

Mapping the Landscape of Organizational Branding: A BERTopic-Driven Exploration

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a comprehensive, two-stage methodology, systematic data retrieval from the Scopus database followed by a Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERTopic)-driven text analysis, to map the thematic landscape of 7,920 articles on organizational branding. The analysis uncovers fifteen predominant topics that together portray an increasingly granular field. Salient streams encompass employer branding and talent attraction, consumer brand loyalty, organizational identity and corporate heritage, place and destination branding, and emerging technology-enabled trust mechanisms such as blockchain. Time-series results confirm an accelerating expansion of branding scholarship after 2000, underscoring the shift from product-centric tactics toward organization-wide brand strategies that intertwine corporate purpose, stakeholder engagement, and sociotechnical change. These findings reinforce branding's role as both a strategic asset and a sociocultural practice, informing theory development in legitimacy, stakeholder co-creation, and the dynamic interplay between technology and organizational identity. The study concludes that an integrative perspective, combining large-scale computational analysis with deep qualitative interpretation, remains essential for capturing the full complexity of organizational branding in a rapidly evolving social landscape.

Keywords: Organizational Branding, Stakeholder Reputation, Topic Modeling, BERTopic

JEL Classifications: M3, C8, C38

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational branding has emerged as a fundamental topic within the social sciences, significantly shaping both theory development and practical applications across a breadth of fields. Over recent decades, scholars have increasingly recognized branding not merely as an economic or marketing asset, but more broadly as an active symbolic system, deeply intertwined with organizational identity, reputation management, stakeholder relationships, and socio-cultural practices (Aaker, 1991; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). While traditional branding research had typically concentrated on product-centric strategies within narrow marketing disciplines, contemporary scholarship increasingly situates branding within larger interconnected frameworks that incorporate culture, organizational behavior, social dynamics, and even public policy considerations (Cheney, 1983; Balmer,

2001). Today, brand scholars actively explore how entities craft and sustain robust brand identities, articulate central values within complex social environments, and strategically mobilize stakeholders around narratives that extend beyond mere promotional activities to encompass broader sociological, psychological, and anthropological dimensions.

Despite this interdisciplinary expansion, current organizational branding literature remains fragmented, spread across diverse research streams and academic traditions, posing significant challenges to scholars attempting to map thematic continuities, measure conceptual impact, and identify research gaps systematically. Fortunately, advances in computational text analysis now offer powerful new mechanisms for synthesizing heterogeneous academic literature into cohesive frameworks while simultaneously tracking thematic progression over time.

Specifically, topic modeling methods, such as Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERTopic), facilitate the analysis of large-scale textual corpora, revealing latent patterns and narrative structures difficult to detect through manual reviews alone, thereby enabling deeper theoretical insights (Blei et al., 2003; Zupic and Čater, 2015).

Motivated by the need for greater conceptual clarity and integrative frameworks, this study aims to systematically map the thematic landscape of organizational branding research by adopting an advanced computational strategy, integrating large-scale data retrieval from the Scopus database with a comprehensive BERTopic analysis. By analyzing 7,920 scholarly contributions, this research identifies and closely examines the 15 most salient thematic clusters among a total of 105 clusters generated, thus offering an updated and sharpened analytic perspective compared to earlier attempts. This refined clustering enables a clearer delineation of major thematic domains, such as employer branding, brand trust mechanisms including blockchain, consumer brand loyalty, organizational identity and corporate heritage, and place or destination branding, highlighting their evolution and trajectories within organizational branding scholarship.

This enhanced investigation not only contributes to theoretical conversations by capturing nuanced shifts in how branding concepts are understood and deployed academically but also presents practical implications by aiding practitioners in comprehensively understanding the organizational identity landscape. Furthermore, by positioning branding as a socially embedded, culturally significant phenomenon, this research advances ongoing scholarly dialogues about legitimacy processes, stakeholder co-creation, and the evolving interface between technological innovation and organizational identities. Ultimately, it articulates the necessity and potency of combining computational rigor and interpretive depth to produce integrative theoretical insights into organizational branding's increasingly complex role within contemporary societies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational branding has emerged as a crucial area within marketing and management research, situated at the intersection of diverse disciplinary insights, emphasizing strategic alignment among identity, culture, and stakeholder engagement to cultivate sustainable competitive advantages (Balmer, 2001; Suddaby, 2010; Shabanabi and Kesavaraj, 2019). Contemporary scholarship increasingly positions organizational branding as not merely a managerial instrument but a symbolic and cultural phenomenon intricately tied to broader societal values, norms, institutions, and expectations (Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Kornberger, 2010). Recent work (2020-2025) further reinforces this shift by emphasizing purpose- and responsibility-infused corporate branding and multi-stakeholder interpretation of CSR claims as integral to brand meaning and legitimacy construction.

2.1. Conceptual Foundations of Organizational Branding

Historically, branding literature focused primarily on consumer products, emphasizing product differentiation, brand equity

measurement, and marketing communication (Aaker, 1991). However, scholars soon recognized that brands could also represent powerful strategic resources linked closely to organizational reputation, identity, and culture (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Thus, branding evolved into an organizational-level concept blending tangible symbols, such as visual identity elements and logos, and intangible phenomena such as shared cultural values, strategic ethics, and corporate social responsibilities (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002; Aaker, 2004). In line with this, recent corporate branding research increasingly treats CSR/purpose not simply as messaging, but as an interpretive domain through which stakeholders judge authenticity, responsibility, and legitimacy (Maon et al., 2021; Abratt and Kleyn, 2023; Abratt et al., 2025).

In this expanded view, organizational branding is often discussed interchangeably or closely associated with concepts like "corporate branding," "corporate identity," or "employer branding," each emphasizing how organizations themselves, and not merely their products, can be strategically positioned and differentiated (Bilro and Loureiro, 2016; Cascio and Graham, 2016). Organizational branding theory thus underscores the alignment between internal cultural values, external stakeholder expectations, and strategic coherence, emphasizing the critical role of authenticity and identity consistency in fostering stakeholder trust and building sustained reputation (Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Keller, 2013). Institutional theorists further elaborate this notion, highlighting how branding helps organizations gain symbolic legitimacy through deliberate conformity to societal norms, values, and regulatory expectations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Suddaby, 2010). From this perspective, organizational branding emerges as a dynamic symbolic enterprise involving diverse stakeholders who collectively negotiate brands' meanings, values, and legitimacy (Wæraas and Solbakk, 2009).

Additionally, contemporary literature highlights that brands increasingly function as identity-based resources capable of catalyzing internal employee commitment and external stakeholder trust (Holt, 2004; He and Balmer, 2007). Harris and de Chernatony (2001) notably posit a critical linkage between internal cultural values and external brand images, arguing that alignment between internal and external perceptions is crucial to building stakeholder confidence. This alignment principle has become foundationally embedded within current branding theories (Biraghi and Gambetti, 2017). Recent studies also revisit how organizations use history and heritage narratives to signal continuity and credibility, while noting that "heritage claims" may be strategically constructed and thus invite authenticity scrutiny (Brunninge, 2023).

2.2. Intersecting Domains: Organizational Identity, Culture, and Internal Branding

Since organizational brands encapsulate strategic mission and cultural integrity, literature highlights interconnected concepts like organizational identity, culture, and internal branding as critical levers shaping brand authenticity and resonance (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). Organizational identity is defined broadly as attributes, beliefs, or expressions that make organizations distinct and recognizable internally and externally. Hatch and Schultz (2003) famously emphasized the challenge of

brand dissonance, wherein divergences between external brand perceptions and internal organizational culture create discrepancies that undermine brand coherence.

Organizational culture thus profoundly influences branding practices through symbolic narratives, shared rituals, and collective identity frameworks that guide employee behaviors and shape brand authenticity (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Morhart et al., 2013). Internal branding literature highlights purposeful efforts, such as employee training, communication reinforcement, and leadership modeling, to embed brand values internally, affirm thoroughly internalized brand values and behaviors, and secure stakeholder trust externally (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Piehler et al., 2018). Thus, integrated internal-external branding processes simultaneously reinforce authentic organizational identities and build sustainable reputational equity. Recent evidence strengthens this internal focus by showing that internal employer branding practices can enhance employee engagement and clarify the employee value proposition (Staniec and Kalińska-Kula, 2021), and that “living the employer brand” becomes especially salient during crisis conditions (Rys et al., 2024).

2.3. Stakeholder Engagement and Brand Co-creation

While classic branding theories emphasize one-way communication models, contemporary branding scholarship increasingly recognizes the value and complexity of stakeholder co-creation and participatory governance (Jones and Bonevac, 2013). Organizations today actively solicit contributions and perspectives from diverse stakeholder groups, including consumers, employees, suppliers, governmental authorities, and community advocates, each wielding varying degrees of influence over brand meaning creation and legitimacy perceptions (Gregory, 2007; Jones et al., 2009). Digital technologies have amplified these collaborative dynamics, accelerating stakeholder visibility and engagement via social media platforms, enabling instant feedback exchanges, public criticism, and grassroots advocacy, all requiring new strategies to manage organizational identity integrity and prevent branding misalignments (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Hatch and Schultz, 2010). Recent empirical research supports these claims by demonstrating how stakeholders (including employees) can co-create brand image and reputation through social networks (Foroudi et al., 2020), and how corporate brand identity co-creation operates in B2B contexts through ongoing interactions among multiple stakeholder groups (Iglesias et al., 2020). Additionally, related recent evidence in IRMM also links digital communication qualities (e.g., media richness) to emotional attachment and brand trust outcomes, reinforcing the importance of digitally mediated engagement processes (Tran, 2025).

Critically, intensified stakeholder involvement and brand co-creation present considerable challenges, such as tensions around divergent stakeholder demands, and significant opportunities, particularly regarding brand authenticity and social identity resonance. Strong co-created identities foster deeper emotional connections, stakeholder loyalty, and reputational resilience, underscoring branding as a strategic asset in competitive markets, talent attraction, and community relationships (Mahesh and Suresh, 2019; Raki and Shakur, 2018).

2.4. Emerging Trends: Sustainability, CSR, and Globalization

Recent evolutions within branding research mirror broader societal shifts toward sustainability concerns, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and globalization issues (Fetscherin and Usunier, 2012; Kiron et al., 2013). Organizational brands increasingly integrate ethical narratives, environmental stewardship commitments, and global positioning to enhance legitimacy, attract ethically driven stakeholders, and affirm corporate citizenship status (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006; Cayla and Arnould, 2008). Scholars explore how global organizational brands balance universal brand coherence with essential local adaptability to cultural sensitivities, thus highlighting the complex interplay between global ambitions and localized cultural resonance (Du et al., 2010; Lynch, 2019). More recent work also extends these debates into brand activism and purpose-based positioning (including in B2B markets), highlighting how brands navigate contested sociopolitical expectations while managing stakeholder relationships and legitimacy risks (Kapitan et al., 2022).

Validating such authentic commitments, however, requires rigorous brand governance; scholars warn that superficial attempts at sustainability or CSR branding may risk backlash through accusations of “greenwashing,” thereby threatening legitimacy and stakeholder trust (Laufer, 2003). Consequently, organizational branding has evolved from merely promotional communications toward a broader socio-cultural construct, intimately connected to ethical, environmental, and societal efforts. Technology-mediated branding is also increasingly visible in recent research, including AI-enabled marketing applications for brand recognition (Shaily and Emma, 2021) and blockchain-oriented branding models (Bartoli et al., 2025) emphasizing transparency and verification as trust mechanisms (e.g., recent blockchain branding model research, 2025).

2.5. Methodological Developments and Ongoing Research Gaps

Methodologically, organizational branding scholarship is diverse, encompassing qualitative case studies, ethnographies, quantitative surveys, mixed-method analyses, and, increasingly, computational text analyses such as topic modeling and bibliometric approaches (Zupic and Čater, 2015; Morhart et al., 2013). While traditional studies relied heavily on qualitative description and theoretical case analyses, recent approaches leverage computational techniques like BERTopic modeling to systematically synthesize fragmented literature, capture latent thematic trends, and outline disciplinary evolutions across extensive publication datasets (Blei et al., 2003; Iankova et al., 2019). In particular, BERTopic has gained popularity for literature mapping because it leverages transformer embeddings for more context-sensitive topic representations (Grootendorst, 2022). Recent benchmarking efforts also emphasize improved preprocessing/evaluation for transformer-based topic modeling on scientific articles using BERTeley (Chagnon et al., 2024).

However, several research gaps persist. Most prominently, empirical studies still disproportionately focus on Western or developed contexts, leaving emerging markets critically understudied (Iglesias et al., 2013). Further methodological triangulation is necessary, for

example, combining network analyses with thematic qualitative insights may better elucidate the dynamics of brand communities and co-creation online (Ind et al., 2013). Additionally, research has inadequately explored evolving technological influences, such as digital transformation, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, and their implications for branding practice and theory. Finally, the broader impacts of CSR and sustainability initiatives on stakeholder responses and economic performance warrant rigorous exploration, as do questions surrounding brand democratization and internal-external power imbalances (Du et al., 2010; Lynch, 2019). Recent work on crisis contexts and employer branding (2021-2024) also suggests a need to theorize how branding systems adapt under shocks and how internal branding supports continuity and trust (Staniec and Kalińska-Kula, 2021; Rys et al., 2024).

Addressing these gaps requires an integrated, interdisciplinary methodological approach. The current study contributes by tracking nuanced thematic evolutions, highlighting emergent focal areas, and providing comprehensive analytical insights that critically advance understanding of organizational branding as both a strategic organization-level resource and a dynamic socio-cultural practice.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a robust two-stage methodological approach, integrating systematic literature retrieval from the Scopus database with advanced topic modeling text analysis. The methodology is explicitly designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the organizational branding literature while allowing deep analytical insights into latent thematic structures and their temporal dynamics. The following sections detail data collection procedures, pre-processing strategies, the topic modeling approach, the analytical interpretation techniques, and key ethical and methodological considerations guiding the study.

3.1. Data Collection Process

The primary objective of the data collection procedure was to compile a broad and relevant corpus of scholarly works dedicated to organizational branding. To create an inclusive search strategy, we employed a carefully designed Boolean query combining strategic keywords reflecting branding as it relates explicitly to organizational, corporate, or institutional contexts.

To align closely with the study's research goals, we restricted our search to the Scopus subject areas of Business (BUSI) and Social Sciences (SOCI). This disciplinary restriction strongly emphasized branding's organizational and socio-

cultural dimensions, aligning clearly with scholarship from management, sociology, organizational behavior, and related fields (Tranfield et al., 2003). Data extraction utilized a custom Python script interfacing systematically with Scopus's API endpoints to ensure methodological reproducibility and transparency. The script implemented multiple safeguards, including API rate-limit compliance and randomization, to reduce search bias, document results consistently, and produce a reproducible audit trail. All bibliometric metadata contributing to later analytical steps (titles, abstracts, authors, publication dates, journals, etc.) were collected into a single CSV file, facilitating streamlined downstream analysis (Figure 1 summarizes the workflow).

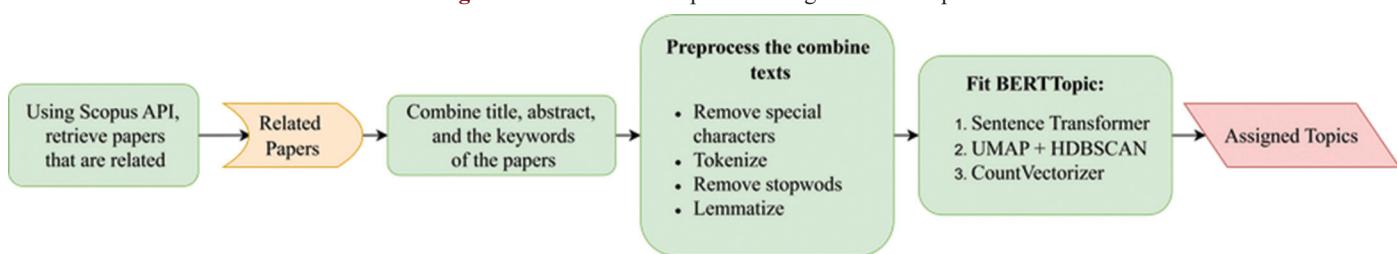
In the final data preparation stage, several restrictions increased the dataset's coherence and analytical robustness. Articles without abstracts, non-English publications, or those insufficiently focused on organizational branding were systematically filtered out. This thorough curation ensured relevance and alignment to the thematic context, preserving the dataset's integrity and compelling subsequent thematic exploration.

3.2. Data Pre-processing

Dataset cleaning began by integrating bibliometric data into a structured Pandas DataFrame. Metadata fields (title, abstract, author, date, and journal) were merged efficiently, consolidating textual information primarily into a unified "text" field composed of article titles and abstracts. Entries missing critical metadata (especially abstracts) or duplicated records resulting from journal indexing were systematically identified and removed to prevent distortion of the topic modeling outputs.

Following dataset refinement, textual pre-processing procedures were rigorously employed to prepare the corpus optimally for computational topic analysis. We followed recommended best practices in natural language processing (NLP), starting with text normalization, lowercasing the entire corpus, and removing symbols, punctuation, and numerical characters through regular expressions (Loper and Bird, 2002). Tokenization divided cleaned text into word-level segments using the NLTK library; common stop words were identified and eliminated to minimize semantic noise (Bird et al., 2009). Next, lemmatization (reducing varying word forms to their base grammatical root) was performed to unite semantically equivalent terms (e.g., "brands," "branding," and "branded" consolidated to the common lemma "brand"). These pre-processing steps yielded a structured and analytically consistent corpus, ideal for the nuanced analysis promised by subsequent topic modeling.

Figure 1: Workflow for topic modeling with BERTopic



3.3. Topic Modeling Strategy

We selected BERTopic (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers Topic Modeling) as our primary text analysis methodology, primarily due to its proven sophistication and sensitivity to contextual semantics compared to traditional topic modeling methods, such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). While LDA traditionally dominated text analytics research, recent advancements in NLP encourage methods capable of capturing complex semantic interactions in domain-specific scientific texts. BERTopic leverages deep neural embeddings, a more flexible, context-sensitive text representation method, combined with clustering algorithms to detect subtle and coherent themes underlying scholarly language. Such an approach particularly suits organizational branding scholarship, which is known for its specialized vocabulary, diverse terminology, and interdisciplinary rhetorical structures.

BERTopic's analytical workflow encompassed distinct sequential stages. Initially, textual embeddings for each pre-processed document (titles and abstracts) were generated using the Sentence Transformers model (sentence-transformers/all-mnlp-base-v2), offering superior semantic capture capabilities compared to classical bag-of-words models. Second, dimensionality reduction through Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection (UMAP) reduced embedding complexity into precise multidimensional representations, efficiently preserving local and global semantic structures (McInnes et al., 2018). Next, Hierarchical Density-Based Spatial Clustering (HDBSCAN) is a sophisticated, parameter-driven clustering algorithm that identifies naturally dense data clusters without requiring pre-set topic numbers, and groups semantic document representations into meaningful clusters.

BERTopic extracted representative keyword terms and n-gram clusters through class-based TF-IDF (c-TF-IDF) to yield interpretable thematic meanings. An iterative, manual refinement procedure subsequently fine-tuned these clusters by resolving overly broad or semantically overlapping themes, splitting single clusters into separate, coherent ones, or merging excessively fragmented clusters. Ultimately, we chose to focus on analyzing the first fifteen clusters (among an initially generated set of 105 clusters) due to their superior thematic coherence, research relevance, and conceptual clarity. Furthermore, we removed the outlier cluster ("−1"), which contained highly heterogeneous documents, enhancing interpretability. This combined computational and qualitative refinement strategy ensured robust, domain-informed themes that maintained high interpretive value for organizational branding research.

3.4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study employed a complementary quantitative and qualitative approach to gain insights into thematic trends and their scholarly evolution. We initiated our analysis by generating descriptive statistics, publication counts over time, major journals, and author affiliations—to clarify structural characteristics of the organizational branding domain and trace thematic shifts corresponding to broader socio-cultural and academic phenomena (Zupic and Čater, 2015).

The qualitative component examined representative documents within each topic cluster closely, enabling richer interpretations constrained by semantic coherence and theoretical nuance. This detailed qualitative reading offered more profound insights into clusters, highlighting methodological nuances, theoretical debates, and localized thematic applications within brand literature contexts. Through this interpretive integration, quantitative topic outputs underwent rigorous sociological and interdisciplinary reflections, connecting empirical topic findings holistically to established theoretical arguments and identifying opportunities for theoretical and methodological advancement (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Suddaby, 2010).

3.5. Ethical and Methodological Considerations

Ethical considerations and intellectual property respect were central guiding principles throughout our methodological processes. Abstract data and bibliometric metadata used here remain publicly accessible content. Additionally, careful consideration was given toward limitations and potential algorithmic biases, acknowledging the method's reliance on the lexical prominence of specific terms. To mitigate such risks, our workflow explicitly integrates reproducibility, transparency, systematic processing guidelines, and extensive qualitative validation, thus enhancing both methodological rigor and analytical robustness.

In summary, this comprehensive methodological design, including systematic and reproducible data collection, rigorous text pre-processing, sophisticated BERTopic-driven semantic modeling, and precise qualitative refinement, provides a robust basis to explore deeply embedded thematic structures, interpret their socio-cultural significance, and clarify the organizational branding literature's rich conceptual landscape.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section reports key results derived from an integrated topic modeling approach, guided by automated clustering outputs, visualizations, and further qualitative analysis (Blei et al., 2003; Grootendorst, 2022). Using the BERTopic algorithm, we identified fifteen principal thematic clusters characterizing the current landscape of organizational branding scholarship. Table 1 summarizes the topic structure and labels, providing concise thematic interpretations and document counts for each cluster.

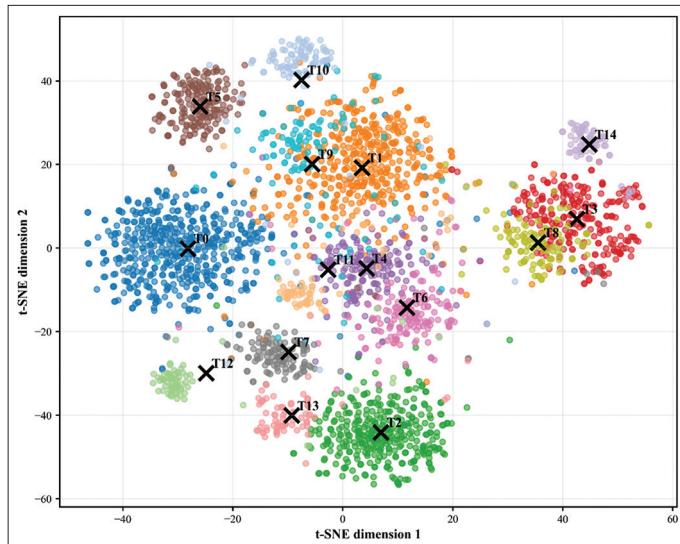
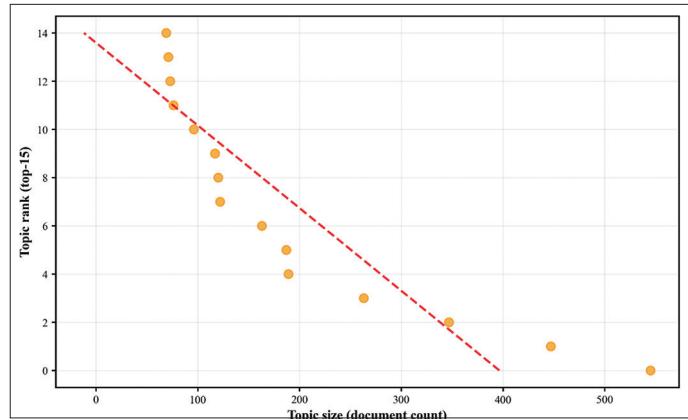
4.1. Topic Distribution and Intertopic Distances

The two-dimensional t-SNE visualization (Figure 2) displays semantic proximities and distributions among the identified topic clusters. Each colored grouping of individual points represents a distinct topic, while larger clusters (e.g., T0, Employer Branding and Talent Attraction; T1, Consumer–Brand Relationship and Loyalty; and T2, Organizational Identity and Change) signify fields possessing large scholarly communities and extensive research interest. Conversely, smaller clusters (e.g., T14, Trust and Reputation in Blockchain Networks) suggest specialized niche research domains attracting targeted academic interest.

Figure 3 provides a clear ranking and distribution of topic sizes, revealing a power-law pattern typical in many scholarly fields:

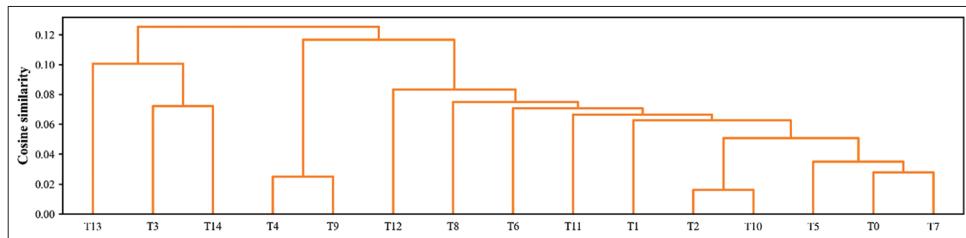
Table 1: Thematic clusters identified through topic-modelling of the branding and corporate-identity literature. The 15 clusters were extracted from 7,920 academic papers

Topic ID	Provisional label	Concise interpretation	# Docs
T0	Employer Branding and Talent Attraction	Studies on how organizations create, communicate, and manage an “employer brand” to attract, engage, and retain employees; includes internal branding, recruitment messaging, and factors that drive employer attractiveness.	545
T1	Consumers’ Brand Relationship and Loyalty	Work on brand personality, image, and identity, and how these shape consumer attitudes (trust, loyalty, purchase intention). Focus on mechanisms that strengthen long-term consumer loyalty to brands or services.	447
T2	Organizational Identity and Change	Theorizing how organizational identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated, especially during change processes, includes narratives, collective memory, and institutional influences on identity work.	347
T3	Corporate Reputation Management	Research on building, measuring, and protecting corporate reputation, including stakeholder communication, crisis management, reputational risk, and the role of public relations and social media.	263
T4	Corporate Heritage Branding	Studies of brand organizations that leverage their history and heritage; topics include corporate heritage brand identity, rebranding, brand stewardship, and stakeholder perceptions of authenticity.	189
T5	Place and Destination Branding	Scholarship on branding cities, regions, and tourism destinations, how Residents, tourists, and other stakeholders define, communicate, and perceive place identity.	187
T6	Corporate Visual Identity and Communication	Work on designing and managing corporate identity systems (logos, color schemes, visual guidelines) and their integration with corporate communication and marketing strategy.	163
T7	Higher-Education Branding	Investigations into how universities and other higher-education institutions (HEIs) position themselves, manage their brands, and influence student/faculty perceptions, including reputation building in HEIs.	122
T8	Intangible Assets and Corporate Reputation	Focus on reputation as an intangible, value-creating asset; links to financial performance, philanthropy, stakeholder evaluation, and corporate communication strategies.	120
T9	Country-of-Origin Effects	Research on how a product or brand’s country of origin influences consumer perceptions, brand equity, and purchase decisions touches on cross-border marketing and foreign versus domestic brands.	117
T10	Sport Branding and Sponsorship	Studies of sport clubs, leagues, athletes, and events as brands; includes fan loyalty, sponsorship effectiveness, brand image transfer, and sport marketing strategies.	96
T11	Conscientious/Ethical Corporate Brands	Work on brands that foreground ethics, social values, and sustainability; covers codes of ethics, influencer communication, climate change positioning, and stakeholder expectations of “conscientious” firms.	76
T12	Green Identity, Innovation and Leadership	Research linking environmental/green identity to organizational innovation and leadership styles (e.g., ethical or transformational leadership) and their effect on performance and pro-environmental behavior.	73
T13	Teacher and School Identity	Studies of educational institutions, teachers, and curricula, focusing on professional and institutional identity, educational reform, and the role of language and culture in schools/universities.	71
T14	Trust and Reputation in Blockchain Networks	Work on how blockchain technology builds or safeguards trust and reputation among users, including security mechanisms, distributed protocols, and e-commerce applications.	69

Figure 2: t-SNE cluster distribution visualization**Figure 3: Rank-size topic distribution**

Notably, Employer Branding and Talent Attraction (T0, n = 545), Consumer-Brand Relationship and Loyalty (T1, n = 447), and Organizational Identity and Change (T2, n = 347) represent the largest thematic concentrations, demonstrating considerable attention in organizational branding research. By contrast, studies into Teacher and School Identity (T13, n = 71) or Trust

most research activity occurs within relatively few major topics, while more specialized themes attract fewer contributions.

Figure 4: The hierarchical topic clustering dendrogram

and Reputation in Blockchain Networks (T14, $n = 69$) represent emerging, smaller-scale research fields.

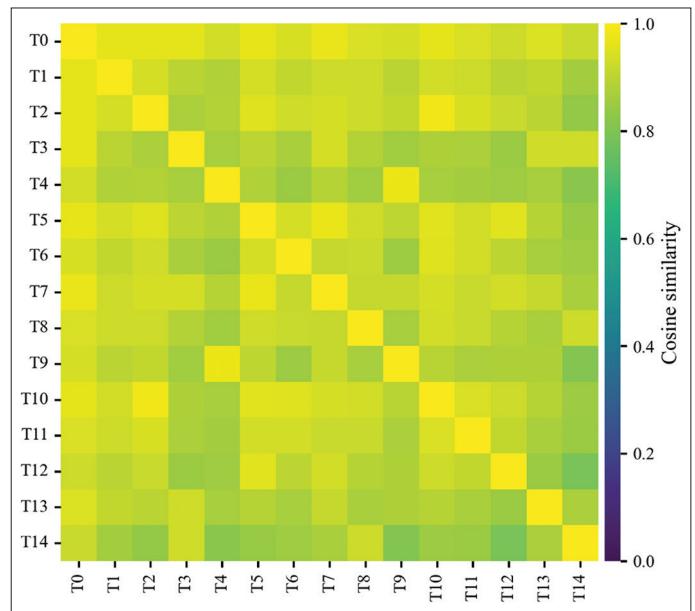
Further insights on thematic coherence appear in the dendrogram-based hierarchical clustering results (Figure 4). Here, thematic topics cluster based on textual similarity, showing a clear grouping of Corporate Reputation Management (T3), Intangible Assets and Corporate Reputation (T8), alongside Trust and Reputation in Blockchain Networks (T14), suggesting common scholarly interests around the concept of reputation as a critical organizational asset. Another notable cluster emerges around Conscientious/Ethical Corporate Brands (T11) and Corporate Heritage Branding (T4), indicating conceptual overlaps centered on organizational authenticity, heritage, ethics, and sustainability.

The similarity matrix visualization (Figure 5) complements this understanding by explicitly capturing textual overlap between clusters. The bright cells between clusters T0 (Employer Branding), T1 (Consumer–Brand Loyalty), and T2 (Organizational Identity), for instance, reflect significant thematic interrelationships, illustrating substantial conceptual overlap around employer attractiveness, stakeholder relationships, organizational culture, and identity management. Interestingly, narrower clusters like Sport Branding and Sponsorship (T10) and Country-of-Origin Effects (T9) demonstrate relatively weaker similarity with other central topics, pointing to their specialized nature in branding scholarship.

4.2. Topic Word Importance and Conceptual Boundaries

Figures 6 and 7 depict granular thematic clarification through keyword importance distributions. For instance, Topic 0 (Employer Branding and Talent Attraction) is prominently anchored by keywords like “employer,” “employer brand,” and “employee attractiveness,” thus highlighting a research focus on organizational image management aimed toward talent acquisition and retention. Similarly, Topic 1 emphasizes wording around “consumer,” “loyalty,” “personality,” and “relationship,” underscoring ongoing scholarly interest in consumer behavior and long-term brand relations.

Organizational Identity and Change (Topic 2) contains terms such as “organizational identity,” “construction,” and “change,” clearly associated with institutional frameworks and identity management. In contrast, Topic 3 (corporate reputation) prominently features terms such as “reputation management,” “crisis,” and “stakeholder communication.” Other clusters, notably Topic 5 (Place and Destination branding) and Topic 7 (higher-education branding), emphasize their specific industry or organizational contexts, with

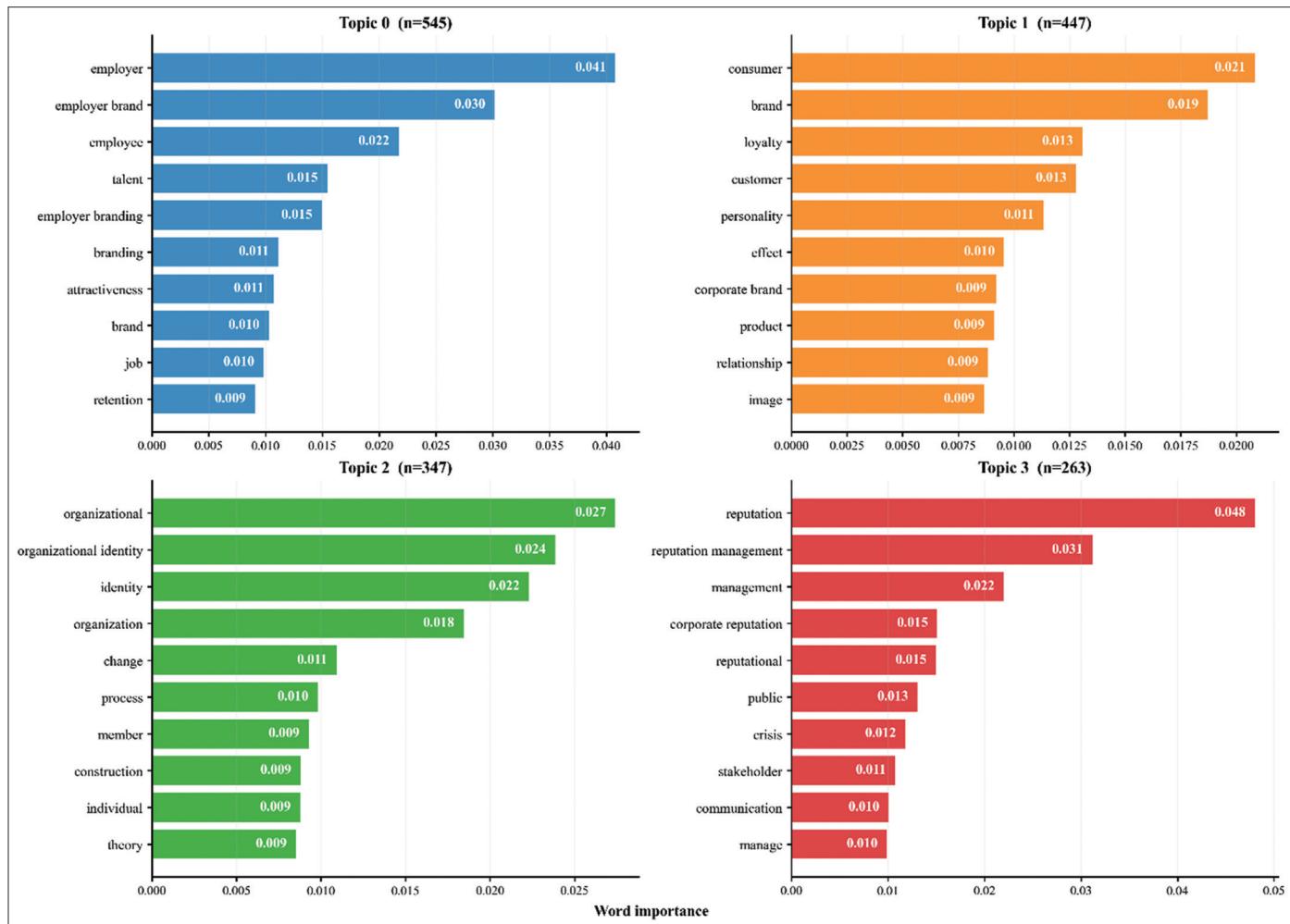
Figure 5: The cosine similarity matrix among topics

terminology clarifying the unique branding challenges these contexts face.

4.3. Temporal Evolution of Thematic Clusters

A temporal examination (Figure 8) underscores the significant growth of research activities since the early 2000s, intensifying notably from around 2010, reflecting the establishment and maturation of organizational branding scholarship as an interdisciplinary research field. Employer Branding and Talent Attraction (T0) marks the most significant topic, revealing sustained and accelerating interest, particularly from 2015 onward, likely reflecting heightened global competition for skilled workers and recognition of branding’s role in talent management. Similarly, notable increases appear in the Consumer–Brand Relationship and Loyalty (T1) and Organizational Identity and Change (T2) clusters, suggesting broadening academic understanding concerning brand loyalty dynamics and the impacts of institutional changes worldwide.

Corporate Reputation Management (T3) research has shown stable, consistent growth, likely responding to an era marked by expanding reputational risks, social media proliferation, and stakeholder crises. In contrast, specialized topics such as Corporate Heritage Branding (T4) reflect more moderate but consistent levels of scholarly production, pointing to steady exploration into historically rooted corporate identities, authenticity narratives, and heritage stewardship strategies.

Figure 6: The topic keyword importance for largest topics

4.4. Interpretation of Emerging Thematic Patterns

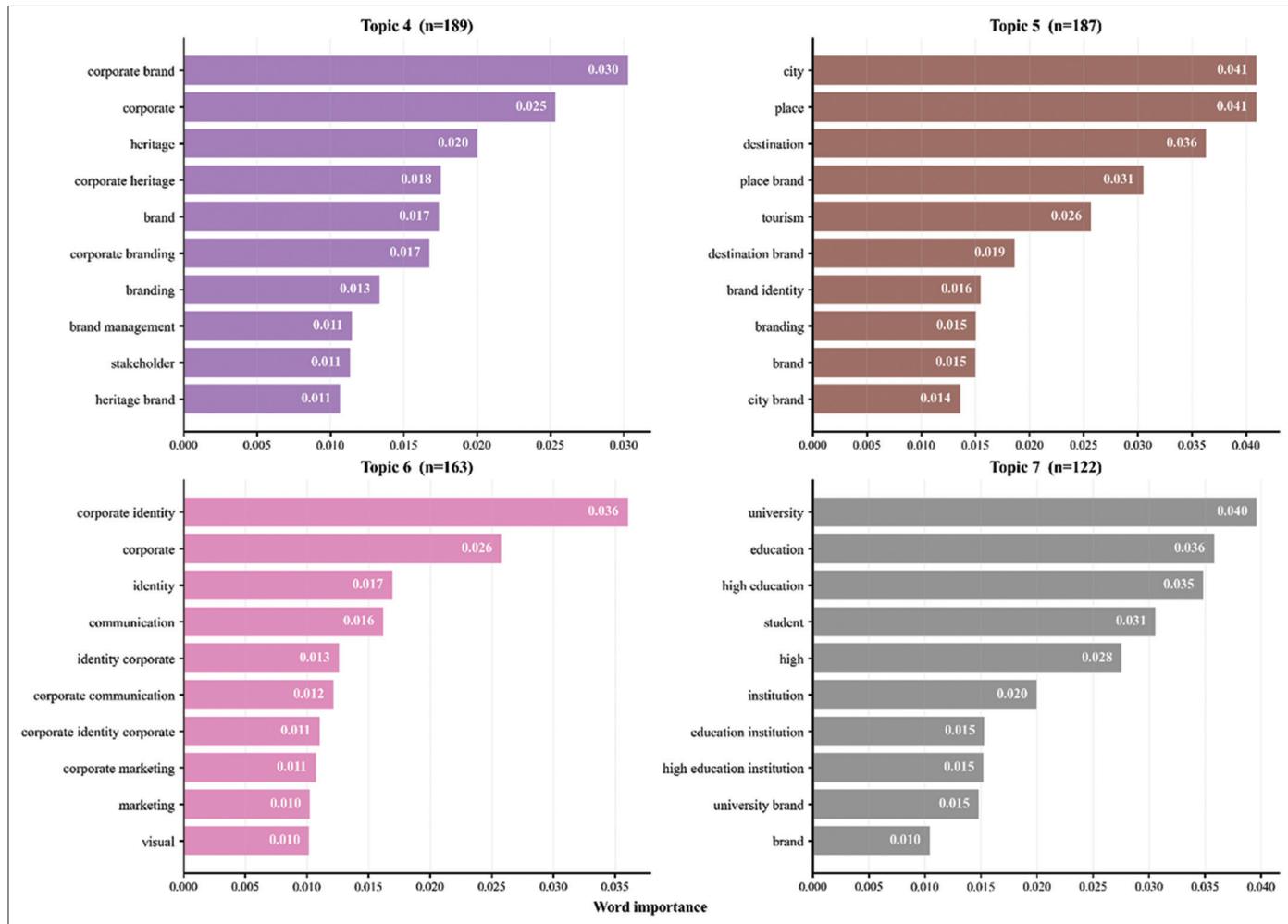
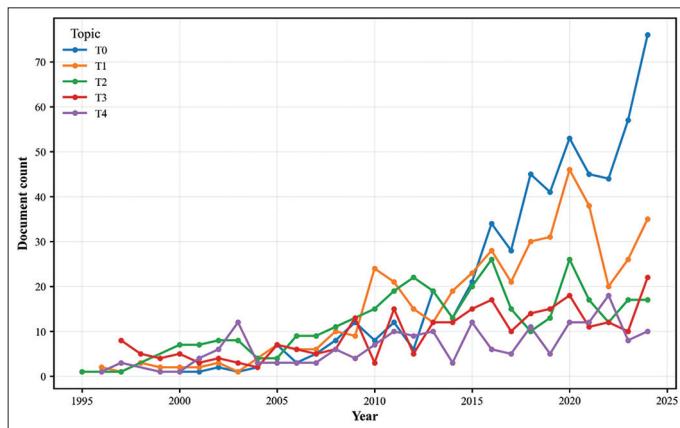
The presented analyses illuminate several enduring, evolving, and emerging thematic trajectories within organizational branding scholarship. Established streams of research are clearly observable around employer branding, consumer loyalty, organizational identity, and reputation management, representing crucial areas of strategic practice and theory. However, new specialized research niches have emerged alongside these dominant themes, such as investigations into Ethical/Conscientious Corporate Branding (T11), Green Innovation and Identity (T12), and Trust and Reputation systems in Blockchain Networks (T14). These niche thematic areas illustrate contemporary societal trends and technological shifts influencing how organizations frame their identities around sustainability, ethics, innovation, and digital trust.

Place and Destination Branding (T5), Higher-Education Branding (T7), and Sport Branding (T10) further expand branding research into specific institutional contexts, demonstrating the extensive applicability and contextual sensitivity of branding theory. These topic-specific inquiries repeatedly underscore branding as a complex socio-cultural practice, necessitating careful contextual understanding regarding stakeholder perceptions and sector-specific dynamics.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal important established and emerging scholarly trajectories within organizational branding, demonstrating both the field's growing conceptual complexity and its increasing socio-cultural relevancy. Identifying fifteen distinct thematic clusters illustrates vividly how organizational branding research encompasses an expansive array of issues from talent attraction and consumer relationships to place and destination branding, ethical signaling, and technological innovation (Balmer, 2001; Suddaby, 2010).

The most significant and most central clusters of studies, such as Employer Branding and Talent Attraction (T0) and Consumer-Brand Relationship and Loyalty (T1), underscore branding's firmly established role as a strategic endeavor in organizational management. These areas' continual rise since the early 2000s (Figure 8) reflects widespread recognition of branding's dual focus: externally oriented, targeting customers and external stakeholders, and internally oriented, aimed at attracting, retaining, and aligning talent around shared corporate identities (Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001).

Figure 7: The topic keyword importance for topics**Figure 8:** The topic evolution over time

Another robust core area, Organizational Identity and Change (T2), confirms branding scholarship's strong integration with foundational sociological and institutional theories (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Albert and Whetten, 1985). The substantial thematic overlap between clusters dealing explicitly with identity, reputation management (T3 and T8), and corporate heritage branding (T4) evidenced by similarity matrices and hierarchical clustering (Figures 6 and 7) suggests scholars increasingly view organizational branding as an active site of legitimacy

struggles, reputation governance, and institutional negotiation (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This shift from purely market-focused to socially embedded branding practices indicates an increasing appreciation of brands' symbolic and cultural roles as legitimating devices, thereby aligning closely with institutional and stakeholder theory perspectives (Freeman, 2015; Balmer, 2001; Kornberger, 2010).

Simultaneously, more specialized clusters such as Place and Destination Branding (T5), Higher-Education Branding (T7), and Sport Branding and Sponsorship (T10) highlight the diversification of branding contexts. These industry-specific clusters demonstrate that identity and image management principles are applicable across distinct organizational forms, where branding emerges as a critical strategy for differentiation in increasingly competitive or resource-constrained environments (Wæraas and Solbakk, 2009).

5.1. Branding's Integration with Ethical and Societal Concerns

A salient emerging theme involves research into Conscientious/Ethical Corporate Brands (T11) and Green Identity, Innovation and Leadership (T12). Such studies demonstrate increasing concern for ethics, sustainability, and responsibility within the branding discourse. These research streams emerge against a backdrop of amplified stakeholder expectations about corporate accountability

and climate action (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006; Du et al., 2010). Seen through a socio-cultural lens, organizational brands become boundary-spanning discursive tools that organizations can use not only to differentiate themselves but also to signal institutional alignment with broader ethical and civic values, thus actively engaging in legitimacy construction through symbolic convening with societal norms (Suddaby, 2010; Biraghi and Gambetti, 2017).

Furthermore, smaller yet increasingly relevant specialized clusters, such as Trust and Reputation in Blockchain Networks (T14), highlight the intersectional and technology-driven expansions in contemporary branding scholarship (Iankova et al., 2019). These findings suggest promising avenues for multidisciplinary exploration, underscoring technology's significance as it challenges and restructures traditional branding theories. Blockchain-enabled branding strategies invite scholars to rethink assumptions about trust, reputation-building, and communication channels, unlocking theoretical opportunities to bridge branding literature and digital innovation scholarship (Kiron et al., 2013).

5.2. Theoretical and Methodological Implications

The identified clusters strongly support incorporating methodological pluralism in organizational branding research. While computational methods such as topic modeling effectively identify macro-level thematic trends and evolutions (McInnes et al., 2018), complementary qualitative approaches such as ethnography, case studies, and qualitative interviewing, remain essential to understanding deeper contextual meanings and human experiences underlying these emergent branding practices (Bansal and Corley, 2012; Albert and Whetten, 1985). Indeed, the nuanced, qualitative interpretation of clusters such as **Teacher and School Identity (T13)** and professional identity construction in educational contexts underscores that branding processes are not only rational-strategic enterprises but also intuitive, psychological, and culturally embedded phenomena (Hatch and Schultz, 2003).

Cross-cultural branding studies and branding governance in increasingly digital environmental contexts appear relatively understudied, indicating key gaps ripe for further exploration (Iglesias et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2013). Additionally, the focused yet limited exploration of **Country-of-Origin Effects (T9)** and branding of public sector or socially significant organizations (such as reflected in topics like T10 and T13) reflects further potential directions. Expanding branding research into these areas could reveal new complexities regarding stakeholder relationships, national-scale legitimacy-building, and culturally embedded brand interpretations (Cayla and Arnould, 2008).

5.3. Implications for Practice and Future Research Directions

The findings demonstrate that branding practitioners must actively navigate the intricate social realities shaping perceptions of legitimacy, reputation, and authenticity. With intensified societal scrutiny of brand actions, practitioners need robust processes for stakeholder engagement, crisis management, transparent value alignment, and brand co-creation strategies, particularly within digital and socially activated environments (Jones and Bonevac, 2013; Fournier and Avery, 2011). As brands become increasingly

visible symbols in societal discourses around ethics, sustainability, heritage, and technology, brand strategists can use insights from clusters such as T11 (ethical branding), T4 (heritage branding), and T14 (blockchain networks) to formulate nuanced and context-sensitive strategic frameworks.

Future studies may extend the integrative analytical framework by incorporating domain-specific computational lexicons, network mapping of influential authors or co-citation analyses, and mixed-method designs. Such approaches could unlock deeper understandings of evolving scholarly collaborations, conceptual innovations, and knowledge transfer dynamics within organizational branding scholarship (Zupic and Čater, 2015; Grootendorst, 2022). Furthermore, continued investigations into emergent societal dynamics, evolving ethical consumer demands, technological innovation, and their joint implications for branding theory promise significant academic and managerial insights.

Ultimately, organizational branding research, now more clearly articulated through computational analyses and qualitative interpretations, offers fertile ground for theorizing about social legitimacy, symbolic institutional practices, stakeholder co-creation, and multi-stakeholder network governance. By grounding branding scholarship firmly within interdisciplinary social science frameworks, researchers can both address organizationally strategic questions and enrich broader theoretical understandings concerning contemporary socio-institutional patterns and new technological realities.

6. CONCLUSION

Over recent decades, organizational branding scholarship has evolved significantly, expanding from a domain largely dominated by marketing theory into a robust and interdisciplinary field that spans organizational behavior, sociology, cultural studies, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and communication disciplines. This progression underscores branding's evolving role from shaping consumer attitudes and behavior to actively constructing organizational identities, negotiating institutional legitimacy, and mediating stakeholder relationships. Research now consistently demonstrates how organizations strategically employ brands not only for differentiation in competitive markets but also as symbolic practices reflecting broader societal meanings, ethical concerns, reputation dynamics, and cultural expectations.

This study has systematically delineated the primary conceptual territories underpinning contemporary organizational branding research by utilizing an integrative methodological approach, combining bibliometric data collection, advanced topic modeling (BERTopic), and qualitative interpretation. The findings illustrate enduring themes such as employer branding and talent attraction, consumer-brand relationships, organizational identity formation, corporate heritage, reputation management, institutional legitimacy, and place and destination branding. Further, these established research streams are complemented by emerging scholarship examining conscientious corporate behavior, ethical branding practices, sustainability initiatives, digital innovation, and technology-driven topics such as blockchain-based trust mechanisms and reputation networks.

Consequently, organizational branding has broadened markedly beyond traditional marketing boundaries, increasingly intersecting with critical social science questions about meaning-making, societal power dynamics, stakeholder co-creation, and digital transformation. In line with seminal theoretical works, notably by Hatch and Schultz (2003), this shift implies an ongoing reconceptualization of branding as not merely an economic or transactional practice but a fundamentally socio-cultural and symbolic organizational endeavor.

From an institutional and stakeholder theory perspective, the observed integration of branding with broader societal norms, values, and ethics highlights the complexity underlying brand management. Organizations, whether businesses, universities, public agencies, or regions, move into increasingly participatory, digitally networked, and ethically scrutinized stakeholder environments. This evolution underscores the need to continually reassess branding strategies, governance structures, communication methods, and legitimacy management practices, recognizing that organizational identities and narratives constantly adapt to external expectations, internal values, and dynamic technological contexts.

Notwithstanding these significant advances, critical gaps remain. Future research can deepen insights by examining how organizational branding strategies vary across cultures, examining branding dynamics in contexts shaped by global crises or uncertainty, and more intensively exploring under-investigated public-sector and unconventional branding fields. Methodologically, studies combining computational text analyses with methodologies such as ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and longitudinal case studies can surface deeper contextual understandings, enriching theoretical conceptions of branding as social practice.

By systematically mapping the organizational branding literature's breadth, depth, and complexity, this analysis affirms that branding remains deeply intertwined with broader social forces, institutional realities, cultural transformations, and technological innovations. Embracing diverse methodological perspectives and ongoing critical dialogues will be essential to advance both the theoretical robustness and practical relevance of organizational branding scholarship, deepening our understanding of branding's multifaceted role in contemporary society.

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