

Brand Building in the Digital Age: A Bibliometric Citation Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

As interest in the relationship between digital technologies and brand management continues to grow, existing research presents diverse and complex findings. This study systematically reviews the current state of the field through a bibliometric citation meta-analysis of 58 studies from the ISI Web of Science database. It examines the evolution of brand building in the digital environment, identifying the most influential countries, journals, authors, and key articles. Additionally, the research explores five subfields and employs co-citation mapping to visualize the interconnections between studies on digital brand building. This study contributes by providing a clear framework for scholars and practitioners to better understand and address the challenges of brand management in a digital context. By identifying pivotal research in the field, it lays a solid foundation for advancing future brand management theories.

Keywords: Brand Building, Digital Age, Bibliometric Citation Meta-analysis, Management, Digital Technologies

1. Introduction

The landscape of brand building and management is evolving at an unprecedented pace. A single tweet or viral video can make or break a brand overnight. The rapidly shifting digital landscape has significantly impacted companies, transforming the global business environment and redefining how organizations operate, innovate, and interact with their customers (Cooper et al., 2023; Hu, 2022; Pappas et al., 2023). As we enter the era of the 5.0 revolution, companies are increasingly aware of the need to adopt digital marketing strategies and enhance brand visibility to establish a strong brand presence in a world characterized by continuous globalization and digital transformation (Sugita & Handayani, 2024). For example, online brand communities allow users to access and share brand information by forming new relationships and collaborating with others (Chapman & Dilmperi, 2022). Additionally, enhancing brand visibility involves leveraging various communication channels and visual elements such as brand identity, branded photos and videos, augmented reality, virtual reality (Zeng, Xing & Jin, 2023), and the Internet of Things (Eslami et al., 2024).

In this digital revolution, businesses face not only the challenge of managing fragmented information but also the increased risk posed by the rapid spread of misinformation. Given these complex opportunities and challenges, it is essential for organizations to understand the evolution of brand management strategies within digital environments. Therefore, the following critical questions merit thorough investigation: 1) *Which countries, journals, authors, and articles are the most cited and thus influential in the field of digital branding studies?* 2) *What are the key insights and prevailing arguments regarding brand building in the digital age, and how do they reflect current trends and challenges in this evolving context?*

The structure of this study is as follows: The second section introduces bibliometric citation analysis. The third section presents the methodology, detailing the process of data collection. The fourth section showcases the research findings, covering the global landscape of relevant research, the most influential journals, authors, and

articles, while offering an analysis of knowledge dissemination patterns and academic collaboration within this field. The fifth section explores the bibliographic coupling of the intellectual core, employing bibliographic co-citation analysis to provide a deeper understanding of the field's intellectual structure and offer insights into emerging research directions. The study concludes with the conclusion and limitations.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Digital Brand

Despite significant advancements in our understanding of branding and brand development in recent years (Oh et al., 2020), research continues to unveil various facets of brands, particularly the opportunities and challenges that arise in brand building within the digital era. Previous studies have underscored the transformative impact of digital technologies on enhancing brand performance. Digital platforms, especially social media and data analytics, enable brands to engage with consumers more directly and at a lower cost compared to traditional marketing methods. Social media fosters customer loyalty, allowing brands to forge more personalized connections with consumers (Al-Hawary & Al-Fassed, 2022), while data-driven marketing strategies empower companies to generate tailored content, improving customer satisfaction and strengthening emotional bonds (Rane, Achari & Choudhary, 2023). Moreover, artificial intelligence plays a pivotal role in this landscape, facilitating automated customer engagement through chatbots and personalized marketing initiatives (Cheng & Jiang, 2022).

However, the widespread use of digital platforms can lead to inconsistencies in messaging, as multiple stakeholders—such as customers, influencers, and employees—contribute to the brand narrative, resulting in fragmented communication that may undermine the brand's core values (Anderski et al., 2023). Additionally, user-generated content on social media can weaken brand authority, as companies have limited control over the narratives shared by consumers (Miliopoulou, 2021). In light of these factors, despite the visibility and engagement afforded by digital platforms, brands face considerable challenges in effectively managing their digital presence. Therefore, it is essential to comprehensively consider the roles and impacts of digital technologies in brand building within this contemporary context.

2.2 Bibliometric Citation Analysis

Bibliometric citation analysis is a relatively novel approach within meta-analytical research, often referred to as a “meta-review” of the literature (Harsanyi, 1993; Kim & McMillan, 2008). Its application spans a wide array of disciplines in both the sciences and the humanities (Small, 1999; Wiberley, 2003), with its use in social science fields emerging more recently (Glanzel, 1996). Notable areas of application include communications (Reeves & Borgman, 1983); Pasadeos et al., 1999), marketing (Arnott, 2007), advertising (Kim & McMillan, 2008), international management (Acedo & Casillas, 2005), and international business (Pillania & Fetscherin, 2009).

This analytical method identifies key works and illustrates the connections between them, relying on citation metrics to provide an objective perspective. It enables researchers to assess the theoretical and empirical advancements within a specific

research domain (Borgman & Furner, 2002; Vassinen, 2006). The foundation of bibliometric citation analysis rests on the premise that scholars publish their most significant findings in peer-reviewed journal articles and typically build their research upon previously published works (Van Raan, 2003). In this context, the primary unit of analysis is the citation itself (Kim & McMillan, 2008). This methodology transcends mere publication counts (cf. Peng et al., 2001; Quer et al., 2007) by identifying influential centers and mapping interconnected research trajectories (Kim & McMillan, 2008).

3. Methodology

To conduct this study, we utilized bibliometric citation meta-analysis to examine empirical research articles on brand building within the digital era. This allows us to identify key works and research streams, mapping out the citation relationships between influential studies (Kim & McMillan, 2008).

The first stage of the study involved the search, collection, and preprocessing of relevant articles. It required identifying contributions in the Web of Science (WoS) database. Our analysis focuses on empirical research publications published up to the cut-off date of October 2024. We imposed subject-specific constraints, selecting only studies that met the following criteria: (1) Relevance: The research must pertain to brand building and management, particularly within the digital era, encompassing dimensions such as digital engagement, brand equity, customer loyalty, and brand authenticity. Publications were identified through a Boolean search query (Linnenluecke, 2017) using the following keywords in the title: “Brand AND Digital.” (2) Data source: Selected articles must be based on empirical research providing sufficient information for calculating different indices. We excluded duplicated publications and those lacking detailed data. (3) Publication quality: Studies should be published in high-quality academic journals or conferences to ensure reliability and validity. For the Web of Science Index, we refined the search by choosing the Social Science Citation Index. We limited our search to published articles, excluding conference proceedings and books, which were not considered ‘certified knowledge’ (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). Additionally, only publications in English were included in the analysis. We subsequently examined the intellectual core of the identified literature, excluding papers that did not include the authors’ names. Two researchers conducted independent reviews of the selected articles.

This process yielded a sample of 58 studies identified as having an intellectual core focused on branding in the digital context. We employed several bibliometric techniques to analyze and map the research findings. We used Biblioshiny, a specialized bibliometric tool designed for the analysis and visualization of citation linkages between scholarly publications (Huang et al., 2021; Veloutsou et al., 2023) to streamline the identification of citation and co-citation relationships among the selected articles.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the bibliometric analysis, including an evaluation of the countries contributing to the literature on brand building in the digital age

(BBDA). Furthermore, we assess highly cited published articles and journals to introduce the research agenda for the subsequent section. Initially, we identified a total of 58 articles in the context of BBDA. A closer examination revealed varying degrees of contribution from different countries in this area of research, reflecting the global distribution and dynamics of scholarly work. Notably, the quantity of research published does not always correlate with its quality, as a few high-quality studies can often yield a more significant academic impact. To address our primary research question, we computed a range of rankings and tables, which will be outlined below.

4.1 Global Landscape of Relevant Research

To identify each country's contribution to the literature on BBDA, we measured academic weight by the number of publications attributed to authors from different countries. The total number of published articles relevant to BBDA was utilized to gauge each nation's contribution (Table 1). The data indicate that the United States leads the field with 12 articles, accounting for 20.7% of the total, underscoring its dominant position in digital brand research. This phenomenon reflects not only the deep-rooted presence of the United States in the academic marketing community but also suggests its significant influence in the practice of digital brand management. Australia and India follow closely with seven articles each.

Table 1
Most Influential Author Countries [sorted by P_{BBDA}].

Rank	Country	P_{BBDA}	Articles %	SCP	MCP	MCP %
1	USA	12	20.7	9	3	25
2	Australia	7	12.1	4	3	42.9
3	India	7	12.1	6	1	14.3
4	United Kingdom	4	6.9	1	3	75
5	China	3	5.2	2	1	33.3
6	Netherlands	3	5.2	3	0	0
7	Spain	3	5.2	3	0	0
8	Belgium	2	3.4	0	2	100
9	Canada	2	3.4	1	1	50
10	France	2	3.4	0	2	100

Note:

P_{BBDA} number of articles published related to brand building in the digital age

Articles % contribution of articles related to P_{BBDA}

SCP single country publications

MCP multiple country publications

MCP% multiple country publications' percentage.

In terms of research quality, single article citation count (SCP) and multiple article co-authorship citation count (MCP) provide important references for understanding the impact of research outputs from different countries. Although the SCP for the United States reaches as high as 9, indicating a high level of recognition for its research outputs, the MCP for the United Kingdom stands at an impressive 75, reflecting the country's prominent role in international academic collaboration and exchange. This data emphasizes the phenomenon of citation clustering, whereby a few highly cited studies significantly enhance a country's overall academic impact. Furthermore, despite lower research outputs, Belgium and France exhibit a 100% MCP, indicating that their research findings have significant influence and a strong reputation in international academic collaboration and exchange.

4.2 Most Influential Journals

This section presents a bibliometric analysis of the contributions of journals to the field of BBDA, aiming to identify which journals are leading in terms of contributions and citations, thereby driving the advancement of this field. Table 2 summarizes the top 20 journals, ranking them based on the total number of published articles related to digital brand building (NP), total local citations (TLC), and the average local citations over time (TLC/t). For instance, the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (IJCS) stands out in this field, with six related articles published, a TLC of 104, and an average TLC/t of 34.67. Similarly, the *European Journal of Marketing* (EJM) and the *Journal of Brand Management* (JBM) also demonstrate significant contributions in this domain, indicating that these journals not only play a crucial role in academic research on brand management but also foster the development of branding theories within the context of the digital era.

Table 2
Ranking of Top 20 Journals (sorted by NP).

Rank ^a	Journal	Label	NP	h	g	m	TLC	TLC/t
1	<i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>	IJCS	6.00	5.00	6.00	1.67	104.00	34.67
2	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	EJM	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.56	76.00	8.44
3	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	JBM	4.00	3.00	4.00	0.33	43.00	4.78
4	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	IJHM	3.00	3.00	3.00	1.00	76.00	25.33
5	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	JBR	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.75	134.00	33.50
6	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	JAMS	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.43	102.00	14.57
7	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	IJRM	2.00	2.00	2.00	0.25	132.00	16.50
8	<i>Profesional de la Informacion</i>	PI	2.00	1.00	2.00	0.33	5.00	1.67
9	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	ATR	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.20	41.00	8.20
10	<i>Australian Journal of Management</i>	AJM	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	7.00	3.50
11	<i>Digital Journalism</i>	DJ	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	19.00	9.50
12	<i>Electronic Commerce Research</i>	ECR	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.25	35.00	8.75
13	<i>Electronic Commerce Research and Applications</i>	ECRA	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	5.00	2.50
14	<i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i>	ISMQ	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	36.00	18.00
15	<i>Ieee Transactions on Professional Communication</i>	ITPC	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.33	3.00	1.00
16	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	IMM	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.20	107.00	21.40
17	<i>International Journal of Electronic Commerce</i>	IJEC	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.08	28.00	2.15
18	<i>International Marketing Review</i>	IMR	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.25	39.00	9.75
19	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	JA	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.33	27.00	9.00
20	<i>Journal of Advertising Research</i>	JAR	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.20	6.00	1.20

Note:

NP number of published articles related to BBDA [P_{BBDA}].

h h-index

g g-index

m m-index

TLC total local citations

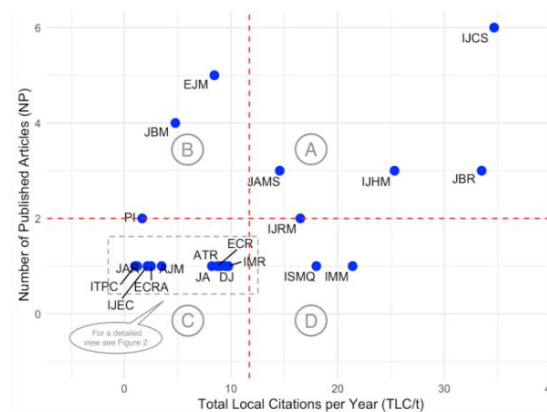
TLC/t average local citations received per year.

^a Ordered by number of published articles related to BBDA [P_{BBDA}].

Furthermore, the impact of journals can be assessed through several key metrics, including the h-index, g-index, and m-index. In our study, the *International Journal*

of *Consumer Studies* (IJCS) demonstrates its significant position in the research on BBDA. Concurrently, the *European Journal of Marketing* (EJM), with its high citation frequency and impact, has made profound contributions to the theoretical development and practical application within this field. These journals not only advance related research but also provide valuable theoretical support for brand management. Collectively, these data indicate that marketing journals, such as the *Journal of Business Research* (JBR) and the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (JAMS), occupy a prominent position in the academic discourse surrounding digital brand building. Additionally, interdisciplinary journals, including the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (IJHM) and the *Annals of Tourism Research* (ATR), have also made significant contributions to this research domain. To further investigate the findings, we used the number of published articles as a proxy for output and the total local citations per year (TLC/t) as a proxy for impact in the field of brand building in the digital era. Figure 1 presents a 2×2 matrix, with the x-axis representing the total local citations per year (TLC/t) and the y-axis representing the number of published articles related to digital brand building in the digital age (PBBDE). By calculating and evaluating the means of the two variables (PBBDA $M = 2.00$; TLC/t $M = 11.27$), we can differentiate four main groups of journals: Quadrant A (high focus on brand building in the digital era and high impact), Quadrant B (low focus on brand building in the digital era and high impact), Quadrant C (low focus on brand building in the digital era and low impact), and Quadrant D (high focus on brand building in the digital era but low impact). This overview provides insight into the performance of these journals in the field of brand building in the digital era, helping readers understand the impact and contributions of different journals.

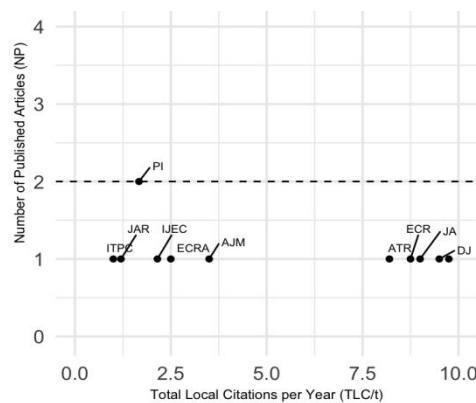
Fig. 1. Journal focus and impact on BBDA research (big picture).



In our dataset, four journals are located in Quadrant A, indicating that they have above-average output and impact in the field of brand building in the digital era. These journals include the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* (IJCS), *Journal of Business Research* (JBR), *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (IJHM), and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (JAMS), with the IJCS

demonstrating significant influence and output in this field. These journals are actively engaged in research within this domain, and their published papers have received widespread citations and recognition. Researchers and practitioners exploring the literature on BBDA should prioritize these journals, with IJCS showing the most outstanding performance. In Quadrant C, we observe a greater number of journals exhibiting low impact and output in BBDA research, suggesting that their research activities require further enhancement. To provide a more detailed presentation of these journals' performance at the lower end of the axes, we also constructed Figure 2, showcasing the specifics of the journals located in Quadrant C.

Fig. 2. Journal focus and impact on BBDA research.



Note: There are 10 journals in quadrant C.

In addition to the top-ranked journals (Table 2, Figure 1, and Figure 2), several other journals significantly contribute to the study of BBDA. For instance, the *Journal of Interactive Marketing* (JIM) has recently published relevant research articles in this field, while the *Journal of Services Marketing* (JSM) has published fewer articles but has received a high number of local citations. Although the primary focus of our bibliometric citation meta-analysis is not to identify all journals related to BBDA, evaluating the most influential journals remains a critical objective of our research. Future studies could delve deeper into this phenomenon. To address the next research question, we will also closely examine the influence of individual articles, with relevant analyses reported in the subsequent sections.

4.3 Most Influential Articles

To address the question of which articles and authors have been most cited and, therefore, most influential in the field of consumer brand relationships, we conducted a multistep procedure. The results of this procedure are presented in Table 3, which lists the top 10 articles ranked by their total global citations (TGC) and their annual average citations (TGC/t). A careful examination of the rankings reveals that all listed articles are highly influential contributions to the study of BBDA.

Among these articles, Varadarajan (2020) ranks first with a total of 107 citations and a TGC/t of 21.4, underscoring its significance within the field. The study

emphasizes that the key to BBDA lies in companies' ability to deeply analyze customer information assets and use customer insights to develop effective marketing strategies, thereby gaining competitive advantages and enhancing performance. Closely following is Stocchi et al. (2022), with 54 citations and a TGC/t of 18. This research provides a comprehensive review of marketing studies on mobile apps, expanding our understanding of how apps shape customer experiences and value. The unified framework proposed integrates concepts such as customer experience, customer journey, value creation and co-creation, digital customer orientation, market orientation, and competitive advantage, facilitating future research and promoting knowledge exchange between academia and industry.

These figures highlight the substantial academic influence of these articles in the research on BBDA. However, it is important to note that some of these articles, such as those by Halder et al. (2021) and Mahr, Stead, and Odekerken-Schröder (2019), consist of broad literature reviews. While they may not focus specifically on brand-building methods for digital platforms, they provide critical foundational contributions to the field from a broader perspective. This underscores the multidisciplinary nature of research on BBDA.

Identifying the origins and foundations of these high-impact articles, as well as uncovering emerging papers, is a valuable endeavor. Recognizing these trending articles is the next step in our analysis, aimed at providing insights into the origins and future directions of brand building in the digital age. The following paragraphs will delve into the content of this research field.

Table 3
Ranking of Top 10 articles (sorted by TGC/t).

Rank ^a	Author(s) (year)	TGC	TGC/t
1	Varadarajan (2020)	107	21.4
2	Stocchi et al. (2022)	54	18
3	Halder et al. (2021)	66	16.5
4	Edeling, Srinivasan, and Hanssens (2021)	54	13.5
5	Tiwary et al. (2021)	49	12.25
6	Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Wiertz (2017)	78	9.75
7	Filieri and Mariani (2021)	39	9.75
8	Chen, Liu, and Mattila (2020)	41	8.2
9	Mahr, Stead, Odekerken-Schröder (2019)	49	8.17
10	Steward, Narus, Roehm (2018)	40	5.71

Note:

TGC total global citations received

TGC/t average global citations received per year.

^a Ordered by TGC/t.

5. Bibliographic coupling of the intellectual core

We applied co-citation mapping to visualize how articles on brands in a digital context are co-cited and reciprocally cited, helping us identify a broader group of published works and uncover clusters of research themes. To further analyze these relationships, we conducted a bibliographic coupling, grouping papers based on shared references—the greater the reference overlap between two papers, the more likely they were to belong to the same research community.

Fig. 3. Bibliographic intellectual structure co-citation

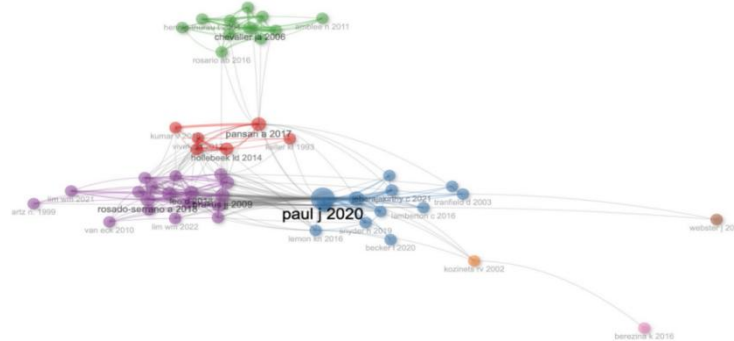


Table 5
Bibliographic Coupling

Cluster	Colour on the map	Number of Papers	Time Span	Main Sources	Main Theoretical Perspective
1	Red	6	1993-2020	JAMS, JM	Customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993) customer engagement behavior (Van Doorn et al., 2010)
2	Blue	9	1994-2023	JAMS, JM, JCM, JBR	Customer experience management throughout the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016); transformative effects of digital, social media, and mobile marketing on customer experience (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016)
3	Green	11	2003-2019	JR, JMR	Elaboration Likelihood Model (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Moe & Trusov, 2011) Social Exchange Theory (Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) Information Processing Theory (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Floyd et al., 2014) Signaling Theory (Amblee & Bui, 2011) Customer Engagement Theory (Algharabat et al., 2020; Brodie et al., 2013)
4	Purple	15	1984-2022	JRCS, EMJ, JIM	Service-Dominant Logic (Brodie et al., 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) Social Identity Theory (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019; Voorveld et al., 2018)
5	Yellow	1	2002	JMR	Netnography
6	Brown	1	2002	JBEM	Internet audience as a mass behavior phenomenon
7	Pink	1	2016	JHMM	Text mining techniques

Focusing on the 58 papers constituting our intellectual core, we used Biblioshiny software, which identified seven clusters (Figure 3), each representing a major research theme related to brands in a digital context. These themes, summarized in Table 5, were examined in detail by identifying the key research questions, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and findings for each paper

5.1. Customer Engagement

The first cluster (Red) includes six milestone papers sharing a common intellectual foundation in customer engagement and its relationship with brand equity. These papers focus on consumer-brand relationships, examining how brands engage

customers, manage brand equity, and foster loyalty. Customer engagement is highlighted as a key factor impacting brand equity, as seen in Keller's (1993) foundational work, further elaborated by Kumar and Kaushik (2020) in their study of brand identification. This focus is evident in the studies by Hollebeek et al. (2014), Pansari and Kumar (2017), and Van Doorn et al. (2010), which explore the psychological and behavioral aspects of customer engagement.

These papers draw from essential marketing theories such as customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993) and customer engagement behavior (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Keller's work on brand equity is critical for understanding how customer engagement influences brand perception, while Van Doorn et al. (2010) theorize the behavioral aspects of engagement, including loyalty and advocacy. For instance, Hollebeek et al. (2014) developed and validated a consumer brand engagement scale, which overlaps methodologically with Pansari and Kumar (2017), as both studies utilize common statistical methods and psychometric techniques for measuring engagement, especially in scale development and validation within marketing research. Additionally, Vivek et al. (2012) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) examine not only the antecedents and consequences of engagement but also its extension beyond mere transactions. This intellectual trajectory aligns closely with Hollebeek et al. (2014), who emphasize the interactive roles customers play in social media, reflecting an evolution in engagement studies. The works of Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Kumar and Kaushik (2020) further stress the behavioral aspects of engagement, demonstrating how deep consumer-brand relationships foster loyalty and advocacy. This behavioral approach enhances Keller's (1993) static brand equity construct by incorporating a more dynamic, interactive perspective, offering a deeper understanding of how customer engagement shapes brand equity.

These papers frequently reference similar conceptual frameworks, such as Keller's (1993) brand equity model, and use overlapping methodologies to measure and scale customer engagement. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional perspective on how engagement enhances brand value, influences consumer behavior, and helps establish long-term brand relationships.

In the digital context, this cluster of papers provides a solid foundation for understanding brand management, particularly regarding brand-consumer interactions and brand equity. Recent studies, such as Hollebeek et al. (2014), focus on consumer brand engagement in social media, offering a framework for effective brand-consumer engagement on digital platforms. This focus is critical as digital engagement becomes essential for building emotional connections with consumers. Keller's (1993) brand equity model remains pivotal in the digital era, offering insights into measuring and managing brand value. In a complex digital environment, where dynamic interactions and user-generated content significantly impact brand perception, Keller's framework helps navigate these challenges. Moreover, the studies by Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) on customer engagement behavior are particularly relevant to digital marketing, where behaviors such as sharing, commenting, and reviewing are vital for brand visibility and decision-making. Collectively, these works provide frameworks for brands to leverage digital engagement to enhance brand value and foster long-term customer loyalty.

5.2. Customer Digital Experience

The second cluster (Blue) of papers intricately links the theme of customer digital experience, presenting it as a multifaceted construct that significantly influences brand engagement and relationship marketing. Central to this discourse is Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) seminal work, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. They emphasize that effective management of customer interactions at each touchpoint is crucial for fostering brand loyalty and advocacy. Building on this foundation, Kumar, Paul, and Unnithan (2020) introduce the concept of *masstige* marketing, asserting that the integration of prestige and mass-market strategies relies on delivering exceptional customer experiences that resonate emotionally. This highlights the need to align marketing strategies with the nuanced preferences of consumers, especially in a digital marketplace.

Further enriching this narrative, Shukla, Misra, and Singh (2023) explore the semiotic dimensions of product packaging, elucidating its impact on brand experience and purchase intentions. Their analysis reveals that the sensory elements of packaging serve not merely as aesthetic choices but as communicative tools that convey brand values and enhance overall customer experience. This connects back to Lemon and Verhoef (2016) by illustrating how the physical manifestations of a brand can significantly shape consumer perceptions and behavior, reinforcing the interconnectedness of customer experience and brand identity.

In a complementary vein, Becker and Jaakkola (2020) frame customer experience as a holistic construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. They advocate for a broader perspective that integrates various elements of customer interaction, aligning with Snyder and Newman (2019), who examine the role of brand communities in alleviating consumer loneliness. Their findings highlight the emotional undercurrents of customer experience, suggesting that brands can cultivate deeper connections by fostering community engagement, thereby enhancing overall customer experience.

The digital dimension is pivotal in this cluster, as evidenced by Lamberton and Stephen (2016), who analyze the transformative effects of digital, social media, and mobile marketing on customer experience. They advocate for reimagining brand engagement strategies that leverage digital touchpoints, underscoring the necessity for brands to adapt to the evolving landscape of consumer interactions. This is further supported by Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2010), who examine how consumer-to-consumer communications in online brand communities shape customer experiences and purchasing behaviors. Their research emphasizes the need for a dynamic understanding of customer experience that encompasses the social and communal aspects of consumer interactions in the digital age.

5.3. Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The third cluster of papers explores the complexities of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and its significant impact on consumer behavior and sales dynamics. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) are pivotal in linking online book reviews to sales, demonstrating that positive eWOM enhances the likelihood of purchase. Their findings set a crucial precedent, prompting further research into the mechanisms

behind eWOM. Additionally, Dellarocas (2003) discusses the digitization of word-of-mouth, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. This exploration is vital for understanding the evolving landscape of consumer interactions and the complexities of digital communication.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) enrich this discourse by investigating consumers' motivations for expressing opinions online, emphasizing the social drivers of eWOM. Their work suggests that consumers are motivated by the desire to share experiences and influence others' perceptions, highlighting the communal aspect of eWOM. Liu (2006) examines eWOM dynamics in the film industry, revealing how consumer discussions can impact box office revenues. This insight underscores the varying effects of eWOM based on industry and product type, prompting further investigation into context-specific applications.

Senecal and Nantel (2004) complement this by exploring how online product recommendations influence consumer choices, emphasizing eWOM's role in guiding purchasing decisions. Zhu et al. (2019) introduce a novel perspective by using self-congruence theory to analyze the interaction between brand type and celebrity endorsements on consumer attitudes. This approach highlights the emotional and psychological factors driving eWOM engagement, expanding the understanding of consumer motivations. Floyd et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis that aggregates findings across studies, reinforcing the claim that online product reviews significantly impact retail sales. Their work validates earlier findings and strengthens the empirical framework surrounding eWOM.

Moe and Trusov (2011) contribute to understanding social dynamics in online product rating forums, showing that consumer interactions can significantly affect product perceptions and influence purchasing behavior. This highlights the interconnected nature of consumer experiences in the digital space. Babić Rosario et al. (2016) perform a meta-analytic review of eWOM's effects across various platforms and products, emphasizing nuanced differences in how eWOM operates based on context and metrics. This underscores the need for marketers to tailor their strategies to specific circumstances. Finally, Amblee and Bui (2011) examine social proof in online shopping, illustrating how eWOM can enhance sales, especially for digital microproducts. This reinforces the idea that social validation is a powerful driver in the digital marketplace.

5.4. Brand Engagement

This cluster (Purple) of papers focuses on brand engagement and the evolving marketing paradigms, especially regarding consumer interactions and experiences. The literature emphasizes the shift from traditional marketing to dynamic, consumer-centric strategies, highlighting the importance of brand experiences, engagement, and social media's impact.

We start with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) seminal study, which describes a paradigm shift toward a new dominant logic in marketing, emphasizing value co-creation in brand-consumer relationships. This perspective stresses the need for brands to actively engage consumers, transforming them from passive recipients into active participants in marketing. Their work encourages a reevaluation of marketing

strategies, urging brands to prioritize relationship-building over mere product promotion.

Building on this foundation, Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) define brand experience as the subjective sensations and responses triggered by brand-related stimuli. They argue that positive brand experiences significantly influence consumer loyalty. Their study measures brand experience and its components, providing actionable insights for marketers to enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty through tailored experiences.

In the realm of social media, Algharabat et al. (2020) examine the antecedents of customer brand engagement and consumer-based brand equity. Their findings highlight the critical role of social media platforms in fostering brand interactions, where engagement is influenced by factors like brand authenticity and consumer participation. This aligns with Voorveld et al. (2018), who emphasize the varying impacts of different social media platforms on consumer engagement and advertising effectiveness.

Lee (2021) explores the emotional dimensions of brand engagement, examining the relationship between emotional expressions and brand status. This study suggests that emotional engagement can enhance brand perception and foster consumer loyalty. Eigenraam et al. (2021) also stress the importance of authenticity in online customer engagement, indicating that genuine brand-consumer interactions can significantly enhance brand loyalty.

The role of influencers in driving brand engagement is emphasized by Hughes et al. (2019), who empirically investigate the effectiveness of sponsored blogging campaigns. Their findings show that influencer marketing can significantly enhance brand engagement, particularly when influencers resonate with the target audience. This is crucial in today's marketing landscape, where consumers often prefer recommendations from trusted figures over traditional advertising.

Brodie et al. (2013) investigate consumer engagement within virtual brand communities, revealing how these communities foster deeper connections between consumers and brands. Their exploratory analysis suggests that active participation in brand communities can enhance loyalty and advocacy. This theme is echoed in the literature review by Roy Bhattacharjee et al. (2022), who call for further research into brand communities and their effects on consumer behavior, proposing future research agendas to better understand this dynamic.

5.5. Digital Consumer Behavior

We grouped the last three clusters around the central theme of digital consumer behavior, examining how online environments and digital interactions shape consumer experiences and influence research methodologies. These studies explore the changing dynamics of consumer engagement in digital contexts, emphasizing both personal and collective aspects of online behavior. By investigating how digital platforms mediate brand-consumer relationships, they establish a foundation for further exploration of strategic opportunities for brands to utilize digital tools to enhance consumer engagement and improve brand outcomes.

From a theoretical and methodological perspective, Kozinets (2002) introduces netnography, a qualitative research method for studying online communities and

consumer behavior within them. By analyzing cultural phenomena in digital spaces, Kozinets highlights the importance of understanding consumers' lived experiences in online communities, providing marketers with valuable insights into consumer preferences and motivations. Webster and Lin (2002) build on this by framing the Internet audience as a mass behavior phenomenon. They argue that web usage can be analyzed like traditional mass media, offering a framework to understand the broader societal implications of online consumer behavior. This complements Kozinets' work by suggesting that online interactions reflect not only individual experiences but also collective behaviors and cultural contexts.

Berezina et al. (2016) focus on hotel customers, employing text mining techniques to analyze online reviews. This study connects to Kozinets' netnography by using a data-driven approach to assess customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. By identifying themes and sentiments in online reviews, the authors provide actionable insights for hotel management, linking customer experiences to service improvements.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates the current state of research on brand building in the digital age through bibliometric citation meta-analysis, while also assessing the academic roots of this field. To address two primary research questions (RQs), we collected data from the ISI Web of Science database, identifying 58 relevant articles for a retrospective empirical analysis. This research makes three main contributions to the understanding of brand building in the digital age.

First, we provide a comprehensive overview of existing literature on this topic up to 2024, extending the timeframe considered in previous reviews and highlighting the ongoing growth and increasing diversity of research themes within this important field. Second, our analysis employs rigorous bibliometric techniques, specifically bibliometric citation meta-analysis. This allows us to systematically identify key contributors in the field and explore the diversity of research themes and their interconnections. The bibliometric analysis presents the global landscape of relevant research (Table 1) and highlights the most impactful journals and lists the top 20 journals (Table 2), with the *IJCS* showing a particularly prominent contribution (Figures 1 & 2). This information can guide researchers on where to publish and keep them informed about the latest relevant research. Additionally, we compiled notable articles and emerging hot topics (Table 3) to help researchers assess the relevance of these themes to their own work and inspire new research avenues. Third, in addressing the second research question, we conducted co-citation analysis using Biblioshiny software to visualize our findings. This method not only presents the results graphically (Figure 3) but also identifies five sub-research streams related to brand building in the digital age (Table 5). Our analysis identifies core theories within each cluster, enhancing understanding of the various themes and theories surrounding BBDA.

While this bibliometric analysis contributes significantly to the literature, it has several limitations. Although bibliometric citation meta-analysis provides objectivity, interpretative biases may still arise in analyzing the intellectual core and theoretical roots. The data from Web of Science is comprehensive but does not encompass all

literature, as using “SSCI” as a refinement excludes certain global journals and conference proceedings, which may limit the validity of our results. Future research could extract data from additional academic databases to broaden the scope and increase the number of subjects. Additionally, the articles reviewed are all in English, and future studies should consider non-English research to enrich the literature review. Despite these limitations, our analysis reveals a relatively novel and compelling research area: brand building in the digital age. While academia and practitioners have historically focused on brand building, the dynamics in the digital era differ significantly from traditional paradigms. Consequently, there remains a limited number of top-tier journals and high-quality publications on this theme, though this number is steadily increasing. We encourage scholars worldwide to engage in this cutting-edge research area of brand building in the digital age.

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