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# Corporate Branding: An Interdisciplinary Literature Review

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## **Corporate Branding: An Interdisciplinary Literature Review**

**Purpose:** This paper examines how scholarly research on corporate branding has evolved using bibliometric author co-citation analysis of articles published between 1969 and 2008 on corporate branding.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The bibliography was compiled using the ISI Web of Science database. We searched articles published between 1969 and 2008 that used terms in their title related to our research scope. Then we used citation mapping to visualize the relationships between and among key works in the field.

**Findings:** Our search resulted in 264 papers by 412 authors in 150 journals. The field is notably interdisciplinary, with articles published mainly in business, management, architecture, arts and communications disciplines. We found three main approaches to corporate branding research (internal, transactional, external) with seven core research streams: (1) product, service and sponsorship evaluation; (2) corporate and visual identity; (3) employment image and application; (4) corporate crime; (5) financial performance; (6) brand extension; and (7) corporate image. We also identified emerging fields such as corporate branding combined with corporate social responsibility.

**Research limitations:** This research is limited by the database and the terms used for the search. Self-citations were also included. We used citation mapping and content analysis to identify core research streams.

**Originality/value:** The article is singular in using bibliometrics by means of author co-citation analyses to identify, analyze and visualize key articles about corporate branding in the last 40 years. The results demonstrate the impact of selected institutions, journals, and key articles and authors on the research field.

**Keywords:** Corporate Branding, Corporate Identity, Corporate Image, Corporate Reputation, Bibliometric Analysis, Literature Review.

**Paper type:** Literature review.

## **1. Introduction**

Researchers have published papers on the importance and value of corporate branding for a considerable time (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Practitioners (Macrae, 1996; Mitchell, 1997; Ind, 1997) as well as academics have weighed in on the topic (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Keller, 1998; Keller and Aaker, 1998; De Chernatony, 1999; Bickerton, 2000; Balmer, 2001; Harris and De Chernatony, 2001; Newman, 2001; Kitchen and Laurence, 2003). Since research can be cyclical (Daniels, 1991), one needs to take an occasional step back to reflect on and examine how scholarly research has evolved and shaped the field of corporate branding. This paper seeks to answer that broad question with a bibliometric author co-citation analysis of articles about corporate branding over the last 40 years. This longitudinal approach is especially valuable and important as corporate branding includes a wide range of concepts and has a multidisciplinary foundation. Corporate branding frameworks and theories reflect diverse areas such as business, communications, graphic design, corporate image, public relations, psychology and strategy (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Due to the interdisciplinary and complex nature of corporate branding, we conducted an interdisciplinary literature review that addressed three main research questions: (1) Which institutions are the most productive and influential and contributed the most to the field? (2) Which journals and articles in the field are most often cited? Who are the authors most often cited? (3) How has corporate branding progressed in the past 40 years? What are the co-citation networks among the most influential works cited in the corporate branding discipline? What underlying research streams and what fields of research need further attention?

This paper makes an important contribution for scholars interested in corporate branding because it outlines, structures, and identifies the key institutions, journals, articles and authors in the field. This helps to identify the center of excellence on corporate branding, the most important journals publish about this topic as well as the most influential articles and authors, or experts, in that field. It also provides an overview of the research history and synthesizes and identifies research streams and research gaps which merit further investigation. Finally, we also aim to provide a quick reference for researchers, consultants, and managers who want to become familiar with the corporate branding literature.

This type of analysis can be conducted with two approaches. The subjective (or bottom-up) approach, based on a qualitative analysis of the literature, starts with any researcher's interpretation of the core authors, papers, and research streams. The objective (top-down) approach employs bibliometric analysis and is quantitative in nature. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages (Acedo and Casillas, 2005). To the best of our knowledge, we could find only articles using the first approach in the literature, such as the paper about branding by Roper and Parker (2006). There are even fewer articles focusing only on corporate branding. The review articles that are most closely related deal with corporate identity (Melewar, 2003; He, 2008), organizational identity (He and Balmer, 2007), corporate branding and corporate social responsibility (Vaaland *et al.* 2008). Balmer's and Gray's (2003) work is probably the most comprehensive literature review of that nature, importance, typology and management of corporate branding, although they use a subjective rather than an objective approach. Moreover, they do not

identify key institutions, journals and the relationships among the most cited articles. Our paper attempts to close that gap and proposes an objectively-driven approach to identify and analyze the main paradigms within this research field by means of a bibliometric author co-citation analysis (Garfield, 1963; Small, 1974).

## **2. Bibliometric Analysis**

Bibliometrics by means of author co-citation analysis is a relatively new form of meta-analytical research or “meta-review” of the literature (Harsanyi, 1993; Kim and McMillan, 2008). It was initially used in a wide range of disciplines in science and humanities (Price, 1976; White and McCain, 1989; Wiberley, 2003) and only recently in social science disciplines (Glanzel, 1996) such as communications (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999), international management (Acedo and Casilla, 2005), international business (Pillania and Fetscherin, 2009), marketing (Arnott, 2007), and advertising (Kim and McMillan, 2008). Bibliometric analysis unveils seminal works and objectively illustrates the links between and among articles by analyzing how many times they have been co-cited. It allows for evaluating the development of a given research field and discipline or phenomenon as well as identifying central theories and key research topics (Borgman, 2000; Vassinen, 2006). Bibliometric analysis is based on the assumption that researchers publish their most important findings in scholarly journals and predominantly base their research on articles previously published in similar journals (Van Raan, 2003), a reasonable assumption in business and management research. Citation analysis considers a citation to be the basic unit of analysis (Kim and McMillan, 2008) and therefore goes

beyond a simple counting of publications to include centers of influence and maps out related research streams (Kim and McMillan 2008).

### **3. Methodology**

We collected data for our analysis in December 2008 from the *ISI Web of Knowledge* database called Web of Science, which includes the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-Expanded), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI). The *ISI Web of Knowledge* was suitable for this study as one of the main objectives is to conduct an interdisciplinary literature review and many notable bibliometric studies have used this database (e.g. Biehl, Kim and Wade, 2006; Schildt, Zahra, Sillanpää, 2006; Kim and McMillan, 2008; Nerur, Rasheed, and Natarajan, 2008). We searched for publications that appeared from 1969 to 2008 and considered only ‘articles’ (including proceedings papers) (Van Raan, 2003). The year 1969 was chosen as cut-off year because using a longer period would not result in a significantly larger number of relevant articles, and the year 1969 still has one publication related to the research topic. Moreover, previous bibliometric studies also used round number of years (e.g. Peng and Zhou, 2006: 10 years; Nerur, Rasheed, and Natarajan, 2008: 20 years; Podsakoff, *et al.* 2008: 25 years). To collect comprehensive data, we used a two-step approach. First, the title of the paper had to include one of the following combinations: *corporate* or *company* or *firm* as well as one of the following terms: *brand* or *branding* or *identity* or *image* or *reputation* or *rebranding*. The use of these terms takes into account the “development of these concepts from a starting point of corporate image through successive organisational constructs, which reflect growing insights into the nature of

organizational branding” or corporate branding (Knox and Bickerton, 2003, p. 1001). We used those search terms in the “title” search field to identify articles that focus exclusively on the topic and have an impact on the research field rather than articles that anecdotally discuss corporate branding. By searching for these key words in the title, we are confident that we have identified the most relevant articles on corporate branding. The search resulted in an initial dataset of 320 articles that include a combination of the terms noted above in their title. In the second step, we did a content analysis of the articles by reading the abstract to “cross-check” whether the database identified the right articles for our analysis. We excluded 56 articles that dealt mainly with branding and government organizations (e.g., Benjamin, 1985), or branding regions or cities (e.g., Williams, 1990), leaving us with 264 articles relevant for this study. For each relevant article we recorded author name(s), journal, title, volume, number, pages, publication date, abstract, and cited references. Inspired by the work of Roper and Parker, (2006) we used bibliometric software to facilitate the process of identifying the citation and co-citation relationships of the articles. We chose to use the HistCite™ software which is a specific bibliometric software tool for analyzing and visualizing direct citation linkages between scientific papers. Its inputs are bibliographic records (with cited references) from ISI Web of Knowledge. Its outputs are various tables and graphs with informetric indicators about the knowledge domain under study (Garfield et al., 2006) [Note 1].

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

Among the 264 articles, the five key disciplines are business (41%), management (16%), architecture (12%), arts (11%), and communications (8%), which together account for

almost 90 percent of all publications. The articles have a total of 412 authors published in 150 journals, with a total of 5,736 cited references, indicating the interdisciplinary nature of the field.

#### **4.1. Centers of Excellence**

We measure the importance and academic weight of institutions by their output and impact within the retrieved articles (local citations) as well as overall citations received (global citations) (Moed *et al.*, 1985; Carpenter *et al.*, 1988; Van Raan, 2008). The results show a diversity of institutions and centers of excellence on corporate branding, which are leading this research field. The most productive and influential institutions are from the US and UK, including the *University of Bradford, Brunel University, Cornell University, Harvard University, Loyola Marymount University, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, and University of North Carolina.*

#### **4.2. Most Influential Journals**

For some years, researchers have used bibliometric analysis to assess journal performance, including studies by Reeves and Borgman (1983) and Schubert, Glanzel and Braun (1989). As Baumgartner and Pieters noted (2003), “different journals are most influential in different subareas of marketing” (p. 123). We therefore want to identify which journals “shape” and “lead” the field of corporate branding. Table 1 summarizes the top 10 journals in terms of total number of articles published (P), the number of citations received within the retrieved articles per year (TLC/t), and the total global citations received per year (TGC/t).



---- **Take in Table 1** ----

Overall, management and business journals, especially those with a focus on marketing and advertising, dominate the lists of the most productive or/and influential journals with the exception of a few practitioner journals (e.g. *Harvard Business Review* and *California Management Review*) and the *Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)*. The high ranking of JBE is not surprising given its standing in the academic community and its dedication to interdisciplinary research.

To investigate this point further, we take the number of articles as a proxy of output or productivity, and the total global citations received per year (TGC/t) as a proxy for the interdisciplinary impact. Figure 1 illustrates the total number of articles published (y-axis) and the total global citations received per year (TGC/t). By calculating the mean values of each variable (vertical and horizontal axes), four main groups of journals can be distinguished. From the 150 journals in our dataset, 97 journals are below the average output (1.76 articles) and impact (0.9 TGC/t). There are 21 journals which are above average output and impact, 16 journals which are above average impact but not output and again 16 which are above average output but not impact. For illustrative purposes, Figure 1 shows that only the journals which are above average in at least one of the two dimensions.

---- **Take in Figure 1** ----

The most **influential** journals (bottom right: low output - high impact) are the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*. The most **productive** journal (top left: high output - low impact) is *Design* journal as well as other visual communications and architecture related

journals such as *Domus* and *Graphis*. However, the most **productive and influential** journals (top right: high output – high impact) are the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, and the *Journal of Advertising*, among others.

### **4.3. Most Influential Articles**

The articles featured in Table 2 can be considered highly influential in shaping the research field of corporate branding. We have chosen to sort the articles along the total local citations of the retrieved articles per year (TLC/t). Table 2 gives the total citations received within the retrieved articles (TLC), the yearly average (TLC/t), the total global citations received (TGC) and the corresponding yearly average (TGC/t) as well as the ratio of local citations in the ending (LCSe) and beginning periods (LCSb) for each article. This ratio shows whether a paper acquired more of its citations in the period immediately after publication ( $LCSe / LCSb < 1$ ) or if there was a relative increase in citations in recent years ( $LCSe / LCSb > 1$ ).

---- **Take in Table 2** ---

### **4.4. History of Corporate Branding**

Corporate branding emerged in the 1970s and was initially mostly managerially inspired, rather than academically driven. A typical piece is Margulies (1977) who explained, based on cases in the U.S., how managing corporate identity can be massively different from simply changing a company's name. One of the first academic studies came in the 1980s with investigations as to how corporate advertising affects company image (Winters, 1986). Corporate reputation, and the factors underlying it, have been a subject

of interest since the beginning of the 1990s with the paper by Fombrun and Shanley (1990), later challenged by Fryxell and Wang (1994) among others. The first papers that highlighted the multi-faceted nature of corporate identity were published in the 1990s, with Dowling (1993) analyzing how successful the transformation of a company's image required the coordination of multiple areas such as vision, marketing communications, strategy, organizational design, and culture. Since then, the categorization of corporate identity dimensions as well as the study of their interactions and relatedness within a broader conceptual design have been the subject of continuing research interest (Balmer, 2001; Davies *et al.* 2001; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Since the 1990s, we have witnessed attempts at understanding and measuring the consequences of corporate image on employee identification and recruitment (Highhouse *et al.*, 1999; Andriopoulos and Gotsi, 2001) and on customer attitudes toward the company (Davies *et al.* 2004), especially in the field of services where the corporate brand is dominant (Yoon, 1993; LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1996; Davies *et al.* 2004). Davies *et al.* (2001) use the personification metaphor as a measurement strategy in the assessment of both the internal and external facets of corporate reputation. Later, Davies *et al.* (2004) propose the corporate character scale which assesses the corporate reputation of an organization from the employee and customer perspectives. Our literature review showed that research on corporate visual identity (e.g. Williams, 1990), although it has been continuous over the whole 40 year period, has never been strongly related to business studies on corporate identity, except in the works of Schmitt (1995), Schmitt *et al.* (1995), and more recently Van Den Bosch *et al.* (2004). The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a growing concern for the consistency between corporate

image and company policies and actions, this being expressed especially by numerous publications in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (e.g. Williams and Barrett, 2000; Sacconi, 2007). There is increasing departure from the simplistic assumption that investments in corporate image will have positive consequences across the board. Research now tends to empirically investigate whether an improved corporate image really affects financial performance (Roberts and Dowling, 2002), and also whether particular forms of generous corporate behavior are likely to improve corporate image (e.g. Dean, 2003).

The next section explores how research in corporate branding has evolved over the last four decades as well as the relationship and co-citation networks between and among the most often cited articles, measured by means of co-citation analysis of articles, in order to identify current and emerging research streams.

## **5. Citation Mapping**

In this section we extend the earlier findings by reviewing the broader group of articles published since 1969 and show which groups form a research stream and which streams are under-represented. To do this, we use a co-citation mapping technique to visualize how articles on corporate branding have been co-cited or have cited each other reciprocally over time. We also examine the apparent direction of future research (Small, 1999). To identify the research streams we take the total number of citations received from the retrieved article collection (TLC) as unit of analysis. To get meaningful results and be able to visualize co-citation networks and relationships between articles, analysis has been limited to those articles which have at least one local co-citation ( $TLC > 1$ ). The reason for this is the need to focus on articles, which have been cited within the domain

of corporate branding. This leaves us with the 27 most important articles out of the 264, as Figure 2 shows. The horizontal axis represents the year. Each article represents a node and the size of each node circle depends on the number of local citations received. An arrow pointing from one node to another indicates a citation relationship between papers; i.e. the paper from which the arrow originates cites the paper the arrow points to. Visualizing the most often cited articles and the themes they discuss reveals seven core research streams in the current literature and some emerging streams.

---- **Take in Figure 2** ----

Figure 2 summarizes research streams that emerged from our bibliometric author co-citation analysis and shows three main approaches to corporate branding research which we label: transactional, internal, and external. The transactional approach is about corporate branding and what the company *does* (product, services, sponsorship). The second approach is internal to the company, with the research focusing on corporate branding and what the company *is* (corporate and/or visual identity) as well as what type of people it attracts (employment image and application). The third approach on corporate branding research is external and explores the influence of corporate misbehavior (crime) on corporate reputation, the influence of corporate image on *how well* the company is actually doing (financial performance), on customer loyalty, and on how it is perceived by the public.

### **5.1. Corporate Branding and Product, Service and Sponsorship Evaluation**

Three sub-research streams focus on the relationship between corporate branding (CB) and (1a) product evaluation, (1b) service purchase intention and (1c) and corporate

branding and sports sponsorship evaluation. Authorities in this stream are Winters (1986, #60) and Javalgi *et al.* (1994, #106). Authority documents are those which are cited by many other domain-specific documents (Garfield *et al.*, 2006).

**CB and Product Evaluation (1a in Figure 2).** This research sub-stream studies the relationship between corporate branding and product evaluation, citing works on corporate branding in product communication (Berens *et al.* 2005, #190) as well as the effect of corporate image (Gurhan-Canli and Batra, 2004, #175) or corporate advertising (Biehal and Sheinin, 1998, # 136) on product evaluation. Berens *et al.* (2005, #190) investigate the effect of corporate brand dominance: i.e., the visibility of a company's corporate brand in product communications and the relationship between corporate associations and product evaluations. Based on two experiments, Gurhan-Canli and Batra (2004, #175) show that corporate image associations with innovation and trustworthiness influence product evaluations more when consumers perceive high versus low risk in the product purchase. Biehal and Sheinin (1998, #136) argue that corporate advertising may influence the way consumers think about brands the company sells.

**CB and Service Purchase Intention (1b in Figure 2).** The most cited works are from LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996, # 112) and Yoon *et al.* (1993, # 98), which appears as a “hub” in the sense of Garfield *et al.* (2006), that is, a document citing many other documents in the domain. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996, #112) investigate the concept of corporate image for services and identify four factors that explain customers' perceptions of company image. Yoon *et al.* (1993, #98) look at business insurance service data and investigate the relationship between the company's reputation and information on the service offering and how both influence the buyer's expectations. Their results suggest

that a buyer's response to a service is consistent with his/her perception of the company's reputation. Thus, using the company's reputation in marketing products and services can be effective.

**CB and Sports Sponsorship Evaluation (1c in Figure 2).** This sub-stream deals mainly with sponsorship of major sports events for product or service related companies. The most cited work from our retrieved articles is Stipp and Schiavone (1996, #119) who confirm findings from previous studies that Olympic advertising can have substantial positive effects not only on product sales, attitudes toward the product, but also the image of the sponsor. Many other studies have been conducted assessing the effects of consumers' attitudes about a sports event, their perceptions of sponsor-event fit (Hermanns and Drees, 1989), their attitudes about the sponsor (Speed and Thompson, 2000), and sponsor brand recall (Nicholls et al.1999).

## **5.2. Corporate branding and corporate Identity**

There are two sub-streams, one focusing on the relationship between corporate branding and corporate identity and the other on the visual identity of a corporation.

**Corporate Identity and CB (2a in Figure 2).** Authorities in this sub-stream are a *Harvard Business Review* paper on corporate identity by Perkins (1995, # 108), Schmitt (1995, #104) and Schultz and Hatch (1997, # 127). Schmitt (1995, #104) shows that linguistic and cultural factors have a deep impact on naming and visual identity when transferring corporate brands to East-Asian countries. Schultz and Hatch (1997, # 127) offer a European view on corporate identity based on an interview with Wally Olins. Gray and Balmer (1998, # 137), and Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006, # 202) are

typical hubs in this field. Gray and Balmer (1998) present a pragmatic operational model which shows that, in addition to an understanding of corporate reputation and image, managers need to understand their firm's corporate identity and corporate communications and the relationships among these components. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006), based on in-depth interviews, assess the essential components of the corporate identity concept, as perceived by managers. Their study shows that uncontrolled corporate communication matters for corporate image and they underline the need for corporate discourse to be in line with operations and behaviors. They also highlight a considerable divergence in opinions about the components of corporate identity among practitioners.

**CB and Visual Identity (2b in Figure 2).** This research stream centers on corporate branding and visual presentation, with the most often cited works coming from Van den Bosch *et al.* (2004, # 177) and Schmitt (1995, # 107), which appear as authorities. Van den Bosch *et al.* (2004, # 177) show that corporate visual identity (CVI) is an important element of corporate identity, reputation, and relationship management. Their article addresses the need for consistent use of a CVI. Based on a survey, their study compares the use and perceived importance of CVI and shows that little correspondence between use and perceived importance exists. Schmitt (1995, # 107) shows that corporate identity, especially the names and symbols that businesses use to represent themselves, must be defined differently in East Asia than in the West in order to appeal to regional clients and customers. This article summarizes the author's research on the linguistic and cultural factors pertinent to naming and visual identity issues.



### 5.3. Corporate branding and Employment

As can be seen from Figure 2, research streams 3, 4, and 5, build on a common authority document, that is, Fombrun and Shanley's paper published in the *Academy of Management Review* in 1990 (#81), which is cited 27 times locally and 274 times globally, making it by far the most cited paper in the domain. This paper is one of the very first articles to deal with corporate names and to look at their relationships with corporate reputation and strategy. There are two sub-streams, one focusing on the relationship between corporate branding and employment image and intention, and the other one focusing on employment applications.

**CB and Employment Image (3a in Figure 2).** The work of Lemmink *et al.* (2003, #164) and Highhouse *et al.* (1999, #141), appearing as a hub on CB and employment image, dominate this research stream of corporate branding and its relation to employment image and intention. Lemmink *et al.* (2003, #164) examine the influence of the corporate image and company employment image on the application intentions of graduate business students. Their results show that both types of images have independent but significant positive effects on the intentions to apply and are thus valuable tools in the labor market. Highhouse *et al.* (1999, #141) show how organizations can assess the image potential applicants hold of their company as a place to work. They identify the most critical employment image dimensions that distinguish among companies in the same industry.

**CB and Employment Applications (3b in Figure 2).** Dominated by the work of Turban and Cable (2003, # 168), this sub-research stream investigates whether organizational reputation influences the number and the quality of applicants seeking positions with

firms. The results show that firms with better reputations attract more and higher quality applicants.

#### **5.4. Corporate Branding and Corporate Crime (4 in Figure 2)**

The work of Williams and Barrett (2000, # 146) is the most often cited about corporate branding and legal issues, an emerging research stream. Their study examines the link between certain categories of corporate crime and corporate reputation. They theorize that firms violating EPA and OSHA regulations should, to some extent, experience a decline in their reputations, while firms contributing to charitable causes should see their reputations enhanced but they find no link between decline in reputation and financial performance. We discuss this further in the next section.

#### **5.5. Corporate Branding and Financial Performance (5 in Figure 2)**

Roberts and Dowling (2002, # 160) contribute the most often cited work on corporate branding and financial performance, arguing that a good corporate reputation not only creates potential value but also makes replication by competitors more difficult. Their results show a positive relationship between reputation and financial performance.

#### **5.6. Corporate Branding and Brand Extension (6 in Figure 2)**

The research stream on corporate branding and brand extension has the most often co-cited articles from de Ruyter and Wetzels (2000, #149) and Andreassen and Lindestad (1998, #130). De Ruyter and Wetzels (2000, #149) examine the role of corporate image in extending service brands to new and traditional markets in the telecommunications

sector, showing that consumers prefer service brand extensions in related rather than unrelated markets. Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) discuss and test corporate image and customer satisfaction as two routes to customer loyalty in the service industry, suggesting that corporate image impacts customer loyalty directly but customer satisfaction does not.

### **5.7. Corporate Branding and Corporate Image (7 in Figure 2)**

The most co-cited works in this research stream are Schmitt *et al.* (1995, # 110) and Dowling (1993, #95), both dealing with corporate branding and perceived corporate image. They focus on external perception of a company compared to corporate identity (c.f. 5.2.), which deals with the internal perception of a company. Schmitt *et al.* (1995) present a corporate aesthetics management strategic framework to manage visual output of a company (e.g. products, logos, packaging, buildings, showrooms, advertisements, company uniforms). Their results show that this framework provides a competitive advantage by reducing communication costs and enhancing company image and products, and increasing sales. Dowling (1993) argues that the world's most successful companies invest in their corporate images. He recommends that, to develop the corporation's image as a valuable marketing asset to the fullest extent, executives must coordinate the company's vision, marketing communications, corporate strategy, organizational design and culture.

## **6. Research Gaps and Future Research Streams**

The previous analysis deconstructed and structured the current research field of corporate branding into major research streams and sub-streams. In this section our objective is to

outline the research gaps identified and to outline some underdeveloped or emerging research areas and make suggestions for future research.

The first and most significant research gap is the lack of conceptual clarity, which has been shown by Balmer (2001), who has used the expression “seeing through the fog” as a metaphor for the relative conceptual fuzziness of the domain. First the use of terminology is not always clear; reputation, image, branding, and identity being used somewhat interchangeably, as near substitutes when they should not be. For instance, identity can be defined either in terms of the fundamental attributes of an organization or alternatively as the graphic-design solutions supporting its corporate visual identity. The precise meaning of many terms remains largely undefined and there is clearly no real consensus on what they mean (see Balmer, 2001, who provides a set of conceptual definitions for all constructs in the domain).

The second research gap is based on a related concern, that is, causality. Such terms are not clearly articulated in conceptual models, where the flow of causality would go from cause to effect, even on the simple principle of temporal ordering of causation (i.e. *post hoc ergo propter hoc*). The difficulty here is that causality may sometimes run both ways between key concepts in the domain, such as corporate identity being both an antecedent and a consequence of corporate branding. In their search for a definition of corporate reputation, Gotsi and Wilson (2001) note that different schools of thought exist concerning the relation between the concepts of corporate reputation and corporate image. While the "analogous" school of thought equates them, the "differentiated" school of thought considers them as different concepts with causality flowing either from corporate image to corporate reputation or vice-versa. The corporate branding domain is

in deep need of - at least - properly articulated models, even if they are not pure in terms of causality, since pure positivistic research may not be the ideal research paradigm for the corporate branding domain.

The third research gap is related to the association - perhaps confusion - between graphic design (corporate visual identity and communications) on the one hand and corporate branding/corporate identity on the other hand. Looking at the 264 articles we find in our dataset, the graphics-design literature has a significant contribution to the field (31%). However, it tends not to be cross-cited by the business side of the literature (57%). In Figure 2, we find few exceptions to this rule, since virtually all top cited articles belong to the business literature, and only a few of them, like Schmitt (1995) and Schmitt *et al.* (1995), relate visual identity to corporate branding. As a consequence, there is a relative lack of linkage, with the graphics-design literature, although it is often claimed that the corporate branding literature is interdisciplinary in nature. Therefore, the research gap in this area is to relate visual identity and corporate branding/corporate identity in a more operative manner.

A fourth research gap is related to the limited number of empirical evidence and empirical interdisciplinary research on the topic. Many papers in the domain illustrate but do not empirically investigate corporate identity and branding (Balmer, 2001), this being partially the consequence of the absence of an integrated conceptual framework with precise definitions and causal relationships that would allow for operationalization and measurement of key constructs in the domain. Furthermore, although a significant proportion of research studies have an empirical setting, these settings are quite *ad hoc*; they cannot be compared and made commensurable in some way or another. As a

consequence, the extant literature may suffer from a relative lack of cumulativeness in the progressive emergence of a body of commonly accepted knowledge.

A fifth research gap is related to the poor cross-fertilization of research on corporate branding across nations/cultures/languages. In order to see which nations, cultures, and languages were represented in the corporate branding literature, we looked at author home country at the time of article publication (c.f. Moed *et al.*, 1985; Braun *et al.*, 1995; Glanzel 1996; Mladen and Silva, 2001). The US and UK have the most publications and the most citations when it comes to research on corporate branding in the last 40 years. Most researchers are based in either English-speaking high-income countries (Australia, Canada, UK, and US), central and northern European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark), or greater China (Taiwan, China). As a consequence, many areas of the world which may even have a significant number of corporate brands, are not included in the study of corporate branding. Their cultures, for instance the influence of collectivism on corporate identity issues, and their languages, especially the influence of east-Asian languages and scripts on corporate brand names, are barely taken into account. As a consequence, there is a need for future research to focus on corporate branding in diverse contexts, on cultural values and behaviors which impact corporate and organizational identities, and on the influence of language on corporate brand naming. Some researchers now pursue research in this direction, for instance Hsieh, Pan and Setiono (2004), who investigate the relationship between corporate branding, product, and country-of-origin image, and the moderating effect of consumer cultural characteristics.

The sixth research gap deals with which companies are concerned by the study of corporate branding. It seems that almost only large multinational corporations are used for illustrations or research in corporate branding. Although there is no causal relationship, we observed that the 10 most productive and influential countries in corporate branding are also those with the most Fortune 500 (Fortune, 2008) companies, as the following breakdown shows (number of companies/rank): United States (153, #1), France (39, #3), Germany (37, #4), UK (34, #5), China (29, #6), Canada (14, #9), Netherlands (13, #10). One interpretation for this concentration could be that since these countries have more multinational companies, corporate branding has also become more important and therefore attracted the attention of researchers in institutions from those countries. However, this results in putting full focus on large, MNC companies, with disregard for corporate branding of mid or smaller size, local companies, often with a definite home-country, domestic operations or operations in only a few countries, and often a family firm background (SMEs, Mittelstand in Germany, PME in France). There is definitely a need for corporate branding research to extend beyond the limited scope of MNCs, to the whole corporate world including family business, whose identity is often strongly related to the founders, business history, and a meaningful local context. One might suggest other avenues of future CB research by extending corporate branding to non-profit organizations or religious organizations (e.g. the Catholic church). Greyser, Balmer and Urde (2006) investigate corporate branding in the case of a traditional institution with application to the case of constitutional monarchies.

A seventh, and last identified research gap is related to the highly normative content of the corporate branding literature that often works on the basis of managerial

recommendations (Do's) but tends to ignore discrepancies between what should ideally be communicated and what is actually communicated through corporate strategy, corporate behavior, and uncontrolled company communication. Gotsi and Wilson (2001) emphasize the pivotal role of staff in corporate reputation management and the need to align internal communication and HRM practices with brand value for employees to be encouraged to "live the brand". Balmer (2001) identifies this gap as "a failure to make a distinction between the actual, communicated, conceived, ideal, and desired identities" (p. 251). This is likely to be of great importance as soon as corporate generosity is used to foster corporate image, especially when it is not coordinated with other, possibly contradicting corporate actions. Consequently, an emerging research field is corporate branding and type of donation (Dean, 2003), philanthropic activities (Menon and Kahn, 2003), and corporate social responsibility (Sacconi, 2007). Future research must also focus on managing the corporate brand by avoiding negative associations and/or controversies that might damage its credibility and reduce the support it receives from external constituencies (Aaker, 2004) or the challenges and issues in corporate rebranding (Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2007). It appears, in fact, that corporate rebranding sometimes results in new corporate brand values that are undermined by contradictory informal norms with cultural consensus being fragmented within the organization (Gotsi, Andriopoulos and Wilson, 2007; Wilson, 2001).

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper makes an important contribution, as it outlines, structures, and identifies the key institutions, journals, articles and authors in the research field of corporate branding.



We collected data from the ISI Web of Science database and searched for articles published between 1969 and 2008 that used terms related to corporate branding in their title. Our search produced 264 relevant articles, mostly from journals in five main disciplines: business and management followed by architecture, arts, and communications. The dataset reveals new insights on the global distribution of the most prolific authors and journals in this research field in terms of output and importance. Our results show that the most productive institutions are based in the US and UK. Many different disciplines conduct research about corporate branding, which confirms its interdisciplinary nature, but management and business journals dominate the lists of the most productive and/or influential journals with the exception of a few practitioners journals. The most **influential** journals are the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*. The most **productive** are *Domus*, *Graphis* and *Design*, which publish many articles but are not often cited. The most **productive and influential** journals in the corporate branding research field are the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, and the *Journal of Advertising*.

Bibliometric analysis identified three main approaches with seven core research streams related to corporate branding and (1) product, service and sponsorship evaluation; (2) corporate and visual identity; (3) employment image and application; (4) corporate crime; (5) financial performance; (6) brand extension; and (7) corporate image. We identified emerging fields such as corporate branding and corporate social responsibility and special applications such as those for religious or non-profit organizations.

Research findings as well as limitations to the approach chosen point to opportunities for future research. While the dataset is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. The top tier marketing journals are included in our study. However, some other journals may be excluded from the ISI Web of Knowledge database. Our results are valid within that scope. We did not exclude self-citations in our analysis. Although this is common practice, future research may exclude self-citations to yield a more accurate assessment of an article's importance. Despite its high degree of objectivity, bibliometric analysis has a subjective dimension (Van Raan, 2003) since we had to make choices on the search terms used and the time period as well as identify and label the core research streams with the help of HistCite<sup>TM</sup> software. The articles reviewed here were all written in English. Future research may investigate the non-English research to highlight its contribution to the academic literature. Research fields on corporate branding and corporate social responsibility, special applications and the relationship and interaction with product and country image appear to be ripe for additional research. In laying out the underrepresentation of these research streams and approaches, we hope to encourage further research.

**Note (from page 6)**

In order to check whether the choice of ISI journals was biasing our analysis by excluding non ISI journals, we did a search for ABI-Inform articles using the same key words. We then have selected those ABI-Inform journals (and not in ISI) that had a minimal level of influence on the literature, which we define as being “globally cited” at least twice by our retrieved articles. Most journals (66) among the 103 ABI-Inform journals (which are not ISI journals) are never cited by our articles. Among the 37 ABI journals cited, 11 journals (36 articles) have more than one article that is cited twice by our articles. In fact, 29 out of the 36 articles are published in 4 journals: *Corporate Communications*, *Corporate Reputation Review*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *Journal of Marketing Management*. Out of 29 articles in those 4 journals, 12 articles are from 5 authors which are already identified in our analysis based on ISI journals as the most locally and globally cited. These authors are Balmer, Fombrun, Greyser, Melewar, and De Chernatony. Our conclusion from this analysis is that there would be no significant change in our findings if we introduced the 36 ABI-Inform articles.

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## Appendix

Table 1: Ranking of Top Ten Journals

| Rank | Journal | P  | Journal | TLC/t | Journal | TGC/t |
|------|---------|----|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| 1    | Design  | 17 | SMJ     | 1.71  | AMJ     | 14.42 |
| 2    | JBE     | 16 | AMJ     | 1.42  | JMR     | 10.18 |
| 3    | EJM     | 12 | LRP     | 1.17  | SMJ     | 7.57  |
| 4    | JAR     | 8  | JMR     | 1.07  | ASQ     | 6.89  |
| 5    | JoA     | 6  | JBE     | 0.8   | JBE     | 6.02  |
| 6    | PRR     | 6  | EJM     | 0.67  | IJSIM   | 5.14  |
| 7    | CMR     | 5  | IJSIM   | 0.53  | PP      | 4.8   |
| 8    | Domus   | 5  | JoA     | 0.52  | JoA     | 4.08  |
| 9    | HBR     | 5  | JM      | 0.5   | LRP     | 3.86  |
| 10   | JAMS    | 5  | JOB     | 0.5   | EJM     | 3.67  |

Legend:

|       |  |     |                                    |
|-------|--|-----|------------------------------------|
| JBE   | Journal of Business Ethics                           | JAR | Journal of Advertising Research    |
| AMJ   | Academy of Management Journal                        | JM  | Journal of Marketing               |
| ASQ   | Administrative Science Quarterly                     | JMR | Journal of Marketing Research      |
| CMR   | California Management Review                         | JoA | Journal of Advertising             |
| EJM   | European Journal of Marketing                        | JOB | Journal of Organizational Behavior |
| HBR   | Harvard Business Review                              | LRP | Long Range Planning                |
| IJSIM | International Journal of Service Industry Management | PP  | Personnel Psychology               |
| JAMS  | Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science          | PRR | Public Relations Review            |
|       |  | SMJ | Strategic Management Journal       |

Table 2: Ranking of Top 10 Articles (sorted by LCSe/LCSb)

| #  | Author(s) (year)                | TLC | TLC/t | TGC | TGC/t | LCSe/LCSb |
|----|---------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----------|
| 1  | Gray and Balmer (1998)          | 10  | 0.91  | 27  | 2.45  | 10/0      |
| 2  | Fombrun and Shanley (1990)      | 27  | 1.42  | 274 | 14.42 | 9/0       |
| 3  | Roberts and Downling (2002)     | 12  | 1.71  | 53  | 7.57  | 9/0       |
| 4  | Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) | 5   | 0.45  | 47  | 4.27  | 4         |
| 5  | Simonin and Ruth (1998)         | 3   | 0.27  | 68  | 6.18  | 3/0       |
| 6  | Fryxell and Wang (1994)         | 6   | 0.4   | 44  | 2.93  | 2         |
| 7  | Yoon <i>et al.</i> (1993)       | 3   | 0.19  | 18  | 1.13  | 2/0       |
| 8  | Melewar and Saunders (1999)     | 3   | 0.3   | 15  | 1.5   | 2/0       |
| 9  | Lemmink <i>et al.</i> (2003)    | 2   | 0.33  | 7   | 1.17  | 2/0       |
| 10 | Javalgi <i>et al.</i> (1994)    | 4   | 0.27  | 31  | 2.07  | 1/0       |