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Employer and internal branding research: A bibliometric analysis of 25 years

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Abstract

Purpose

In the past 25 years, employer and internal branding have grown significantly. Prior reviews tended to focus on either one of these domains. This study aims to map the intellectual structure of research on both employer branding and internal branding, thereby identifying impactful authors and journals, current and evolving themes and avenues for future research.

Design/methodology/approach

Using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny software packages, a bibliometric analysis of 739 articles was conducted using various methods such as citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, cluster analysis, keyword analysis and three-field plot. The Scopus results were further validated using 297 articles produced by the Web of Science data set. It ensured the robustness of the results and generalizability of the findings across bibliometric data sets.

Findings

The findings first report the impactful articles, authors and institutions of employer and internal branding research, along with popular keywords used in this area. Next, the analysis reveals four major clusters and seven subthemes (i.e. employer brand and job seekers, employer brand and employees, employer brand and international human resource management (HRM), third-party employer branding, internal branding – conceptualization/review, internal branding – antecedents and consequences, internal brand management). Early research focused more on “corporate brandings,” whereas current research deals more with “employer branding: antecedents and consequences,” “employer branding conceptualization/review,” and “internal branding” and its subthemes. The employer and internal branding clusters have evolved largely independent from each other. This study offers future research directions and practical implications per cluster.

Originality/value

To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this study is the first comprehensive bibliometric analysis of both employer and internal branding research.

Keywords

Employer branding, Internal branding, Employee branding, Employee value proposition, Bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer, Biblioshiny

Introduction

In the past 25 years, key principles of marketing and, in particular, the “science of branding” have been applied to human resource (HR) activities in relation to current and potential employees (Edwards, 2010; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016; Theurer *et al.*, 2018). Marketing/branding strategies are leveraged for influencing human resource management (HRM) systems and processes, thereby leading to better HRM outcomes such as higher employer attractiveness, increased employee commitment, engagement and productivity, reduced employee turnover intentions and even better firm performance (Fulmer *et al.*, 2003).

In 2004, Backhaus and Tikoo published a landmark article to conceptualize and study employer branding (after Ambler and Barrow, 1996, coined the term “employer brand”). In this article, they applied marketing principles (brand equity) to recruitment contexts because an organization’s efforts to hire applicants are similar to efforts to attract consumers. A similar founding article on internal branding was published by Burmann and Zeplin (2005), which offers the most widely used conceptualization in recent internal branding research (Du Preez and Bendixen, 2015). The authors conceptualized internal branding as brand-centered HR activities, brand communications and brand leadership. Later, based on the systematic literature review, Saleem and Iglesias (2016) proposed the five components of internal branding – brand ideologies, brand leadership, brand-centered HRM, internal brand communication and internal brand communities.

Since these pioneering articles, two different research streams have emerged: one on employer branding and the other one on internal branding. These two domains and concepts are best distinguished in terms of their objectives [1]. Employer branding is about engaging current and prospective employees to establish a perception that the organization is a great place to work (King *et al.*, 2012; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Saini and Jawahar, 2019; Theurer *et al.*, 2018). So, it focuses on attracting, motivating and retaining potential and current employees at the expense of other competing companies. Conversely, internal branding focuses on encouraging employees to live the brand and consistently delivering on brand promises so that individual employee behavior is congruent with the communicated brand identity (King *et al.*, 2012; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Thus, internal branding aims to affect customers’ experiences and perceptions of the brand through employee knowledge, commitment and behavior.

In recent years, several reviews have been published. Two major reviews dealt with employer branding (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Theurer *et al.*, 2018), whereas two others (King *et al.*, 2012; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016) concentrated on internal branding. Critically, none of them attempted to review research on both employer and internal branding. Yet, a certain degree of cross-pollination might and should also be expected because both streams share a similar theoretical background (notion of brand equity or the added effects that uniquely result from consumers’ perception of the brand name of a product/service rather than from the product/service itself without that specific brand name; Keller, 1998). Currently, there is no insight into how distinct these two research streams are and whether there exists any cross-fertilization (in terms of overlapping themes and research collaborations).

Therefore, the study conducts a bibliometric examination of 739 articles on employer and internal branding. Compared with traditional literature reviews, in the bibliometric approach, massive amounts of scientific data such as citation counts, occurrences of keywords (instead of the scholars) take center stage. Accordingly, a bibliometric analysis complements traditional literature reviews because it serves as a more objective and less biased analytical approach (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003) for revealing the current and evolutionary nuances of a specific discipline [2].

In particular, a bibliometric approach is well suited for better understanding the employer and internal branding field for several reasons. First, it allows uncovering the intellectual structure of these domains by pinpointing the influential authors, countries, institutions, potential collaborations and networking patterns. Second, it detects dominant research themes by identifying clusters within a

field. Third, a bibliometric approach that deals with 25 years of academic research on the employer and internal branding offers essential insights into the evolution of the literature and sheds light on the matured and emerging areas of this field. Finally, besides revealing the current status, themes and developments in a field, bibliometric analysis enables building foundations for the future by delineating research gaps and fruitful research avenues.

In sum, our bibliometric analysis of 739 articles on the employer and internal branding is the first complete systematic quantitative analysis of the employer and internal branding domain. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Who or which are the most dominant authors, articles, journals, organizations and countries that have contributed to the employer and internal branding research?

RQ2. What are the current employer and internal branding research themes? How can these themes develop further? Has their prevalence changed over time?

RQ3. What are the major keywords in employer and internal branding research and how have they changed over time?

RQ4. What are the future research avenues in employer and internal branding?

Methodology

The present study followed Donthu *et al.*'s (2021) recommendations for the bibliometric analysis. In particular, the study proceeded along the following five stages:

Step 1: selection of database

Several databases are available for bibliometric analysis, such as Scopus, PubMed and Web of Science (WoS) (AlRyalat *et al.*, 2019). According to AlRyalat *et al.* (2019), PubMed is centered on biomedical and life science research, whereas WoS and Scopus focus on multidisciplinary research. It was decided to use Elsevier's Scopus over Clarivate's WoS because of better coverage (Paul *et al.*, 2021; Pranckutė, 2021). The former covers 25,100 journals with 1.7 billion citations, whereas the latter has 21,419 listed journals with access to 1.6 billion citations (Elsevier, 2020; WoS, 2021). However, the Scopus results were validated using WoS data set [3]. It was an essential step to check the robustness of the results, increase the generalizability of the findings across bibliometric data sets and avoid database errors and idiosyncrasies (Donthu *et al.*, 2021).

Step 2: creating the search formula

The employer and internal branding literature were scrutinized to create the search formula. It was found that other than "employer branding" (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), there are some additional commonly used keywords. These are "employer brand" (Ambler and Barrow, 1996), "employer value proposition" (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015), "employer image" (Lievens *et al.*, 2007), "employer brand equity" (Alshathry *et al.*, 2017; Theurer *et al.*, 2018), "internal branding" (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; King *et al.*, 2012; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011), "internal brand management" (Burmman *et al.*, 2009) and "employee branding" (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Additional keywords included "employer reputation" (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2010; Dögl and Holtbrügge, 2014), "employer identity" (Lievens *et al.*, 2007), "recruiter equity" (Banerjee *et al.*, 2020; Yu and Cable, 2012) and "employer advertising" (Ewing *et al.*, 2002; Puncheva-Michelotti *et al.*, 2018). So, these were further added to the search query.

The "title, abstracts and keywords" search fields were used and Boolean Operators "AND/OR" were applied to the identified keywords. It led to the following final search formula: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("employ* brand*" OR "employ* value proposition" OR "employ* image" OR "employ* brand equity" OR "employ* reputation" OR "employ* identity" OR "recruit* equity" OR "employ* advertising" OR "internal brand*").

Step 3: data collection and retrieval

The above search formula initially yielded 2,023 documents (Figure 1). Documents from subject areas other than "Business, Management and Accounting" were excluded, resulting in 901 documents.

Next, only articles and reviews (also known as “certified knowledge”) were selected as recommended by Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro (2004). So, all other documents, such as conference papers, books and book chapters, were excluded. Subsequently, 776 articles remained on the list. Next, 763 articles that appeared in journals only were shortlisted to ensure that other sources such as conference proceedings, books and book series were not part of the data set. All articles written in a non-English language were then excluded, which led to a pool of 744 articles. Finally, articles published before 1996 (the year when the first academic article on employer branding was published) were excluded, resulting in a final set of 739 articles. These articles were then retrieved from Scopus in a comma-separated (.csv) file.

Step 4: conducting the analysis

As highlighted by Donthu *et al.* (2021), both main and enrichment analyses were conducted for the present study. Performance analysis and science mapping analyses were performed as the main analyses, whereas visualization techniques were adopted under enrichment analyses (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). The study used both *Biblioshiny* and *VOSviewer* for the analysis. The extensive set of bibliometric techniques offered by *Biblioshiny* tool, combined with a network visualization tool like *VOSviewer*, enable bibliometric scholars to complement and leverage the strengths and overcome the limitations of each (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Moral-Muñoz *et al.*, 2020). Because of this advantage, recent bibliometric studies (Abhishek and Srivastava, 2021; Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2022) have adopted the *Biblioshiny*–*VOSviewer* combination.

The study used *VOSviewer* to identify the most cited documents, authors, sources and organizations and conduct bibliographic coupling (see below). *Biblioshiny* was used to obtain the annual scientific production graph, geographic spread of the top five countries, the author impact, source impact and most local cited sources in the domain. Different keyword analyses were then performed to obtain the top 30 keywords, treemap, word growth analysis, trend topic analysis and thematic map analysis. Finally, a three-field plot was generated to visualize the interaction between countries, keywords and journals in the domain.

Step 5: identifying the present themes and future research directions

Bibliographic coupling using *VOSviewer* was performed to identify the domain’s various evolving themes/clusters. According to Donthu *et al.* (2021), business scholars should use this analysis to obtain the evolving themes and developments in the domain. Later, the output of keyword analyses, cluster analysis and content analysis was used to propose yet unexamined future research directions under each theme, following the recommendations of Donthu *et al.* (2021).

Results and interpretations

Results of performance and citation analyses

The annual production of 739 documents from 1996 to 2021 is presented in Figure 2, with a yearly growth rate of 21%. These 739 articles are published in 309 journals with 22.56 average citations per document and 38,136 references. These documents include 685 articles and 54 reviews.

An article-wise analysis resulted in 465 articles (377 linked) with a minimum of 3 citations. Table 1 presents the top 10 cited documents. Harris and de Chernatony’s (2001) article “Corporate branding and corporate brand performance” received the highest citations (408). The article examines the relationship between organizational structures and individual brand supporting behavior and shows the significance of leadership in the internal brand building process. The second highest cited (406 citations) article is by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which provides conceptual clarity to researchers and outlines the theoretical foundations of employer branding. Berthon *et al.* (2005) (323 citations) proposed five dimensions of employer attractiveness which subsequent researchers have used (Saini *et al.*, 2014; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013), making it a helpful paper in this area. Overall, the top 10 cited articles represent a good mix of three major themes: “employer branding” (Backhaus and Tikoo,

2004; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Edwards, 2010), “internal branding” (Burmam *et al.*, 2009; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006) and “corporate branding” (Aaker, 2004; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001).

An author-wise analysis revealed 71 authors who have at least three documents with a minimum of three citations. The list of the top ten cited authors is given in Table 2. *De Chernatony L* is the most influential author with six documents and 802 citations, followed by *King C.* (18 documents, 688 citations), *Punjaisri K.* (eight documents, 565 citations) and *Lievens F.* (six documents, 493 citations). The “author impact analysis” conducted on *Biblioshiny* revealed that *King C.* has the highest *h*-index of 14. At the same time, both *Grace D.* and *Punjaisri K.* are at the number two position, with an *h*-index of seven each (Table 3).

Next, a source-wise analysis was performed, resulting in 73 such journals with at least three documents and three citations. Table 4 presents the top ten cited sources in the domain and Table 5 depicts the source impact analysis output. The *European Journal of Marketing* emerged as the leading journal in the discipline with 18 documents and 1,648 citations (Table 4), followed by the *Journal of Brand Management* (31 documents, 979 citations). However, in the source impact analysis, the *Journal of Brand Management* and *European Journal of Marketing* stands at the top position with *h*-index of 16 each. Table 6 presents the list of most local cited sources. The *Journal of Brand Management* is the most locally cited source, with 1,257 local citations.

An organization-wise analysis was then conducted, which resulted in 59 institutions with a minimum of two documents and two citations. The top ten influential organizations in the domain are listed in Table 7. The Business School of Birmingham University, the UK; Thammasat University, Thailand; and the University of Lugano, Switzerland emerged as the top institutions with two documents and 288 citations each. Finally, it was found that 44 countries have at least three documents and three citations in a country-wise analysis. The USA is the most influential country with 156 documents and 6,205 citations; the UK is number two with 101 documents and 3,713 citations, followed by Germany (61 documents, 1,432 citations) and Australia (35 documents, 1,426 citations).

The analysis shows that the employer and internal branding domains are growing exponentially. It is also striking that scholars publish in a large number of journals. However, some prominent journal “hubs” have emerged over the past few years that publish employer and internal branding research. Following the categorization of the developmental stages of a phenomenon (von Krogh *et al.*, 2012), one can conclude that the employer and internal branding domains have moved from an embryonic to a growth stage. Employer and internal branding research are not yet in a mature stage because there are no specific journals devoted to them.

Results of science mapping and visualization

Figure 3 presents the top 30 salient keywords. As visible from the figure, “employer branding,” “internal branding,” and “employer brand” are some of the most popular keywords in the domain. Figure 4 shows the treemap depicting that “employer branding” has 31% occurrences, whereas the keywords “internal branding” and “employer brand” have 21% and 8% occurrences, respectively. The word growth graph is presented in Figure 5. Interestingly, the figure shows that keywords such as “employer branding,” “internal branding,” “employer brand,” “employee engagement” and “internal brand management” are growing in usage, whereas “corporate branding” and “brand management” are declining. This trend is understandable because the employer and internal branding adjusted its terminology in the early 2000s after the publication of some critical papers [Berthon *et al.* (2005), Burmam *et al.* (2009), Edwards (2010), King and Grace (2010), King *et al.* (2012), Lievens *et al.* (2007) and Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006)]. They guided subsequent scholars to use more discipline-focused constructs. Conversely, earlier articles on the employer and internal branding used constructs from general fields of corporate branding and brand management.

Next, a trend topic analysis was performed to understand the top three trending keywords of the domain in the past decade. “Author’s keywords” was set as the field of analysis and the minimum word frequency was set to five. A similar trend like the word growth graph can be witnessed here also (Figure 6). In the last wave of research (five years: 2016–2021), the use of keywords has been driven by the recent and increased focus on the application of branding for both existing and potential employees and this domain of research has used constructs such as “recruitment,” “internal brand management,” “human resource management” and “employee engagement.” Further, the rising presence of employees and job seekers on social media and the increasing use of social media for employer branding has given impetus to studies on social media in employer branding contexts, leading to the emergence of “social media” as a major keyword.

A thematic map analysis was also conducted to obtain the emerging themes in the domain (Figure 7). The analysis was run with 100 author’s keywords and a minimum cluster frequency of 10 (per thousand documents), which resulted in five clusters on the map. The bigger the circle, the higher the number of keywords appearing in that cluster Cobo *et al.* (2011). “Internal branding” emerged as the most prominent cluster with 18 independent keywords and 338 cumulative occurrences, followed by “corporate branding,” having 14 separate keywords with 182 cumulative frequencies. Centrality and density are the two dimensions of the map. The term *centrality* refers to “the intensity of its links with other clusters” (Callon *et al.*, 1991, p. 164). It is, therefore, indicative of the importance of a theme in developing a particular domain. In contrast, *density* denotes “the strength of the links that tie the words making up the cluster together” (Callon *et al.*, 1991, p. 165). It measures the theme’s capability to sustain and develop itself over a period (Callon *et al.*, 1991; Cobo *et al.*, 2011). On the basis of Figure 7, one can visualize that the “internal branding” cluster is a “motor-theme” in the domain as it belongs to the quadrant having both high density and centrality. It implies that this theme is well connected with other themes in the domain and the keywords belonging to this cluster are closely tied up with each other. Some of the major keywords falling in this cluster are “brand commitment,” “internal marketing,” “brand citizenship behavior,” “internal brand management,” “employee brand commitment” and “brand identification.” Conversely, the “brand management” cluster appears in the quadrant with low density and low centrality, and this theme can be considered a declining theme in the domain (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). It is also evident that the “corporate branding” cluster has a relatively higher density, whereas the “employer brand” has the lowest density. This can be further validated by looking at keywords appearing in these clusters. For instance, the theme “corporate branding” contains keywords such as “organizational culture,” “corporate image,” “corporate identity,” and “corporate reputation,” which seem closely related. The theme “employer brand” has keywords like “work engagement,” “talent management,” “organizational identification” and ‘HRM’, which are loosely tied together. Finally, the analysis shows that the “employer branding” cluster partially appears in the fourth quadrant, suggesting this theme is significant for the domain but still developing and needs more consideration by scholars (Cobo *et al.*, 2011).

The three-field plot of country, keywords and journal is presented in Figure 8. The plot is based on the Sankey diagrams, in which the bigger boxes represent more occurrences (Riehmman *et al.*, 2005). As shown, scholars from India (e.g., Saini *et al.*, 2021) use keywords like “employer branding” and “employee engagement” more often, whereas keywords such as “internal branding” and “internal brand management” are more popular among US scholars. Scholars from the UK and Germany mostly use “employer branding” in their studies apart from “internal branding.” Examining journal-wise keywords, apart from “employer branding,” the “internal branding” keyword is preferred in the *Journal of Product and Brand Management* and *Journal of Brand Management*. In contrast, the *European Journal of Marketing* the terms prefers “corporate branding” and “employees” as keywords.

Validation of citation analysis and science mapping results using Web of Science data set [4] The results obtained through the Scopus dataset were validated using the WoS dataset to assess the findings’ robustness. The same search formula was used and the exact steps were followed to shortlist the articles that were used for the Scopus database search. A total of 297 articles met the inclusion

criteria and were selected to validate the Scopus results. Most of the bibliometric analyses were repeated on the selected articles and the WoS results were compared with those of Scopus (Web Appendix A) [5].

As expected, both results were highly similar, with minor exceptions. Specifically, six of the top ten cited documents were exactly the same, as noted in Table 1 of Web Appendix A. Among the four new articles produced by WoS results, two articles (King and Grace, 2010; Sirianni *et al.*, 2013) were among the top 15 cited documents, whereas the remaining two articles – Collins and Stevens (2002) and Highhouse *et al.* (2007) – did not appear in the Scopus search and hence were absent from the Scopus results. Similarly, the top ten cited authors' lists were almost identical, with seven authors appearing in both lists with highly similar ranks. WoS analysis produced three new authors in the top ten cited authors: I. M. Welpe, R. Piehler and R. Du Preez (see Table 2 of Web Appendix A). All three of them also appeared in the extended rank list. Comparing the top ten cited sources also generated a similar journal list with six matching journals. The remaining four new journals (i.e. *Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Journal of Service Management* and *Industrial Marketing Management*) produced by the WoS dataset (Table 3 of Web Appendix A) were present in the top 20 cited journals list of Scopus results. Finally, both the databases ranked the top five countries identically in their contribution to the discipline.

The study also compared the Scopus results with WoS results on several other parameters, such as popular keywords and their occurrences, growth in keywords over time and clusters produced by the thematic map and a three-field plot of country, keywords and journal. Specifically, three major keywords, “employer branding,” “internal branding” and “employer brand,” were among the top five keywords in both databases. A similar pattern was observed in the “word growth graph” (Figures 3 and 5 of Web Appendix A). Additionally, the WoS database produced two keywords – “branding” and “brand.” The treemap comparison revealed that “internal branding” and “employer brand” keywords occurrences were identical in both databases. However, the “employer branding” keyword had 31% occurrences in Scopus against 18% occurrences in the WoS database (Figure 4 of Web Appendix A). The “internal branding” and “employer branding” clusters had similar positions on the thematic map generated by both the databases. However, differences were observed in the position of “employer brand” and “corporate branding” clusters (Figure 6 of Web Appendix A). A closer inspection revealed that the lower score of “employer brand” on centrality was due to the lower intensity of its links with other clusters. In other words, the keywords belonging to the “employer brand” cluster had lower connections with other clusters. Such minor variations are not unexpected, considering the significant differences in journal coverage of the two databases. Finally, a three-field plot of country, keywords and journal generated by the WoS data set (Figure 7 of Web Appendix A) converged with the results obtained by the Scopus data set.

All of this shows that similar results, patterns and trends were observed regardless of the database used. It is consistent with prior research (Archambault *et al.*, 2009) that found high correlations between bibliometric results from Scopus and WoS.

Cluster analysis

Bibliometric coupling using *VOSviewer* was also conducted to understand the domain and its evolving themes better. In this analysis, the unit of analysis can be the author, document or source (Van Eck and Waltman, 2019). “Document” was selected as the unit and “fractional counting” as the analysis method, as per the recommendations of Perianes-Rodriguez *et al.* (2016). The minimum threshold for the number of citations was set to 50, which resulted in 85 documents. *VOSviewer* grouped these documents into eight clusters. However, a careful reading of articles showed that 18 articles were unrelated to the employer and internal branding or any of the themes or subthemes generated in the previous analyses. Hence, they were dropped from further analysis. A careful content analysis was performed on the remaining 67 articles to assess the face validity of each cluster and examine within and across cluster parsimony. This generated four clusters which consisted of “employer branding” (comprising two subclusters i.e. “employer branding conceptualization/review” and “employer

branding: antecedents and consequences”) and two unique clusters of “internal branding” and “corporate branding.” The findings categorized the “employer branding” cluster into two subclusters based on the kind of topics/issues studied by the articles in this cluster. The papers in the “employer branding” cluster were either “conceptual/review” or they studied “antecedents and/or consequences of employer branding” and hence were labelled accordingly. Table 8 reports [6] the details of the articles classified in each of the four clusters with their citations and total link strength. These four clusters are discussed in this section.

Cluster 1 A: employer branding conceptualization/review

This cluster represents nine articles that were either conceptual (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010) or review papers (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Theurer *et al.*, 2018) and hence forming a natural group. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) received the highest number of citations (406), followed by Berthon *et al.* (2005) with 323 citations. Higher citations accrued by these papers are understandable as they contribute to the conceptual understanding of the discipline. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) combined the resource-based view with brand equity theory and proposed testable propositions about the relationship between employer branding and organizational career management. Theurer *et al.* (2018) has the highest total link strength (100). This article reviewed 187 papers and proposed an “employer branding value chain model” covering all aspects of antecedents (i.e. employer branding activities such as employee value proposition [EVP] positioning, job design, internal employees EVP marketing and rewards systems) and consequences (i.e. influence on job seekers and employees, reputation effects and shareholder value) of employer branding. Similarly, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) discussed the antecedents (i.e. organizational actions and characteristics, organizational as well as nonorganizational information) and outcomes (i.e. prehire/posthire outcomes, differentiation, emotional bond and return on investment) of employer image. Several scholars have referred Berthon *et al.*'s (2005) scale development paper to measure the dimensions of employer attractiveness or EVP defined in five values – development, social, interest, application and economic. Other important papers in this cluster are Aggerholm *et al.* (2011), Foster *et al.* (2010) and Martin *et al.* (2011).

Cluster 1B – employer branding: antecedents and consequences

The major antecedents of employer branding include elements of EVP, corporate social responsibility (CSR), culture and employer branding activities, while outcomes include employee satisfaction, turnover intention, loyalty and employer attractiveness. A content analysis of this cluster revealed that it comprised papers related to the four themes:

1. Employer brand and job seekers (16 papers);
2. Employer brand and employees (six papers);
3. Employer brand and international HRM (IHRM) (three articles); and
4. Third-party employer branding (two articles).

Thus, the discussion is structured accordingly.

Cluster 1B – theme (i): employer brand and job seekers.

This theme deals with antecedents and/or consequences of employer brand for job seekers. In this theme, Collins and Stevens (2002) received the highest citations (244), followed by Cable and Graham (2000) (207 citations) and Lievens (2007) and Wilden *et al.* (2010) with 137 citations each. Cable and Graham (2000) found that industry type, developmental opportunities and organizational culture affect the job seekers’ reputation perceptions, whereas Lievens (2007) assessed the importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for different segments of employees in the Belgian Army, such as military employees, actual and potential applicants and found significant differences across the segments. Wilden *et al.* (2010, p. 56) found that potential employees assess the attractiveness of employers based on their earlier direct work experiences with the employer, where the credibility, consistency and clarity of the employers’ brand signals are essential for increasing employer attractiveness. Other significant papers included in this cluster are Elving *et al.* (2013), Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017), Moroko and Uncles (2008) and Sivertzen *et*

al. (2013). Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017) showed that millennial job seekers' attitudes toward CSR play a vital role in understanding how they perceived CSR signals which subsequently influence employer attractiveness.

Cluster 1B – theme (ii): employer brand and employees.

This theme has papers (Cascio, 2014; Davies, 2008; Dögl and Holtbrügge, 2014; Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Schlager *et al.*, 2011) related to the antecedents and/or consequences of employer brand for employees. In a service sector company, Schlager *et al.* (2011) found a positive influence of the perceived employer brand on employees' attitudes. They argued to create a strong employer brand as it contributes to service branding. Cascio (2014) suggested that employer brand, performance management strategies and innovative approaches to designing and delivering HRD initiatives are three crucial strategies for employee retention. Maxwell and Knox (2009) identified attributes that made an organization's employer brand attractive to its current employees and grouped them into four categories, i.e. employment, organizational successes, construed external image and product or service characteristics. Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014) found the positive influence of the corporate's environmental responsibility on the employer's reputation and employee commitment. This cluster is less about the actual internal brand management (IBM) but more about how the external image impacts how employees see their company, their attitude and their decision to keep working in it.

Cluster 1B – theme (iii): employer brand and international human resource management.

The papers (Baum and Kabst, 2013; Brewster *et al.*, 2005; Stahl *et al.*, 2012) of this theme are related to employer brand from the IHRM perspective. Baum and Kabst (2013) found that the impact of some elements of employer image (e.g. task attractiveness) on intention to apply varies across geographies. In contrast, no country-wise differences were observed for career opportunities and working atmosphere attributes. Stahl *et al.* (2012) proposed "employer branding through differentiation" as one of the six effective global talent management principles. Brewster *et al.* (2005) identified the organizational drivers of IHRM: efficiency orientation, global service provision, information exchange, core business processes and localization of decision-making. Further, the article also proposed the enablers of high-performance IHRM: HR affordability, central HR philosophy and HR excellence and knowledge transfer.

Cluster 1B – theme (iv): third-party employer branding.

This theme represented the papers studying newer phenomena in the discipline, such as third-party employment branding (Dineen and Allen, 2016) and crowdsourced employer branding (Dabirian *et al.*, 2017). This theme has gained prominence because of its rising popularity among managers. Dineen and Allen (2016) found that third-party employment branding (i.e. "best places to work" certifications) has a favorable influence on key human capital outcomes such as applicant pool quality and turnover intentions, whereas Dabirian *et al.* (2017), using 38,000 Glassdoor reviews of the highest- and lowest-ranked employers, identified seven employer branding value propositions that current, former and potential employees consider while evaluating employers.

Cluster 2: internal branding.

A content analysis of this cluster revealed that it has papers on three themes:

1. Internal branding – conceptualization or review (4 papers);
2. Internal branding – antecedences and/or consequences (19 papers); and
3. IBM (10 articles).

The three themes are discussed below.

Cluster 2 – theme (i): internal branding – conceptualization or review.

This theme has four conceptual/review papers (King *et al.*, 2012; King and Grace, 2010; Miles and Mangold, 2004; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). However, King *et al.* (2012) have made a significant contribution to this cluster by conceptualizing the employee brand equity construct and delineating its components through developing scale items. They developed a three-dimensional scale of "employee

brand equity” (i.e. brand endorsement, brand allegiance and brand-consistent behavior), which several scholars in this field have used. Saleem and Iglesias’ (2016) article published in the *Journal of Product and Brand Management* mapped the domain of the fragmented field of internal branding and has the highest total link strength in this cluster (59). The article identified the five key internal branding components: brand ideologies, brand leadership, brand-centered HRM, internal brand communication and internal brand communities. Saleem and Iglesias (2016, p. 50) define “internal branding” as:

The process through which organizations make a company-wide effort within a supportive culture to integrate brand ideologies, leadership, HRM, internal brand communications and internal brand communities, as a strategy to enable employees to consistently co-create brand value with multiple stakeholders.

A group of scholars (Miles and Mangold, 2004) has also used the “employee brand(ing)” term to represent the concept of “internal branding.” However, both terms represent the same construct and the difference between the two is more semantic than real.

Cluster 2 – theme (ii): internal branding – antecedences and/or consequences.

The major papers on this theme include Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010), de Chernatony and Cottam (2006), Morhart *et al.* (2009), Punjaisri *et al.* (2008) and Punjaisri *et al.* (2009). Morhart *et al.* (2009) is the most cited paper in this cluster with 263 citations. The article shows that “brand-specific transformational leaders influence followers through a process of internalization, leading to a decrease in turnover intentions and an increase in in-role and extra-role brand-building behaviors” (Morhart *et al.*, 2009, p. 122). Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) identified determinants and consequences of internal brand equity and found a significant influence of a brand-oriented corporate culture on internal brand equity. They also demonstrated its relationship with external brand equity.

Cluster 2: – theme (iii): internal brand management.

This theme includes ten papers, which focus on the systems and processes of IBM (Burmam *et al.*, 2009; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Terglav *et al.*, 2016). Burmam *et al.* (2009) received the highest number of citations (168), followed by Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006) (163 citations). Burmam *et al.* (2009) identified the antecedents of brand commitment or brand citizenship behavior: brand-centered HRM, internal brand communication and brand-centered leadership, which subsequently determine the quality of the brand–customer relationship. Similarly, Punjaisri and Wilson (2011, p. 1521) assessed the influence of internal branding on brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty among service employees. They recommended that service organizations should coordinate internal branding activities to enhance their employees’ identification with commitment and loyalty to the brand.

In this theme, Piehler *et al.* (2016) conceptualized and measured four IBM outcomes, namely, brand understanding, brand identification, brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior, also examining the interrelationship among these variables. In comparison, Terglav *et al.* (2016) highlighted that “the brand-oriented leadership of top management is an important driver of the internal branding process and an indirect predictor of employees’ commitment” (Terglav *et al.*, 2016, p. 1). The cluster also includes papers related to certain aspects of IBM in the tourism and hospitality sector (Buil *et al.*, 2016; King, 2010). For example, King (2010, p. 517) examined the effect of IBM practices on tourism and hospitality employees’ ability to demonstrate brand supportive behaviors and found that brand commitment significantly contributed to the brand supportive behavior of frontline employees. Similarly, Buil *et al.* (2016, p. 256), based on a study of 323 frontline hotel employees, found that internal brand communications and training enhance employees’ organizational identification, subsequently enhancing citizenship behaviors toward an organization.

Cluster 3: corporate branding

This cluster has six articles, which consisted of both conceptual reviews (Fetscherin and Usunier, 2012; Ugglá, 2006) and empirical analysis of corporate branding outcomes (Harris and de

Chernatony, 2001). In this cluster, three articles (Fetscherin and Usunier, 2012; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Uggla, 2006) appeared in the *European Journal of Marketing*, making this journal an important outlet for publishing on this theme. Harris and de Chernatony (2001) has received the highest number of citations (408), followed by Helm (2011) with 114 citations. The former article explored the implications of corporate branding for managing internal brand resources. It proposed a model for managing brands by narrowing the gap between a brand's identity and its reputation. The latter article identified how employees' awareness of their impact on employers' reputation is influenced by pride, job satisfaction, affective commitment and perceived corporate reputation. They also provided insights into leveraging internal reputation-building strategies to enhance corporate reputation. Helm (2011) has the highest total link strength (29) in this cluster. It is then followed by Fetscherin and Usunier (2012) with a total link strength of 26. The study comprises an interdisciplinary literature review of 264 papers on corporate branding published between 1969 and 2008. Yaniv and Farkas (2005, p. 447) examined the impact of person-organization fit on the corporate brand perception of employees and customers. They found that:

Employees' person-organization fit positively affects the extent to which they perceive their corporate brand values as congruent with those declared by the management and that this brand perception level of employees positively affects the perception level of the customers.

Overall, the paper in this cluster focused on "corporate branding" as a central theme, forming a natural cluster.

Implications for practice

In each cluster, many studies provide actionable recommendations for putting employer branding into practice in companies. The major implications for practice per cluster are summarized in the following sections.

Employer branding (clusters 1A and 1B)

- Make employer branding part of the corporate strategy so that it is rooted in the overall corporate brand.
- Use employer branding as an umbrella so that all recruitment and retention activities fit into the HRM strategy.
- Conduct image audits that assess both instrumental and symbolic attributes among multiple stakeholders (employees, applicants, etc.) to understand what these stakeholders find attractive about the company.
- Ensure that the messages stemming from company-controlled recruitment practices (e.g., ads, webpages, website testimonials, social media presence) are aligned in terms of branding the organization.
- Ensure that the brand presented in company-controlled recruitment practices is an accurate and authentic representation of the company and of the employment offerings.
- Monitor and manage the information on third-party employment review websites (e.g., Glassdoor).
- Assess the impact of employer brand practices on recruitment outcomes and company performance.

Internal branding (cluster 2)

- Design IBM as a strategic, company-wide effort (supported by top management) to motivate and retain valuable employees and to deliver the brand promise to all relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure HR and marketing departments work closely together.
- Invest in enhancing employees' understanding/knowledge of the brand and their emotional bond with the brand as firm foundations for IBM.
- Implement brand-centered HR practices: that is, recruitment, selection, onboarding, training (e.g., brand books to build brand knowledge), performance evaluations (e.g. KPIs) and compensation (both via rewards and recognition) should support and reinforce a consistent employee brand and delivery.

- Have employees cocreate and disseminate brand information to personalize the brand's authenticity and increase identification (e.g., storytelling, opportunities for employees to have brand experiences). Set up internal brand communities and organize workshops where the company and its employees share brand intelligence.
- Have leaders serve as catalysts (role-models) for internal brand initiatives so that everyone "walks the talk."
- Regularly monitor employees' brand knowledge and brand commitment and adjust HRM practices accordingly. Pay attention to specific groups because the impact of internal branding might vary across employees (in terms of age, educational background, tenure).

Corporate branding (cluster 3)

- Spell out, communicate and develop your brand internally and deliver it consistently.
- Ensure alignment between your consumer, employee, employer and overall brand by using consistent communication for promoting the brand to all stakeholders (current employees, potential employees, customers, etc.): The greater the congruence between employees' values and the corporate brand, the more likely employees will act in accordance with the brand and the stronger will be the brand's identity.
- Companies with a favorable corporate brand can engage their prouder and satisfied employees as brand ambassadors. Conversely, as long as the corporate brand has negative associations, do not leverage it and first focus on improving it.
- Ensure that people's perceptions (based not only on communications but also on their own experience with the brand) match the promises being made.
- Put mechanisms in place to deal with incongruent brand perceptions.

Validation of cluster analysis using Web of Science database [7]

Similar to the validation of citation analysis and science mapping results, the study also validated the cluster analysis using the WoS database. The citations threshold was reduced from 50 to 40 citations to increase the article pool. It generated 56 linked articles. Among these, 37 papers matched with the Scopus article pool and nine new articles were produced (incorporated appropriately in Table 8). The remaining ten papers did not belong to the theme of bibliometric analysis and, hence, were omitted from further analysis. The WoS cluster membership of 89% of the articles matched the Scopus cluster membership. Further, a careful content analysis helped group the remaining and new articles into the existing four clusters produced by Scopus (see the articles identified as ^{WoS} in Table 8). Specifically, among the new papers produced by the WoS database, Aaker (2004) belonged to "corporate branding," and Sirianni *et al.* (2013) was grouped with the "internal employee branding" cluster. The former article highlighted the role of corporate brands in creating and sustaining product brands. In contrast, the latter article recommended firms to leverage employee behavior through employee-brand alignment to create customer-based brand equity, especially for new or unknown brands. The remaining seven papers (Biswas and Suar, 2016; Collins, 2007; Collins and Stevens, 2002; Highhouse *et al.*, 2007; Knox and Freeman, 2006; Stahl *et al.*, 2012; Wayne and Casper, 2012) were grouped with "employer branding: antecedents and consequences" cluster. Collins and Stevens (2002) received the highest number of citations (244), followed by Stahl *et al.* (2012) with 182 citations. Collins and Stevens (2002) suggested that early recruitment-related activities (i.e. publicity, sponsorships, word-of-mouth, endorsements and advertising) indirectly influence job pursuit intentions and decisions through general attitudes toward the company and perceived job attributes. Other papers in this cluster also examine the influence of employer brand image (Knox and Freeman, 2006), recruitment practices (Collins, 2007) and HR practice reputation (Wayne and Casper, 2012) on job application behaviors, such as intention to apply as well as other antecedents and consequences of employer branding (Biswas and Suar, 2016). Overall, the cluster results of the WoS database converged with the Scopus clusters, thereby validating our cluster groupings.

Discussion

Employer branding and internal branding: two different research streams?

Although our bibliometric analysis confirms that employer branding and internal branding come from different traditions and have evolved primarily separate from each other, there was some cross-fertilization. For instance, only one cluster in employer branding dealt with how the employer's image from the outside impacts the employees' perception of their company. The theoretical notion of brand equity [8] provides another common ground between employer branding and internal branding (Theurer *et al.*, 2018). Traditionally, *customer-based brand equity* is defined as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand" (Keller, 1998, p. 45). Such differential effects include better recall, willingness to pay a price premium and more loyalty. On a broader level, building and maintaining brands are then regarded as critical for a company's strategic advantage and sustainability (i.e. *financial-based brand equity*; Atilgan *et al.*, 2005, p. 238; de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006).

Based on the same brand equity foundation, *employer-based brand equity* can be defined as the differential effect that employer brand knowledge has on an applicant's response to employer brand management. This effect may be in the form of stronger job pursuit intentions, larger and more qualified applicant pools and even superior organizational performance (Collins and Han, 2004; Cable and Turban, 2003; Fulmer *et al.*, 2003; Gardner *et al.*, 2011; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016).

Similarly, King *et al.* (2012) defined *employee-based brand equity* as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on an employee's response to internal brand management" (p. 269). These differential responses are observed in employees' willingness to go the extra mile by engaging in what they say about the company and do to promote it as brand ambassadors (de Chernatony *et al.*, 2006; King *et al.*, 2012). In addition, it results in employees' higher satisfaction, loyalty and commitment to stay and work for the company.

So, while, in the past, brand equity was primarily defined in terms of consumer-based and/or financial brand equity, recently, a more balanced, multiple stakeholder perspective has been adopted (King and Grace, 2010; King *et al.*, 2012). Essentially, this means that brand equity subsumes not only consumer-based and financial-based brand equity but also employer-based brand equity and employee-based equity. The latter two perspectives are also conceptualized as key elements of brand equity. All of this might promote more integrative research.

Future research questions

After identification of the cluster themes, all articles were carefully read, including their recommendations for future research directions. This generated a list of future research questions that were based on the suggestions given in the published articles. Next, using keyword search, this list was filtered to ensure that no research question had been already addressed by prior researchers. Thus, a list of future research questions for each cluster theme was obtained using this procedure, which is reported in Table 9. Although the classification of articles into the cluster themes was based on homogeneity of topics covered by the articles, authors of these papers sometimes proposed future research directions on a range of topics that were not always aligned with the cluster theme to which their paper belonged. The same is also reflected in the future research questions in Table 9.

Apart from the above research agenda generated from the bibliometric analysis (Table 9), the authors also briefly add below their own suggestions related to future research. Some of them build further on those mentioned in Table 9. First, it is recommended that greater attention should be paid to the novel notion of brand equity being a cocreation process. It implies that social media and online communities should be scrutinized. It has methodological implications too. Future researchers need to go beyond surveys and self-reports. Through machine learning and artificial intelligence, researchers can automatically scrape companies' employment Web pages (Theurer *et al.*, 2022), social media websites and third-party employment websites (e.g. Glassdoor, see Saini and Jawahar, 2021, 2019 for

instance). For their part, companies can use machine learning to monitor, at regular intervals, how their employer brand is perceived among various stakeholders.

Second, future researchers should examine how companies can best deal with the employer and internal brand disruptions. Examples are economic scandals, environmental disasters, diversity and inclusion issues. To this end, image repair theory (Benoit, 1995) might be used to inspire remedying actions. It might result in “rebranding” or even “unbranding” interventions.

Finally, the authors would like to reiterate their call for more cross-fertilization between employer and internal branding research. One of the subthemes provides good examples of such more integrative research. For instance, what are the effects of current employees’ perceptions of how outsiders regard the employer brand on their perceptions and engagement in internal branding activities? There is also a need to better understand the relationships and spillover between different perspectives on brand equity (consumer-based, employer-based and employee-based) and how they affect companies in the long term.

Limitations

Like any other study, the present study also has some limitations. Scopus has been used as the single source for data collection, which might have resulted in certain exclusions (yet, see our validation analyses through WoS). In addition, “Business, Management and Accounting” were chosen as the subject area. So, the data does not include articles from other areas, such as not-for-profit organizations or the government sector, where employer and internal branding is also relevant.

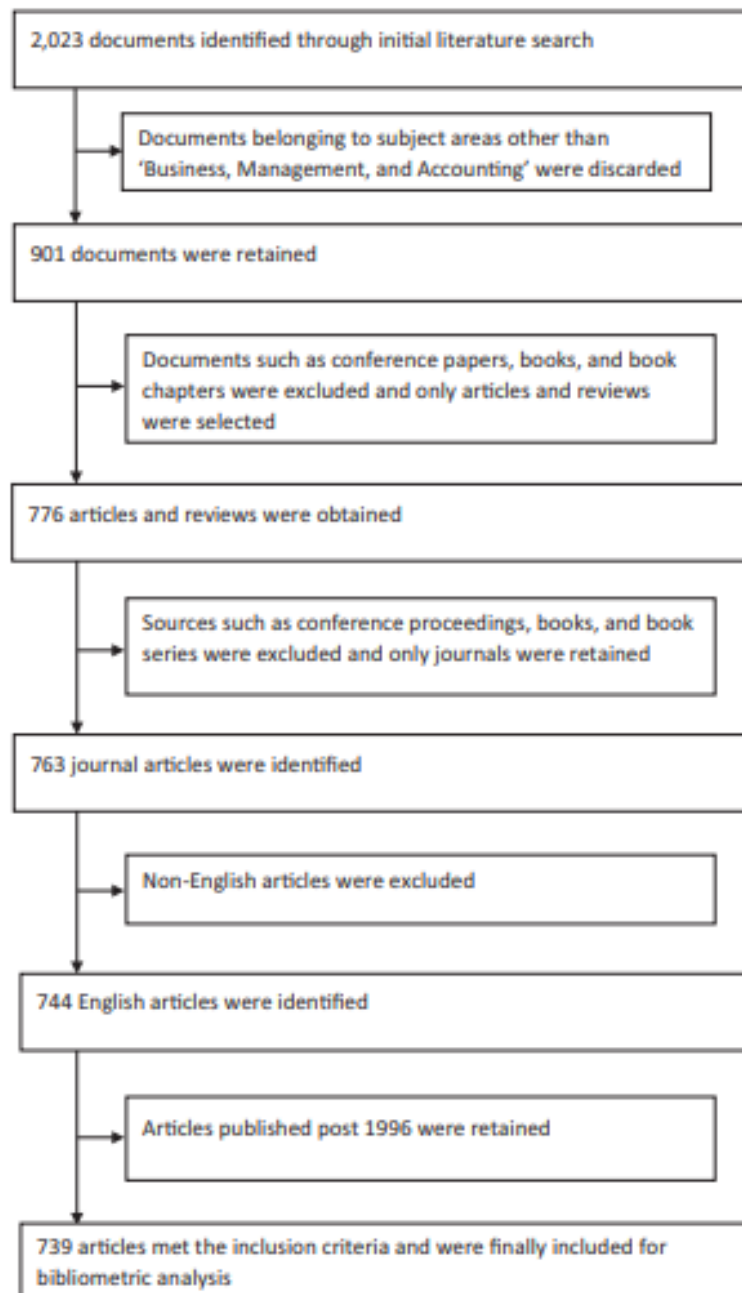
Conclusions

This study is the first bibliometric analysis of 25 years of research on employer and internal branding. The quantitative assessment contributes to prior reviews that focused on either employer branding or internal branding. Hence, the study offers an all-encompassing quantitative view of the past, present and future of employer and internal branding research. The general takeaway is that the field of employer branding is still exponentially growing and has moved from an embryonic stage to a growth stage. The first wave of employer branding research drew from brand research in general and corporate brand research in particular, however, recent studies have increasingly focused on employer branding and internal branding. Despite these two domains sharing similar theoretical underpinnings (brand equity), thus far, there has been little cross-pollination. The two streams of employer and internal branding research seem to have evolved separately from each other.

The study is helpful for both novice and seasoned researchers in employer and internal branding. Upon reading the paper, it is clear what the leading journals, seminal articles and content themes in these domains are, along with the emerging and declining trends. Moreover, the identified clusters provide a bird’s eye view of the domains while at the same time pointing to intriguing avenues for future research. All of this should provide a fruitful foundation for the next wave of employer and internal branding research.

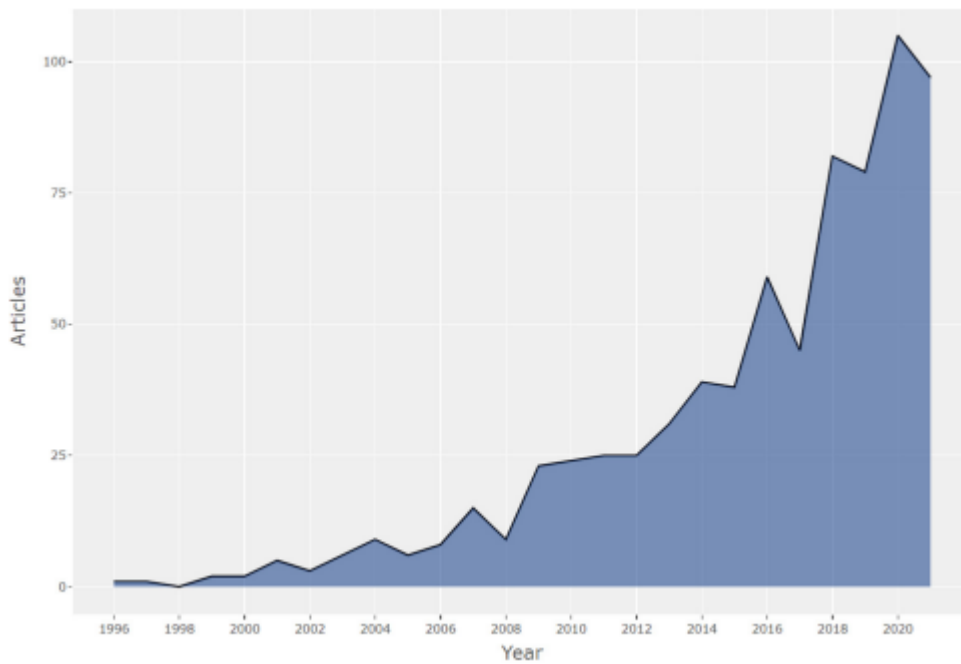
Figures

Figure 1: The steps of literature collection and selection



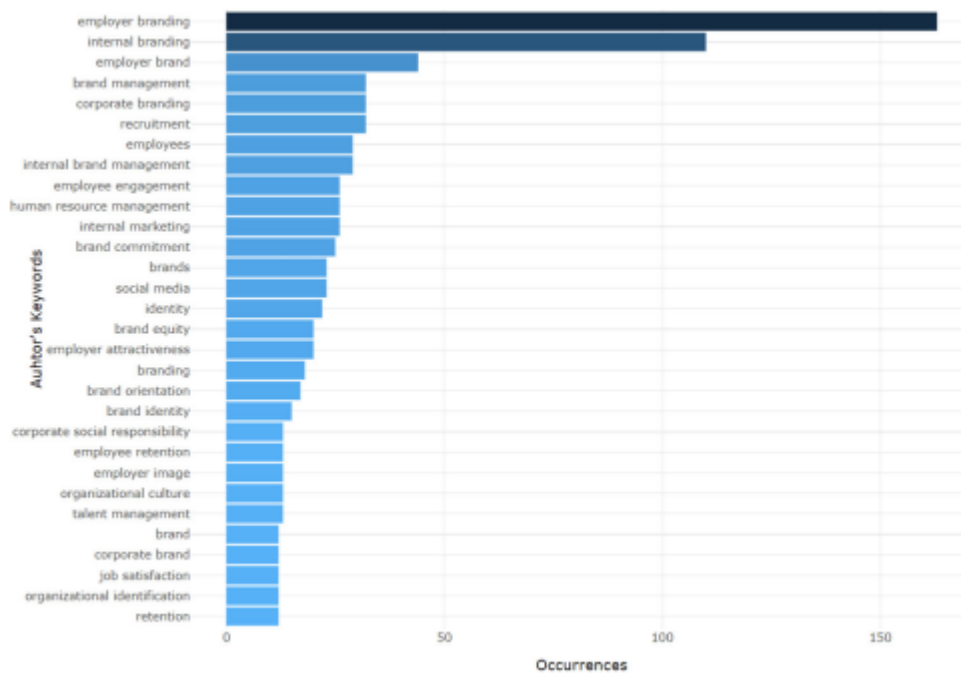
Source: The Authors

Figure 2: Annual production of 739 articles during 1996–2021



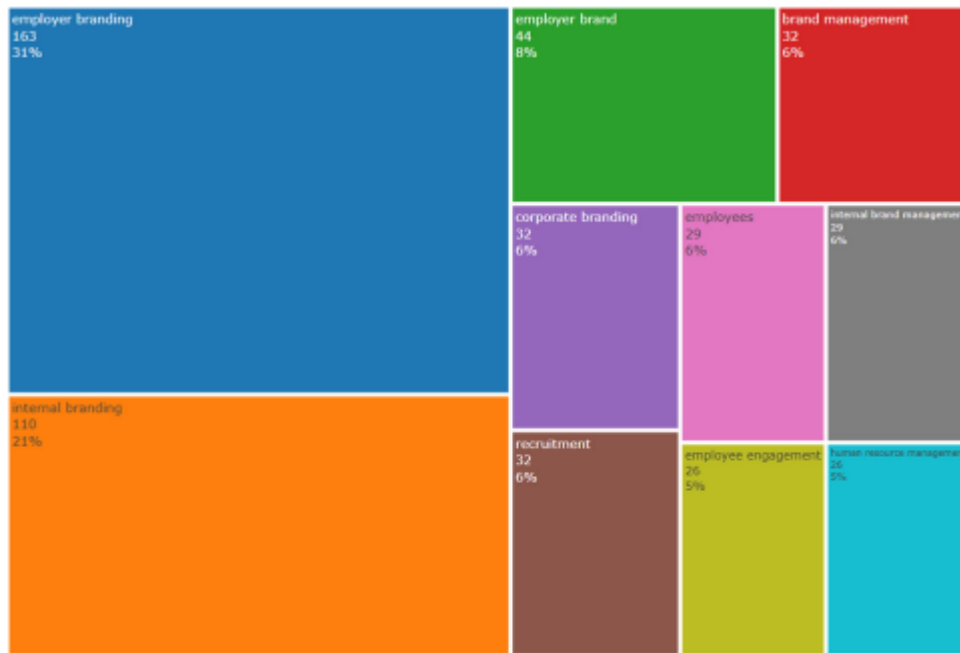
Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 3: Top-30 most popular keywords



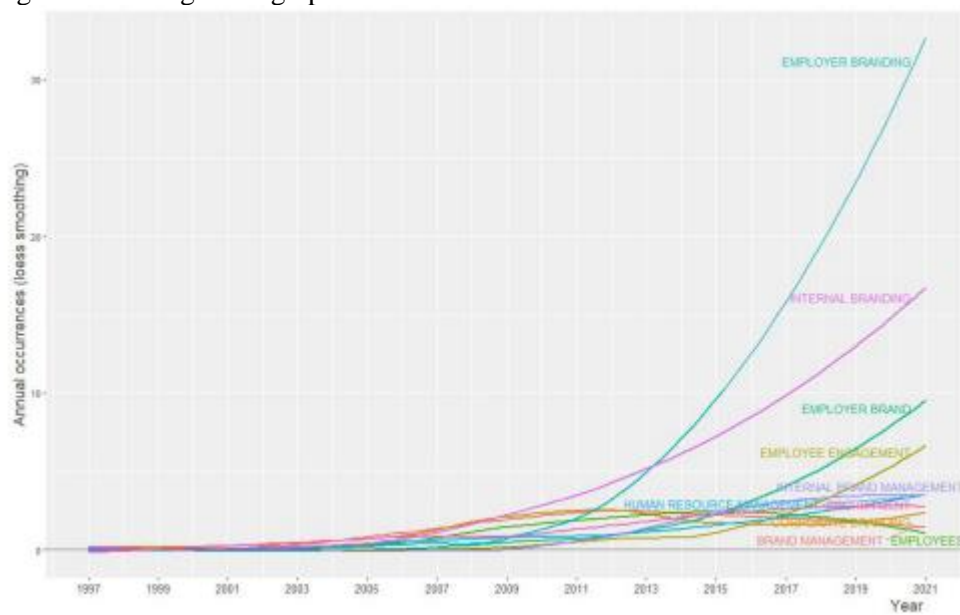
Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 4: Treemap



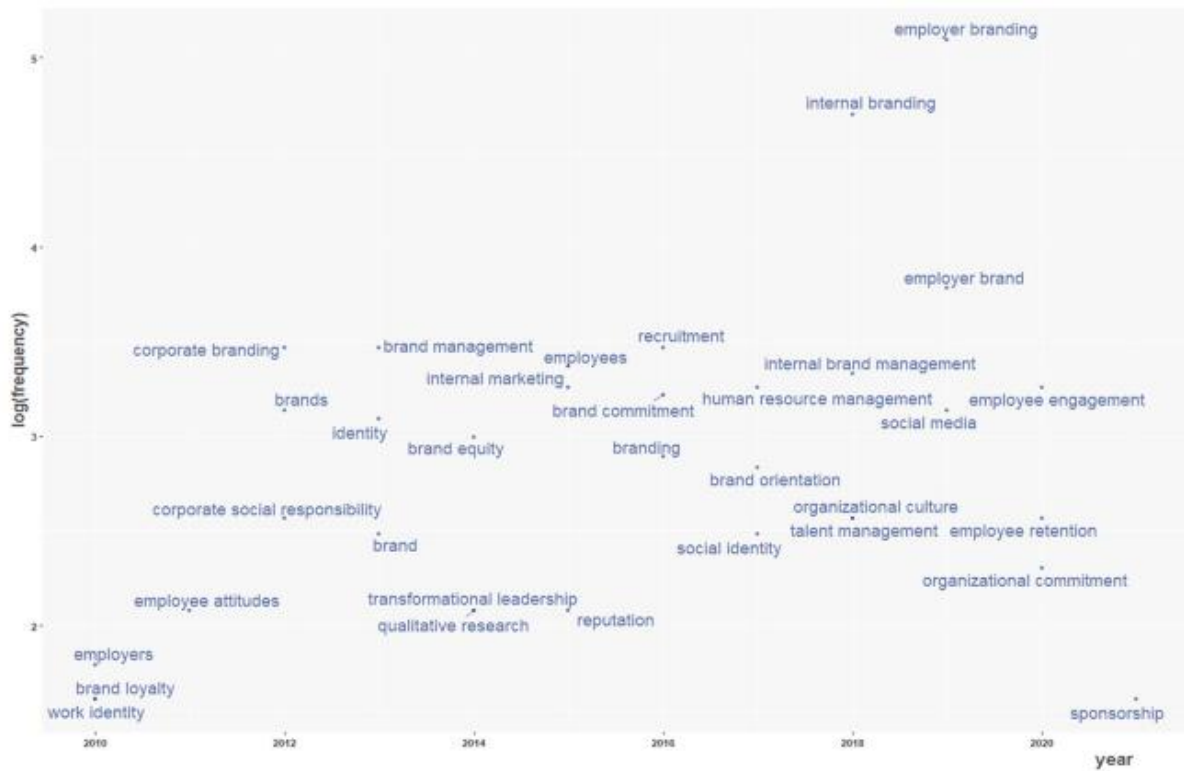
Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 5: Word growth graph



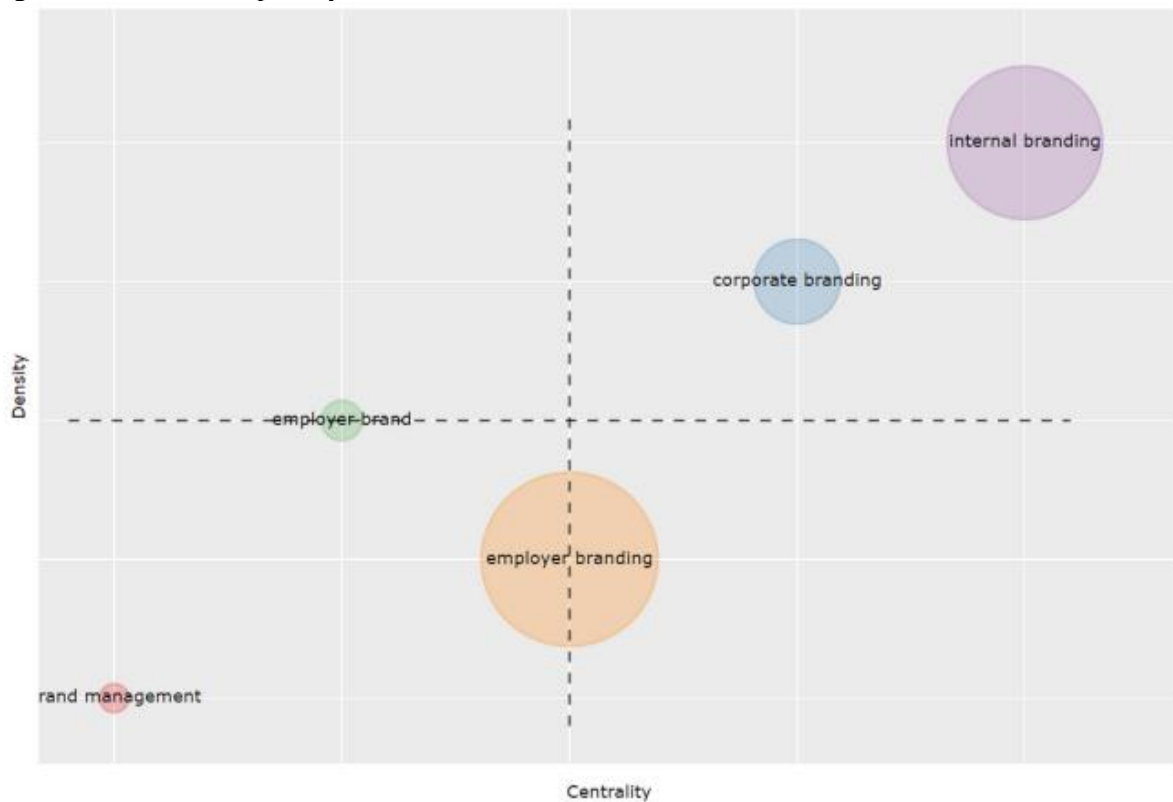
Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 6: Trend topic analysis



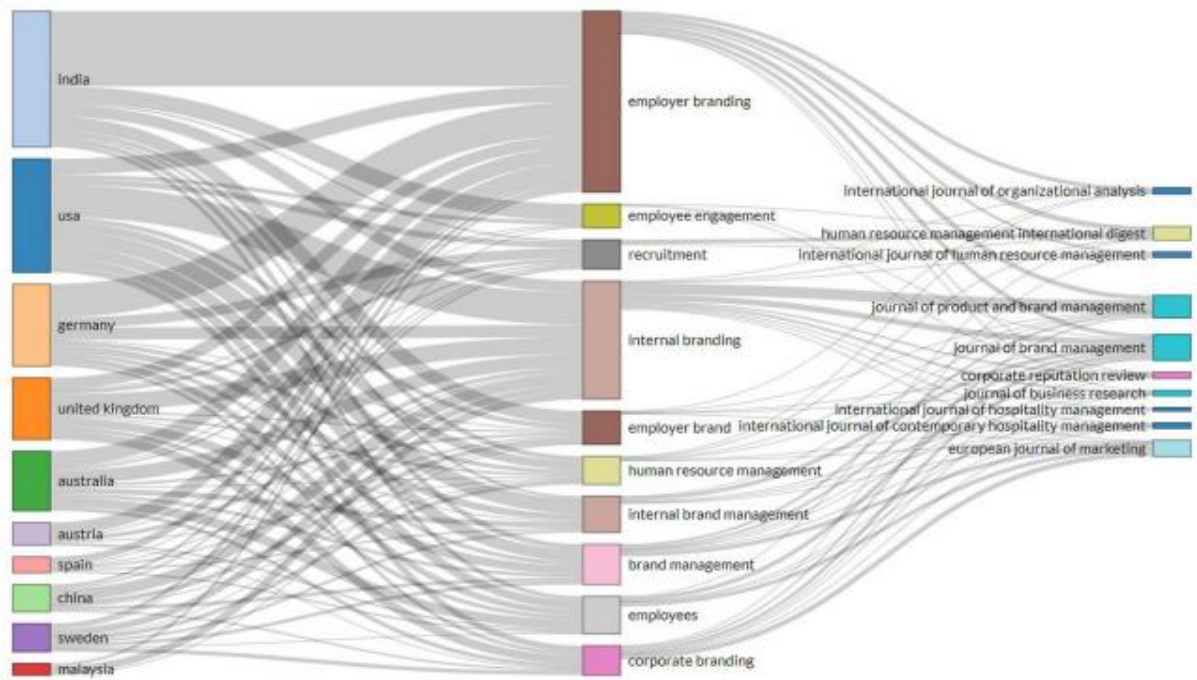
Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 7: Thematic map analysis



Source: Biblioshiny

Figure 8: Three-field plot



Source: Biblioshiny

Table 1: Top-ten most cited documents

S. no.	Author/year	Title	Citations	Links
1	Harris and de Chernatony (2001)	Corporate branding and corporate brand performance	408	49
2	Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)	Conceptualizing and researching employer branding	406	112
3	Berthon et al. (2005)	Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding	323	86
4	Aaker (2004)	Leveraging the corporate brand	319	14
5	Morhart et al. (2009)	Brand-Specific Leadership: Turning Employees into Brand Champions	263	64
6	Cable and Graham (2000)	The determinants of job seekers' reputation perceptions	207	21
7	Lievens et al. (2007)	Organizational Identity and Employer Image: Towards a Unifying Framework	183	30
8	Edwards (2010)	An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory	176	16
9	Burmam et al. (2009)	Key determinants of internal brand management success: An exploratory empirical analysis	168	61
10	Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006)	Internal brand building and structuration: the role of leadership	163	42

Source: VOSviewer

Table 2: Top-ten most cited authors

S. no.	Author	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
1	De Chernatony L.	6	802	124
2	King C.	18	688	474
3	Punjaisri K.	8	565	262
4	Lievens F.	6	493	129
5	Berthon P.	3	433	90
6	Backhaus K.	3	431	91
7	Grace D.	8	391	248
8	Wilson A.	4	375	164
9	Miles S.J.	7	308	87
10	Burmam C.	6	278	219

Source: VOSviewer

Table 3: Author impact analysis

S. No.	Author	H_Index	G_Index	M_Index	TC	NP	PY_Start
1	King C.	14	18	1.167	688	18	2010
2	Grace D.	7	8	0.583	391	8	2010
3	Punjaisri K.	7	8	0.5	565	8	2008
4	Xiong L.	6	8	0.667	225	8	2013
5	Miles S.J.	6	7	0.333	308	7	2004
6	De Chernatony L.	6	6	0.286	802	6	2001
7	Burmam C.	5	6	0.385	278	6	2009
8	Lievens F.	5	6	0.333	493	6	2007
9	Piebler R.	5	6	0.556	175	6	2013
10	Prasad A.	5	5	0.833	128	5	2016

Note: TC – total citation, NP – no. of publications, PY_Start – starting publication year
Source: Biblioshiny

Table 4: Top-ten most cited sources

S. no.	Source	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
1	European Journal of Marketing	18	1648	370
2	Journal of Brand Management	31	979	441
3	Academy of Management Journal	3	768	12
4	Journal of Product and Brand Management	27	647	389
5	International Journal of Advertising	4	495	104
6	Journal of Business Research	16	483	102
7	Career Development International	3	440	131
8	Journal of Marketing Management	10	389	164
9	International Journal of Human Resource Management	12	328	65
10	International Journal of Hospitality Management	11	322	139

Source: VOSviewer

Table 5: Source impact analysis

S. no.	Source	H_Index	G_Index	M_Index	TC	NP	PY_Start
1	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	16	31	1.143	979	31	2008
2	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	16	18	0.762	1648	18	2001
3	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	12	25	0.706	647	27	2005
4	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	9	16	0.818	483	16	2011
5	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	9	11	1.000	322	11	2013
6	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	8	10	0.615	389	10	2009
7	<i>International Journal of Organizational Analysis</i>	7	10	0.583	122	10	2010
8	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	6	12	0.353	328	12	2005
9	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	6	10	0.500	175	10	2010
10	<i>Personnel Review</i>	6	9	0.462	283	9	2009

Note: TC – total citation, NP – no. of publications, PY_Start – starting publication year

Source: *Biblioshiny*

Table 6: Most local cited sources

S. no.	Sources	No. of local citations
1	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	1,257
2	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	1,091
3	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	1,047
4	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	878
5	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	667
6	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	635
7	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	620
8	<i>Personnel Psychology</i>	543
9	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	532
10	<i>Journal of Management</i>	504

Source: *Biblioshiny*

Table 7: Top-ten most influential organizations

S. no.	Organizations	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
1	Centre For Research in Brand Marketing, Birmingham University, Business School, United Kingdom	2	288	30
2	Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand	2	288	30
3	University of Lugano, Switzerland	2	288	30
4	Manchester Business School, Manchester, United Kingdom	2	208	7
5	University of Bremen, Germany	2	191	25
6	Monash University, Melbourne, Australia	2	187	15
7	Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, United Kingdom	2	174	36
8	Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia	2	170	18
9	University of Technology, Sydney, Australia	2	154	12
10	Department of Marketing, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Il, United States	2	149	21

Source: *VOSviewer*

Table 8: Details of clusters

Cluster label	Themes	S. no.	Article	Title	Citations	Total link strength
Cluster 1A: <i>Employer branding conceptualization/ review</i>		1	Aggerholm <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations	61	33
		2	Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)	Conceptualizing and researching employer branding	406	32
		3	Berthon <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding	323	25
		4	Edwards (2010)	An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory	176	39
		5	Foster <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding	130	56
		6	Lievens and Slaughter (2016)	Employer image and employer branding: What we know and what we need to know	100	83
		7	Lievens <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Organizational identity and employer image: Towards a unifying framework	183	32
		8	Martin <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Is there a bigger and better future for employer branding? Facing up to innovation, corporate reputations and wicked problems in SHRM	82	15
		9	Theurer <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Employer branding: A brand equity-based literature review and research agenda	61	100
Cluster 1B: <i>Employer branding: antecedents and consequences</i>	Theme (i): employer brand and job seekers	1	Biswas and Suar (2016) ^{WoS}	Antecedents and Consequences of Employer Branding	44	46
		2	Cable and Graham (2000)	The determinants of job seekers' reputation perceptions	207	22
		3	Collins and Stevens (2002) ^{WoS}	The relationship between early recruitment-related activities and the application decisions of new labor-market entrants: a brand equity approach to recruitment	244	23
		4	Collins (2007) ^{WoS}	The interactive effects of recruitment practices and product awareness on job seeker' employer knowledge and application behaviors	94	25
		5	Elving <i>et al.</i> (2013)	The war for talent? The relevance of employer branding in job advertisements for becoming an employer of choice	52	45
		6	Ewing <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Employment branding in the knowledge economy	105	18
		7	Highhouse <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Assessing company employment image: An example in the fast-food industry	105	9
		8	Highhouse <i>et al.</i> (2007) ^{WoS}	Social-identity functions of attraction to organizations	160	24
		9	Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017)	Does CSR enhance employer attractiveness? The role of millennial job seekers' attitudes	55	25
		10	Knox and Freeman (2006) ^{WoS}	Measuring and managing employer brand image in the service industry	101	30
		11	Lievens (2007)	Employer branding in the Belgian Army: The importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants and military employees	137	26
		12	Moroko and Uncles (2008)	Characteristics of successful employer brands	126	33
		13	Rampl and Kenning (2014)	Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness	65	35
		14	Sivertzen <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media	99	33

(continued)

Cluster label	Themes	S. no.	Article	Title	Citations	Total link strength
Cluster 2: Internal branding	Theme (ii): employer brand and employees	15	Wayne and Casper (2012) ^{WoS}	Why does firm reputation in human resource policies influence college students? The mechanisms underlying job pursuit intentions	43	22
		16	Wilden <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment (EA)	137	21
		1	Cascio (2014)	Leveraging employer branding, performance management and human resource development to enhance employee retention	50	1
		2	Davies (2008)	Employer branding and its influence on managers	92	18
		3	Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014)	Corporate environmental responsibility, employer reputation and employee commitment: an empirical study in developed and emerging economies	89	28
		4	Kuchеров and Zavyalova (2012)	HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand	66	11
		5	Maxwell and Knox (2009)	Motivating employees to "live the brand": a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm	114	26
		6	Schlager <i>et al.</i> (2011)	The influence of the employer brand on employee attitudes relevant for service branding: an empirical investigation	73	54
		1	Baum and Kabst (2013)	How to attract applicants in the Atlantic versus the Asia-Pacific region? A cross-national analysis on China, India, Germany and Hungary	50	40
		2	Brewster <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Towards a new model of globalizing HRM	116	1
	Theme (iii): employer brand and international HRM	3	Stahl <i>et al.</i> (2012) ^{WoS}	Six principles of effective global talent management	182	4
		1	Dabirian <i>et al.</i> (2017)	A great place to work!? Understanding crowdsourced employer branding	60	5
	Theme (iv): third-party employer branding	2	Dineen and Allen (2016)	Third party employment branding: Human capital inflows and outflows following "best places to work" certifications	63	32
		1	King and Grace (2010)	Building and measuring employee-based brand equity	152	56
	Theme (i): internal branding – conceptualisation/ review	2	King <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Employee brand equity: Scale development and validation	56	47
		3	Miles and Mangold (2004)	A conceptualization of the employee branding process	75	16
		4	Saleem and Iglesias (2016)	Mapping the domain of the fragmented field of internal branding	50	59
		1	Aurand <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Human resource management's role in internal branding: An opportunity for cross-functional brand message synergy	120	12
		2	Baker <i>et al.</i> (2014)	The role of brand communications on front line service employee beliefs, behaviors and performance	56	38
		3	Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010)	How strong is the business-to-business brand in the workforce? An empirically-tested model of 'internal brand equity' in a business-to-business setting	123	59
4		Chang <i>et al.</i> (2012)	A multilevel investigation of relationships among brand-centered HRM, brand psychological ownership, brand citizenship behaviors and customer satisfaction	85	19	
5		De Chernatony and Cottam (2006)	Internal brand factors driving successful financial services brands	125	29	
Theme (ii): internal branding – antecedences and/or consequences	6	Judson <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Building a university brand from within: A comparison of coaches' perspectives of internal branding	55	12	
	7	Judson <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Building a university brand from within: University administrators' perspectives of internal branding	55	12	
	8	Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010)	Service brand equity and employee brand commitment	121	32.33	

(continued)

Cluster label	Themes	S. no.	Article	Title	Citations	Total link strength
		9	King and Grace (2012)	Examining the antecedents of positive employee brand-related attitudes and behaviours	80	42
		10	Lee et al. (2014)	The impact of internal branding on employee engagement and outcome variables in the hotel industry	50	33
		11	Löhdorf and Diamantopoulos (2014)	Internal branding: Social identity and social exchange perspectives on turning employees into brand champions	111	44
		12	Mäläskä et al. (2011)	Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding	54	26
		13	Miles and Mangold (2005)	Positioning Southwest Airlines through employee branding	91	2
		14	Morhart et al. (2009)	Brand-specific leadership: turning employees into brand champions	263	27
		15	Punjaisri et al. (2008)	Exploring the influences of internal branding on employees' brand promise delivery; implications for strengthening customer-brand relationships	66	20
		16	Punjaisri et al. (2009)	Internal branding to influence employees' brand promise delivery: A case study in Thailand	132	56
		17	Wagner and Peters (2009)	Can association methods reveal the effects of internal branding on tourism destination stakeholders?	56	20
		18	Whisman (2009)	Internal branding: A university's most valuable intangible asset	53	2
		19	Xiong et al. (2013)	"That's not my job": Exploring the employee perspective in the development of brand ambassadors	71	50
	Theme (iii): internal brand management (IBM)	1	Buil et al. (2016)	From internal brand management to organizational citizenship behaviours: Evidence from frontline employees in the hotel industry	57	51
		2	Burmann et al. (2009)	Key determinants of internal brand management success: An exploratory empirical analysis	168	12.71
		3	De Chernatony et al. (2003)	Building a services brand: stages, people and orientations	79	20
		4	King (2010)	"One size doesn't fit all": Tourism and hospitality employees' response to internal brand management	62	34
		5	Piehler et al. (2016)	The importance of employee brand understanding, brand identification and brand commitment in realizing brand citizenship behaviour	57	52
		6	Punjaisri and Wilson (2011)	Internal branding process: Key mechanisms, outcomes and moderating factors	135	34
		7	Santos-vijande et al. (2013)	The brand management system and service firm competitiveness	70	31
		8	Sirianni et al. (2013) ^{Wos}	Branded service encounters: strategically aligning employee behavior with the brand positioning	138	15
		9	Terglav et al. (2016)	Internal branding process: Exploring the role of mediators in top management's leadership-commitment relationship	63	50
		10	Vallaster and de Chernatony (2006)	Internal brand building and structuration: The role of leadership	163	43

(continued)

Cluster label	Themes	S. no.	Article	Title	Citations	Total link strength
Cluster 3: corporate branding		1	Aaker (2004) ^{Wos}	Leveraging the corporate brand	277	1
		2	Fetscherin and Usunier (2012)	Corporate branding: An interdisciplinary literature review	77	26
		3	Harris and de Chernatony (2001)	Corporate branding and corporate brand performance	408	19
		4	Helm (2011)	Employees' awareness of their impact on corporate reputation	114	29
		5	M'zungu et al. (2010)	Brand management to protect brand equity: A conceptual model	54	17
		6	Ugla (2006)	The corporate brand association base: A conceptual model for the creation of inclusive brand architecture	71	20
		7	Yaniv and Farkas (2005)	The impact of person-organization fit on the corporate brand perception of employees and of customers	58	21

Note: ^{Wos} = Additional articles produced by the Web of Science data set in the validation analysis

Source: VOSviewer

Table 9: Future research areas per cluster

Cluster	Sample research questions	Authors	
Cluster 1A: employer branding conceptualization/ review Cluster 1B: employer branding: antecedents and consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What processes should be used to develop the underlying value proposition of the employer brand? • How should employer branding, consumer branding and corporate branding activities be coordinated. How do the interrelationships among consumer, employer and corporate brand vary by type of industry and market? 	Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do employees' shared perceptions of an organization's central, enduring and distinctive characteristics (i.e. an organizational identity) influence current and prospective employees? 	Edwards (2010)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do disruptive events (e.g. downsizing, strikes, mergers, product recalls, financial crises, ecological disasters) impact a company's employer image? • To what degree are companies trying to manage the public's perceptions of the company through social media? How effective are their efforts? 	Lievens and Slaughter (2016)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does authentic voice of different groups of employees and managers at all levels and locations inside and outside the company makes employer branding more effective? • How does employer branding contribute to building social capital such as bonds, bridges and trust among employees and how do organizations go about doing so? 	Martin <i>et al.</i> (2011)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do antecedents and outcomes of employer branding differ across various cultures and geographies? 	Biswas and Suar (2016)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivates employees to provide feedback on third-party (i.e. crowdsourced) employment branding sites such as Glassdoor? • How can smaller companies benefit from third-party employment branding? 	Dabirian <i>et al.</i> (2017)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do employees who have unfavorable views of company employment practices perceive and attribute positive third-party employment branding? • How do best places to work certifications affect longer-term financial metrics, product marketing benefits? How do rank level effects (5th vs 17th rank out of top 20 best employers) influence current and potential employees? 	Dineen and Allen (2016)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do individual attitudes toward corporate social responsibility (CSR) impact job seekers' responses to different CSR practices or company motivations for CSR? 	Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017)	
	Cluster 2: internal branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do individual factors such as personality, gender, values, motivation, emotional intelligence, affective reactions and behavioral responses affect internal brand management? 	King and Grace (2012)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do employees' organizational identification dimensions (i.e., cognitive, affective and evaluative) moderate the relationship between internal branding outcomes and employees' brand-congruent and customer-oriented behavior? 	Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are individual and company factors that facilitate or hinder employees' brand-related actions? 	Piehler <i>et al.</i> (2016)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do leader-employee levels (i.e., direct supervisors that daily work with customer-contact employees versus - top management) moderate the relationship between brand-oriented leadership and employees' brand commitment? 	Terglav <i>et al.</i> (2016)

(continued)

Cluster	Sample research questions	Authors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the mediating role of psychological contract fulfilment in affecting the relationship between brand-oriented leadership and employees' brand commitment? • What are the macrolevel facets of transformational leadership that influence employees' organizational citizenship behavior? • How does leadership at the micro (supervisory) and macro (managerial) levels affect employees' identification, work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors? 	Buil <i>et al.</i> (2016)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the internal branding tools and processes to align the behavior of employees from brand partners? • How can internal brand communities foster employee identification and brand identity cocreation? 	Saleem and Iglesias (2016)
Cluster 3: corporate branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does employee pride influence job satisfaction and commitment impact on corporate reputation to the same degree than perceived corporate reputation? • How to integrate internal reputation building behaviors into daily work routines of employees? 	Helm (2011)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend corporate branding research beyond multinational corporations to family business contexts and nonprofit organizations. • Understand discrepancies between what should ideally be communicated and what is actually communicated through corporate strategy, corporate behavior and uncontrolled company communication. 	Fetscherin and Usunier (2012)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do (1) adopting a brand orientation mindset, (2) the development of internal branding capabilities and (3) consistent brand delivery contribute to brand equity protection? 	M'zungu <i>et al.</i> (2010)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more comprehensive brand architectures for brand collaboration, including various levels of positioning for partner brands in terms of constellations, co-brands and ingredient brands, as part of a corporate brand portfolio. • Develop methodologies for separating contributions to corporate brand equity from connected and licensed brands, persons and institutions in the environment. 	Ugglá (2006)

Notes

1. A misconception is to make the distinction on the basis of target group by stating that employer branding focuses on potential employees and internal branding focuses on existing employees.
2. Given its advantages, in recent years, bibliometric studies have blossomed in business research, such as in marketing (Ye *et al.*, 2021), finance (Kumar *et al.*, 2021), HRM (Subramony *et al.*, 2021) as well as on the specific themes of a particular discipline such as presumption (Shah *et al.*, 2019), reference price (Srivastava *et al.*, 2022) and customer engagement in marketing (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2021), nonprofit branding (Sepulcri *et al.*, 2020), financial literacy in finance and accounting (Goyal and Kumar, 2021) or multigenerational workforce and work values in the HR domain (Singh *et al.*, 2020).
3. The authors are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.
4. The authors thank one of the reviewers for recommending the validation analysis.
5. Tables and figures generated using the WoS data set are not reported in the main paper and are included in the Web Appendix, available at: <https://cccloud.tiss.edu/index.php/s/n6JCSD5vPr96vLJ>
6. The table also includes the additional articles (identified as WoS) produced by the Web of Science data set in the validation analysis.
7. The authors thank one of the reviewers for recommending this validation analysis.
8. Note that brand equity is not the only theoretical foundation that has been used in this research. Our bibliometric analysis showed that in employer branding research the following major frameworks were adopted – signalling theory and social-identity theory. Similarly, in internal branding, social-identity theory, organizational identity, brand positioning, customer experience and corporate reputation were the major theoretical frameworks.

Note: Web appendix link: <https://cccloud.tiss.edu/index.php/s/n6JCSD5vPr96vLJ>

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