



Trends, Themes, and Collaborations in Digital Branding Research: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Study

Waqi Athar Malik

PhD Scholar

*Hailey College of Commerce,
University of the Punjab,
Lahore, Pakistan.*

Email: malikwaqi2@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0008-2988-0351

Sabra Munir

*Professor and Head of Research & Development
(ACCA)*

*PAC Group of Colleges,
Lahore, Pakistan.*

Email: sabra_munir@hotmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3425-0262

Fouzia Hadi Ali

Associate Professor

*Hailey College of Commerce,
University of the Punjab,
Lahore, Pakistan.*

Email: fozia.hcc@pu.edu.pk

(Corresponding Author)

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0838-9762

Citation: Malik, W. A., Ali, F. H., & Munir, S. (2026). Trends, Themes, and Collaborations in Digital Branding Research: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Study. *The Lahore Journal of Business*, 13(2), 27-56.

<https://doi.org/10.35536/ljb.2026.v13.i2.a2>

Abstract: This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of digital branding-related articles published between 2015 and 2025 using data from the Scopus database. A total of 349 journal articles were analyzed to identify key bibliometric indicators, such as publication trends, top authors, most productive countries, collaboration networks, and the key thematic clusters of digital branding. The Scopus Analysis function was used to generate publication trends and top author graphs, and VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) was employed to visualize co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrences, and their relationships. The findings revealed a continuous increase in digital branding-related publications over the past decade. Findings also showed that developed economies contributed significantly to the field, while developing countries showed growing contributions. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identified six major thematic clusters that highlighted the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of digital branding research. This study identifies important research gaps in existing literature, including a lack of international collaboration, digital branding frameworks for developing economies, and integration of authenticity and technology. The findings contribute to a clearer understanding of the knowledge structure and thematic development of digital branding literature. They also provide future research directions based on these gaps.

Keywords: Digital branding, brand equity, digital marketing, authenticity, immersive technology, emerging markets.

Received: 16th January 2026

Revised: 20th April 2026

Accepted: 12th June 2026

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M37.

Paper type: Research paper

Copyright:

The Lahore Journal of Business is an open-access journal that distributes its articles under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>): this license permits non-commercial re-use, dissemination, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is appropriately cited, and is not changed, transformed, or built upon in any way. Therefore, with this Creative Commons license in mind, the authors retain the copyright to their work while granting the Lahore Journal of Business the right to publish the article upon successful completion of the submission and approval process.

Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding:

There is no funding for this research.

Trends, Themes, and Collaborations in Digital Branding Research: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Study

1. Introduction

Branding has been continuously evolving over the last decade due to the development of digital technologies. Platforms such as mobile applications and social media have enabled branding to move beyond the traditional framework of broadcasting and one-way communication, becoming an interactive and personalized process in which consumers co-create brand value (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2024; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Thus, brands are now dynamic entities that are constantly evolving due to continuous consumer engagement (Dessart, 2017). This change has led to digital branding emerging as an academically important topic that combines ideas from marketing, consumer behavior, communication, technology, and other fields (Collis & Collis, 2020; France et al., 2025; Ray et al., 2025).

Digital branding is the process of using digital technology and platforms to build and maintain a brand and its engagement throughout the digital ecosystem (Keller, 2016). The importance of this engagement has been increasing due to the rise of social media, thereby increasing the relevance of branding models based on consumer engagement, where user participation is necessary (Dessart, 2017; Vinerean, 2016). Innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and the metaverse are further revolutionizing how consumers experience brands and how companies' branding strategies build trust and demonstrate authenticity (Dwivedi et al., 2023; France et al., 2025).

Despite digital branding being a strategically important topic, research on it is scattered across multiple fields, ranging from influencer marketing to consumer behavior and brand management, as there is a lack of an overview of how these themes connect. There is also limited clarity about the field's structure, main contributors, and how digital branding has evolved thematically (Dropulić et al., 2022). Empirical evidence from emerging markets like Pakistan also highlights the various constraints organizations may face when pursuing digital branding adoption. This

includes issues such as building and maintaining consumer trust, ensuring data security, and integrating traditional channels with digital channels (Basit et al., 2025). Here, a bibliometric analysis can provide a structured way to map this field, thus highlighting the various links between digital branding-related research and offering future directions for theoretical development (Donthu et al., 2021).

The authors were unable to find any prior bibliometric study that has systematically mapped the thematic evolution of digital branding across developed and emerging markets simultaneously, or examined the collaboration patterns between these regions. The main issue is the lack of a holistic overview of the development of digital branding across contexts such as developed and developing markets (Adenuga, 2025; Deku et al., 2024). This gap has been filled in the past by scholars who have used bibliometric analysis to map fields like digital advertising and social media influence (Pahari et al., 2024; Sherief et al., 2025).

The present study contributes to the literature by providing the first integrated mapping of publication trends, collaborative networks, and thematic clusters in digital branding research from 2015 to 2025, with a specific focus on comparing developed and developing country contexts. The purpose of this study is to map the field's structure and help guide future studies by identifying top contributors, main thematic clusters, and conceptual links present in existing studies. The study aims to examine annual publication trends, authorship trends, and collaborations between countries and authors, and identify key themes and connections to discuss differences in digital branding between developed and developing countries. This is done using a bibliometric analysis of research on digital branding published in the Scopus database from 2015 to 2025, conducted with the Scopus Analyze function and VOSviewer.

Accordingly, this study explores the development of digital branding research over the years, identifying leading contributors to this growing field. The nature of collaborations is also studied along with the dominant themes and conceptual areas of existing studies. It also investigates the differences in digital branding research between developing and developed markets.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: section 2 reviews the existing literature on digital branding and its conceptual foundations, highlighting its current status. Section 3 explains the methodology, including the search strategy and tools employed. Section 4 presents the results, including publication trends, collaboration networks, keyword clusters, and some bibliometric laws. Section 5 discusses what these findings mean and links them back to the literature explored in section 2. Finally, section 6 concludes the study by outlining limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Foundations: Customer-Based Brand Equity Model and Digital Adaptation

Digital branding is a rapidly growing subfield of marketing research that combines digital technology, consumer behavior, and communication. Its increasing importance makes it a practical topic to study (Dwivedi et al., 2021; France et al., 2025; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). However, its foundation is still traditional branding theories, which have been adapted to fit digital environments (Keller, 2016). One of these is Keller's customer-based brand equity model, which shows how brand value depends on customer perceptions and responses (Keller, 1993). Its focus has shifted from consistency in brand meaning across mass media to creating co-created, consistent, and authentic brand narratives throughout digital platforms (Keller, 2016). This adaptation helps the consumer-based equity model remain a fundamental model even in the field of digital branding, as it helps provide a conceptual framework that can be used to study how digitization has changed the relationship between consumers and brands. It does this by linking brand identity to consumers' feelings and behavior (France et al., 2025; Ray et al., 2025).

2.2. From Promotion to Participation

Initially, digital branding was considered just a part of digital marketing that uses online tools to market a business (Edelman, 2010), but this view began changing over time. Scholars began debating the scope of this viewpoint. They believed that this limited the scope of digital branding to digital marketing despite the fact that consumer behavior on social

media platforms like Instagram and X was very different from that on other platforms (Collis & Collis, 2020; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

In these platforms, users could engage with one another and brands directly. Consumers began actively participating in brand-related discussions and even promoting their favorite brands by posting reviews online, sharing brand-related content, and engaging with brand posts (Collis & Collis, 2020). Evidence from recent bibliometric studies also shows that the focus of academic inquiry in digital promotion and advertising research has shifted toward participation-driven engagement models (Pahari et al., 2024; Sherief et al., 2025). This indicates that evolving literature is pointing toward a rethinking of branding as not just a part of digital marketing but rather a process of continuous brand-consumer interactions.

2.3. Social Media, Engagement, and Co-Creation

The sample of 349 articles showed that the focus of branding is shifting toward interaction and active consumer participation, as a significant portion of empirical studies consisted of research on social media (Instagram, Facebook). This may show that social media has become a hub that connects technology, communication, and consumer behavior by allowing consumers to comment, and share brand-related content (Dessart, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

The visual, emotional, and behavioral aspects of a consumer's interaction with brands play an important role in the level of trust and commitment a consumer has toward brands (Ali et al., 2025). Interactive campaigns are not only more effective at improving how customers perceive brands but also increase the likelihood that consumers will create user-generated content, which can, in turn, lead to increased purchases (Kiran et al., 2024; Vinerean, 2016). Beyond perceptual and behavioral outcomes, recent evidence shows that brand activity on social media may influence financial indicators, such as stock market dynamics and shareholder value for firms, highlighting the strategic importance of digital branding investments (Fayvishenko et al., 2023). Influencers can also provide a new channel that can be used in branding efforts effectively, because when influencers promote brands that align with their public image, the perceived credibility of the brand's message can improve. This can lead consumers to perceive such endorsements as more genuine and authentic (Ali et al., 2025; Khamis et al., 2016; Saini & Bansal, 2025).

Research on social media also shows that brand meaning in digital contexts arises from engagement between brands and consumers, where social media platforms enable this engagement (Dessart, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Gumparthi & Srivastava, 2024). Evidence from emerging markets also suggests that the results of these engagements may be mediated by variables such as brand trust and emotional attachment (Sarmad, 2024). These may play a critical role in turning digital interactions into loyalty-related outcomes.

2.4. Authenticity, Consistency, and Loyalty

The increase in interactions between brands and consumers highlights a trend. Authenticity is emerging as an important factor for a brand's success in digital environments (Labrecque et al., 2011). Moreover, when a brand aligns its ethical values and communications with its actions, it can increase its perceived authenticity. Empirical studies show that this may help increase the brand's credibility (Collis & Collis, 2020; Dropulić et al., 2022). This can lead to higher levels of sustained loyalty, as emotional and ethical engagement can help improve long-term brand equity. This is because authenticity requires continuous effort to be built over time through consistent, credible actions by a brand (Ray et al., 2025). Research also suggests that brands have to balance authentic storytelling with ongoing interactions.

2.5. Immersive Technologies and Measurement Challenges

Recent studies on digital branding reveal that the scholarly focus on technological advancements and their use in digital branding is increasing. These studies are increasingly focusing on the use of AI, AR, VR, and the metaverse for branding. This is due to these technologies transforming how consumers interact with brands. AI allows brands to personalize consumer's experiences, and AR enables virtual product trials. This makes consumer interactions much more dynamic and immersive. As such, traditional methods, such as surveys, may not be as useful for measuring consumer experience and the effectiveness of branding efforts.

These immersive technologies can help create more memorable brand experiences, which, in turn, can make branding efforts more effective. However, as measuring brand effectiveness is difficult, scholars suggest combining multiple data sources to measure it. They suggest combining

engagement metrics with behavioral data and experience metrics to measure it. However, studies also suggest that there are ethical concerns regarding the use of these technologies and measurement methods. These include persuasive design-related concerns and concerns related to personal data collection transparency. Scholars suggest that future studies focus on developing measurement methods while considering these ethical concerns.

2.6. Small and Medium Enterprises and Digital Branding in Emerging Markets

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are emerging as a recurring theme in applied research on digital branding. This is due to smaller businesses using online platforms to enter international markets. Online platforms lower entry barriers and allow targeted branding at lower costs (Basir, 2024; Deku et al., 2024). But SMEs in emerging markets still face challenges such as limited budgets, a lack of infrastructure, and limited digital literacy. This may limit the potential benefits of digital branding for them (Adenuga, 2025; Ijomah et al., 2024). Empirical evidence from Pakistan further highlights constraints related to consumer trust, digital skills, and the integration of traditional and digital branding strategies that organizations may face. The way organizations manage these constraints determines the effectiveness of digital branding among firms in emerging economies (Basit et al., 2025). Therefore, although digital branding can help smaller businesses enter the global market more easily, their success depends on whether they focus on building strategic partnerships, continuous training, and organizational capacity-building (Ijomah et al., 2024).

2.7. Innovation, Sustainability, and Ethical Concerns

Recent studies on digital transformation are focusing on integrating innovation and sustainability with branding strategies, as they no longer view technology as merely a channel for branding but rather as a core capability that can be built to help create and deliver value to consumers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; France et al., 2025). A recent study also highlights how themes like sustainability are increasingly linked to digital marketing-related themes (Tian et al., 2025). Brands can now use technologies such as data analytics and AI to personalize the branding messages they communicate to consumers, helping them develop narratives focused on sustainability (Dropulić et al., 2022).

However, this opportunity has its challenges, such as the level of trust consumers have in the authenticity of brand narratives, even when brands rely heavily on personalized marketing. Brands need to align their ethical values with their technological capabilities to increase transparency in consumer engagement, as this helps build trust and credibility (Dropulić et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

2.8. Methodological Trends and the Case for Bibliometrics

Existing research on digital branding is growing rapidly. However, it remains diverse and fragmented when viewed through a methodological lens. Scholars have used multiple methods to study digital branding. These range from surveys and online activity data to practical experiments that study the effects of engagement and authenticity on the value of branding efforts (Donthu et al., 2021). The need for a systematic analysis of the field continues to grow stronger. Bibliometric analysis is a method that could be suitable for synthesizing the literature on digital branding and analyzing its trends and emerging patterns (Chen et al., 2025; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This method can help identify key themes, collaborations between authors and countries, and future areas of research by providing a systematic understanding of the field of digital branding and its evolution (Chen et al., 2025; Donthu et al., 2021).

2.9. Synthesis and Research Agenda

Overall, research indicates that digital branding is an interdisciplinary field of study. It describes a field that is growing and becoming increasingly diverse. The literature highlights how traditional branding theories have been adapted to digital environments for digital branding. These adaptations integrate social and technological factors such as social interactions, immersive technologies, and innovative capabilities. Scholars and practitioners use these adaptations to help explain how brands create value and build brand equity in digital environments.

Some major themes have been identified in the literature, such as digital brand identity, social media engagement, the effects of authenticity in narratives, the use of immersive technologies for branding, digital transformation, an emphasis on sustainability, and digital brand equity. These diverse themes highlight the need for a systematic bibliometric

analysis for a more complete understanding of the field (Donthu et al., 2021; Ray et al., 2025). A recent study by Chen et al. (2025) showed how bibliometric analysis can enhance the understanding of a field by mapping its trends and structures. This paper conducts a bibliometric analysis of digital branding literature.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Database, Search Strategy, and Selection Criteria

All bibliometric data was taken from Scopus due to its comprehensive database of journals in business and social sciences.

Table 1: Queries and document counts

No.	Query	No. of documents
1	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ('digital brand' OR 'online brand' OR 'social media brand')) OR (TITLE-ABS-KEY ('digital marketing' OR 'online marketing' OR 'e-marketing') AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ('brand'))	936
2	AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'BUSI') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'SOCI') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'ECON') OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, 'DECI'))	744
3	AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, 'ar'))	410
4	AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, 'English'))	386
5	AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026	349

A total of 349 articles remained after applying filters for subject area, document type, and language.

Table 1 shows the steps taken to refine the Scopus search that produced the final 349 articles. This search was conducted on 21 October 2025. First, a combination of 'digital marketing' and conceptually similar terms, such as 'online marketing' and 'e-marketing' was searched with 'digital branding' using Scopus's OR and AND options to obtain 936 documents. Second, the subject areas were restricted to business, social sciences, economics, and decision sciences for better relevance. This reduced the results to 744 documents. Then, the search was limited to journal articles. After this, 410 documents remained. The authors further limited the documents to only English-language documents, and 386 articles remained. Finally, the authors used the publication-year filter to include only articles from 2015 to 2025. This resulted in a final set of 349 articles.

Table 1 shows how the authors capture the full scope of digital branding research while maintaining conceptual specificity. The Boolean structure combines two complementary streams of direct digital branding terms ('digital brand,' 'online brand,' and 'social media brand') and digital marketing terms ('digital marketing,' 'online marketing,' and 'e-marketing'). These two streams are linked to the term 'brand' through the AND option. This is done to ensure that all articles are relevant to branding in digital contexts. This dual-stream approach is necessary because digital branding research is rarely published as standalone research. Instead, it is often published under broader digital marketing research and thus linked to digital marketing and online marketing-related keywords. Restricting the search to only explicit 'digital brand' phrases would exclude relevant studies where branding is examined within digital marketing contexts, e.g., social media campaigns and influencer branding.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria used for screening and refinement

No.	Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
1	Database source	Articles indexed in the Scopus database	Articles not indexed in Scopus
2	Publication type	Journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, dissertations, working papers
3	Language	English-language publications	Non-English-language publications
4	Conceptual focus	Studies explicitly addressing digital branding, branding in digital marketing contexts, digital branding in social media marketing contexts, or having an online brand identity-related emphasis	Studies focusing on unrelated topics, such as e-commerce systems or ICT,* without a branding context
5	Field of study	Business, management, marketing, social sciences, psychology, decision sciences, economics	Technical or computer science domains unrelated to branding or marketing
6	Relevance and scope	Papers with a conceptual, empirical, or bibliometric focus on digital branding or brand communication in digital environments	Papers where branding is a secondary or incidental topic

* ICT = information and communications technology.

The inclusion criteria in Table 2 further helped refine the set of selected articles. It ensured that branding remained the central conceptual focus and excluded general digital marketing studies that lacked a branding dimension. The subsequent manual screening of titles and abstracts was conducted by the first author, and all articles were found to be relevant to branding. Full-text screening was not conducted systematically for all articles. However, full texts were consulted for some articles when thematic relevance could not be established from the title and abstract alone. The final number of articles used in the bibliometric analysis was 349. This strategy allowed the authors to balance sensitivity with specificity.

Table 2 shows the criteria used to include articles relevant to digital branding and to exclude other documents. The database source was limited to Scopus, and the publication type was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles. Language was restricted to English for readability and consistency. Conceptual focus criteria ensured that branding was the central theme, so this step removed works that focused on other aspects and did not use branding as a research variable. The field of study was restricted to ensure that the results focused on business and social science perspectives, excluding purely technical computer science publications. Relevance and scope criteria limited the results to papers with a primary focus on branding to ensure thematic coherence in co-occurrence analyses.

3.2. Data Cleaning and Refinement

Data cleaning was conducted in the following steps. First, a thesaurus file was created to combine keywords with similar meaning. For example, 'consumer behaviour' and 'consumer behavior' were merged as they contained a word with different spellings. 'Digital marketing' and 'online marketing' were also merged as they were treated as synonyms. Generic terms irrelevant to the topic, such as 'bibliometric analysis' and 'higher education' were removed for better coverage of the themes. Country names and author names were also excluded for the same reason. Second, minimum occurrence thresholds were set at 2 for co-authorship, 5 for country co-authorship, and 4 for keyword co-occurrence. These numbers were selected after testing different cutoffs, such as 3 and 5 for keywords—3 resulted in too many, and 5 resulted in too few keywords. The selected

thresholds were, therefore, retained as they provided interpretable network structures while minimizing excessive fragmentation and isolated nodes.

3.3. Analysis Tools

Data was analyzed using VOSviewer (v.1.6.20) for mapping networks and Scopus Analyze Results for descriptive statistics.

4. Empirical Results

The findings from the bibliometric analysis included publication trends, author- and country-level collaborations, and keyword co-occurrence. All results were based on the final refined set of 349 Scopus articles from 2015 to 2025.

4.1. Bibliometric Indicators

Table 3 shows the study's bibliometric indicators based on the sample of 349 articles. These include information regarding publications, authorship, citations, journal distribution, and keyword clustering.

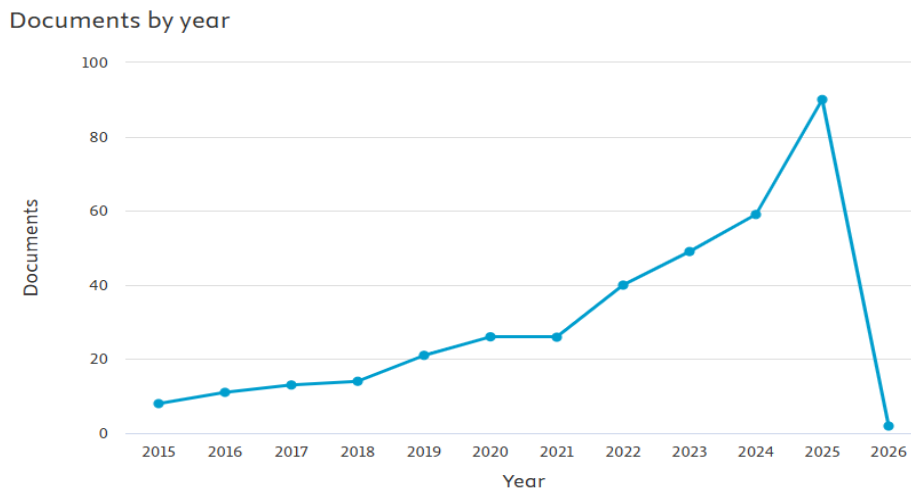
Table 3: Summary of bibliometric indicators

Indicator	Value
Total documents	349
Study period	2015–2025
Total authors by Scopus ID	948
Total journals	252
Total countries	77
Total citations	8,050
Avg. citations per article	23.07
Dataset h-index	36
Authors with one publication	913 (96.31%)
Lotka's law exponent	5.32
Core journals (Bradford zone 1)	31
Articles in core journals	117 (33.52%)
Most frequent keyword	Social media (74)
No. of keyword clusters	6

4.2. Annual Publication Trends

Figure 1 shows the annual publication trend, which suggests three stages of growth in publications related to digital branding. First, the early stage from 2015 to 2018, when researchers applied branding theories in online environments (Keller, 2016). Second, the middle stage from 2018 to 2021, when research on digital branding increased, and the focus shifted to social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that the two may be correlated, but the bibliometric data alone cannot determine this as multiple factors may have played a role. Research growth halted and even decreased slightly from 2020 to 2021. Finally, the later stage from 2021 to 2025 saw a surge in publications, which may reflect the two situations.

Figure 1: Publication trend



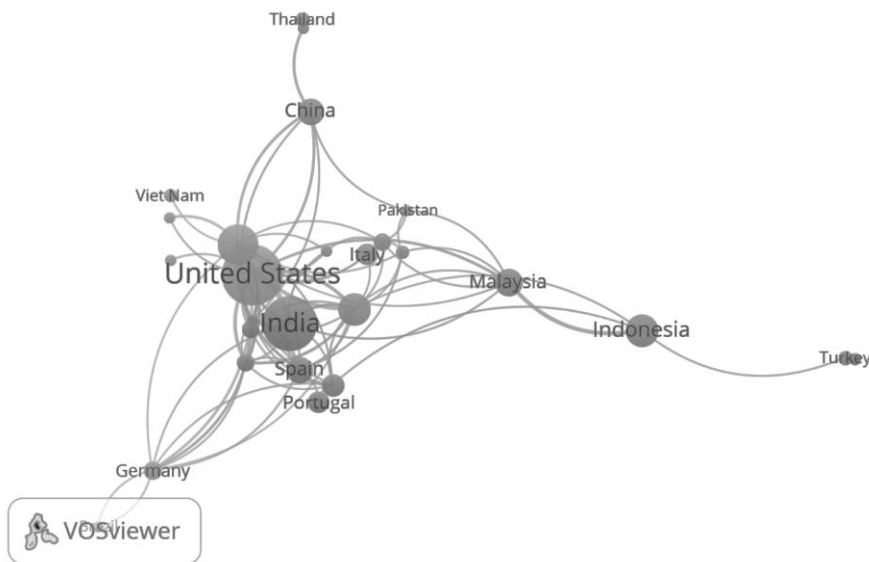
First, this may reflect brands' growing investment in digital channels. Second, there may be new research opportunities that have emerged due to advancements in technology, such as AI and VR (Dwivedi et al., 2023; France et al., 2025).

Recent increases in publications should be seen as both an increase in quantity and diversification in themes, reflecting a shift toward studies focusing on authenticity and immersive experiences (Collis & Collis, 2020; Ray et al., 2025).

4.3. Country and Regional Contributions

Figure 2 shows country-wise contributions and collaboration links. The network map shows the US, UK, and Australia as the largest collaboration networks by publication count and link strength, indicating frequent cross-country co-authorships. This network plays a pivotal role in research on digital branding (Donthu et al., 2021). Secondary clusters formed by countries in Western Europe, such as Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, make major contributions to themes such as place branding and authenticity in tourism-related contexts (Collis & Collis, 2020). Asia-Pacific nodes, mainly emerging economies such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan, are smaller but growing, indicating that research on digital branding-related topics from these regions is expanding but remains less integrated with core Western networks (Basir, 2024; Deku et al., 2024).

Figure 2: Collaboration networks between countries



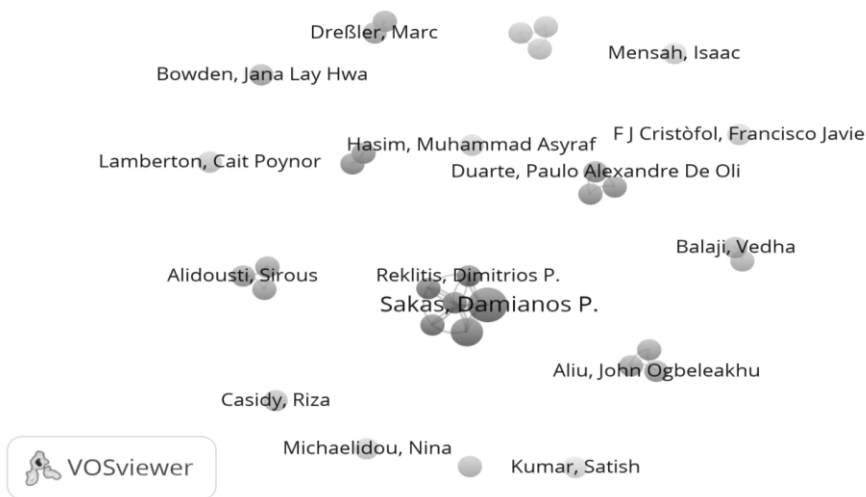
Within the refined dataset, 18 of 21 countries are linked in the network, which shows that several countries are publishing research independently. This shows both the dominance of Western countries in this area of research and the rise in works that address regional and local market challenges and SME branding challenges (Adenuga, 2025). The country with the most contributions is the US, with 68 articles. India

follows with 58, showing how research in emerging markets is increasing rapidly, and then the UK with 32. These three countries account for nearly half of the articles related to digital branding in the Scopus database. The map suggests that comparative and cross-cultural studies could add value by integrating established theoretical frameworks from countries such as the US and UK with evidence from emerging markets.

4.4. Author Collaboration Network

Figure 3 shows networks of collaboration between different researchers. There is no single network that connects many authors. Instead, there are multiple, separate, small and medium-sized clusters with limited links between them. The largest cluster has six authors and centers on social media branding and consumer engagement themes with relatively more co-authorship, indicating it is an active research group that repeatedly collaborates on similar topics (Dessart, 2017; Vinerean, 2016). Other clusters focus on brand identity and authenticity, SMEs, and entrepreneurship-related branding.

Figure 3: Authorship collaboration map



The fragmented network structure shows that authors mainly work in groups, usually within the same institutions or countries, rather than international collaborations. This might be due to constraints like data availability, language, and funding. However, the presence of clusters

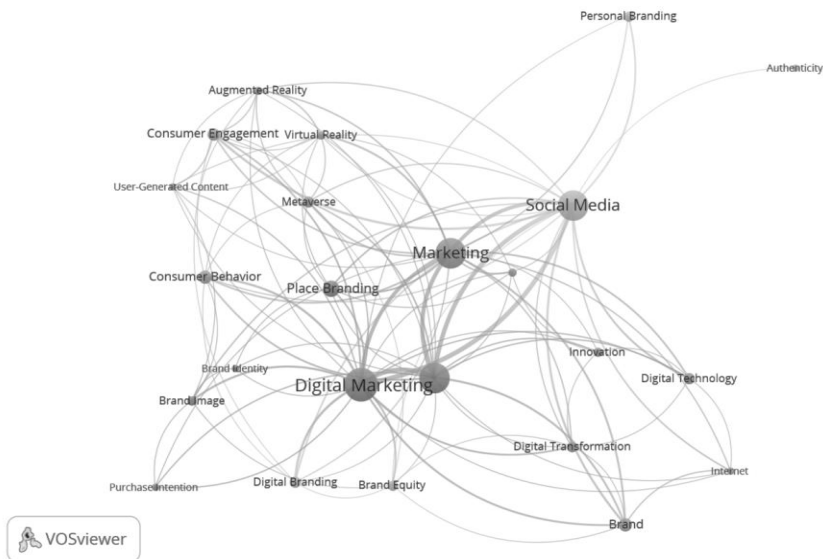
focused on related themes indicates the possibility for future collaborations.

The author with the largest number of documents on digital branding in the Scopus database between 2015 and 2025 was D. P. Sakas, who had published four articles. The second was M. C. Terzi, who had three articles. Others, such as S. Alidousti, J. Aliu, V. Balaji, R. Casidy, F. J. Cristòfol, M. Dreßler, P. Duarte, and A. Estima, followed, with two articles each. This data further proves the fragmented structure of authorship in this field.

4.5. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

Figure 4 maps six distinct clusters representing keywords from the sample. This map was obtained using keyword co-occurrence analysis on our sample. This analysis was performed using VOSviewer. The six clusters obtained from the analysis each represent themes present within the digital branding literature. The figure also highlights the links between the keywords and digital branding research. Among the keywords, 'social media' has the most occurrences (74). Digital marketing and marketing-related keywords also have high occurrence rates. Figure 4 shows the connections between the keywords and highlights the use of digital branding under the broader fields of digital and social media marketing. As such, digital branding itself has fewer occurrences. However, the use of digital and social media marketing for branding is much more extensive in the literature.

Figure 4: Author keywords co-occurrence map



4.5.1. Cluster One: Branding and Digital Marketing Focus

The keywords included ‘brand identity,’ ‘brand image,’ ‘branding,’ ‘digital marketing,’ ‘place branding,’ and ‘purchase intention.’ Cluster one is the largest on the map and represents one of the most prominent themes in digital branding literature. It highlights the combination of traditional branding concepts with digital activities. It shows the trend of researchers adapting these concepts to digital environments. Researchers continue to explore how digital activities influence branding efforts and their outcomes. Among these, many studies explore the effects of social media campaigns as well. Platform-based branding efforts and campaigns have also been studied. Another aspect that these studies focus on is the outcomes. The most common branding outcomes that researchers studied are awareness, trust, purchase intention, and engagement.

4.5.2. Cluster Two: Immersive Tech and Consumer Engagement

The keywords include ‘augmented reality,’ ‘consumer behavior,’ ‘consumer engagement,’ ‘metaverse,’ and ‘virtual reality.’ Cluster two focuses on immersive technologies, an emerging area of research gaining attention. These studies focus on the application of these technologies.

They study the use of AR, VR, and the metaverse for branding purposes. They also examine consumer experiences regarding these branding efforts. The studies discuss the limitations of traditional branding methods and measuring outcomes that are no longer sufficient for newer branding methods. This cluster contains 20 articles that highlight a limited number of studies but a growing interest.

4.5.3. *Cluster Three: Technology, Innovation, and Sustainability*

The keywords include 'digital technology,' 'digital transformation,' 'innovation,' 'marketing,' and 'sustainability.' Cluster three highlights changes in traditional branding activities but links them with digital transformation. Studies in this cluster focus on technology advancements and innovation within digital branding contexts. These studies focus on topics such as AI, analytics, big data, and other important changes that are transforming digital branding activities. The appearance of the keyword 'sustainability' suggests that scholars are also studying digital branding contexts and 'their connection to digital branding strategies.

4.5.4. *Cluster Four: Authenticity and Personal Branding*

The keywords include 'authenticity,' 'personal branding,' and 'social media.' Cluster four focuses on personal branding in social media contexts, showing that researchers have focused on identity-building and self-preservation within digital environments. Scholars also emphasize the authenticity of communication and its effects. As such, authenticity is also a recurring topic within digital branding research. This cluster highlights the roles of social media and personal branding and the link between them.

4.5.5. *Cluster Five: Core Brand and Internet*

The keywords include 'brand' and 'internet.' Cluster five represents a small but important cluster for digital branding studies. It represents broader studies that focus on the use of the internet for branding purposes. It mainly reflects the initial evolution of digital branding.

4.5.6. *Cluster Six: Digital Branding*

The keywords include 'brand equity' and 'digital branding.' Cluster six is another core cluster that focuses on digital branding activities

and the value these activities provide. Scholars discuss how digital branding activities contribute to brand value, highlighting the concept of brand equity within digital contexts. These studies also highlight scholars' increasing interest in digital branding.

4.6. Bibliometric Law Verification

The study examines whether the digital branding literature aligns with well-known bibliometric patterns, such as Lotka's law and Bradford's law, to better understand the field (Bradford, 1934; Lotka, 1926). Lotka and Bradford's laws were included to provide additional insights into author productivity patterns and journal concentration within the digital branding literature.

In line with Lotka's law of author productivity, the findings show that most authors published only one article in our sample. This was about 96.31 percent of our sample. Only 2.95 percent published two articles. The calculated exponent, which was 5.32, was estimated using a log-log transformation of Lotka's distribution ($A_n = A_1/n^c$), where the relationship between the number of publications and the frequency of authors was modeled through linear regression on logarithmically transformed values. This result is much higher than Lotka's value of around 2. The share of single-publication authors is also higher than Lotka's prediction of 60 percent. The fitted distribution, therefore, suggests a steeper decline in author productivity than predicted by the classical Lotka distribution. This highlights a highly fragmented authorship structure. However, the findings should be interpreted descriptively because the upper tail of the productivity distribution was limited. This might have been due to fragmentation in the field, as most of the authors publish once or twice at most, with a few highly prolific authors.

The study also uses Bradford's law, which deals with journal scattering. The journals were first ranked in descending order of productivity. They were then divided into three approximately equal Bradford zones, each containing approximately one-third of the total articles. The first zone represented the Bradford core journals of the field. The results show that our sample of 349 articles appeared across 252 different journals, but the Bradford core zone 1 had 31 journals that published 33.52 percent of the articles. This result aligns with Bradford's

assumptions that a small number of journals publish a large share of articles. The estimated Bradford multiplier was 2.01, indicating progressive journal scattering across successive zones.

In terms of citations, the authors calculated that the average article received 23.07 citations, and the h-index for the whole dataset was 36. This means that 36 articles in the sample have at least 36 citations each. Moreover, the most cited paper had 1,035 citations (Khamis et al., 2016). The citation indicators also collectively suggest that the field remains fragmented in authorship structure. However, several highly cited studies have greatly contributed to the development of digital branding literature, which suggests that this might be an emerging field gaining recent attention from scholars.

5. Discussion of Findings

The bibliometric mapping shows a field that is swiftly growing and diversifying. A sample of 349 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2025 was analyzed in this study. The findings show three main patterns about how current research has been shaped. There is a concentration of social media and campaign-related studies. Additionally, an emerging but rapidly growing interest in immersive technologies is evident as more scholars have begun studying their effects on branding. Finally, a persistent conceptual effort by scholars to adapt brand-equity thinking to digital contexts is also present.

The top author keyword is 'social media,' which occurred 74 times. Platform-related keywords were present in 25 articles (7.16 percent). Keywords related to immersive technologies were present in 20 articles (5.73 percent). Brand equity-related keywords appeared in 21 articles (6 percent). These numbers highlight both the empirical focus and conceptual emphasis of digital branding literature. The reviewed literature also reveals several important tensions within the digital branding field.

Algorithmic personalization increases content relevance for users and can improve short-term engagement. However, personalization may undermine perceived authenticity. This happens when data usage policies are not transparent. Recent and older studies suggest that brands should combine personalization with transparent and consistent actions to build

customer trust and sustain long-term relationships (France et al., 2025; Keller, 2016). Similarly, immersive platforms such as the metaverse create new experiential opportunities for branding. However, existing measurement tools and ethical frameworks remain insufficient for evaluating these environments (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The country collaboration analysis shows that the strongest research networks were concentrated in the US, UK, Australia, and several Western European countries. Developing countries, such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan, appeared in smaller collaboration clusters. As such, they had fewer international links. Publications from these countries have increased in recent years, but their integration into dominant collaboration networks is still limited (Adenuga, 2025; Deku et al., 2024). This suggests that most of the existing knowledge on digital branding is generated within developed economies. They may not be able to fully reflect the institutional, cultural, and technological conditions present in emerging economies like Pakistan.

The methodological approaches used in the reviewed literature also reveal several imbalances. Literature reviews, survey-based research, and platform metric analyses were common across the sample, while longitudinal studies, experiments, and cross-country comparative research remained limited. This makes it difficult to determine whether observed relationships remain stable over time or across different contexts. The growing interest in immersive technologies such as augmented reality (AR), VR, and the metaverse also highlights the need for research designs that examine consumer behavioral responses beyond self-reported perceptions.

A review of the thematic clusters revealed two issues. First, many studies have focused on relationships between digital campaign characteristics and outcomes, such as engagement, trust, and purchase intention, while fewer studies have examined branding efforts under controlled conditions.

Second, recent studies have called for integrated models of digital branding and digital brand equity (France et al., 2025; Ray et al., 2025). However, there is still little consensus on how these concepts should be measured across different platforms and digital environments. This

demand for integrated models and lack of consensus further suggest that the field is still developing more standardized theoretical and methodological frameworks. However, there was a lack of studies using longitudinal research designs, experiments, or comparative approaches that study cross-country or regional effects. This makes it difficult to determine whether observed relationships remain stable over time or across different contexts. The growing interest in immersive technologies, such as AR, VR, and the metaverse, also highlights the need for more appropriate research designs. These research designs should help scholars study consumer behavioral responses beyond their self-reported perceptions.

5.1. Practical Implications

The findings have several implications for practitioners. The dominance of social media-related keywords and themes suggests that digital branding strategies should prioritize continuous consumer interaction rather than one-way promotional communication. Personalization has also been observed in literature to increase engagement. However, authenticity also emerged as a recurring theme across literature. As such, organizations should ensure that personalization efforts are supported by transparent communication regarding data collection and usage practices. Otherwise, a lack of transparency may weaken consumer trust despite the use of personalized content for improving engagement.

Growing scholarly attention toward immersive technologies also has practical implications. Organizations investing in these technologies may benefit from evaluating consumer experiences using behavioral indicators rather than relying only on traditional engagement metrics. Interaction patterns and time spent within digital environments may also provide a better understanding of consumer responses to immersive brand experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The country-level analysis showed increasing contributions from emerging economies despite their comparatively weaker integration into international collaboration networks. For SMEs operating in these markets, digital branding offers opportunities to reach broader audiences at a lower cost. However, successful implementation may depend on investments in

digital capabilities, consumer trust building, and adaptation to local market conditions (Basir, 2024; Ijomah et al., 2024).

5.2. Study Limitations

Several limitations exist. First, the dataset is limited to Scopus-indexed journal articles in English, and important works in other languages, conference proceedings, or other documents were not included. Second, the keyword-search and text-matching approach identifies thematic presence rather conservatively, as papers that discuss a topic without using the exact search terms may be missed. Third, bibliometric methods visualize structural patterns but cannot establish causal links or verify the quality of individual empirical designs. Fourth, country attribution using affiliation strings is best-effort and may undercount cross-affiliated authors or institutions with complex listings. Finally, this study does not utilize altmetric indicators that could capture attention and societal engagement that citations alone cannot.

5.3. Future Research Directions

This study highlights future directions for the field. Researchers should reconcile personalization and authenticity. Future theory should specify mediators and boundary conditions, for example, when personalization enhances perceived value compared to when it undermines authenticity. Researchers should test mechanisms experimentally and incorporate perceived transparency as a moderator (France et al., 2025).

Another direction is to advance immersive measurement and causal design. Given the early stage of immersive research (20 articles explicitly mention AR/VR/metaverse terms), scholars should develop and validate measurement protocols that combine behavioral traces, experience sampling, and attention metrics. A further priority is to promote comparative and inclusive research. Comparative designs that include emerging markets are needed to test the boundary conditions of currently dominant models and to suggest adaptations that account for the business environment (Adenuga, 2025; Deku et al., 2024).

This study does not utilize altmetric indicators, and future studies could include them to provide a complementary view of the research impact and public engagement beyond citations alone. Future studies could also overlay mapping techniques in VOSviewer using altmetric data to visualize which thematic clusters have higher public engagement.

Finally, scholars should develop measures for operationalizing digital brand equity. Recent studies emphasize the need for integrative frameworks that can operationalize and compare brand equity measures across platforms (France et al., 2025; Ray et al., 2025).

6. Conclusion

This study mapped the intellectual structure of digital branding research using 349 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2015 and 2025. The bibliometric analysis included publication trends, co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and verification of Lotka and Bradford's laws. The results show that research on digital branding has increased considerably, with growth accelerating after 2021.

Social media was the most frequently occurring keyword in the dataset. This showed that the literature is focused on social media-related branding activities. The keyword clusters also showed growing interest in immersive technologies. However, the number of studies in this area remains small.

Another recurring theme was digital brand equity. This indicates that researchers are continuously adapting traditional branding concepts to digital contexts.

The collaboration analysis showed that authors mostly worked in small groups with limited connections between clusters. This resulted in fragmented collaboration networks between authors. A similar pattern was observed at the country level. The US and UK occupied central positions in the collaboration network, while other European countries had more connections. However, emerging economies such as Pakistan showed increasing research output but remained less connected to the larger international networks that are dominated by the US and European countries.

The findings point to the need for more comparative research involving emerging markets and greater use of experimental designs to establish causality. Further research is also needed to better operationalize digital brand equity. This will help develop improved methods for measuring consumer responses to branding efforts. Overall, digital branding has matured into a distinct subfield, but important gaps remain, particularly in theory development for private platforms and cross-cultural collaboration.

References

- Adenuga, D. (2025). Digital marketing strategies for emerging markets: Opportunities and challenges. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 27(2), 13–21.
- Ali, F., Suveatwatanakul, C., Nanu, L., Ali, M., & Terrah, A. (2025). Social media marketing and brand loyalty: Exploring interrelationships through symmetrical and asymmetrical modeling. *Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC*, 29(1), 114–135.
- Basir, N. H. (2024). *Digital marketing strategies for SMEs: Enhancing competitiveness in the technological era*. SSRN.
- Basit, A., Bhaumik, A., & Niazi, A. A. K. (2025). Challenges of digital marketing adoption in FMCG Sector in Pakistan: A MICMAC-ISM Approach. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 19(3), 468–494.
- Bradford, S. C. (1934). Sources of information on specific subjects. *Engineering: An Illustrated Weekly Journal*, 137, 85–86.
- Chen, K.-Y., Chan, H.-C., & Chan, C.-M. (2025). How has global research on neural degeneration in glaucoma evolved from 1977 to 2025? A pioneering bibliometric insight into trends, impact, and future directions. *International Ophthalmology*, 45, 335.
- Collis, W., & Collis, D. J. (2020, October 29). *How to build a digital brand that lasts*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/10/how-to-build-a-digital-brand-that-lasts>
- Deku, W. A., Wang, J., & Preko, A. K. (2024). Digital marketing and small and medium-sized enterprises' business performance in emerging markets. *Asia Pacific Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 18(3), 251–269.
- Dessart, L. (2017). Social media engagement: A model of antecedents and relational outcomes. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(5–6), 375–399.

- Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 133, 285–296.
- Dropulić, B., Krupka, Z., & Vlašić, G. (2022). Brand equity in a digital age: Systematic literature review. *Ekonomski Vjesnik*, 35(1), 277–302. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/403509>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Hughes, L., Wang, Y., Alalwan, A. A., Ahn, S. J., Balakrishnan, J., Barta, S., Belk, R., Buhalis, D., Dutot, V., Felix, R., Filieri, R., Flavián, C., Gustafsson, A., Hinsch, C., Hollensen, S., Jain, V., Kim, J., Krishen, A. S.,...Wirtz, J. (2023). Metaverse marketing: How the metaverse will shape the future of consumer research and practice. *Psychology & Marketing*, 40(4), 750–776.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168.
- Edelman, D. C. (2010, December). *Branding in the digital age: You're spending your money in all the wrong places*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2010/12/branding-in-the-digital-age-youre-spending-your-money-in-all-the-wrong-places>
- Fayvishenko, D., Cherniavska, L., Bondarenko, I., Sashchuk, T., Sypchenko, I., & Lebid, N. (2023). The impact of brand social media marketing on the dynamics of the company's share value. *Business: Theory and Practice*, 24(1), 24–32.
- France, S. L., Davcik, N. S., & Kazandjian, B. J. (2025). Digital brand equity: The concept, antecedents, measurement, and future development. *Journal of Business Research*, 192, 115273.

- Gumparthi, V. P., & Srivastava, M. (2024). The social influences in consumer-brand relationships: The moderating roles of gender and consumer age. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 30(5), 767–810.
- Ijomah, T. I., Idemudia, C., Eyo-Udo, N. L., & Anjorin, K. F. (2024). Innovative digital marketing strategies for SMEs: Driving competitive advantage and sustainable growth. *International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(7), 2173–2188.
- Kaur, J., Saini, S., Behl, A., & Poonia, A. (2024). Impact of digital storytelling on improving brand image among consumers. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 30(8), 1348–1376.
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2016). Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208.
- Kiran, F., Lodhi, S. A., Shabbir, R., & Zubair, A. (2024). Consumers’ journey toward brand loyalty using social media brand community engagement: A case of fashion brands. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 30(1), 129–156.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Keller, K. L. (2016). Reflections on customer-based brand equity: Perspectives, progress, and priorities. *AMS Review*, 6, 1–16.
- Labrecque, L. I., Markos, E., & Milne, G. R. (2011). Online personal branding: Processes, challenges, and implications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25(1), 37–50.
- Lamberton, C., & Stephen, A. T. (2016). A thematic exploration of digital, social media, and mobile marketing: Research evolution from 2000 to 2015 and an agenda for future inquiry. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 146–172.
- Lotka, A. J. (1926). The frequency distribution of scientific productivity. *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, 16(12), 317–323.

- Pahari, S., Bandyopadhyay, A., Kumar, V. M., & Pingle, S. (2024). A bibliometric analysis of digital advertising in social media: The state of the art and future research agenda. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1).
- Ray, A. S., Srikumar, M. S. S. V., Dash, P., & Gaurav, K. (2025). Digital branding - Antecedents and consequences. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 29(3), 1–11. <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/digital-branding--antecedents-and-consequences.pdf>
- Saini, S., & Bansal, R. (2025). Parasocial relationships and self-disclosure: Strengthening brand image through brand attitude in premium cosmetics. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 31(2), 337–366.
- Sarmad, I., Imtiaz, M. A., Bukhari, S. M. H., Abbas, A., & Munir, I. (2024). Brand experience and brand loyalty: The moderating role of brand trust and the mediating role of brand love in Pakistani smartphone users. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 18(1), 40–61.
- Sherief, A. R., Tarofder, A. K., Ibrahim, A. M., Sabir, R. I., Ahmad, M., & Rahman, A. U. (2025). Bibliometric analysis of social media persuasiveness and influence: A comprehensive review from 2010 to 2023. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1).
- Tian, Y., Kamran, Q., & Henseler, J. (2025). Sustainability in marketing: a review using multiple correspondence analysis. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1).
- Vinerean, S. (2016). Branding strategies for social media marketing. *Expert Journal of Marketing*, 4(2), 77–83.
- Van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84, 523–538.

Appendix

Thesaurus used for keyword standardization

Original term(s)	Unified or deleted	Rationale
consumer behaviour, consumer behavior	consumer behaviour	Same meaning, different spelling (British English kept)
digital marketing, online marketing, e-marketing	digital marketing	Functional synonyms in the context of branding
brand equity, brand value	brand equity	Conceptual overlap in digital branding literature
augmented reality, AR	augmented reality	Abbreviation expanded for clarity
virtual reality, VR	virtual reality	Abbreviation expanded for clarity
bibliometric analysis	deleted	Methodological term, not a branding concept
higher education	deleted	Context-specific, not generalizable
country names (e.g., USA, India)	deleted	Geographic identifiers, not thematic
author names	deleted	Not relevant to thematic analysis

