

Safety as a strategic element of tourist destination branding to strengthen resilience in crisis conditions

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Abstract. The relevance of this study stems from the growing importance of safety in shaping the tourist appeal of regions amidst global instability, military risks and tourists' heightened sensitivity to threats. The aim of the article was to provide a theoretical justification for the role of safety as a strategic element of tourism destination branding and to elucidate the mechanism through which it influences the formation of a region's image, tourists' trust, their intentions and the resilience of destinations in crisis conditions. The study employed a systems approach, alongside methods of theoretical generalisation, systematisation, structural-logical analysis, deduction, scientific interpretation, graphical visualisation, secondary analysis of statistical data, the cartographic method and correlation analysis. As a result, the definitions of the concepts of a tourist destination brand, tourist destination branding and tourist destination safety have been clarified. The physical, social, sanitary-epidemiological, informational, environmental and institutional components of safety as an element of the destination brand have been systematised. It has been demonstrated that safety influences the destination brand through a multi-level mechanism, shaping the cognitive and emotional components of the territory's image, trust in it, a reduction in perceived risk, and positive behavioural intentions among tourists. A conceptual model for destination brand development has been developed, based on the integration of safety factors in both positive and negative scenarios. An empirical analysis of regional data from Ukraine revealed a weak inverse correlation between the number of air raid alerts and the volume of tourist tax revenue, confirming the influence of the safety factor on tourist activity. The practical value of the findings lies in their potential use by local authorities, destination management organisations and hospitality industry stakeholders to develop resilient strategies for promoting regions during crisis and post-crisis periods

Keywords: destination brand value; tourist confidence; tourists' behavioural intentions; crisis resilience; reputational positioning; perceived travel risk; tourism recovery strategies

Introduction

Under conditions of global instability, military risks, threats to physical and mental health, the dynamic nature of the information environment and tourists' growing sensitivity to dangers, the safety aspect objectively extends beyond the purely functional characteristics of a tourist destination.

This factor is gradually becoming a strategic element in shaping a region's image, the trust placed in it, tourists' behavioural intentions and the resilience of its brand. For tourist destinations operating in crisis conditions, safety becomes not only a prerequisite for minimising risks, but also an im-

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portant reputational signal through which tourists assess the reliability, predictability, manageability and attractiveness of the destination. Theoretical developments in recent years indicate a shift in the understanding of the safety attribute, transforming it from a minimum necessary standard for travel into a key element of a destination's brand equity.

Academic discourse confirms a growing interest among researchers in the interrelationship between safety, destination image and tourist behaviour. In particular, G. Ding & J. Wu (2022) observe in their empirical studies that the level of perceived safety significantly influences the cognitive, affective and conative components of a destination's image, with tourists who perceive a higher level of safety tending to demonstrate greater loyalty and a greater willingness to return. Building on this line of research from the perspective of social constructivism, Y. Zou & Q. Yu (2022) argued that the safety of a destination is perceived by tourists not only as an objective state of the environment, but also as a socially constructed notion formed through information sources, travel experiences, social interactions and communicative signals at all stages of the journey. These approaches are important for the present study, as they confirm that the safety factor is directly integrated into the brand perception of a territory through a complex system of associations and reputational signals.

The geographical universality of these patterns is confirmed by studies focusing on the European and Asian markets. B. Gavurová *et al.* (2023), using Central European countries as a case study, found that an increase in the level of perceived safety is a significant factor in shaping a positive image of a destination, with healthcare, the quality of infrastructure and service identified as key dimensions. In the context of protracted systemic macro-crises, academic research demonstrates that a prolonged state of crisis distorts the cognitive and affective image of a territory, intensifying the perception of military, political and financial risks even before the stage of direct service consumption (Gorji *et al.*, 2023). Taken together, these perspectives substantiate the role of trust as a fundamental factor in risk minimisation within the framework of anti-crisis branding.

The issues of brand capitalisation, its value markers and the cultivation of long-term traveller loyalty are highlighted as a distinct area of discussion. In particular, S. Majeed *et al.* (2024) argued that, in the context of health-related threats, perceived risk ceases to be an isolated factor and becomes integrated into the structure of a destination's brand perception, directly correlating with travellers' choices. In their study of emotional triggers, D. Jimenez-García *et al.* (2025) identified the image of a destination and its brand value as key predictors of tourist behaviour, the role of which is significantly enhanced by the emotional component of the experience. The behavioural and economic dimensions of this relationship are detailed by R.M. Elalfy *et al.* (2025), who substantiate the transformation of a destination's brand equity into repeat visits and support for local products. A synthesis of these perspectives allows the territorial brand to be interpreted

as a comprehensive strategic asset with pronounced behavioural and financial performance.

The communication dimension is of strategic importance for shaping a safety image, as it shifts the focus of safety from operational response to reputational positioning. In particular, J. Yin *et al.* (2024) found that the specific nature of how messages are presented can influence travellers' behavioural responses, whilst Y. Liu *et al.* (2025) characterised the dual nature of security communication, which, in addition to its protective function, also serves a distinct promotional purpose. K. Tomej & I. Bilynets (2024), through the lens of the concept of living systems, substantiated a profound functional transformation of Ukraine's tourism ecosystem, where adaptation to the shock of war occurred through regenerative changes in the business models of local enterprises and the reorientation of space towards humanitarian and rehabilitation functions.

The specific nature of tourism transformation within a similar geographical and institutional context is actively explored in academic works where safety attributes are directly linked to the processes of territorial capitalisation. In particular, N.V. Necheva & I. Davydenko (2022) substantiated the role of branding as a key instrument for enhancing the recognition and competitiveness of destinations. In turn, M.Ya. Topornytska *et al.* (2023), examining these patterns in the context of martial law, argue that the safety factor is transforming from a background condition into a central determinant of a region's tourist appeal. At the same time, these studies largely document the empirical characteristics of the wartime context, whilst overlooking the deep-seated structural links between safety and a destination's reputational assets.

An analysis of the academic literature demonstrates that, despite active research into the influence of perceived safety on destination image, trust, crisis communication and traveller behaviour, most existing approaches remain fragmented. Safety is predominantly interpreted as an external exogenous circumstance, an operational constraint or a crisis-response instrument. Its role as an independent internal structural element of destination branding, directly generating reputational capital, brand equity and strategic tourist trust, remains beyond the scope of systematic analysis. In view of this research gap and the need to shift perspectives from a purely functional perception of safety towards its strategic and marketing-oriented understanding, the aim of the article was to provide a theoretical substantiation of the role of the safety factor as a strategic element of tourist destination branding and to reveal the mechanism through which it influences the formation of territorial image, tourist trust, tourists' behavioural intentions and destination resilience under crisis conditions.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study is a systematic approach to the analysis of safety as a strategic asset within the structure of tourism destination branding. To achieve the set aim, a set of general scientific and specialised

research methods was employed, structured in accordance with the logic and stages of scientific inquiry. In particular, at the theoretical and conceptual stage of the study, methods of theoretical generalisation, comparative analysis and systematisation were applied to clarify the conceptual and categorical framework, namely the definitions of “tourist destination brand” and “destination safety”. The method of structural-logical analysis was used to develop a conceptual model for destination branding based on the integration of safety factors. The method of deduction and scientific interpretation made it possible to extrapolate the identified trends regarding barriers and tourists’ motivations for choice, in order to substantiate strategic guidelines for destination development. The method of graphical visualisation was applied to present the research results clearly, in particular when constructing conceptual diagrams, cartograms and scatter plots.

The empirical-analytical stage of the study, aimed at assessing the impact of the safety factor on actual tourism activity, was carried out through a comprehensive combination of secondary analysis of statistical data, cartographic methods, combined typological analysis, and mathematical and statistical modelling. To quantitatively assess the safety factor and the disruption to the tourism market, a dataset of verified and relevant data for the year 2024 was compiled. The total number of air raid alerts (units) was selected as the indicator of the safety situation, and the source of information for compiling this dataset was the online platform for monitoring and aggregating official civil defence alerts in Ukraine, “Official Map of Air Raid Alerts in Ukraine” (Map of Alerts in Ukraine, n.d.). This resource continuously records and archives reports from the State Emergency Service of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Air Force, broken down by administrative-territorial units. The use of this source ensured a high level of granularity and accuracy in recording the total number of air raid alerts in the regions under study. This indicator was chosen because the frequency of air threats is the main psychological and physical barrier that directly shapes tourists’ perception of a destination’s risk. At the same time, the volume of tourist tax (in millions of UAH) was used to analyse tourist activity; this was selected as the most objective and fiscally recorded indicator of the actual state and dynamics of local tourism markets in crisis conditions, and the relevant data were obtained from official figures provided by the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine (Almost UAH 273 million in..., n.d.; Survey results on..., n.d.; Re-branding Ukraine as a tourist destination, n.d.).

The data pre-processing and preparation procedure involved standardising the data and converting them into comparable units of measurement. In Microsoft Excel, the empirical dataset was organised in the form of a matrix, where the rows (samples) represent the regions of Ukraine, and the columns represent standardised indicators: the number of incidents (units); and the tourist tax (million UAH). Data from 20 regions of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv were included in the analysis (a total of $n = 21$

observations). The Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Kharkiv regions were excluded from the analytical dataset due to the temporary occupation of parts of their territories, active hostilities taking place within their borders during the study period, and the destruction of tourism infrastructure, which makes it impossible to collect objective official statistical data on the tourist levy and would distort the results of the overall modelling of interrelationships.

To investigate the spatial differentiation of the destructive impact of safety risks on tourism activity, a method of combined typological analysis of Ukraine’s regions was applied, based on two quantitative criteria: the intensity of air raid alerts and the volume of revenue from the tourist levy. The first criterion was the intensity of security threats, measured by the number of air raid alerts declared in the region in 2024; based on an analysis of the variation in this figure, three threat levels were identified: low or moderate (fewer than 1,000 alerts); medium (1,000-1,999 alerts); high or critical (2,000 or more alerts). The second criterion is the fiscal performance of the tourism sector, assessed by the volume of tourism tax collected in 2024, where the threshold for high tourism and business activity is set at 10 million UAH, which corresponds to the criterion for classifying a region among the eight leading regions in terms of fiscal revenue. Based on a combination of these parameters, three typological groups of destinations have been formed, reflecting varying degrees of their resilience and adaptability.

The calculation of indicators in the study was formalised using mathematical relationships that allow for a quantitative assessment of both the general characteristics of the sample and the interrelationships between the indicators. At the initial stage, basic summary indicators were determined. In particular, the total value of the indicator under study was calculated as the sum of its components:

$$X = \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \quad (1)$$

where x_i – individual values of the indicator; n – the number of observations (regions). The next stage of the study involved assessing the strength of the relationship between the number of air raid alerts and the amount of tourist tax. Pearson’s pairwise linear correlation coefficient was used for this purpose:

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (A_i - \bar{A})(T_i - \bar{T})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (A_i - \bar{A})^2 \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n (T_i - \bar{T})^2}} \quad (2)$$

where A_i – the number of air raid alerts in the i -th region; T_i – the amount of tourist tax in the i -th region; $\bar{A}$, $\bar{T}$ – the mean values of the indicators, respectively.

The application of Pearson’s linear correlation coefficient to analyse the sample is appropriate, given that the data satisfy the method’s basic mathematical assumptions. Firstly, both variables under study – namely, the number of air raid alerts and the amount of tourist tax – are represented on a continuous metric scale (ratio scale). Secondly, a

visual analysis of the scatter plot confirmed the existence of a linear trend between the safety criterion and the fiscal indicator of tourist activity, which rules out the need to apply more complex non-linear models. Since the sample under analysis covers almost the entire population of regions in Ukraine available for study (excluding areas of active hostilities and occupied territories), this method allows for the most accurate assessment of the strength and direction of the direct relationship between the two variables without distortion caused by ranking. The calculations were carried out in Microsoft Excel using the standard CORREL function. To ensure the reliability of the results, they were verified by replicating the calculations using alternative computer modelling tools and by logically checking the values obtained. This confirmed the correctness of the methodology applied and the accuracy of the calculations.

Results and Discussion

Developing a coherent academic concept requires, first and foremost, a re-examination and a fundamental distinction between the basic categories that form its foundation, namely “tourist destination brand”, “tourist destination branding” and “tourist destination safety”. This necessity stems from the fact that contemporary theoretical approaches define a destination brand not merely as a set of visual or promotional characteristics, but as a complex system of perceptions, associations, values and expectations formed in the minds of consumers of tourism products. A destination brand not only ensures the identification and differentiation of a territory but also shapes perceptions of the quality, character and emotional value of the future tourism experience. This is precisely why it is appropriate to interpret it as a multidimensional construct encompassing brand recognition, image, perceived quality, trust, loyalty and other elements of brand equity (Blain *et al.*, 2005; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). The branding of tourist destinations, in turn, should be understood as a purposeful and systematic process of shaping, maintaining and promoting a unique image of a territory, aimed at ensuring its recognisability, attractiveness and competitive advantages in the tourism market. Its scope is not limited to the creation of a name, logo or advertising message, but encompasses a range of measures aimed at fostering lasting positive associations with the destination, its values, atmosphere, quality of the environment and the distinctive features of the tourist experience. It is precisely through branding that a destination gains not only market visibility but also a certain symbolic value, which influences tourists’ choices, expectations, levels of satisfaction and subsequent loyalty (Blain *et al.*, 2005; Dedeoğlu *et al.*, 2019).

In this context, the concept of a tourist destination’s safety takes on particular significance. It is advisable to interpret this not only as the state of a tourist’s protection from physical, social, informational, sanitary-epidemiological, environmental or other threats, but also as an important characteristic of the tourist environment itself, which determines its reliability, predictability and comfort. Safety

in modern tourism is shaped not only by the presence of appropriate infrastructure, response mechanisms or institutional support, but also by the tourist’s perception of the destination’s overall level of safety. This is precisely why it has both an objective and a subjective dimension (Gavurová *et al.*, 2023; Awais-E-Yazdan *et al.*, 2025). In the context of tourism development, safety is increasingly moving beyond the purely functional characteristics of a destination and becoming a strategic factor in its market positioning, reputation and brand. At the international level, this trend is confirmed by UN Tourism’s (n.d.) focus on the SAFE-D initiative, which regards safety, crisis preparedness, response and recovery as fundamental conditions for the sustainable development of tourism. Within this paradigm, safety is defined not only as a means of protecting travellers, but also as an essential prerequisite for the viability of tourism ecosystems, ensuring the long-term preservation of travellers’ trust and the stability of socio-economic benefits for local communities.

The need for such a conceptualisation is further confirmed by global trends identified in the World Economic Forum report (2026). Analysis of the global threat landscape confirms that such safety-related factors as geo-economic confrontation, disinformation and misinformation, societal polarisation, extreme weather events, and armed conflicts between states remain dominant within the risk structure and rank among the five most likely and impactful risks in the short term. This environment directly affects the stability of tourism flows and perceptions of destination reliability. The results of a survey of more than 1,300 global experts and opinion leaders confirm that physical and digital safety have become fundamental determinants of consumer confidence (World Economic Forum, 2026). This transforms the subjective sense of safety into a key determinant of economic behaviour and consumer choice across all sectors, including the tourism industry. This is consistent with the emerging trend towards an economy of trust and safety, in which the predictability and safety of the environment in which people stay become the principal intangible asset of a territorial brand, ensuring its resilience during periods of global turbulence.

These changes in conceptual approaches mean that safety ceases to be merely a functional prerequisite for travel and takes on the significance of a strategic intangible asset for a destination, as it shapes its image, influences trust, reduces perceived risk and increases tourists’ willingness to choose that particular destination. This conclusion is consistent with the academic position of M. Awais-E-Yazdan *et al.* (2025), according to which, under contemporary conditions of turbulence, the safety factor is increasingly becoming one of the key criteria in tourist decision-making and an important element of effective destination branding. This view is also shared by relevant international institutions, which emphasise that, in the context of contemporary global instability, safety attributes are becoming a defining factor in consumer behaviour and a fundamental component of strategic destination marketing (OECD, 2025). It is

worth noting that, in the context of current global instability, safety is transforming from a technical requirement for travel into a dominant factor in consumer choice and a key element of strategic destination marketing (OECD, 2025).

This issue takes on particular significance for Ukraine. Against the backdrop of full-scale war, high sensitivity to risks and the need to support domestic tourism, safety is becoming not merely an operational requirement, but a strategic factor in building trust in destinations, tourist routes and local brands. The safety factor plays a dual role, as it acts both as the main barrier to travel and as a key criterion for differentiating destinations. The results of a survey on travelling in Ukraine during the war, conducted by the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine (SATD) in partnership with the UNICEF U-Report Ukraine project, show that for the overwhelming majority of potential tourists – 57.4% – it is precisely safety risks that are the main constraint on travelling within the country under martial law (Survey results on travelling..., n.d.). This confirms that safety is the primary filter determining a destination's ability to make it onto a consumer's short-list of preferred options, particularly in times of crisis. One

in five respondents (20.7%) state that they actively avoid travelling due to a sense of danger. For branding purposes, this means that one-fifth of the market is temporarily out of reach due to a psychological barrier, which can only be overcome by establishing a solid reputation as a safe destination. Among those who do plan to travel, 27.2% of respondents prioritise “the region's safety and stability” when choosing a specific location. This indicates that, for a quarter of active domestic tourists, the safety factor is the key competitive advantage, outweighing even natural or cultural attractions. These figures confirm the deep integration of the safety attribute into the structure of a destination's brand. In order to clarify the role of safety within the structure of a tourist destination's brand, it is advisable to systematise its main components and determine how each of them influences tourists' perception of the area. This approach allows safety to be viewed not as an abstract characteristic of a destination, but as a complex of interrelated elements that shape its image, reputation, trust and overall brand value. In this context, the main components of safety as an element of a tourist destination's brand are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Key components of safety as an element of a tourist destination brand

Safety component	Description	Impact on the destination brand
Physical safety	Protection of tourists from crime, violence and accidents, as well as the consequences of war-related threats, including missile strikes, shelling and the danger posed by landmines	Creates a fundamental sense of security and increases trust in the destination
Social safety	Social stability, tolerance, friendliness of the local population and absence of discrimination	Contributes to a positive emotional perception of the destination and is associated with hospitality
Sanitary-epidemiological safety	Public hygiene standards, quality of healthcare services, food safety and preparedness for epidemiological challenges	Strengthens the destination's reputation as a reliable and comfortable environment for visitors
Information security	Protection of personal data, security of online bookings, digital services and communications	Enhances trust in the destination in the digital environment and reinforces its modern image
Environmental safety	Environmental cleanliness, quality of the natural environment, safety of natural routes and protection against environmental threats	Creates an image of a responsible, sustainable and attractive destination to visit
Institutional safety	Effectiveness of local governance, availability of emergency response services, organisation of tourism infrastructure, warning systems, shelters, evacuation routes and crisis coordination	Highlights the destination's reliability and its preparedness to respond to risks and crisis conditions

Source: compiled by the authors

An analysis of the results presented in Table 1 shows that, under crisis conditions, the structure of a destination's safety capital takes on a distinct hierarchical nature. By differentiating the impact of individual components, it is possible to categorise key safety factors according to the specific characteristics of the tourism environment. In particular, for urban destinations, the physical, social and informational aspects of safety are of decisive importance. An urbanised environment requires the seamless functioning of security systems in areas of mass gathering, a high level of digital safety for municipal services and a stable social climate. Taken together, these factors determine the day-to-day comfort of daily life and the micro-mobility of tourists. At the same time, for nature-based, recreational,

mountain or seaside destinations, environmental and sanitary-epidemiological safety is the fundamental priority. The specific nature of such areas is linked to the autonomy of tourists' stays in the natural environment, which means that a destination's brand depends directly on the ecological purity of the landscapes and the ability of local services to respond promptly to natural and man-made risks, as well as seasonal infrastructure overloads. In business, event and internationally oriented destinations, the institutional and informational components take precedence. For business travellers and organisers of large-scale events, the key selection criteria are guarantees of cybersecurity, data confidentiality during online bookings, and the legal and organisational transparency of local institutions.

In the context of consumer cognitive psychology and strategic marketing, physical and institutional safety have the greatest cumulative impact on building tourists' trust and a destination's brand equity. Safety serves as a fundamental prerequisite; in its absence, or where there is a high threat to life, all other marketing advantages of the destination are completely negated. Conversely, the institutional component is the primary tool for converting a sense of protection into long-term brand loyalty, as it demonstrates to the customer the management system's ability to minimise uncertainty. A well-founded classification of safety components is practical in nature and can be used by destination management and local authorities to formulate appropriate management decisions in crisis situations across the following strategic areas:

1. Conducting risk audits and risk decomposition. Matching the type of destination with its specific safety components allows for a differentiated approach to the funding of protective infrastructure. This ensures priority investment in shelters and warning systems in city centres or in the monitoring of environmental threats along recreational routes.

2. Implementing innovative crisis-response branding and repositioning. Targeted communication campaigns are developed based on the identified components. To restore confidence, the destination brand shifts the emphasis from abstract hospitality to demonstrating specific institutional guarantees, such as the availability of certified

safe locations, autonomous energy supply and access to high-quality medical care.

3. Building integrated safety ecosystems. This approach involves integrating physical, information and institutional safety into a single digital platform for the destination. The creation of digital interactive maps showing shelters, up-to-date safe routes and real-time alerts serves as an effective tool for enhancing the territory's competitiveness in the market.

The implementation of these measures as a whole allows safety to be viewed as a fully-fledged element of a destination's brand equity, capable of strengthening its competitive advantages and ensuring its viability in times of crisis. In this context, the subjective perception of safety influences the destination's brand, as tourists assess a destination not only on the basis of its actual safety conditions but also on signals from official sources, digital platforms, the media and travellers' reviews. Safety therefore serves not only as a prerequisite for minimising risks but also as an important reputational signal that shapes the destination's image, the level of trust in it, and the traveller's willingness to undertake the journey. In a context of global instability, the safety criterion is increasingly being integrated into a destination's brand promise and is becoming one of the key factors influencing tourists' choices. To summarise the above, it can be argued that safety fulfils at least three functions within the structure of a tourist destination's brand (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Safety features within the structure of a tourist destination brand

Source: created by the authors

Firstly, safety forms the functional foundation of the tourist experience, as it ensures a comfortable and protected stay in the area. This function directly minimises perceived risk at the level of basic human needs, such as safety of life and health, by transforming objective environmental threats into controllable travel parameters through the provision of an inclusive protective infrastructure (for example, digital warning systems and the location of shelters). Secondly, it fulfils an emotional and psychological function, fostering a sense of calm, trust and reduced uncertainty. Its effect is aimed at building trust in the destination brand, where the subjective perception of safety neutralises

tourists' cognitive dissonance and anxiety, transforming the destination into a priority choice for safety. Thirdly, it serves a strategic communication function, as it conveys information through various channels about the quality of the destination's management, its sustainability and its accountability to tourists. This function directly translates the established trust and reduced risk into the destination's long-term resilience. Through transparent crisis communications, the brand demonstrates the system's ability to adapt to changing threats, which fosters traveller loyalty, maintains the stability of tourist flows even in crisis conditions, and ensures rapid post-crisis recovery.

The synthesis of these functional determinants enables the transformation of theoretical principles regarding the safety factor into innovative practical tools for ensuring the viability of tourist destinations. In this context, the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine continues to promote domestic tourism and work on a new tourism image for Ukraine, which demonstrates the undeniable relevance of combining branding considerations with issues of safety and resilience. Consumers cease to perceive a territory as a coherent and attractive destination if its safety status is uncertain or insufficiently communicated. In such an environment, the Ukrainian destination brand can no longer be built solely around cultural attractiveness or the uniqueness of its resources; it must necessarily

incorporate a clearly communicated capacity of the destination to ensure safety, predictability and responsible risk management (Rebranding Ukraine as a tourist destination, n.d.). In the context of Ukraine's current safety challenges, this model takes on particular relevance, as it defines the nature of the correlation between the level of stability in the safety environment and the intensity of recreational and tourist flows. To verify the spatial differentiation of these processes, Figure 2 presents a cartographic visualisation of geospatial disparities in terms of safety indicators and tourist activity. This makes it possible to identify spatial patterns and assess the extent of the adverse impact of safety risks on destination development under contemporary conditions.

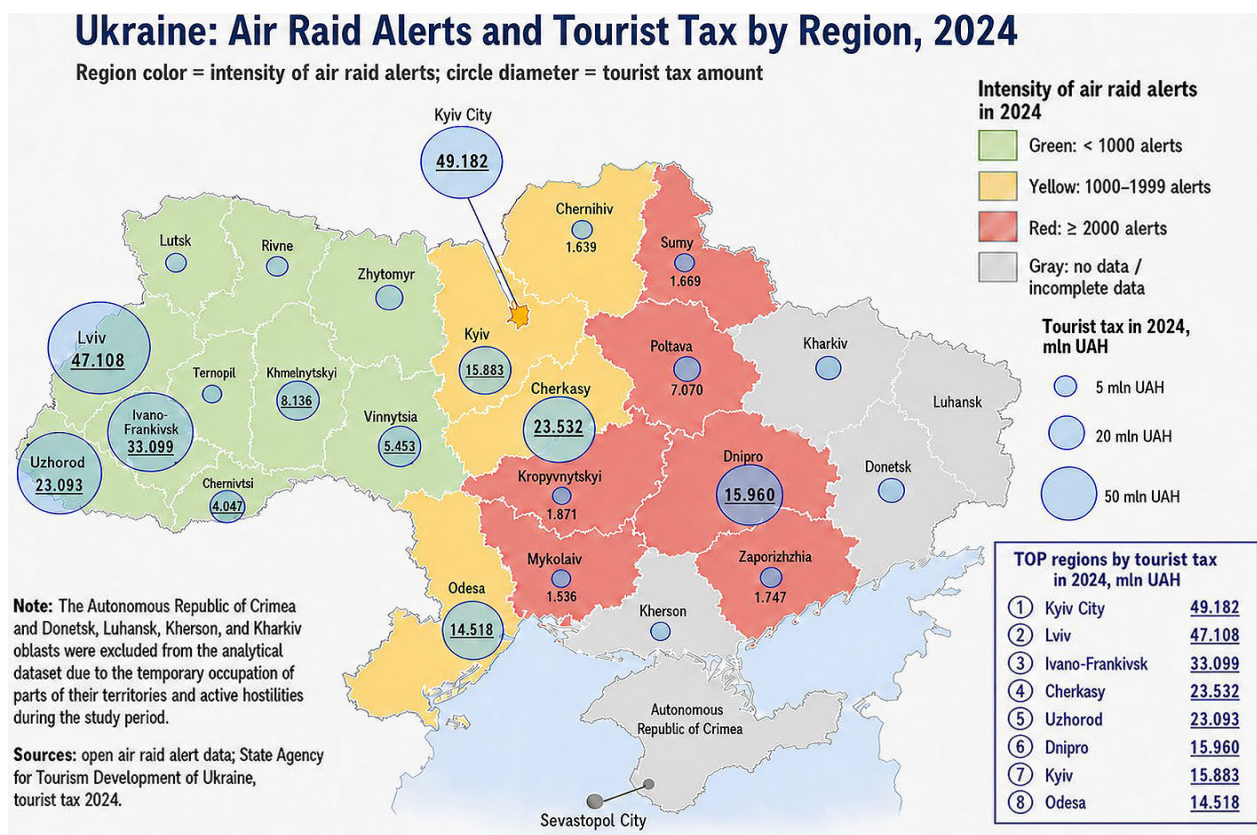


Figure 2. Spatial variation in the frequency of air raid alerts and the volume of tourist tax revenue across the regions of Ukraine in 2024

Source: created by the authors based on Almost UAH 273 million in tourist tax was transferred to local community budgets in 2024 (n.d.), Map of Alerts in Ukraine (n.d.)

The cartographic visualisation presented in Figure 2 allows for a detailed examination of the spatial patterns of domestic tourism development under martial law. A visual analysis of the map reveals not only profound territorial disparities between the intensity of safety threats and the volume of tourist tax revenue. It also demonstrates a clear spatial differentiation and polarisation of Ukraine's tourism market, where the geographical shift in tourist flows correlates directly with distance from the front line and the borders with the aggressor state. Based on the observed spatial

patterns, Ukraine's regions have been divided into three main groups according to the relationship between safety risks and the fiscal performance of the tourism sector.

The first group comprises destinations with moderate or relatively lower levels of air raid alerts and consistently high tourism revenue figures. This category includes the city of Kyiv, as well as the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia and Cherkasy regions. The trends observed demonstrate that a relative level of safety, combined with robust infrastructure capacity, an established historical reputation,

high transport accessibility and brand recognition, enables these areas to attract the main tourist flows and act as key hubs for domestic tourism. The second group comprises regions with high and medium levels of air raid alerts and comparatively lower volumes of tourist tax revenue, specifically the Zaporizhzhia, Sumy, Mykolaiv, Kirovohrad and Chernihiv regions. For these destinations, the impact of the safety factor is more pronounced. The constant threat, proximity to active combat zones or the border with the aggressor, as well as the critical media coverage, significantly distort the image of these territories, virtually nullifying their traditional marketing advantages and reducing travellers' willingness to visit. The third group consists of regional exceptions, which include the Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, Poltava and Kyiv regions. They maintain relatively high and notable levels of tourist revenue despite moderate or critically high levels of safety risks. This pattern can be explained by the significance of these regions as major industrial, economic, business, transport and transit, or recreational centres of the country. A key role here is played by the presence of a well-developed service infrastructure, stable domestic demand, and the high crisis adaptability of the local tourism sector, which is a direct manifestation of its resilience.

Spatial analysis has confirmed that safety is an important, but not the sole, factor in shaping tourism activity and a destination's brand. Its direct impact is mediated by infrastructural capacity, economic integration, reputational

stability and the level of adaptability of local communities to ongoing challenges. At the same time, a visual analysis of the map does not allow for a sufficiently accurate assessment of the strength and direction of the relationship between safety risks and tourism activity. Thus, the next stage of the study involved a quantitative measurement of this relationship using correlation analysis tools. Application of this algorithm yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.287$. This value indicates a weak inverse linear relationship between the intensity of safety threats and the fiscal performance of the tourism sector in 2024. On the one hand, this confirms the hypothesis regarding the destructive impact of safety risks on tourist flows; on the other, it empirically demonstrates the high resilience threshold of the domestic hospitality market and its ability to withstand systemic pressure. This level of correlation provides grounds for asserting that the architecture of tourism activity in crisis conditions is a multi-factor model, in which the safety factor, whilst decisive, is dynamically adjusted by a complex of economic, infrastructural and specific psychological and behavioural determinants of the consumer. To examine the relationship between the intensity of air raid alerts and the cumulative volume of tourist tax in greater detail, it is advisable to apply the method of graphical modelling (Fig. 3). This approach not only allows for a visual assessment of the nature and strength of the relationship between the indicators under study, but also provides empirical confirmation of the results of the correlation analysis carried out.

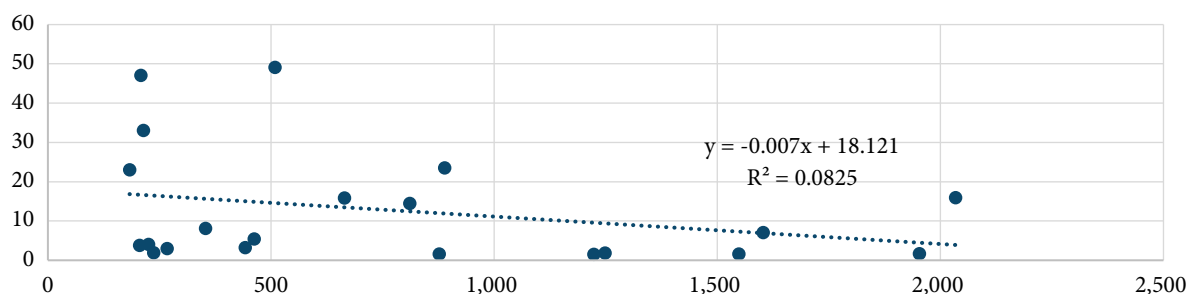


Figure 3. Scatter plot showing the relationship between the number of air raid alerts and the amount of tourist tax in the regions of Ukraine in 2024

Source: compiled by the authors

The results obtained showed that the safety factor has a statistically significant, albeit not dominant, impact on tourism activity in the regions. This means that the role of safety in the development of destinations is not limited to a direct impact on tourist flows, but is realised through more complex mechanisms involving tourists' perceptions, trust, reputation and behavioural intentions. It is for this reason that further analysis should focus on revealing how safety transforms from an environmental characteristic into a strategic element of a tourist destination's brand.

The synergy of the functional, emotional-psychological and strategic-communication components of safety shapes a holistic brand perception of the destination. This makes it possible to trace how safety parameters influence

the image of the area, trust in it and tourists' behavioural intentions, thereby transforming safety into a significant element of the destination's brand. The impact of safety on a tourist destination is multi-layered, as it shapes the tourist's fundamental perceptions of the area's reliability, predictability, comfort and overall suitability for travel. Safety influences not only the cognitive but also the emotional and sensory components of a destination's image, as associations with peace and stability reinforce positive perceptions, whilst information about risks generates anxiety and wariness. An important consequence of this perception is the development of trust in the destination, which lowers psychological barriers to travel, increases the willingness to choose it, revisit it and recommend it to others. In

modern digital environment, this influence is further amplified through social media, travel platforms and official information resources, which shape the collective perception of a territory's safety status even before the journey begins. In summary, it can be argued that the consistent interconnection between safety, image characteristics, trust and behavioural responses confirms the status of safety as one of the leading mechanisms for capitalising

on a destination's brand. In this regard, the integration of the safety component into the territorial branding system should be regarded as a strategic priority for managing a destination's tourist appeal and competitiveness. To systematically illustrate this interdependence, a conceptual model for the development of a tourist destination brand based on the integration of safety factors has been developed (Fig. 4).

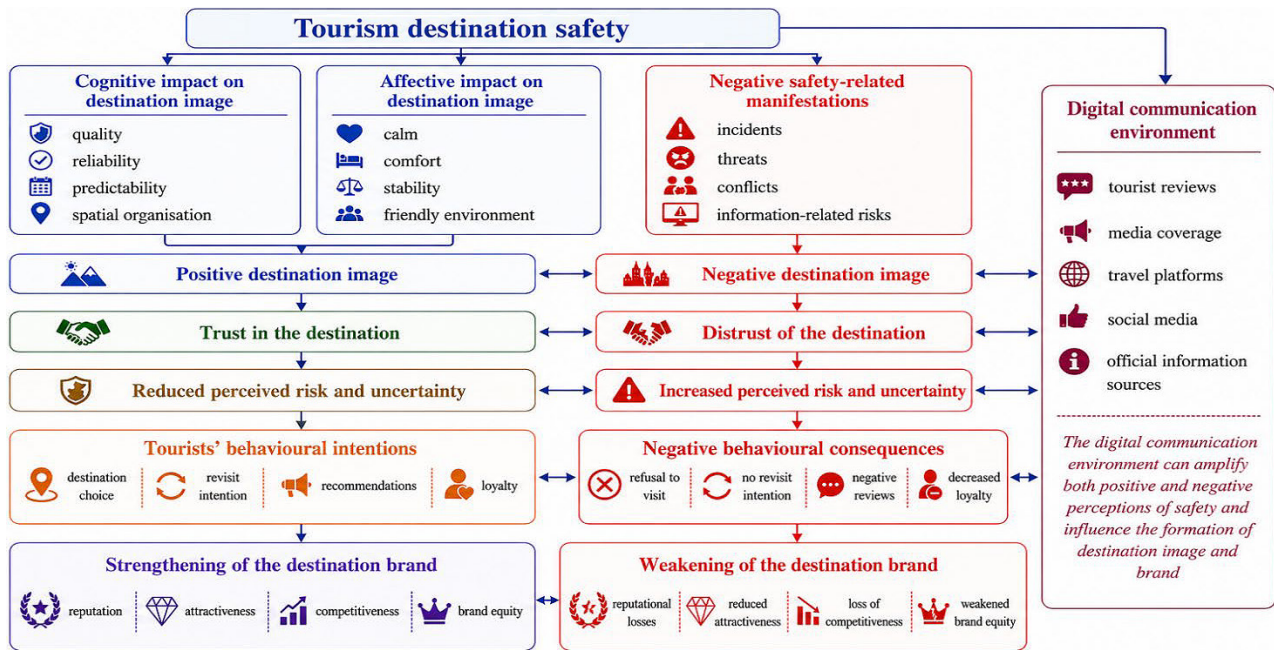


Figure 4. A conceptual model for destination branding based on the integration of safety factors

Source: created by the authors

The scientific contribution of the proposed model lies in the structuring of a chain mechanism that demonstrates how objective safety characteristics are transformed into strategic assets of a destination. According to the conceptual framework, the key element and starting point of the model is the safety of a tourist destination, which has an indirect and dual-vector nature of positive and negative influence. The central structure of the positive scenario is formed by a sequential cause-and-effect relationship between cognitive and affective triggers, perceptions of the territory, consumer behaviour and the resulting brand equity. At the initial stage, the safety factor generates the tourist's rational perceptions of quality, predictability and the spatial organisation of the area. At the same time, the affective dimension comes to the fore, shaping emotional markers such as tranquillity, comfort, stability and a friendly environment.

The integration of these cognitive and affective effects results in the formation of a positive image of the destination. The model clearly demonstrates that it is the image of the destination that serves as a direct prerequisite for the formation of strategic trust. In turn, high levels of trust act as a psychological factor in neutralising threats, thereby reducing perceived risk and uncertainty. Risk minimisation directly determines tourists' positive behavioural

intentions, which are differentiated into specific marketing indicators: destination choice, repeat visits, willingness to recommend, and long-term loyalty. The end point of this chain is the conversion of behavioural intentions into destination capital, that is, the strengthening of its brand, which is reflected in an increase in reputation, attractiveness, competitiveness and, directly, brand capital. At the same time, the model also reflects a negative scenario in which incidents, threats, conflicts and reputational risks have a destructive impact on the market environment. These create a negative image of the destination, breed mistrust, heighten perceived risk and uncertainty, and lead to negative behavioural consequences, including a decision not to visit, a lack of repeat visits, negative reviews and a decline in loyalty. Taken together, these destructive effects lead to a deep recession in the tourism sector, which ultimately results in a systemic weakening of the destination's brand, reputational damage and the erosion of financial brand equity.

A key element of the model's structure is a dedicated, integrated digital and communications environment. Travel platforms, social media, media reports, traveller reviews and official resources do not merely convey information, but maintain a two-way interactive connection with every level of the cognitive-behavioural chain, as illustrated in

the diagram by horizontal two-way arrows. The digital environment acts as a powerful catalyst for informational influence, capable of artificially amplifying or neutralising both positive and negative perceptions of safety. Under such conditions, even objectively high levels of safety in a destination require professional reputation management, as only convincing and credible communication can transform the actual state of safety into brand equity.

The conceptual model presented confirms that the safety factor is an important strategic element in the formation of a tourist destination's brand equity. In this context, the safety factor has an impact on the reputation, attractiveness and competitiveness of the area and shapes its overall value in the tourist's mind. This provides grounds for asserting that safety should be regarded not as a secondary or purely technical component of destination management, but as a strategic, systemically integrated resource for its branding. Accordingly, an effective tourist destination brand in the contemporary context is formed at the intersection of the territory's resource attractiveness, the quality of the tourist experience, trust and perceived safety. Thus, the consistent integration of safety factors into the overall structure of management and marketing communications constitutes a fundamental prerequisite not only for strengthening the long-term attractiveness of destinations, but also for strategically enhancing their resilience in a turbulent crisis environment.

The results obtained are generally consistent with the findings of recent studies, in which safety is regarded as one of the key factors shaping the image of a tourist destination and tourist behaviour. In particular, G. Ding & J. Wu (2022) empirically demonstrated that perceptions of safety have a positive impact on the cognitive and affective image of a destination, which, in turn, determines tourists' behavioural intentions. At the same time, B. Gavurová *et al.* (2023) argued that safety is a vital component in ensuring the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the context of contemporary technological and social transformations. An analysis of these studies has shown that, in academic discourse, safety is predominantly viewed by authors as an external factor influencing the formation of a positive image of a tourist destination, visitors' behavioural intentions and the competitiveness of tourist regions. The approach proposed in this article broadens this interpretation by considering safety as an internal strategic element of a tourist destination's brand. In this context, safety emerges not only as a functional prerequisite for carrying out tourism activities, but also as a strategic intangible asset that shapes a tourist destination's brand equity, strengthens tourists' trust in it and enhances its resilience in the face of contemporary crisis challenges.

In terms of quantitative assessments, the weak correlation identified between the number of air raid alerts and the volume of tourist tax revenue in the regions of Ukraine is generally consistent with the findings of G. Fuchs *et al.* (2024), who demonstrated that an increase in perceived risk reduces travel intentions, although the strength of this effect depends on the perception of the temporal, spatial

and social distance of the risk, as well as the context in which the travel decision is made. At the same time, the results obtained showed that, in the context of a full-scale war in Ukraine, the immediate factor of safety is not the sole or determining factor in tourism activity. The weak strength of the established relationship confirms the multifactorial nature of the tourism market, where the impact of the safety factor interacts with other factors, in particular the level of infrastructure development, transport accessibility, the institutional capacity of regions and their adaptability to crisis conditions. This conclusion partly correlates with the findings of S. Castaldo *et al.* (2024), who substantiated that the negative impact of perceived risk may be mitigated by different levels of trust, particularly trust in tourism stakeholders and interpersonal trust, which act as risk-compensation mechanisms in travel decision-making. In this context, the results obtained suggest that, under wartime challenges, other factors contributing to the resilience of tourist destinations may also perform a compensatory role, including the effectiveness of local governance, transport accessibility, uninterrupted functioning of critical infrastructure and established trust in local safety mechanisms within the territory.

The proposed conceptual model builds on the findings of M. Awais-E-Yazdan *et al.* (2025), which substantiate the positive influence of perceived safety on the formation of trust, the destination's image and tourists' future intentions to visit it. In contrast to this approach, the proposed model systematically integrates safety into a single cause-and-effect system that combines the safety environment, destination image, trust, perceived risk and the destination's brand equity. At the same time, the conceptual scope of the model has been expanded by including a reverse scenario, which reflects the mechanism of reputational damage to the brand resulting from safety incidents or crisis events. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of D. Jimenez-García *et al.* (2025), who emphasise the decisive influence of crisis risks on the perception and recovery of tourist destinations, as well as with the conclusions of R.M. Elalfy *et al.* (2025), who highlighted the role of trust, effective crisis management and resilience in maintaining the competitiveness of tourist regions. Taken together, these findings make it possible to regard safety not merely as a factor influencing current tourist choice, but as a strategic element of the brand that determines the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the destination.

The strategic and communicative dimension of safety plays a significant role in the structure of the proposed model. The findings are consistent with the conclusions of researchers that safety communication in crisis situations not only fulfils informational and crisis-management functions, but also serves as an important tool for building trust, fostering a positive image and maintaining a region's competitive position (Yin *et al.*, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2025). In turn, A.-M. Martínez-Sala *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that digital communication platforms are an important tool for shaping and promoting a tourist destination's brand.

M.D.P. Pascual-Fraile *et al.* (2024) emphasised the strategic role of communications in maintaining a destination's positive reputation and minimising the impact of crisis situations. At the same time, H. Huang *et al.* (2025) argued that the effectiveness of digital communications is determined by the ability to respond promptly to crisis challenges and maintain tourists' trust in the destination. The proposed approach expands on these concepts, substantiating the dualistic nature of the digital communication environment in the process of managing a tourist destination's brand. Provided that information flows are managed effectively, it helps to strengthen trust in the destination, shape its positive image and enhance brand equity; whereas untimely or uncoordinated communication can accelerate the spread of negative information, exacerbate reputational damage and reduce the destination's overall resilience.

The specific nature of the Ukrainian tourism market was examined through the lens of recent research into the transformation of tourism in wartime conditions. In particular, K. Tomej *et al.* (2023) found that even in the first months of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine's tourism sector demonstrated a high level of adaptability due to rapid changes in business models, the localisation of tourism products and the revitalisation of domestic tourism. N. Williams *et al.* (2023), analysing the phenomenon of war tourism in Ukraine, demonstrated a shift in social perceptions of travel, in which, alongside traditional tourist motivations, new practices are emerging linked to volunteering, digital interaction and visits to areas of active conflict. J. Tan & M. Cheng (2025) also confirm that crisis conditions significantly alter tourists' motivations, risk perception mechanisms and destination selection criteria. The authors elaborate on the media and reputational dimensions of this transformation, demonstrating the capacity of wartime media narratives to artificially amplify a destination's vulnerability and to have a destructive impact on the level of strategic trust among stakeholders. The findings generally align with these conclusions, confirming that safety is becoming a defining factor in the transformation of the tourism market in times of war. At the same time, the authors' approach expands upon existing concepts by considering safety not merely as a passive reaction to crisis events or a characteristic of individual tourism products, but as a strategic element of a destination's brand, which ensures the accumulation of brand equity, strengthens stakeholder trust, and enhances the competitiveness and long-term resilience of the region. This conclusion is consistent with the position of O. Ivanov & D. De Marchi (2025), who argued that even tourist destinations located in active conflict zones, provided there is strategic planning, an innovative approach and responsible management, are capable of using tourism as a tool to strengthen resilience, support local communities and facilitate the long-term recovery of territories. A synthesis of the findings provides grounds for viewing safety not merely as a tool for operational response to crisis challenges, but as a strategic intangible resource of a tourist destination's brand, which ensures its repositioning,

strengthens stakeholder trust, builds brand equity and enhances resilience during the post-crisis recovery process.

Conclusions

The study resulted in a set of theoretical and practical findings that reflect the specific features of integrating safety into the structure of destination branding to strengthen resilience under crisis conditions. It has been demonstrated that destination safety in the context of crisis challenges is not merely a functional prerequisite for travel, but a strategic element of the destination brand. Clarification of the definitions of "destination brand", "territorial branding" and "destination safety" provided grounds for interpreting safety as a multidimensional characteristic of a space that integrates the objective level of protection with tourists' subjective perception of its reliability, predictability and comfort.

The main components of destination brand safety have been systematised, and it has been demonstrated that their impact varies depending on the type of location. It has been established that the physical and institutional vectors are fundamental to all destinations, whilst the environmental vector dominates in nature-based and recreational destinations, the social and informational vectors in urban and event-based destinations, and the sanitary and epidemiological vector in internationally oriented centres. This differentiation transforms the theoretical classification into an innovative applied tool for crisis management of territorial brand capital. The empirical component of the study established a weak inverse relationship between the number of air raid alerts and the volume of tourist tax revenue in the regions of Ukraine in 2024. It was demonstrated that the safety factor is not the sole linear determinant of tourism activity; rather, its actual impact is multifactorial, spatially differentiated across the three identified groups of regions, and mediated through the psychological mechanisms of consumer perception.

As part of the study, a conceptual model has been developed in which safety is identified as a three-dimensional strategic resource of a destination, encompassing functional, emotional and communicative dimensions. This resource serves as a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring the resilience of territorial brands during periods of macro-regional turbulence. The visualised model illustrates the end-to-end chain of transformation from perceived safety to consumer loyalty, where environmental safety shapes the cognitive-affective image of the territory, on the basis of which trust is progressively built, perceived risk is minimised, and tourists' future behavioural intentions are established. The characteristics of a destructive brand development scenario under the influence of safety threats are outlined. A mechanism is identified whereby safety incidents and ineffective communication management in the digital communication environment act as direct triggers for a decline in trust in the brand, creating the conditions for the gradual erosion of the territory's reputational capital. The formulated provisions lay the theoretical foundation for the applied safety-oriented repositioning of the

tourism market. The practical significance of the findings lies in their potential use by local authorities, destination management organisations and hospitality industry stakeholders to develop crisis-oriented brand strategies. The proposed approach can be applied to identify priority safety components, improve security and service infrastructure, establish transparent crisis communications, and strengthen consumer confidence in destinations during crisis and post-crisis periods. Prospects for further research lie in the quantitative measurement of the strength of the relationship between the level of perceived safety and the volume of

brand equity in different types of destinations during their post-crisis recovery.

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Conflict of Interest

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Безпека як стратегічний елемент брендингу туристичних дестинацій для зміцнення резильєнтності у кризових умовах

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена посиленням ролі безпеки у формуванні туристичної привабливості територій в умовах глобальної нестабільності, воєнних ризиків і підвищеної чутливості туристів до загроз. Метою статті було теоретичне обґрунтування ролі безпеки як стратегічного елемента брендингу туристичних дестинацій та розкриття механізму її впливу на формування образу території, довіри туристів, їхніх намірів і резильєнтності дестинацій у кризових умовах. У дослідженні використано системний підхід, методи теоретичного узагальнення, систематизації, структурно-логічного аналізу, дедукції, наукової інтерпретації, графічної візуалізації, вторинного аналізу статистичних даних, картографічний метод і кореляційний аналіз. У результаті уточнено зміст понять бренду туристичної дестинації, брендингу туристичних дестинацій і безпеки туристичної дестинації. Систематизовано фізичну, соціальну, санітарно-епідеміологічну, інформаційну, екологічну та інституційну складові безпеки як елемента бренду дестинації. Обґрунтовано, що безпека впливає на бренд дестинації через багаторівневий механізм, формуючи когнітивний та емоційний компоненти образу території, довіру до неї, зниження сприйманого ризику та позитивні поведінкові наміри туристів. Розроблено концептуальну модель формування бренду дестинації на основі інтеграції безпекових чинників у позитивному і негативному сценаріях. Емпіричний аналіз регіональних даних України виявив слабкий обернений зв'язок між кількістю повітряних тривог і обсягом туристичного збору, що підтверджує вплив безпекового чинника на туристичну активність. Практична цінність результатів полягає у можливості їх використання органами місцевого самоврядування, організаціями з менеджменту дестинацій і суб'єктами індустрії гостинності для формування резильєнтних стратегій просування територій у кризовий і посткризовий періоди

Ключові слова: брендова цінність дестинації; туристична довіра; поведінкові наміри туристів; кризова стійкість; репутаційне позиціонування; сприйняття ризику подорожі; стратегії відновлення туризму