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The Evolution of Employer Branding: A 25-Year Journey Through Global Trends, Thematic Clusters, and Intellectual Foundations

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, employer branding has emerged as a strategic domain at the intersection of marketing, human resource management, and organizational behavior. This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 145 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024, drawing data from the Scopus database and analyzed using Biblioshiny (RStudio). The review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual evolution and thematic development of employer branding scholarship. Key findings reveal five major research streams: (1) internal branding and employee outcomes, (2) employer attractiveness and signaling theory, (3) digital and social media-based employer branding, (4) value-driven and CSR-oriented employer branding, and (5) employer brand equity and strategic talent management. Furthermore, a TCCM (Themes, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) synthesis highlights critical research gaps, including the dominance of Western corporate settings, limited cross-disciplinary perspectives, and a methodological reliance on survey-based studies. This review contributes to the literature by mapping the scientific landscape of employer branding and proposing a future research agenda that calls for greater contextual diversity, theoretical integration, and methodological innovation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The urgency of strengthening workplace branding is gaining prominence during global phenomena such as the war for talent, digital transformation, and changes in the values of the work generation. Organizations that have a strong employer brand have proven to be more competitive in attracting potential candidates, reducing recruitment costs, and increasing staff member retention and loyalty rates (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). In the context of higher education, employer branding also plays a strategic role in building the reputation of the institution. Systematic research by Ciptagustia et al., (2023) confirms that EB can shape the image of higher education institutions in the eyes of lecturers, education staff, and prospective academics. Understanding the employee value proposition (EVP) is crucial in this context, as emphasized in the study by Ciptagustia & Kusnendi (2023), which sees EVP as a core element of the academic employer branding strategy. Furthermore, the findings from Ciptagustia (2019) and Ciptagustia & Kusnendi (2019) strengthen the position of employer branding in the framework of competitive advantage, by showing that distinctive capabilities formed through skill management are the foundation of a superior employer brand narrative.

The urgency of strengthening employer identity is gaining prominence during global phenomena such as the war for talent, digital transformation, and changes in the values of the work generation. Organizations that have a strong employer brand have proven to be more competitive in attracting potential candidates, reducing recruitment costs, and increasing personnel retention and loyalty rates (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). In the context of higher education, employer branding also plays a strategic role in building the reputation of the institution. Systematic research by Ciptagustia et al. (2023) confirms that EB can shape the image of higher education institutions in the eyes of lecturers, education staff, and prospective academics. Understanding the employee value proposition (EVP) is crucial in this context, as emphasized in the study by Ciptagustia & Kusnendi (2023), which sees EVP as a core element of the academic employer branding strategy. Furthermore, the findings from Ciptagustia (2019) and Ciptagustia & Kusnendi (2019) strengthen the position of employer branding in the framework of competitive advantage, by showing that distinctive capabilities formed through human capital strategy are the foundation of a superior employer brand narrative.

Employer branding also includes internal dimensions of the organization, such as strengthening work culture, value communication, knowledge management, and talent development. In this context, the role of the knowledge worker becomes essential. Ciptagustia (2014) shows that organizational effectiveness is highly dependent on knowledge management carried out by knowledge-based human resources, which at the same time strengthens the internal value proposition of the employer identity. This idea is in line with the concept of staff-based brand equity (EBBE), which places personnel as strategic agents in creating and disseminating organizational brand values (Sousa & Ferreira, 2023). Nevertheless, conceptual fragmentation in the EB literature is still quite striking, characterized by inconsistencies in definitions and approaches, thus hindering theoretical consolidation and practical progress (Theurer et al., 2018). Therefore, an integrative

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framework is needed that can bridge the various dimensions of employer branding with other strategic aspects in HR management such as organizational culture and team involvement.

Furthermore, recent research reveals that most employer identity studies still focus too much on internal personnel, while understanding of how prospective staff members identify with the employer brand and its impact on the intention to apply is still minimal (Hollstein et al., 2024; Jaffari et al., 2024). Hollstein et al. (2024) emphasized that identification of the work community turns out to be more influential than identification of companies and CEOs. In addition, employees are not only the object of the branding strategy, but also the co-creators of the brand that strengthens the equity of the employer brand through their experience and advocacy (Näppä et al., 2023). Unfortunately, this potential has not been fully maximized due to the lack of an in-house branding strategy that supports the active participation of employees in building an institutional reputation (Näppä et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of adaptive employer branding, but studies on an effective framework for branding in crisis situations are still limited (Bagheri et al., 2022). Approaches based on corporate social responsibility and sustainable relationships have also not been systematically explored (Bagheri et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to conduct systematic literature review (SLR)-based research to map the dynamics, trends, and thematic integration in employer branding especially by emphasizing the role of employee co-creation and the identification of potential employees as crucial elements in shaping the strategic value of the employer brand (Azhar et al., 2024 and Jaffari et al., 2024). Based on this background, this study aims to fill the literature gap through an SLR approach to scientific publications on employer branding from 2000 to 2024. This range was chosen because it covers the initial phase of conceptualization, theoretical developments, and the strategic adoption of employer branding in the digital and post-crisis era.

Using the Scopus database and analyzed through the Biblioshiny software, this study will specifically to: (1) Analyzing annual publication trends and identifying the most influential contributors (authors, journals, and countries) in the field of workplace branding, (2) Mapping the thematic structure and intellectual development of employer branding research through bibliometric and co-occurrence analysis, (3) Classifying employer branding studies into distinct research streams based on conceptual focus and keyword clustering, (4) Synthesizing existing studies using the TCCM (Themes, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) framework to identify knowledge gaps and propose future research directions. The results of this study are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution through mapping the scientific landscape of employer branding, identifying untapped research areas, and providing an empirical basis for a more inclusive and adaptive HR strategy. So the questions of this research are:

1. How has the scientific output on employer reputation evolved over time (2000–2024) in terms of publication trends and growth patterns?
2. Who are the most influential authors, institutions, and countries contributing to employer identity research based on productivity and citation impact?

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3. What are the dominant themes and how are they interconnected within the intellectual structure of employer identity literature?
4. What are the main research clusters that have emerged from the thematic structure of employer identity studies?
5. What are the key research gaps and potential directions for future studies as identified through a structured TCCM (Theory–Context–Characteristics–Methodology) synthesis?

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

2.1. Origin and Definition of Employer Branding

Employer branding emerged at the intersection of marketing and human resource management, first formalized by Ambler & Barrow (1996) as the set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits an employer offers to current and potential workforce. Drawing from brand management principles, employer identity aims to position organizations as desirable workplaces. In the late 1990s, it gained traction in business circles amidst competitive labor markets. However, academic interest began to grow significantly only in the early 2000s, as organizations increasingly recognized the need to strategically differentiate themselves as employers of choice (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

2.2. Conceptual Mapping Theoretical Foundations of Employer Branding

Scholarly research on workplace branding took off in the mid-2000s with foundational models that bridged marketing theory and HR outcomes. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) were among the first to conceptualize employer branding in academic literature, offering a framework that linked external marketing outcomes (employer attractiveness to prospective hires) with internal outcomes (personnel loyalty and productivity). In their framework, a firm's employer branding efforts create "brand associations" in the minds of potential applicants – shaping the employer's image and attractiveness – while also influencing current team members' identification with the organization (organizational identity) and reinforcing a positive organizational culture. The development is explained by Figure 1.

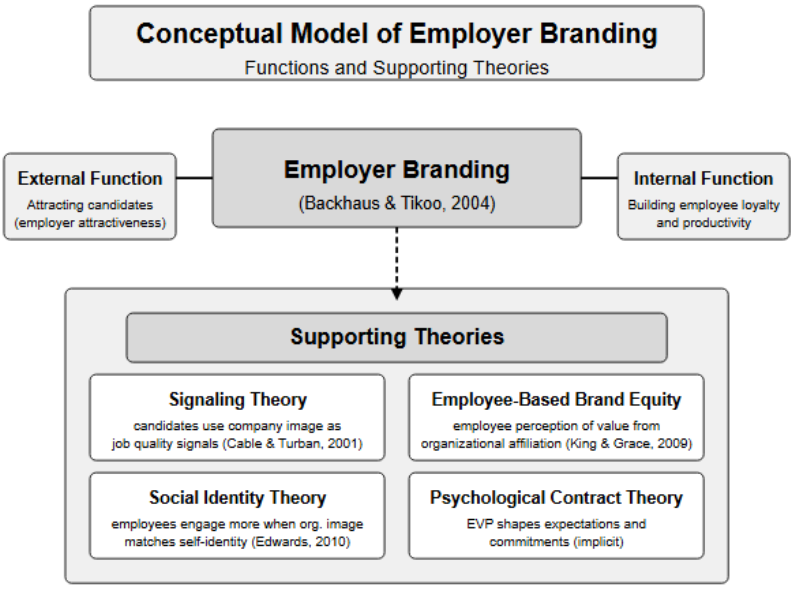


Figure 1. Theoretical Foundations of Employer Branding

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Cable & Turban's earlier work on organizational reputation (2001) can be seen as a precursor, explaining how job seekers use employer image as a signal of job attributes, consistent with signaling theory in recruitment. Lievens & Highhouse (2003) introduced the instrumental-symbolic framework, showing that job seekers are attracted not only by instrumental attributes (e.g., pay, location) but also symbolic ones (e.g., prestige, culture). Moroko & Uncles (2008) emphasized authenticity and consistency as core elements of effective employer identity. Another important framework is the notion of personnel-based brand equity (EBBE) introduced by King & Grace (2009) and furthered by Maxwell & Knox (2009), adapting brand equity concepts to personnel' perceptions of value in being associated with their employer.

Social identity theory also contributes to understanding employer reputation. Edwards (2010) explained that personnel seek affiliation with organizations whose image aligns with their self-concept, thereby boosting organizational commitment. The psychological contract theory complements this, suggesting that a clearly communicated employer value proposition (EVP) can shape expectations and strengthen the implicit employer-personnel agreement. Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate that employer branding draws from marketing (brand equity, image) and organizational behavior (identity, commitment), providing a multi-disciplinary theoretical base.

More recently, scholars have expanded these conceptualizations by integrating developments in digital communication and generational workforce dynamics. Jiang & Lavaysse (2022) examined how remote work and digital engagement reshape employer identity, while Tanwar & Prasad (2016) highlighted the expectations of Gen Z and the role of branding in appealing to a values-driven workforce. Hendriana et al. (2023) added further nuance by exploring how employer branding moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and staff member retention among Gen Z workers. Meanwhile, Ivanov (2025) emphasized the importance of socially responsible branding in enhancing employer attractiveness and long-term retention. These perspectives illustrate the ongoing theoretical evolution of employer branding in response to contemporary changes in the labor market.

2.3. Key Dimensions and Constructs in Employer Branding

Employer attractiveness—measured through the EmpAt scale (Berthon et al., 2005)—captures five core dimensions: economic, social, development, interest, and application value. Employer brand image (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and in-house branding (Foster et al., 2010) also play a crucial role in shaping perceptions. Empirical evidence links strong employer identity with increased applicant attraction (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001), personnel retention (Allen et al., 2010; Deepa & Baral, 2019), and organizational performance. Recent research includes the impact of social media (Dabirian et al., 2017), CSR (Greening & Turban, 2000; Klimkiewicz & Olsten, 2017), and digital platforms (Digiverifier, 2025).

2.4. Employer Branding and Related Constructs

It is important to distinguish employer identity from, yet relate it to, adjacent concepts. Internal branding refers to promoting brand values to team members to ensure they deliver on the brand promise – overlapping with but not identical to employer branding, which

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focuses on perceptions of the organization as a workplace. Employer reputation or image is often used interchangeably with employer brand, though reputation is more about outcomes, while branding is the proactive strategy.

Employer value proposition (EVP) refers to the unique set of benefits and values an employer offers – a central message in employer identity. Talent management and staff member engagement are strategic areas closely linked with employer branding; for instance, a compelling EVP can support both recruitment and retention, while branding enhances employee connection and purpose. Overall, employer branding has become an integral part of strategic human resource management, spanning recruitment, onboarding, engagement, and alumni relations.

In summary, the literature on workplace branding has developed substantially over the past 25 years, beginning with foundational definitions and gradually integrating robust theoretical models and empirical measures. Despite this progress, the field remains fragmented with inconsistent terminology and conceptual overlaps. While numerous constructs (e.g., attractiveness, brand equity, EVP) and outcomes (e.g., engagement, retention) have been studied, there is a lack of synthesis that maps the intellectual structure and global evolution of the field. This fragmentation, coupled with emerging trends such as digital employer branding, generational shifts in the workforce, and the increasing role of CSR, signals an urgent need for a systematic literature review that not only synthesizes past findings but also frames the future research agenda for the next era of employer branding.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, guided by the seminal framework proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003), to ensure transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness. The review spans a 25-year period (2000–2024) to capture the evolution of employer reputation scholarship across multiple disciplines, including human resource management, marketing, organizational behavior, and psychology.

3.1 Search Strategy

To ensure a robust and inclusive search, we employed a structured search protocol using the keywords:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("workplace branding" OR "employer brand" OR "employer attractiveness" OR "employer image" OR "employer reputation") AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employer Branding") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employer Attractiveness") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employer Brand") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Organizational Attractiveness") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Talent Management") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employer Image") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Human Resource Management") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employee

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Retention") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Organizational Culture") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employer") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Talent Attraction") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Human Resources") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Talent") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Psychological Contract") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Job Satisfaction") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Job Pursuit Intentions") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Internal Branding") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Theoretical Study") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Signalling Theory") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Organizational Commitment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Organisational Attractiveness") OR EXCLUDE (EXACTKEYWORD , "Amazon Mechanical Turks") OR EXCLUDE (EXACTKEYWORD , "Alternative Work Schedules") OR EXCLUDE (EXACTKEYWORD , "Aged") OR EXCLUDE (EXACTKEYWORD , " Age"))

The initial search returned several hundred records, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and highly cited book chapters. All bibliographic data were imported into bibliometric software (Biblioshiny/R) for further processing and deduplication.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To refine the dataset, we applied rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria until get 145 articles. Kemudian kriterianya dijelaskan dalam table berikut:

Table 1. Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Year	2000–2025	-
Language	English	-
Document Type	Article (ar)	Non-articles (books, editorials, conference papers)
Source Type	Journal (j)	Non-journal sources
Subject Area	Business, Management and Accounting	Other unrelated subject areas
Access Type	All (Open Access and non-OA)	-
Main Keywords	Includes at least one of 20 keywords (e.g. Employer Branding, Attractiveness, EVP)	-
Excluded Keywords	-	Amazon Mechanical Turks, Alternative Work Schedules, Aged, Age
Focus Relevance	Employer branding is a core topic or main variable	Only tangential mention of employer branding
Publication Stage	Final publication stage	Early access, in-press, or pre-publication drafts

Source: scopus.com, 2025

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3.3 Data Analysis

ToolsBibliometric and thematic analysis were conducted using Biblioshiny (RStudio interface) to extract insights regarding publication trends, author networks, thematic clusters, and intellectual structures within the field of employer reputation.

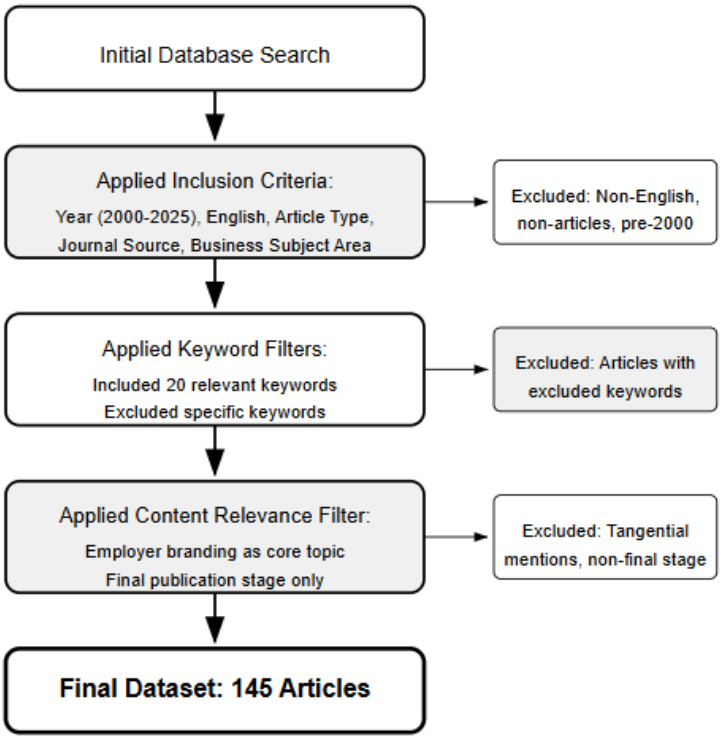


Figure 2. Flowchart of the Article Screening and Selecion Strategy

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Question 1

The following are the results for the first research question regarding the development of research on the topic of Employer Branding.



Figure 3. Key Information on the Development of Employer Branding Research 2000-2025
Source: Biblioshiny Report, 2025

During the period 2010 to 2025, research on employer identity showed significant developments with an annual growth rate of 12.69%, reflecting a consistent increase in academic interest in this topic. Of the 143 documents analyzed, 107 publication sources and 368 authors were recorded that showed a high diversity of disciplines and research collaborations, with 31.47% of them being the result of international cooperation. The average number of authors per article of 2.83 indicates a tendency towards a collaborative

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approach, while only 16 documents were written by a single author. The high number of diverse keywords (491 keywords) and the average citation per document of 18.27 strengthens the position of employer branding as a research topic that is not only developed quantitatively but also of high value theoretically and practically. With an average document age of 3.9 years, it is seen that this topic is constantly updated and is highly relevant to the challenges of modern organizations in attracting and retaining talent. Furthermore, the trend of publication of this topic from year to year is explained by Figure 4.

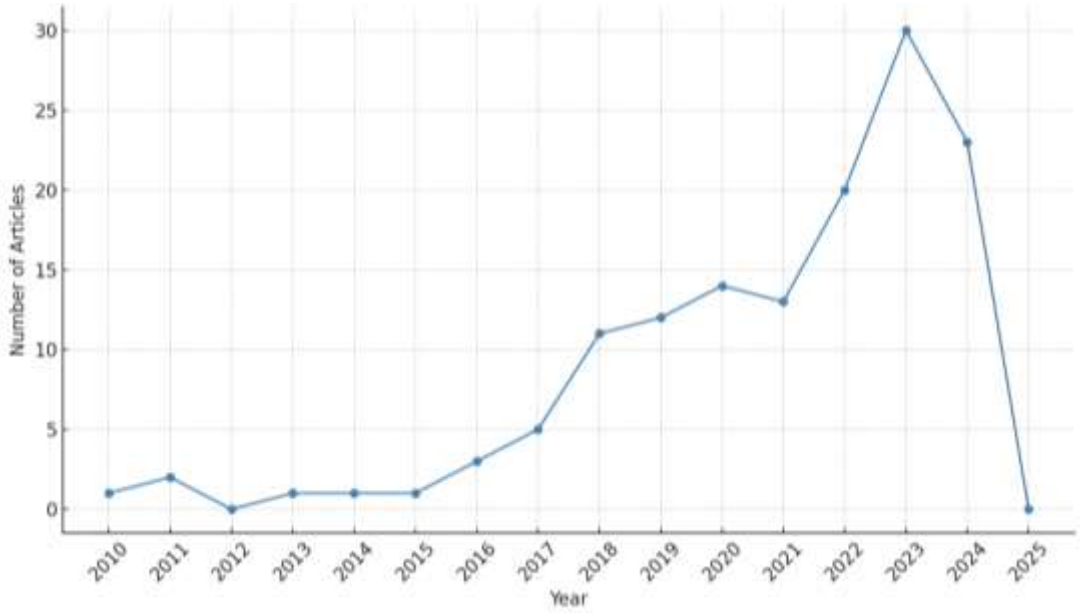


Figure 4. Trend Publication Year Employer Branding 2000-2025
Source: Biblioshiny Report, 2025

The annual scientific production graph on employer reputation from 2010 to 2025 shows a steady growth trend, with a significant surge during the 2022–2023 period, peaking in 2023 with 30 published articles. This increase reflects the growing academic attention to employer branding, especially in light of the shifting work landscape in the post-pandemic era and the rising importance of organizational appeal to global talent. However, the sharp decline in 2025 is likely due to incomplete annual data or publication delays rather than a genuine drop in interest. These findings affirm that employer branding is becoming an increasingly strategic topic in human resource management and organizational research.

4.2 Reseacrh Question 2

Meanwhile, the "Authors' Production Over Time" Figure 5 illustrates the productivity of the main authors in the topic of workplace branding during the time range of 2017 to 2023.

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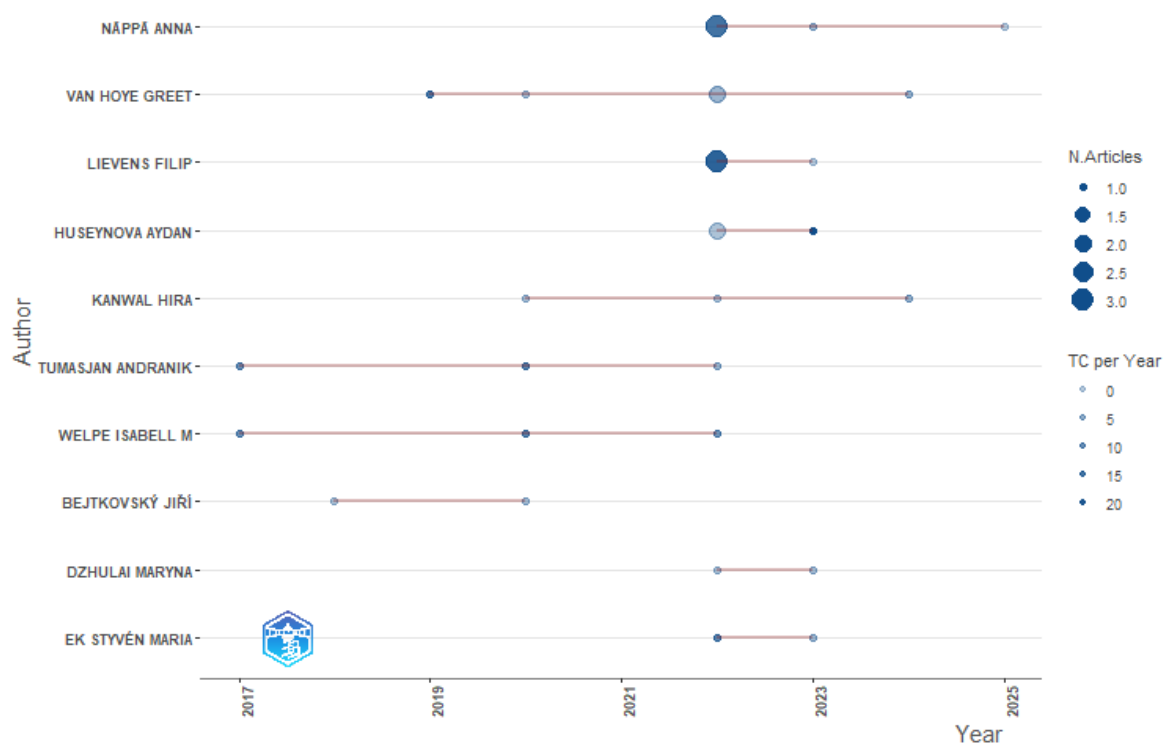


Figure 5. Author's Production over Time
Source: Biblioshiny Report, 2025

Based on Figure 5, authors such as Lievens Filip and Nappa Anna are noted as the most prolific contributors, each publishing up to three articles during the period. The circle size indicates the number of articles, while the color level signifies the average citations per year. This trend shows the continuity of contributions from active authors and indicates that employer branding research is not only a momentary trend, but continues to develop systematically by the global academic community. The findings of researcher Nappa Anna, namely Employer branding in the tourism and hospitality industry, not only focus on hiring but also on staff engagement and retention. Studies show that internal communication strategy is often underemphasized, even though company values applied in daily work can increase job satisfaction. The industry's reputation and prosocial values play a big role in attracting team members, while limited training opportunities can reduce the industry's appeal. In addition, employer branding should be seen as a collective process that involves all employees, not just HR responsibilities, in order to build a stronger and more sustainable corporate identity and culture. (Näppä et al., 2024; Näppä et al., 2023; Näppä, 2022)

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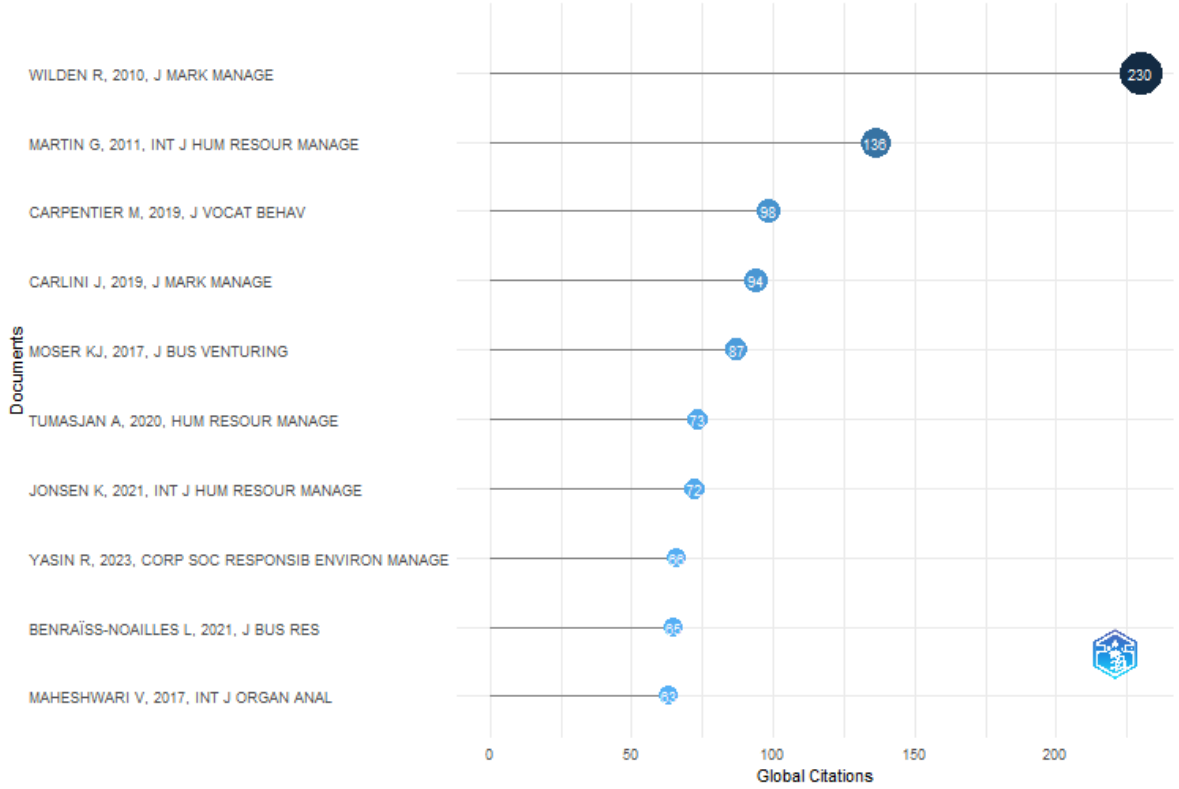


Figure 6. Most Global Cited Document
Source: Biblioshiny Report, 2025

Furthermore, Figure 6 shows the Most Globally Cited Documents on the topic of employer identity, with the article by Wilden et al. (2010) occupying the highest position with 230 global citations, indicating that this article is the main reference and an important milestone in the study of employer branding. Wilden et al. (2010) found that job seekers' perceptions of an employer's attractiveness are strongly influenced by the clarity, credibility, consistency, and level of investment in employer brand signals, which are strategically used to reduce information asymmetry and perceived risk during the recruitment process. They developed a conceptual framework of personnel-based brand equity (EBBE) by adapting signalling theory and brand equity into the employment context, thereby bridging marketing and human resource management literature in an innovative way. This article has been widely cited because it offers an original and applicable theoretical model, highly relevant for explaining organizational branding strategies in attracting talent in competitive labor markets, and it serves as a key foundation for subsequent studies on employer branding, talent attraction, and organizational signaling (Wilden et al., 2010). The second highest citation is from Martin et al. (2011) argue that employer identity holds strategic significance beyond talent attraction, as it contributes directly to building reputational capital and fostering innovation within multinational enterprises (MNEs) by integrating human, social, and organizational capital. The authors introduce a conceptual model positioning employer branding as a strategic mechanism that mediates between innovation and corporate legitimacy, capable of addressing complex challenges—termed "wicked problems"—arising from conflicting strategic human resource management (SHRM) logics. By promoting

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authenticity, privileging localized identity expression, and cultivating social capital, employer branding emerges not merely as a recruitment tool but as a driver of organizational transformation and adaptive capacity. The article is widely cited because it repositions employer branding as a critical lever for reconciling global integration with local responsiveness in MNEs, offering theoretical and practical pathways for aligning HR strategy with corporate governance, reputation management, and innovation agendas (Martin, et al., 2011). Following on from Backhaus & Tikoo (2004); Cable & Turban (2001); and Edwards (2010), this graph represents the seminal literature that has shaped the theoretical and methodological framework in this field over the past two decades.

4.3 Reseacrh Question 3

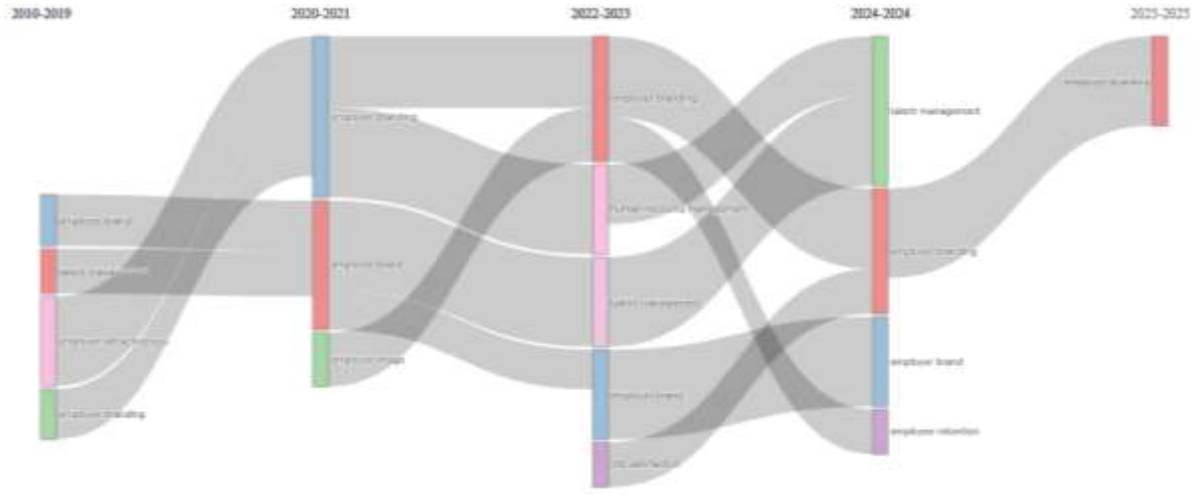


Figure 7. The Evolution Research from Employer Branding 2000-2025

Based on Figure 7, to answer RQ3, Figure 5 illustrates the evolution and structural linkages between the dominant themes in the workplace branding literature during the period 2000 to 2025. Throughout time, employer branding has consistently emerged as the most prominent central theme, acting as a key conceptual node connecting various related constructions such as employer brand, personnel development, employer attractiveness, and individual engagement. In the initial phase (2010–2019), the intellectual landscape was still fragmented, with basic themes such as corporate image, internal communication strategy, and recruitment emerging separately.

Entering 2020, there is structural consolidation, where employer identity is beginning to be integrated with strategic issues in human resource management such as talent retention, personnel value proposition, and psychological contracts. In particular, the theme of employer attractiveness often appears in conjunction with theoretical constructions such as signaling theory and person-organization fit, forming a conceptual sub-network that focuses on the perception of job seekers. On the other hand, skill management and job satisfaction form their own clusters under the broader domain of HRM, indicating a shift in focus towards understanding the long-term impact of the organization.

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4.4 Reseacrh Question 4

A co-occurrence keyword analysis was conducted using Biblioshiny, applying a modularity-based clustering algorithm to group related terms within the employer reputation literature. The analysis revealed six distinct research clusters, each representing a thematically cohesive area within the field. Table 2 presents the resulting clusters, the prominent keywords associated with each, and a thematic label summarizing their conceptual focus. These clusters illustrate the diversity and structure of employer branding research across various theoretical and practical domains.

Table 2. Thematic Research Clusters Identified Through Co-Occurrence Keyword Analysis in Employer Branding Literature (2000–2024)

Cluster	Top Keywords	Thematic Label
1	employer branding, employee retention, social media, applicant attraction, corporate reputation, employees, internal branding, job satisfaction, marketing, psychological contract, corporate image, employee engagement, family business, india, organizational commitment, banking, co-creation, content analysis, development value, e-recruitment, employee value proposition	Core Employer Branding & Engagement
2	employer attractiveness, signaling theory, job pursuit intentions, diversity, person-organization fit, diversity management	Employer Attractiveness & Recruitment Perception
3	employer brand, talent management, csr, talent, talent attraction	Talent Management & CSR Positioning
4	employer image, recruitment, organizational attractiveness	Employer Image & Organizational Appeal
5	human resource management, organizational culture, czech republic	Strategic HRM & Cultural Context
6	human resources, employee	Foundational HR Concepts

Source: Bibilioshiny, 2025

Thematic clustering of co-occurring keywords reveals a multifaceted structure within the employer identity literature. Cluster 1, labeled Core Employer Branding & Engagement, contains foundational concepts such as personnel retention, internal communication strategy, and job satisfaction, indicating a strong emphasis on internal HR outcomes. Cluster 2, Employer Attractiveness & Recruitment Perception, revolves around signaling theory,

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diversity, and person-organization fit, suggesting a focus on how potential applicants perceive and evaluate employer brands. Cluster 3, themed Talent Management & CSR Positioning, connects employer brand with CSR and talent attraction, reflecting the strategic alignment between branding and organizational responsibility. Cluster 4, Employer Image & Organizational Appeal, includes recruitment, employer image, and organizational attractiveness, highlighting external positioning and branding visibility. Cluster 5, Strategic HRM & Cultural Context, integrates HRM and organizational culture, suggesting a contextualized approach to employer branding in specific institutional settings. Finally, Cluster 6, Foundational HR Concepts, groups general terms like employee and human resources, acting as a peripheral yet essential base for broader discussions.

The identification of six thematic clusters in this study demonstrates that employer reputation has evolved beyond its original focus on recruitment marketing to encompass broader strategic dimensions of human resource management. This thematic mapping provides a nuanced understanding of the dominant research streams from individual engagement and organizational value propositions (Cluster 1), to applicant perceptions and employer attractiveness (Cluster 2), and CSR-aligned talent strategies (Cluster 3).

For other researchers, recognizing this structure is not only essential for understanding the current theoretical positioning of the field, but also serves as a strategic navigation tool to identify meaningful research opportunities. Scholars may choose to deepen specific thematic areas, bridge previously disconnected clusters (e.g., branding and engagement), or propose new methodological approaches to underexplored themes. The clusters also offer strong justification for developing interdisciplinary frameworks such as linking organizational identity theory with individual experience management.

Moreover, for applied or context-sensitive research, this thematic architecture enables scholars to align their inquiries with real-world challenges such as employer reputation in the public sector, SMEs, or digital work ecosystems. In sum, the cluster structure presented here does not only explain what has been studied, but also critically informs what should be explored next within the evolving intellectual landscape of employer branding.

4.5 Reseacrh Question 5

To address RQ5, this study employed a structured TCCM framework encompassing Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology to systematically uncover research gaps across the employer reputation literature. This multidimensional approach, grounded in a review of 145 articles spanning six thematic clusters (identified through co-occurrence keyword analysis using Biblioshiny), enables a comprehensive mapping of the field's blind spots and future directions.

Theoretically, the literature remains heavily anchored in Signaling Theory and internal communication strategy perspectives, which, while foundational, risk narrowing conceptual innovation. Broader theoretical lenses such as Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and the Resource-Based View are underutilized, limiting interdisciplinary dialogue and theoretical expansion.

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Contextually, research is disproportionately centered on Western corporate and hospitality environments, with sparse attention given to developing economies, SMEs, public sector organizations, or digitally-mediated workspaces. This skew limits the generalizability and practical relevance of existing frameworks across diverse organizational settings.

In terms of conceptual characteristics, most studies prioritize employer image and attractiveness from an organizational viewpoint. However, few explore branding from within—such as individual voice, co-creation, or authenticity of experience suggesting a conceptual imbalance that overlooks how employer reputation is enacted and experienced by internal stakeholders.

From a methodological standpoint, the field is dominated by survey-based quantitative designs and isolated case studies. There is a marked scarcity of longitudinal research, mixed-methods approaches, and digital or ethnographic inquiry methods that are increasingly relevant for capturing the evolving dynamics of employer reputation in complex organizational landscapes.

These findings are summarized in Table X, which presents the core gaps across each TCCM dimension. The table was constructed based on manual coding of representative articles per cluster, offering a transparent synthesis of where the literature stands and where it needs to go. Overall, this analysis provides a roadmap for scholars aiming to develop more inclusive, context-sensitive, and theoretically robust studies in the employer identity domain.

Table 3. TCCM-Based Research Gaps in Employer Branding Literature

Dimension	Key Gaps Identified
Theory	Overreliance on Signaling Theory and Internal Branding frameworks; limited use of Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, or Resource-Based View.
Context	Concentration in hospitality and European markets; underrepresentation of emerging economies, public sector, SMEs, and digital ecosystems.
Characteristics	Predominantly managerial or external brand perspectives; limited exploration of employee voice, co-creation, and internal brand experiences.
Methodology	Heavy use of quantitative surveys and case studies; scarcity of mixed-methods, longitudinal designs, or ethnographic approaches.

Note: The TCCM gaps summarized above are derived from a structured review of 145 articles on employer reputation. Articles were grouped based on thematic clustering results generated using Biblioshiny, and each was coded manually for its primary theory, context, characteristic focus, and methodology.

5. DISCUSSION

This study presents several novel contributions to the employer identity literature based on a systematic analysis of 145 Scopus-indexed articles using Biblioshiny.

First, in response to RQ1, the trend analysis reveals a consistent and strategic rise in employer reputation publications, with a recorded 12.69% annual growth and a peak in 2023. This surge aligns with post-pandemic shifts in organizational priorities, especially regarding

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talent retention and digital work environments. Unlike earlier SLRs such as Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) and Edwards (2010), which emphasized conceptual foundations, our study incorporates document age, authorship collaboration (average 2.83 authors per article), and citation dynamics (average 18.27 citations per paper), offering a more holistic view of academic momentum and its scholarly diffusion.

Second, addressing RQ2 and RQ3, the study confirms the intellectual dominance of authors such as Lievens, Näppä, and Wilden whose works not only appear frequently but are also extensively cited, indicating foundational relevance. For instance, Wilden et al. (2010) bridge signaling theory and individual-based brand equity, which remains a cornerstone of workplace branding theory. Meanwhile, Näppä et al. (2024) emphasize co-creation and employee-focused branding in hospitality, signaling a paradigmatic shift from perception-based to experience-based branding. Keyword network analysis (Figure 5) further reveals that employer branding has matured into an integrated intellectual domain where terms such as "staff engagement," "recruitment," and "corporate reputation" coalesce into a densely interconnected structure. This differs from fragmented patterns identified in previous bibliometric reviews (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016), showing how thematic cohesion has increased over time.

Third, in response to RQ4 and RQ5, the identification of six thematic clusters ranging from internal engagement and employer attractiveness to CSR and talent strategy highlights the field's multidimensional evolution. This study goes beyond typical thematic categorization by embedding the cluster analysis within a structured TCCM synthesis. Theoretically, the literature's reliance on signaling theory and employer reputation frameworks underrepresents newer constructs such as psychological contract theory, institutional logics, and dynamic capabilities. Contextually, most studies focus on Western and hospitality sectors, whereas emerging markets, SMEs, and hybrid work contexts remain understudied. Conceptually, there is an overemphasis on corporate image with limited attention to lived team member experience, value co-creation, and employee-driven brand advocacy. Methodologically, the dominance of cross-sectional surveys limits causal inference and depth; thus, future studies could adopt mixed-methods, longitudinal, or digital ethnographic approaches.

This dual-layered approach integrating bibliometric mapping with qualitative thematic analysis positions this study as a comprehensive roadmap for advancing workplace branding research. It not only reveals where the field stands, but more importantly, where it can and should go. Scholars are encouraged to transcend traditional branding logics by incorporating interdisciplinary theories and engaging with underexplored contexts, ultimately positioning employer branding as both a strategic HR tool and a socially embedded organizational capability.

For future researchers, this study offers actionable pathways. Readers particularly practitioners in HR, branding, and organizational development can leverage these findings to better understand how workplace branding strategies intersect with personnel experience, talent attraction, and organizational legitimacy. For scholars, the thematic clusters and TCCM synthesis serve as a navigational map to formulate relevant research questions, select

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underexplored contexts (e.g., SMEs in developing economies), or experiment with novel theoretical perspectives (e.g., institutional logics, sensemaking theory). The synthesis also supports integrating employer branding into broader discussions on employee well-being, agile work systems, and corporate sustainability.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

This study provides a comprehensive and integrative mapping of the workplace branding literature through a bibliometric and thematic synthesis approach, identifying five key research questions and offering structured answers supported by empirical biblioshiny results. The findings contribute to theory by highlighting dominant and emerging constructs, clarify gaps across TCCM dimensions, and serve as a strategic guide for future investigations. Employer branding is shown to have matured conceptually and expanded methodologically, paving the way for more nuanced explorations of internal dynamics, co-creation processes, and cross-sectoral applications.

However, this review is not without limitations. First, the analysis is restricted to articles indexed in Scopus, potentially overlooking influential contributions from other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar. Second, while thematic interpretations were validated using cluster analysis and TCCM mapping, the coding of theoretical lenses and methodological strategies remains subject to the researchers' interpretation. Future research could expand the dataset, apply triangulated coding with expert validation, or adopt meta-analytic techniques to quantify the strength of conceptual linkages across clusters.

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