR "*place marketing*" OR "*place promoting*" OR "*place promotion*" OR "*city branding*" OR "*city brand*" OR "*city marketing*" OR "*city promoting*" OR "*city promotion*" OR "*urban branding*" OR "*urban brand*" OR "*urban marketing*" OR "*urban promoting*" OR "*urban promotion*" OR "*destination branding*" OR "*destination brand*" OR "*destination marketing*" OR "*destination promoting*" OR "*destination promotion*") AND DOCTYPE (ar OR re) AND PUBYEAR < 2019

The search query for each reference pair can be checked in Appendix A. In this article, we used Scopus to compile our literature dataset. We are aware that our selection of the database Scopus restricts the bibliography and, thus, limits our sample of place branding research. However, Scopus is one of the most comprehensive and standardized literature databases for the exporting of data [53]. Consequently, we chose the more complete, but less extensive database, rather than for example Web of Science, which would have probably increased our dataset. We collected academic journal articles and reviews in the English language from the Scopus database from 1980 to 2018. We decided only to include English articles and reviews, which unfortunately leaves out valuable international scientific contributions in other languages such as Spanish or French. We chose 1980 as the starting date since the reference pair ('urban promotion') was first used in an article. The year 2018 was chosen as this was the last complete publication year. The longitudinal scale of the data sample allows us to explore the evolution of concepts used in the place branding domain. Three bibliographic locations (title, abstract, keywords) describe the essence of a study and basically summarize and represent the main academic information of a publication. Therefore, we assume that when the term features in these bibliographic locations, it is a key conceptual focus of the underlying study. Consequently, our selection of place branding literature contains all scientific publications in English in Scopus which make use of any of the 12 LT–BA reference pairs in one of the bibliographic locations (title, abstract, keywords). As a result of this filtering process, we ended up with a database of 2665 articles containing the reference pairs, which provides the full place- branding research dataset.

2.1. Occurrences Per Location Type–Broadcasting Activities (LT–BA) Reference Pair

To explore the popularity of each of the 12 LT–BA reference pairs in place branding research, we counted the frequency of occurrence of the reference pairs in titles, keywords, and abstracts in databases containing academic literature over time. The results are shown in Figure 2. The distribution of different discipline categories are presented in Figure 3. The dataset was subjected to subsequent bibliometric analyses, which will be reported in Section 3 (see Figures 4 and 5).

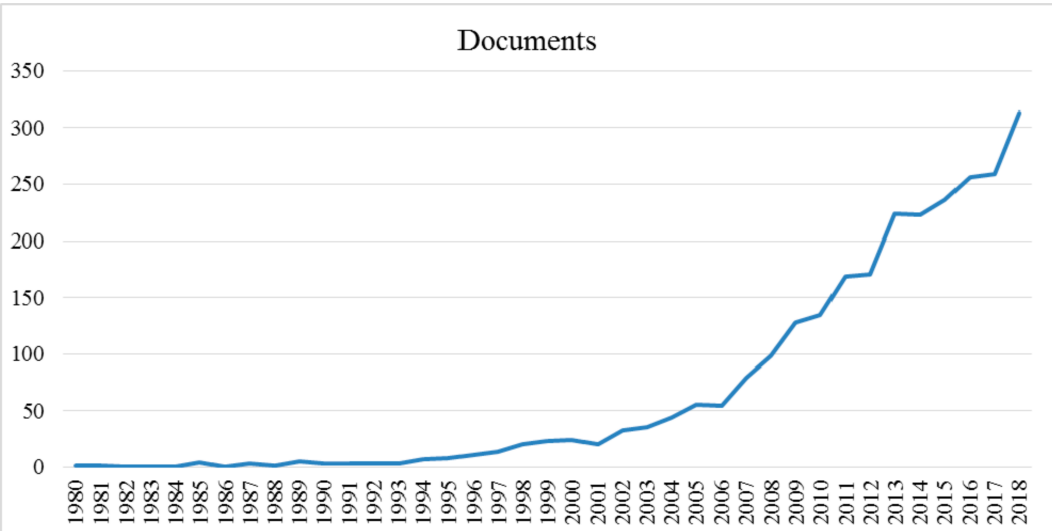

Figure 2. The number of articles about place branding research (1980–2018).

2.2. Co-Occurrences Per LT–BA Reference Pair

As a second step, we analysed whether articles cover one or more reference pairs, mapped the connections among different reference pairs, and identified which key reference pairs co-occurred the most in articles. Finally, we mapped the instances of co-occurrence between the reference pairs to visualise the relationships between the 12 LT–BA reference pairs. The results can be seen in Figure 6 in Section 3. The more central the position of a reference pair the more co-occurrences were identified, and the more closely connected the pair is with other reference pairs.

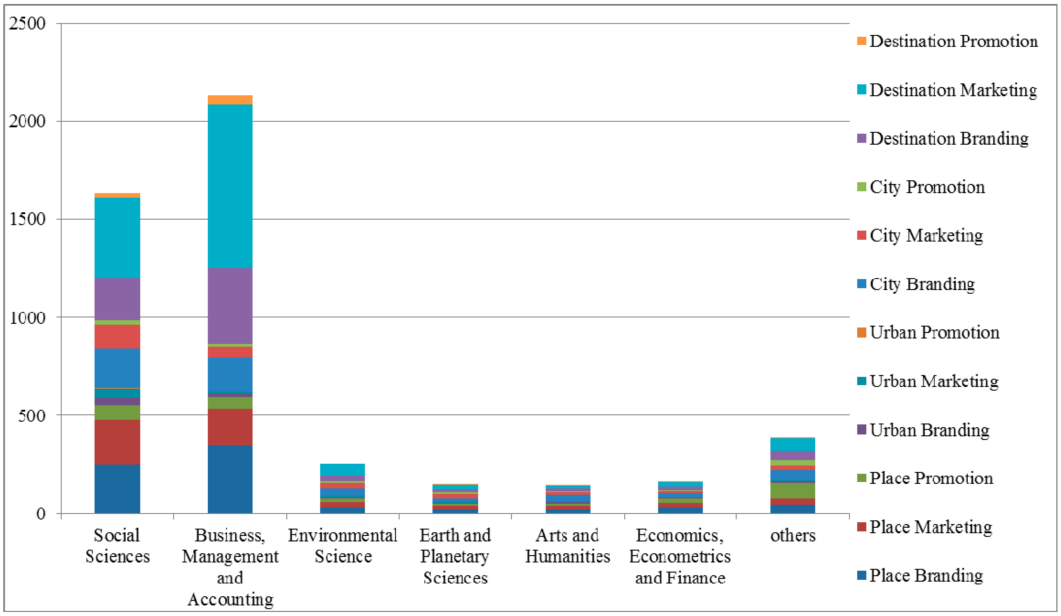

Figure 3. Discipline categories of articles in the place branding research domain.

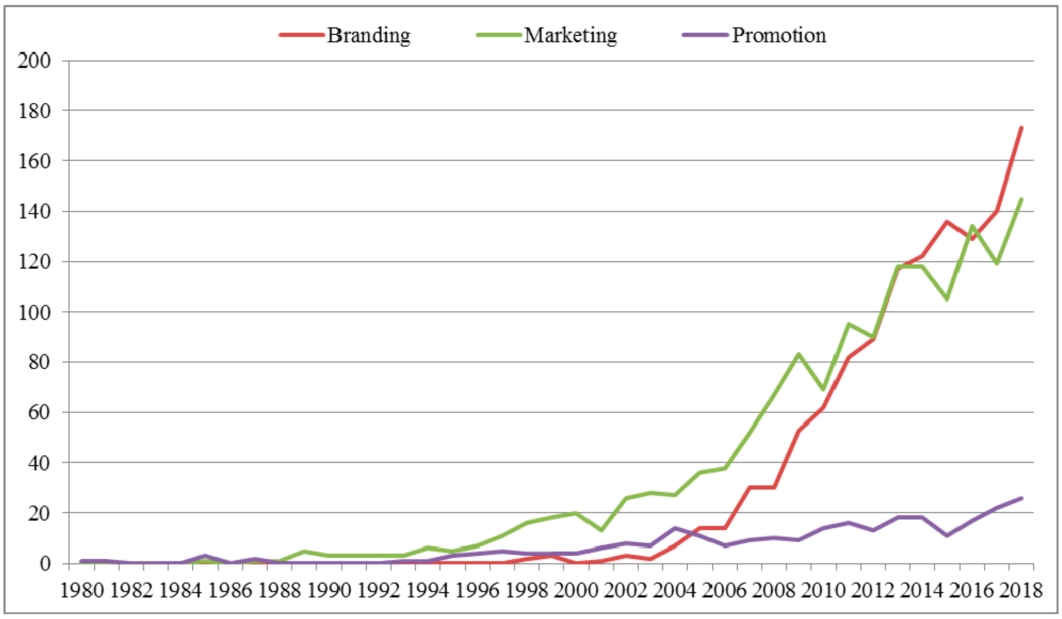

Figure 4. Development in number of publications per year for concepts in use, grouped by broadcasting activity.

2.3. Co-Occurrences for Each LT–BA Reference Pair with Other Concepts

As a third and final step, we explored how the 12 LT–BA reference pairs are connected with other keywords and concepts in place branding research. We mapped the co-occurrences of articles key words and obtained outcomes of each LT–BA reference pair and their links to other concepts. Developments in bibliometric research and analytical tools develop relatively quickly and so different options for visualization can be used, for example Bibliometrix, VOSviewer or CiteSpace [54,55]. Based on our earlier work [9], we decided to use the software program PAJEK [56] to calculate the links between the concepts and visualize the results. The resulting network is shown in Figure 7 in Section 3. This figure presents the most related concepts in the center and the more loosely connected ones on the outside of the figure. To increase the visibility, only connections with at least three co-occurrences within different concepts are displayed here. As a result all weak connections were excluded from the

figure. It should be noted here, however, that the use of other visualization software tools might have yielded different insights.

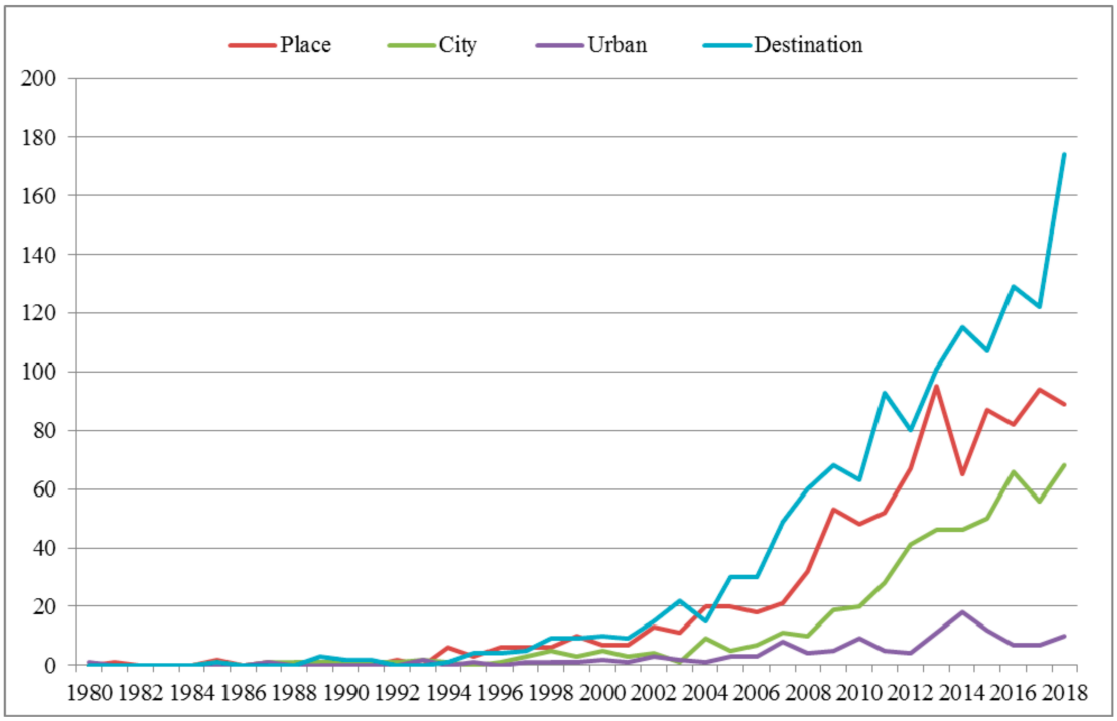

Figure 5. Development in number of publications per year for concepts in use, grouped by location type.

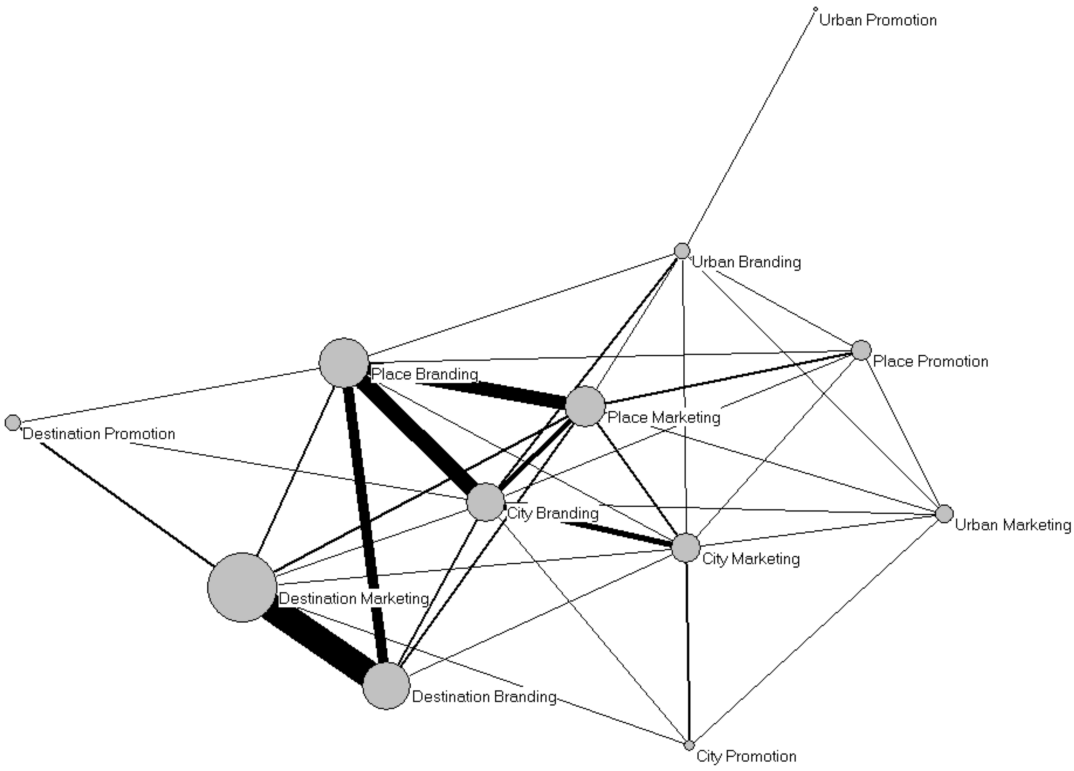

Figure 6. Co-occurrence of 12 LT–BA reference pairs in titles, abstracts, and keywords.

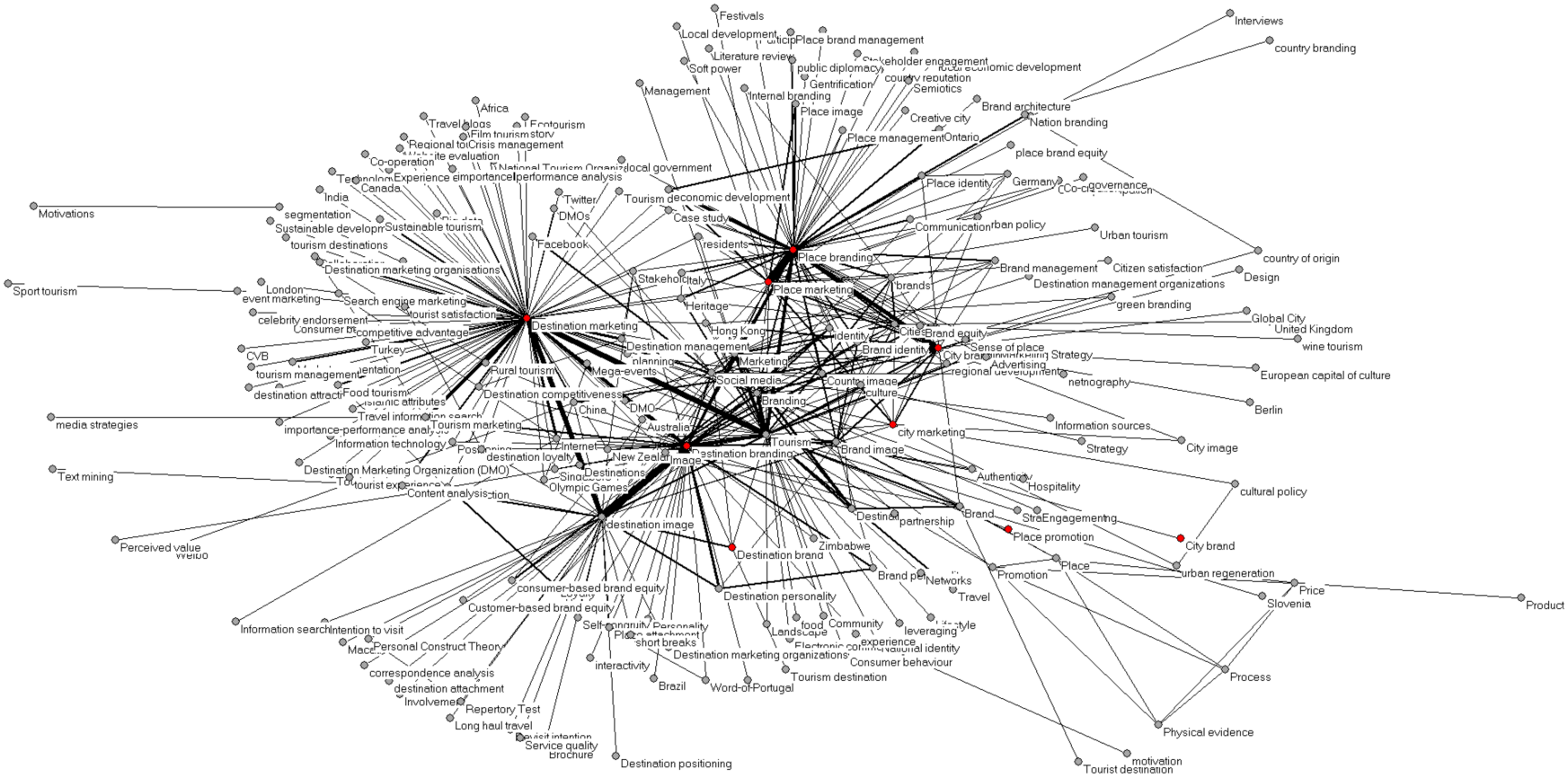

Figure 7. The network structure of article keywords associated with 12 LT–BA reference pairs (minimum of 3 co-occurrences).

3. Research Findings

The following sub-sections summarize the results for the various analyses we conducted: the analysis of the occurrence and co-occurrence of the selected LT–BA reference pairs, and the co-occurrence of the LT–BA reference pairs with other concepts.

3.1. Occurrences Per LT–BA Reference Pair in Article

Figure 2 shows the number of articles in our dataset representing the scientific place branding research in Scopus during the period of 1980–2018. Based on the figure we can conclude that the quantity of articles has proliferated dramatically since 2004, especially in the past 10 years.

The 12 LT–BA reference pairs show distinctive patterns of occurrence in our dataset of place branding research. Table 1 (below) presents the number of articles for each LT–BA reference pair. The 'destination marketing' reference pair is by far the most frequently used in place branding research, followed by 'place branding', 'place marketing', 'city branding' and 'destination branding'. Each of these reference pairs were used more than 300 times in our place branding literature database. 'City marketing' and 'place promotion' end up in the middle, and 'city promotion', 'urban branding', 'urban marketing', and 'urban promotion' were arguably far less used in place branding research. From a broadcasting-activity perspective, branding and marketing dominate the place- branding research domain. Location-wise, the concepts destination, place and city are far more frequently used than urban.

Table 1. Total number of articles per location type–broadcasting activities (LT–BA) reference pair.

	Branding	Marketing	Promotion	Total (Locality)
Place	514	341	159	926
City	324	177	52	518
Urban	57	63	8	123
Destination	468	925	51	1333
Total (Activity)	1210	1466	269	2665

To investigate the relationship between the 12 LT–BA reference pairs and the different disciplines, we analysed the distribution of the different subject categories in place branding literature. From Figure 3, we can conclude that articles in the place branding research domain mainly come from the social sciences and business management. More specifically, the majority of 'destination marketing' and 'destination branding' studies come from business management. The combinations of 'city/urban BA (broadcasting activity)' are primarily identified in the social sciences. Research articles featuring 'place marketing' and 'place branding' concepts seem to originate in both business management and the social sciences.

Figures 4 and 5 describe annual volumes of publications from 1980 to 2018 which feature the conceptual 'broadcasting-activity' and 'location-type' combinations (in either title, abstract and keywords).

Figure 4 shows the results of the changes over time in the volumes of publications and their focus on different broadcasting activities in our dataset of the place branding research domain. We can observe that the research articles which combine the reference pairs 'LT marketing' and 'LT promotion' first appeared around 1980. Research containing 'LT branding' as conceptual focus appeared much later from 1998 and onwards. However, the volume of articles covering these reference pairs increases quickly.

The combinations 'LT branding' and 'LT marketing' achieved the same value around 2012. Prior to 2012, the number of articles in 'LT marketing' was higher than that of 'LT branding' and 'LT promotion'. After 2012, the reference pairs 'LT branding' attracted more attention in place branding research. Figure 4 also illustrates the dominant research trend changing from 'marketing' to 'branding' in the

place branding research domain. In contrast, the combination of 'LT promotion' shows a longitudinally far more consistent and relatively small annual publication volume throughout the observed period.

Figure 5 shows the results of the different location types combined with the broadcasting activities in the place branding research domain. Over time the volume of articles with reference pairs containing 'destination BA' remain dominant in place branding research (with the exception of some years in the 1990s). This trend has continued since the early 1980. The reference pair 'place BA' contains the second largest group of annual publications. The second largest group of annual publications in place branding research covers a broader range of topics due to the more generic term 'place'. This reference term includes concepts such as regional branding, national branding, rural branding and so on [5]. The annual publication volume of place branding publications focusing on the city level ('City BA') occupies a solid third position, indicating that this unit of analysis seems well-established in the place branding research domain. The annual volume of articles which combine the reference pairs of 'urban BA' in the place branding research dataset is the smallest. One potential explanation for this more or less consistent lowest score might be that the term 'urban' is adopted only narrowly in one or a few (sub) disciplines, such as urban planning or human geography.

3.2. Co-Occurrences Per LT–BA Reference Pair in Articles

Figure 6 shows how the 12 LT–BA reference pairs are interconnected. The larger the number of co-occurrences between reference pairs, the more central position the LT–BA reference pair takes within the overall network which represents place branding research. Figure 6 also displays different circle sizes for the different LT–BA reference pairs, which indicates the relative occurrences of each LT–BA reference pair.

Based upon this analysis, 'destination marketing' appears to be the most commonly used reference pair (the biggest circle), but it does not occupy the most central position in the place branding research domain. 'Destination marketing' has a close connection with 'destination branding' and a more distant connection to 'destination promotion' on the left hand side of the figure. However, all of these reference pairs seem positioned on the 'fringes' of the place branding research domain. In fact, they seem to almost constitute their own independent conceptual cluster. In contrast, 'city branding', 'place branding', 'city marketing', and 'place marketing' – although not that frequently used in terms of volume (size of circles) are relatively more centrally placed in the place branding research, with relatively denser links to each other and direct connections to (almost) all other LT–BA reference pairs.

'City branding' occupies a central position with links to other key LT–BA reference pairs in the place branding literature, albeit with a lower frequency than 'destination marketing' and 'destination branding'. 'Place branding' has a higher frequency (bigger circle) than 'city branding' and has a similar centrality as the previous two (but misses connections with 'urban marketing' and 'city promotion'). Based on the analysis and the figure, we can see the relative centrality of the reference pair 'place branding' and the size of the 'links' which connect to other major reference pairs. These suggest that research publications which use these reference pairs are rather interdisciplinary in nature and, thus, cover a broader research scope.

The reference term 'promotion' ('destination promotion', 'urban promotion', 'place promotion' and 'city promotion') clearly fulfils a peripheral position in place branding research. All reference terms have a loose connection with other key LT–BA reference pairs, and are less important in place branding research.

3.3. Co-Occurrences for Each LT–BA Reference Pair with Other Concept

Figure 7 visualises how the article keywords connect to the 12 different LT–BA reference pairs. The reference pairs, 'urban branding', 'urban marketing', 'urban promotion', 'destination promotion', 'city promotion' do not appear in this network graph because these reference pairs are mentioned less than three times in the title, abstract, and keywords of the articles in our database. The reference pair

'place promotion' appears quite peripheral. Scholars rarely use the reference pairs 'LT promotion' and 'urban BA'.

Based upon Figure 7 and our analysis, we offer a number of observations about the place branding research domain. We observe that there are two core areas, designated as clusters, in this picture, which include the reference pairs 'destination branding' and 'place branding'. On the one hand, 'destination branding' and 'destination marketing' can be found closely linked in a significant cluster of its own, which demonstrates it occupies a large proportion and central position in current place branding literature. Keywords such as destination image, tourism, branding, and marketing feature in the core of keyword clusters around the destination domain. On the other hand, 'place branding', 'place marketing', 'city branding', and 'city marketing' connect closely as well, and remain a crucial topic in current research.

Around the reference pair 'place branding', the core elements of branding theories appear, such as 'brand equity', 'brand image' and 'brand identity'. The place branding reference pairs are also related to 'social media' and 'economic development', which illustrates a changing focus from the traditional communication to social media, as well as as to more environmental, ecological, and economic aspects. Researchers seem to combine 'place marketing' reference pairs more with keywords such as 'urban regeneration', 'marketing strategy', and 'advertising'. 'Place promotion' connects more closely with 'place marketing' than with 'place branding'.

What further caught our eye is that topics related to tourism seem to have connections with the marketing literature. As for 'tourism' and 'destination marketing', most of the related keywords are from tourism management, covering all kinds and means of tourism, for example, food tourism, sustainable tourism and rural tourism. Keywords destination marketing organization, customer behavior, heritage, and cultural aspects can be found around the reference pairs of 'destination marketing' and 'destination branding' forming clusters.

Specific countries also feature prominently in the keyword co-occurrence graph, such as Australia, China, Singapore, Portugal, New Zealand, Brazil, Italy, and Germany. Furthermore, some cities and regions such as Barcelona, London, Hong Kong and Ontario also appear in this graph. We find that cities receiving attention from scholars are often those with strong tourism markets, or capital cities and famous historical or cultural cities.

As for the different branding channels, the graph provides strong evidence that media use (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and events (e.g., Olympic Games and other mega-events) have emerged as new and important tools in brand promotion and thus feature in our place branding research database. Besides, case study, content analysis, and text mining are presented in this picture, all referring to methods that are or can be applied in academic research.

Figure 7 provides evidence that in their work, scholars tend to focus primarily on the marketing and branding of cities rather than on regions and nations, and only rarely on towns. A potential explanation could be that cities still dominate in (spatial) policymaking processes and urban research across the world compared to regions and countries [57].

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Conceptual Distinction and Development of Place Branding Research in BA

We use Figure 8 to describe and explain the evolution of the use of reference pairs 'LT promotion', 'LT marketing', and 'LT branding'. We distinguish and explain the development and evolution of place branding research based upon the frequency of occurrence of these three reference pairs, the changing keywords, the intended goals behind the concepts and the types and the number of locations featuring in the research.

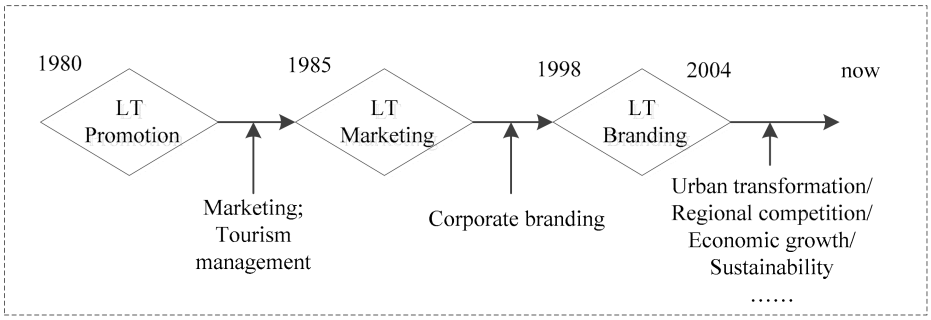

Figure 8. The evolution of place branding and the changing of key reference pairs.

Initially, place branding research dealt with 'LT promotion'. Since then, many marketing theories and key concepts were developed [58,59]. From the late 1980s, place branding research moved on to the second stage and became more marketing oriented, and later evolved to also include research about branding [31]. On most occasions, the three different reference pairs appear side by side in academic research which makes their difference unclear [21,58]. There is extensive overlap in research which uses the concepts in the reference pairs 'LT branding', 'LT marketing', and 'LT promotion' [21]. However, mainstream opinion changes as research evolves from 'LT promotion' to 'LT marketing' and the overall development in the direction of 'LT branding' seems to be the latest step in this process of conceptual development (see Figure 8). In the figure we highlight the influence of the various scientific disciplines to the development process of place branding research.

4.1.1. Broadcasting Activity: Promotion

In the first phase, much of the place branding literature contributed to knowledge development about 'LT promotion'. The research of 'LT promotion' started in 1980, a bit earlier than other reference pairs according to our earlier analyses. Currently (2019), 'LT promotion' research takes place in the periphery of place branding research and is not nearly as important is it once was. Key concepts in use in LT promotion research were concepts such as place promotion [60,61], destination promotion [47], city promotion [62], selling places [63,64], urban promotion [65], the urban image [66]. The origin of this body of research can be found in tourism management and focused on the governance of the city image and used promotion as an instrument to advertise cities as popular travel destinations [67]. Many authors in this phase approached LT promotion research from the angle of tourism. LT promotion research aimed to attract different visitor segments to a city via pragmatic tactics, such as advertising activities or urban image design [21]. In this first phase of the development of place branding literature, only cities which were highly dependent on tourism and holiday resorts were engaged in the development of place promotion and destination promotion activities to advertise the city and to attract tourists [47]. 'LT promotion' employed promotion instruments that were designed to "beautify the city", and included focused, short-term advertising campaigns to draw specific visitors at specific times. Compared to 'LT marketing', 'LT promotion' is largely limited to incidental, promotional activities, and focused on a limited set of visitors as well as city departments (e.g., only tourism departments) to implement LT promotion activities. LT promotion research pays less attention to the actual development of cities or regions [21].

4.1.2. Broadcasting Activity: Marketing

'LT Marketing' succeeded 'LT promotion' as a dominating concept in place branding research in the late 1980s. Madsen [68] studied the concept of 'place marketing' and the concept of "selling cities" started to appear along with 'city marketing' [63,69]. From 1988 to 2005, place branding research was influenced by new disciplines such as business management which paid attention to the application of marketing strategies on cities [37,63,70]. Place branding research is primarily 'LT marketing' oriented and includes concepts such as city marketing [46], place marketing [20,71,72], destination

marketing [50], and metropolitan marketing [73]. Two main drivers promoted the transition from 'LT promotion' to 'LT marketing'. On the one hand, the transition of the notion of government from a managerial to an entrepreneurial position [21,74]. On the other hand, globalization and continuous urbanization intensified the competition among countries, regions, and cities to attract various target audiences [45,75]. Consequently, places need different marketing strategies to gain a competitive advantage and reputation [1]. In this period, more and more cities begin to market themselves with a variety of aims, but primarily focus on increasing their competitiveness [76]. Compared with earlier 'LT promotion' concepts in place branding literature, 'LT marketing' stresses the application of a coherent, visible, attractive and unique set of marketing strategies and tactics designed to make cities more attractive. In this way, 'LT marketing' substantially influenced actual urban development [21].

4.1.3. Broadcasting Activity: Branding

As a final development we identify a third phase in which the concept 'LT branding' matures and evolves yet again. 'City branding' as a concept was identified by Kavaratzis in 2004 [37]. Since then, the concepts of 'place branding' and 'city branding' became popular. Merging new insights from brand research, key concepts about city brands are developed such as brand identity and brand image [77–79], destination branding [80], brand equity [77,78]], place positioning [81], brand identity [79] and brand personality [82]. Insights from public administration or urban planning are used to further develop city branding as an instrument for (strategic) spatial planning [30,38,83,84]. One of the reasons for the continued popularity of this research field is that cities are expected to play a dominant role in global production and consumption [57]. The pressures from urban transformation and economic growth help to push the transition from 'LT marketing' to 'LT branding'. Compared with 'LT promotion' and 'LT marketing', 'LT branding' goes much further and aims to integrate the efforts of local governments aimed at making long-term and in-depth changes [21]. 'LT branding' not only "sells cities or places", but aims to align cities' visions, missions, and strategies using a more systematic perspective [28,85]. The goals of branding activities are not just to obtain current resources but to manage and influence the long-term reputation of the location and focuses on attitudes within (city) organizations and target groups [21]. In addition to making the place more attractive, 'LT branding' thus also helps cities to experience a transition [41]. In this phase many places try to acquire a strong reputation and become attractive through branding activities [32,86], contributing significantly to the volume of research in this domain.

Figure 8 shows that research from different disciplines promotes and influences the development and application of branding in urban governance [38,42,87,88]. At first, scholars addressed 'LT promotion' and 'LT marketing' from a tourism management perspective. With unprecedented rapid urbanization and a need for continuous economic development, intense competition between cities has become an important driver for 'LT branding' in urban planning. Research identifies that corporate branding and corporate-level marketing provide potentially valuable lessons for implementation of branding within cities [38,44,63]. Marketing mix strategies [89,90], and rebranding theory [91] once seen only in the corporate world are now widely used in city branding, urban renewal, and urban redevelopment activities [21].

4.2. Conceptual Distinction and Development of Place Branding Research in LT

4.2.1. Location Type: Destination

Based on our analysis of the place branding research literature database, research which featured the reference pair 'destination BA' appeared first, compared to the other reference pair combinations. To this day, the largest proportion of research in our place branding research database is identified with this reference pair. According to the analysis which identifies the conceptual connection with other concepts, we can conclude that 'destination BA' has established its own independent conceptual terminology in tourism management [6,19]. These feature alongside the goals of 'destination marketing'

and 'destination branding'. They have continued to develop the local tourism industry and generate additional resources based on direct economic stimulation [47,63] through some advertising and sport events [80,92]. Many cities set up professional destination marketing organizations (DMO) to develop tourism and attract increasing numbers of visitors [49]. Destination has a broad spatial scope similar to place. The destination can be a nation, a city, a town or rural community [72,93]. The experiences in destination branding and marketing provide lots of branding lessons for city and regional government departments and officials.

4.2.2. Location Type: Place

'Place branding' has a broader scope than its predecessors, such as the branding and research activities in cities, towns or conurbations, national and regional, city branding and town center marketing and so on [5]. Apart from an economic motive, local policymakers who apply this concept pay more attention to reputation management in a place [20,21]. Some key concepts used in 'place BA' research are put forward, include 'place marketing' [68], and 'place branding' [23]. To be specific, place branding can broaden the concept to the whole process of collective strategy making by government managers [94]. This process covers several steps from policy design to decision making about different types of activities and their implementation. The management of place and the effects of place branding can be analyzed at different levels, including the intentions of political leaders, urban elites and the experiences of the general public [33,95]. The popularity of place branding is visible in two ways, namely place governance and increased academic attention. At the same time, two different opinions about place branding appear. On the one hand, some scholars believe that 'place branding' is a precious and meaningful tool for (local) governments [32,36,42]. Place branding can support government efforts to achieve a variety of aims, including attracting investments, potential residents, a talented workforce and so forth which contribute to urban transformation [32]. On the other hand, critics have claimed that place branding is but a vague term. Some voices doubt the consequences and effectiveness of place branding activities. They claim that place branding is merely a tool that is employed by local governments to beautify their place image. They doubt whether place branding achieves its stated aim of in-depth redevelopment and will be eventually able to change the core identity of the place [38,43,96].

4.2.3. Location Type: City

Although research into 'city BA' started late compared with the other conceptual combinations, it experienced a significant increase since 2004. By 2005, 'city branding' publications emerged in scientific fields such as urban studies, public policy and environmental science as scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds evaluated (the effects of) empirical urban policies [6]. City branding can be defined as "a set of actions to build the positive image of the city and communicate it among various target groups via visuals, narratives, and events locally and internationally to gain a competitive advantage over other cities" [51] (p. 371). This research connects the disciplines of urban planning and public policy more closely. At a higher level, the concept of 'city branding' also relates to regionalization and the promotion of regional development [36] even though it is safe to conclude that city branding forms the core element of the place branding research field. City branding has attracted much practical attention from city policy makers and has been applied to achieve in-depth changes to realize multiple goals for cities, such as sustainability, urban transformation, redevelopment and so on. 'Place branding' as such, however, has seen its spatial scope broaden and come to include research on town branding, city branding, regional branding, and national branding [79].

4.2.4. Location Type: Urban

The combination of 'urban BA' is underexplored in the place branding research domain and attracts little attention. It is minimally mentioned in the keywords section among all 2265 articles in our database. According to our statistical results and literature review, scholars prefer to use 'urban planning' or 'urban studies' rather than the combination of 'urban BA'. Actually, 'urban BA' has

a similar meaning as 'city BA'. Urban branding is a well-known concept in urban studies. Urban branding also is mixed with city branding and city marketing by some authors [52]. Both of them focus on branding activities on a city-scale. However, the combination of 'urban BA' remains comparatively unusual. Compared with the more generic concepts in place branding research, urban branding partly overlaps with the highly complex issue of politics of representation [35,51,97].

5. Conclusions

Place branding is a popular policy tool that is often used by (local) policymakers aiming to redevelop their city or region and simultaneously attract companies and a talented workforce. Place branding research also generates attention from urban studies, environmental studies and the policy sciences. However, can place branding research achieve the goal of sustainable urban development? How have the various concepts in place branding research evolved? In this article, we have analysed English publications on the Scopus platform, from 1980 up to 2018 based on 12 different location type and broadcasting activity (LT–BA) reference pairs in place branding research. More in-depth knowledge of the reference pairs helps to identify place branding's conceptual origins, and distinguishes their underlying application logic.

First, place branding is a growing academic field, and the number of studies in which place branding has proliferated in the literature in recent years. Both in our occurrences analysis as well as in our analysis of co-occurrences of concepts within the place branding literature, 'destination BA', 'place BA', and 'city BA' are the key combinations. They represent the core of the research in the place branding literature both in terms of absolute numbers and conceptual centrality. In contrast, 'urban BA' and 'LT promotion' are more sparsely connected to other concepts within the place branding literature and take up a more peripheral position.

Our analysis shows that 'destination BA' appeared earliest compared to other conceptual combinations, and it is proportionally the largest in the place branding research domain. The research and key concepts in 'destination BA' are primarily related to tourism management, developing into a more or less independent conceptual community. Place branding research which uses 'place BA' has a much broader scope, and covers concepts such as town marketing, city branding and national and regional branding, and so on. 'City branding' research forms the core part of the 'place branding' research domain and continues to attract growing academic attention because of the rapid urbanization and global competition between cities. In contrast, 'urban BA' takes up a relatively peripheral position in place branding research.

Furthermore, we conclude that the conceptual emphasis of place branding research evolved over time, shifting from an initial emphasis on 'LT promotion' to 'LT marketing' and finally to 'LT branding'. However, this shift is relative rather than absolute, meaning we can only say the studies are more 'LT marketing' oriented or 'LT branding' oriented in each stage. This conceptual evolution is tightly related to the growing influence of new more planning- and policy-related disciplines in place branding research. Over time, the place branding research domain has become much more diverse, and multi-disciplinary. Currently, judged by the volume of publications, the social sciences and business management are the key disciplines in place branding research. The knowledge from different disciplines stimulates its evolution and feeds the development of the three key reference pairs in place branding research. Tourism management, marketing, and corporate branding provide lessons to place branding activities undertaken by governments.

Our analysis of the city branding literature and its use of key concepts shows that despite overlap among the various concepts aimed to achieve different goals with different strategies. 'LT promotion' aims to attract outsiders to visit the place, and to achieve direct economic goals. 'LT marketing' focuses on building a place image, seeking to attract outside companies and recruit a talented workforce. Finally, 'LT branding' identifies in-depth and strategic goals for places, for example, achieving urban regeneration, ecological modernization, and improving a city's reputation. Understanding and distinguishing the multiple concepts offers managerial implications to policymakers and academic

clarification for researchers in place branding. For instance, designating place promotion essentially as advertising of a location, place marketing as deploying methods and techniques to understand and influence target groups relevant to this location and place branding as a long-term strategy to alter its reputation embedded in a broader economic and ecological policy agenda with a range of policy instruments helps both policy-makers and academics grasp subtle but important distinctions and understand which term was dominant in which context and era. This, in turn, makes interventions more targeted and well-informed.

Managerial implications for brand managers and policymakers, thus include an increased awareness that the city branding strategies can be quite diverse and need to be aligned to overall policy goals. That is cities can simply employ promotional tools or advertising activities if they only want to make their city well-known. Specific place marketing strategies should be designed to promote the development of the tourism industry. Place branding should be in line with place development strategies and combined with other policy instruments to contribute to broader goals such as urban renewal, sustainable urban transformation, increased regional competitiveness, and so on. Thus, cities, which brand themselves as eco cities should do more than simply claim their brand, but actively implement specific environmental policies to change its industrial base.

With our analysis of place-branding research, we have signalled the need for more in-depth reviews of place branding, place marketing and place promotion bibliometric research and we look forward to literature reviews which will increase our knowledge of these key research strands.

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Appendix A

	Key Categories	Query
12 Reference Pairs	Destination Branding	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*destination branding*” OR “*destination brand*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Place Branding	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place branding*” OR “*place brand*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < 2019
	City Branding	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*city branding*” OR “*city brand*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Urban Branding	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*urban branding*” OR “*urban brand*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Destination Marketing	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*destination marketing*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Place Marketing	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place marketing*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	City Marketing	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*city marketing*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Urban Marketing	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*urban marketing*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Destination Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*destination promoting*” OR “*destination promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Place Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place promoting*” OR “*place promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	City Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*city promoting*” OR “*city promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Urban Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*urban promoting*” OR “*urban promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
Different LTs + BA	Destination+ Branding/ Marketing/Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*destination branding*” OR “*destination brand*” OR “*destination marketing*” OR “*destination promoting*” OR “*destination promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Place+ Branding/ Marketing/Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place branding*” OR “*place brand*” OR “*place marketing*” OR “*place promoting*” OR “place promotion") AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	City+ Branding/ Marketing/Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*city branding*” OR “*city brand*” OR “*city marketing*” OR “*city promoting*” OR “*city promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Urban+ Branding/ Marketing/Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*urban branding*” OR “*urban brand*” OR “*urban marketing*” OR “*urban promoting*” OR “*urban promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
LT +different BAs	Destination/Place/City/Urban+ Branding	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place branding*” OR “*place brand*” OR “*city branding*” OR “*city brand*” OR “*urban branding*” OR “*urban brand*” OR “*destination branding*” OR “*destination brand*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Destination/Place/City/Urban+ Marketing	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place marketing*” OR “*city marketing*” OR “*urban marketing*” OR “*destination marketing*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*
	Destination/Place/City/Urban+ Promotion	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“*place promoting*” OR “*place promotion*” OR “*city promoting*” OR “*city promotion*” OR “*urban promoting*” OR “*urban promotion*” OR “*destination promoting*” OR “*destination promotion*”) AND DOCTYPE (*ar* OR *re*) AND PUBYEAR < *2019*

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