Elevating B2B branding in a global context: Integrating existing literature and proposing a forward-thinking conceptual framework

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate B2B branding in a global context by constructing a framework for future research, practitioners, and brand managers operating in international B2B markets. Employing co-citation and text-mining techniques to investigate 281 articles, we identified five knowledge fields that map the intellectual structure of this domain: brand equity, industrial branding, brand value, global brand leadership, and relationship marketing. We also gained a deeper understanding of the important topics in global B2B branding literature. This framework not only highlights gaps and challenges in conceptual and methodological approaches but also challenges and extends existing academic discourse. It offers a systematic approach to strategic decision-making and the overhaul of marketing practices, guiding practitioners to navigate the complexities of global B2B branding. Our critical analysis sets a new agenda for future research, calling for a more rigorous and holistic advancement in the field of global B2B branding.

1. Introduction

The global corporate landscape has seen significant expansion in business-to-business (B2B) branding, with giants like Microsoft and IBM demonstrating the critical role of effective branding in achieving competitive advantages (McKinsey, 2022). Effective B2B branding transcends the creation of memorable logos or slogans; it strategically positions companies in ways that resonate globally with business customers, influencing their decision-making processes by establishing trust, demonstrating value, and uniquely highlighting a company's offerings (Cartwright et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018). This strategic influence helps secure and maintain lasting business relationships, differentiates products and services in a competitive market, and enhances a company's reputation and credibility internationally. Such branding not only justifies premium pricing by emphasizing quality, innovation, and service but also fosters customer loyalty and facilitates market expansion. Loyal customers, who perceive the brand's offerings as superior, are less likely to switch to competitors and more inclined to advocate for the brand, thus amplifying its competitive advantage. Moreover, recent research by BCG **(Boston Consulting Group)** and Google underscores the impact of brand marketing in the B2B sector as equal to, or greater than, that in the consumer sector, with well-branded companies

achieving greater returns on marketing investments and enhanced audience engagement (Sheerin et al., 2021).

Recent research highlights the critical role of robust global B2B branding in enhancing the decision-making confidence of industrial purchasers (Anaza et al., 2023). Strong global brands not only suggest superior product qualities but also stimulate increased purchasing interest due to their associative aspects (Brown et al., 2011). The complexities inherent in organizational buying models necessitate that B2B brands provide decision-makers with both a rapid and emotionally resonant pathway to finalize their purchase decisions (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2019; Mogaji et al., 2023). The dynamic and multifaceted nature of B2B branding has spurred extensive scholarly and practical exploration, resulting in a substantial body of literature (Deng et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). However, managers still grapple with significant challenges in implementing and integrating global B2B branding strategies effectively within their organizations. One major difficulty lies in assessing the impact of these strategies and making informed decisions that capitalize on their potential value, a process complicated by the varied dynamics of global markets (Liu et al., 2020).

This complexity is compounded by a general lack of deep insights into the intricacies of global branding efforts and their strategic implications, emphasizing the need for a more profound and strategic

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approach to global B2B branding initiatives (Bilro et al., 2023; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Swani et al., 2020). Such strategic gaps often lead to hesitancy in committing to significant ongoing investments in branding efforts, risking underutilization of assets that could otherwise provide substantial benefits to firms. Despite the extensive attention global branding and B2B branding research have garnered in marketing and brand management literature (Dam et al., 2024; Iglesias et al., 2023; Kapitan et al., 2022), there remains a limited understanding of global branding within the B2B context. This gap is especially pronounced in distinguishing the unique attributes of corporate versus product branding in global settings and understanding customer identifiability, buying behaviour, and the impact of brand extensions on firm performance in B2B markets, which differ significantly from B2C settings (Keller, 2014; Lim, 2023; Wang & He, 2023). A dedicated investigation into the foundational intellectual structure of global B2B branding literature is essential to advance the understanding and effectiveness of B2B branding strategies globally. Such research will help establish the legitimacy of global B2B branding as a distinct field and provide a structured framework for future academic and practical advancements.

Despite numerous reviews synthesizing B2B branding literature (Keränen et al., 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Seyedghorban et al., 2016; Voola et al., 2022), a critical gap persists in the examination and integration of foundational knowledge specific to global B2B branding. Existing studies, while mapping general topics and notable contributors, fall short in proposing actionable managerial frameworks, thus limiting theoretical progress and practical application in global B2B branding. This oversight hinders the development of a nuanced understanding of how B2B branding operates on a global scale and its impact on brand equity. Our study aims to address these deficiencies by pursuing three objectives: first, to identify the most influential contributions within global B2B branding using text mining and co-citation analysis; second, to consolidate the core knowledge and fundamental concepts of global B2B branding, exploring the interactions between strategies like Industrial Brand Strategy and Industrial Relationship Strategy; and third, to develop a practical, evidence-based framework for B2B brand managers. This framework will facilitate a deeper exploration of how strategic concepts can enhance brand performance in international markets, paving the way for a more structured approach to future research in global B2B branding.

This study tries to answer three questions: (1) what is the knowledge structure of global B2B branding literature? (2) what are the key foundational research streams, concepts and their relationships in this domain? (3) what are possible future research directions of global B2B branding literature and guidelines for B2B global brand managers?

Our research makes critical contributions to the domain of global B2B branding through innovative use of co-citation and text mining methodologies, enhancing both the theoretical and practical aspects of brand management. Firstly, by employing co-citation analysis, we have established foundational knowledge that legitimizes global B2B branding as a distinct field within the broader branding discourse. This separate investigation confirms the importance of viewing global B2B branding as a unique entity, vital for advancing the entire domain of B2B branding (Randhawa et al., 2016). Secondly, by integrating insights from text mining with cross-disciplinary theories and methodologies, our study has identified crucial theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches. This amalgamation has allowed us to pinpoint significant research gaps that future investigations could address, thus driving the field forward. Thirdly, our research goes beyond academic discourse to develop a practical and actionable conceptual framework tailored for brand managers in the global B2B sector. This framework is designed to navigate the unique challenges and opportunities of global branding, incorporating advanced B2C marketing strategies to enhance B2B practices. By doing so, it bridges a crucial gap between B2C and B2B branding strategies, offering brand managers a robust toolkit for operating in complex international markets. The framework, informed by the latest trends and findings from our analysis, provides a strategic

roadmap that is directly applicable to real-world brand management (Mahavarpour et al., 2023a).

Additionally, our methodological approach, combining co-citation and text mining from bibliometric research, addresses typical biases found in conventional literature reviews. This dual approach not only relies on systematic data gathering from scholarly articles but also enhances accuracy in the development of within-text dictionaries, text coding, concept correlation, and concept mapping. This precision helps in reducing biases during various stages of research, ensuring a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the literature (Subramony et al., 2021; Wilden et al., 2017; Liesch et al., 2011; Stead et al., 2022). This detailed exploration of our methodology and its application underscores the dual value of our study, emphasizing its critical role in advancing both the theory and practice of global B2B branding, and ensuring its relevance to ongoing and future challenges in the field.

2. Method: enhancing systematic understanding through co-citation and text mining

In this study, we utilize a combined methodology of citation analysis and text mining to conduct a comprehensive, systematic review, thereby enhancing our understanding of global B2B branding. This approach addresses several critical limitations associated with traditional literature reviews, which are typically characterized by subjective interpretations and reliance on manual content analyses. Traditional literature reviews, such as integrative frameworks and thematic reviews, require intensive manual analysis to identify primary themes within specific fields, making them inherently susceptible to researcher biases (Mukherjee et al., 2022). Unlike these traditional approaches, our method employs technology-driven automated analysis that systematically leverages quantitative data from a large corpus of documents. This shift not only reduces the potential for personal bias but also improves the efficiency and objectivity of our review process (Marvi & Foroudi, 2024; Zha et al., 2024). Traditional literature reviews are often criticized for their qualitative nature and the subjective selection of literature, which can significantly skew research outcomes and hinder the reproducibility of the research. By integrating co-citation analysis and text mining, we mitigate these concerns by ensuring a more rigorous, data-driven approach that enhances the reproducibility and credibility of our findings. This methodology enables us to systematically analyze and cross-verify large volumes of literature with greater precision, providing a more robust and comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of global B2B branding. Such an approach not only contrasts sharply with the inherent limitations of traditional reviews but also sets a new standard for conducting literature reviews in complex interdisciplinary fields.

Co-citation analysis and text mining are integral, complementary methodologies that enhance our ability to systematically and objectively examine a large and diverse body of literature on global B2B branding—a task that would be impractical to perform manually (Podsakoff Philip et al., 2005; Wilden et al., 2017). Co-citation analysis helps researchers identify the most frequently cited papers and understand how specific concepts (groupings of words that co-occur throughout the text, as defined in the Leximancer manual) have been integrated with other research streams. This method is crucial for tracing the evolution of core concepts and for mapping the intellectual connections between seminal works, thereby establishing a coherent intellectual framework upon which the field of global B2B branding has evolved (Chabowski et al., 2011).

Additionally, text mining is employed to categorize fundamental concepts and themes related to B2B branding in the existing research, distinguishing between early and later developments (Wilden et al., 2017). This approach allows for the extraction of valuable insights and patterns from the extensive body of literature, revealing underlying themes and patterns that might not be evident through citation analysis alone. By examining the groupings of words that co-occur throughout

the texts, text mining provides deeper insights into the thematic structure of the literature, identifying emerging trends and gaps that co-citation analysis might overlook. Together, these methodologies provide a robust approach for understanding the intellectual landscape of global B2B branding. By leveraging the strengths of both co-citation analysis and text mining, this dual approach ensures a comprehensive review of the literature, enhancing the credibility and depth of the research findings. It establishes a solid foundation for assessing the intellectual framework and advancing the field's theoretical and practical implications, thereby enriching our understanding of global B2B branding with a detailed and nuanced exploration of the domain.

2.1. The data

We followed recommendations from previous studies (e.g., Mahavarpour et al., 2023b; Marvi & Foroudi, 2024; Zha et al., 2023). Initially, we reviewed prior work within our research domain (e.g., Keränen et al., 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Seyedghorban et al., 2016). Subsequently, we consulted three independent experts to identify related syntax most relevant to our research area. We adhered to the approach outlined by Chabowski et al. (2023), ensuring that our syntax encompassed three crucial characteristics: branding terms (e.g., "brand*"), international terminology (e.g., "inter$nation*" OR "binationon*" OR "global*" OR "cross$nation*" OR "cross$border*" OR "cross$cultur*" OR "multi$nation*"), and B2B business (e.g., "B2B", OR "Business-to-Business", OR "industrial" OR ""BtoB") context terms. Utilizing publication in the business, finance, and management categories, the search was conducted in Web of Science (WOS), and included the title, abstract, and keywords of all journals in this field. Book chapters, editorial notes, and any articles that had undergone a review process were extracted from the database. WOS database was chosen since it It's regarded as an extensive database for scientometrics research. Previous studies (e.g., Foroudi et al., 2021; Zha et al., 2024) regarded WOS, among various databases, as offering comprehensive and comparable data within the management domain, surpassing Scopus and Google Scholar in this aspect. Furthermore, Google scholars could not provide text input that is required for bibliometric analysis (Marvi & Foroudi, 2024). This stage resulted in 480 articles.

Then, the journals included in the ABS (Association of Business Schools) list were filtered in the process, as this list is widely used and recognized for its comprehensive journal rankings and adherence to international scholarly standards (Akarsu et al., 2023; Colmekcioglu et al., 2022; Haddoud et al., 2021; Mahavarpour et al., 2023a). Further, it offers "an extensive interdisciplinary list that is verified through a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, as well as expert and editorial judgements and citations" (Zha et al., 2024, p. 5), thus enabling us to ensure the high quality and relevance of our database. Next, two authors independently read and examined the articles to ensure that the main

topic of interest was "global B2B branding". Researchers reached a consensus in 95% of cases, and in instances where there were differences of opinion, a third independent reviewer was consulted. These differences mainly stemmed from variations in the articles, where the topics and/or samples used in each publication revolved around the B2B branding in international context (e.g., Wise & Zednickova, 2009).

After this stage, the final sample consisted of 281 articles (Fig. 1), as some abstracts had been included that were not relevant to the research topic and these articles were removed from the database. In the subsequent phase, the researchers imported the database of 281 articles into *Bibexcel*. The aim here was to identify the most frequently referenced publications related to B2B branding as represented in this study's sample. Table 3 (The most frequently cited B2B branding publications) presents the 25 articles that received the highest number of references within the realm of B2B branding in our database.

2.2. Co-citation analysis

Citation analysis enables researchers to evaluate the influence of cited and citing articles on research performance and scholars' contributions in the field (Chabowski et al., 2011; Cartwright et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2016). Co-citation refers to how two papers are treated together by a third one, contributing to the intellectual structure of the topic (Foroudi, Kitchen, et al., 2020). With the aid of Bibexcel and SPSS 28.0 a co-citation matrix was constructed. Next, we analysed the co-citation matric by employing multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) and hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) in the SPSS 28.0 to identify the most influential knowledge structure on global B2B branding literature (Chabowski & Mena, 2017; Foroudi, Nazarian, et al., 2020). Applying MDS and HCA allow researchers examined all potential pairings of articles in the dataset. The greater the shared references between two articles, the more robust their bibliographic connection, known as the association strength (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). This analysis led to the systematic emergence of publication groups and clusters based on their interconnectedness patterns – also known as standardized distance. The gap separating two articles signifies the intensity of their bibliographic connection. In other words, the closer two journal articles are positioned, the greater the percentage of shared references between them.

Multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) - Following established bibliometric methods, we employed MDS to analyze our database. This technique provides a two-dimensional configuration representing the intellectual structure of global B2B branding (McCain, 1990). MDS offers precise and meaningful results, with approximately 25–30 publications being sufficient to generate a satisfactory or good model (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). A stress value of less than 0.10 is considered good, while a value between 0.10 and 0.20 is considered fair (Chabowski et al., 2011). To find the most appropriate stress value, we systematically reduced the number of publications,
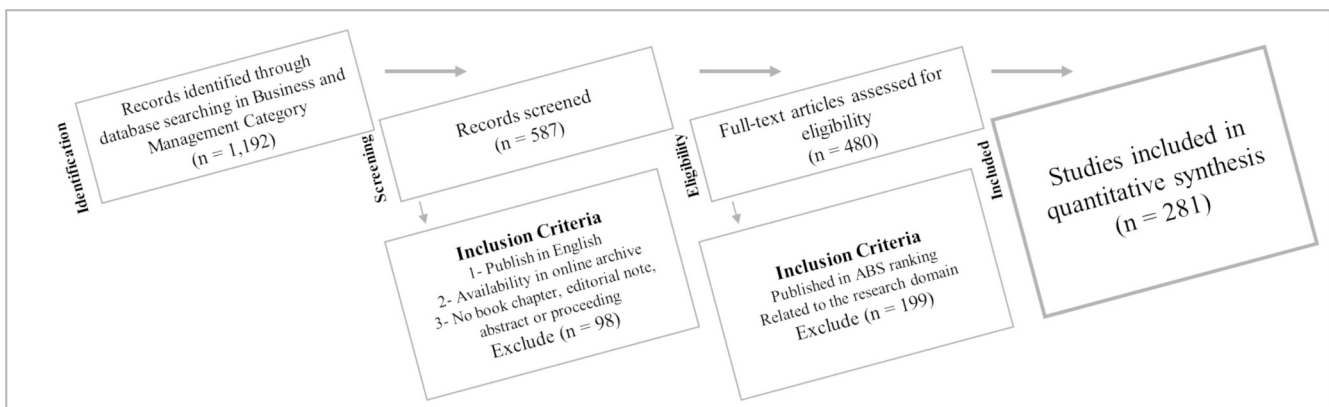

Fig. 1. Process of the article selection using the PRISMA protocol.

ultimately including 25 articles for B2B branding co-citation data. The stress value of 0.048 was deemed most appropriate (Hair et al., 1998). To identify closely related connections within the intellectual structure, standardized Euclidean distances were used to group cited publications (Scott, 2000). A threshold of 0.25 or lower was employed to establish research groups in the spatial arrangement of the B2B branding literature, ensuring meaningful and interpretable outcomes (Hair et al., 1998; McCain, 1986) (Fig. 2).

Hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) - HCA is a commonly used in bibliometrics (e.g., Zha et al., 2024) to identify distinct research subsets, though the thresholds used are sometimes seen as arbitrary. We generated a dendrogram using Ward's method, which focuses on the similarity between publications and minimizes differences within clusters, thus preventing the excessive clustering of publications (Zha et al., 2024; Hair et al., 1998). The dendrogram for each period formed the basis for our HCA solutions (Ketchen & Shook, 1996). In this study, a rescaled distance of 5 or lower was used to identify clusters in the co-citation data.

2.3. Text mining

Using Leximancer, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) and automated content analysis program, this study employed text mining to visually represent specific information extracted from significant documents (Mathies & Burford, 2011). The software analysis occurrence information, such as frequency, position, nouns, and co-occurrence of verbs, is used to generate textual documents (Kamimaeda et al., 2007). Leximancer enables users to identify higher levels of complexity in hidden thematic structures, concept hierarchies,
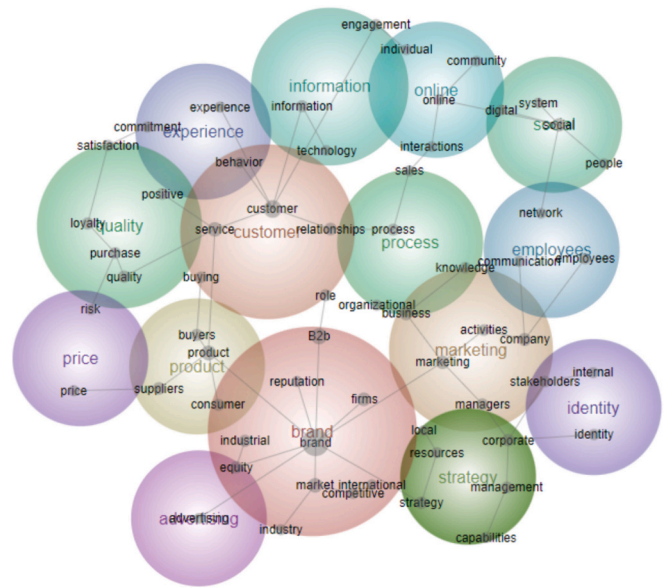
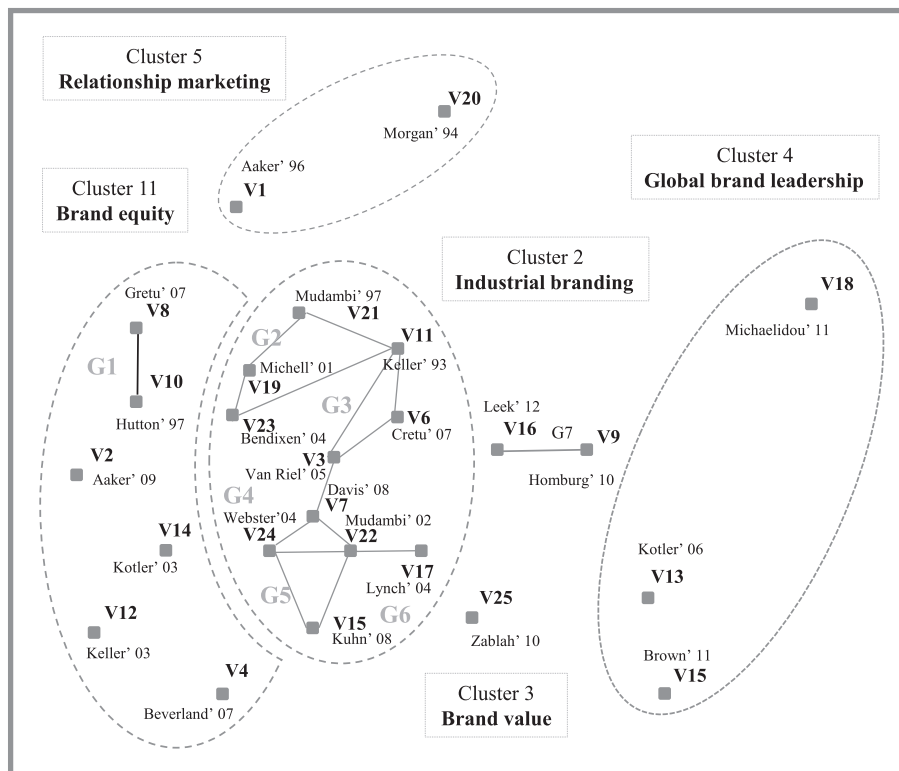**Fig. 3.** Themes and concepts based on text mining.

Fig. 2. Knowledge fields of B2B branding.

Note: Multidimensional scaling analysis (Stress value = 0.048, standardized Euclidean distance 0.25 Influential work-forming groups are identified by first authors' names and publication year. MDS G1: Brand name and brand equity (V8 Gordon et al., 1993; V10 Hutton, 1997). G2: Industrial brand value (V11 Keller, 1993; V19 Michell et al., 2011; V21 Mudambi et al., 1997; V23 Van Riel et al., 2005). G3: Customer-based brand equity (V11 Keller, 1993; V6 Cretu & Brodie, 2007; V3 Bendixen et al., 2004). G4: Brand equity in the logistics services contexts (V3 Bendixen et al., 2004; V7 Davis et al., 2008). G5: Brand communication and organizational buying behaviour (V7 Davis et al., 2008; V24 Webster, 2004; V22 Mudambi, 2002; V15 Kuhn et al., 2008). G6: Brand information processing and theory of buyer behaviour (V17 Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004; V22 Mudambi, 2002). G7: Brand value (function and emotional) and performance (V16 Leek & Christodoulides, 2012; V9 Homburg et al., 2010). HCA: C1: Brand equity (Group 1;V2 Aaker, 2009; V4 Beverland et al., 2007; V12 Keller, 2003; V14 Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). C2 Industrial branding (Groups 2–6). C3: Brand value (Group 7; V 25 Zablah et al., 2010). C4: Global brand leadership (V5 Brown et al., 2011; V18 Michaelidou et al., 2011; V13 Kotler et al., 2006). C5 Relationship marketing (V1 Aaker, 1996; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

or syntax, providing a different perspective of textual data (Fig. 3).

Leximancer's relational (semantic) and conceptual (thematic) analysis identifies groups of related terms in the text and creates associations between them through concept maps, enabling the determination of meaning by interpreting concepts and themes. The Leximancer analysis retrieves words that hold interconnected meanings, and it presents the findings through visual and tabular formats, highlighting recognized themes and concepts (Randhawa et al., 2016). Words that often appear together in a text are depicted as concepts, while themes consist of concepts that frequently occur in comparable contexts (Mathies & Burford, 2011). To extract clear semantic patterns from the text, Leximancer utilizes non-linear dynamic and machine learning algorithms that extend and modify the latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA). The software allows researchers to extract concepts from the literature using concept seeds, which are defined using a thesaurus-based concept generated through machine learning, bootstrapping, or iterative word disambiguation processes. The co-occurrence matrix is developed, identifying all concept seeds or the nearest cells with peak values (closest local maxima) (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2011; Smith & Humphreys, 2006; Stockwell et al., 2009). Unlike LDA, where researchers determine the number of themes, Leximancer's machine-learning algorithm selects the most appropriate number of topics/themes based on the identified concepts. For this study, Leximancer was deemed the most suitable software (Campbell et al., 2011).

The text-mining process involved downloading the articles, converting them to text, and removing references following Wilden et al. (2017) approach. Thesaurus-based concepts were then extracted from the text data using keyword searching without a prior dictionary (Mahavarpour et al., 2023a; Wilden et al., 2017, 2019). Leximancer's Bayesian statistics and algorithms automatically classify corresponding and thematic concepts. While the software employs unsupervised learning, researchers have the flexibility to amend procedures. The study followed Leximancer's eight stages, including loading data, pre-processing, identifying concept seeds, editing emergent concepts, developing a concept thesaurus, creating compound concepts, coding concepts into text, and generating outputs and interpretations. Throughout the process, Leximancer's data processing was edited based on the results, indicating that the algorithm produces relatively stable patterns of meaning (Kohtamäki et al., 2022; Stead et al., 2022) when cross-validated across different styles and genres of text (Colmekcioglu et al., 2022; Wilden et al., 2017).

3. Results: Mapping the Landscape of Global B2B Branding

In this section, we first present the findings of two co-citation analyses both MDS and HCA, focusing on the identification of five distinct knowledge fields that map the landscape of global B2B branding literature. These knowledge fields are brand equity, industrial branding, brand value, global brand leadership, and relationship marketing (see summary of five knowledge fields in Table 2). Next, we present the findings of text-mining analysis.

4. Co-citation analysis (MDS & HCA)

4.1. Brand equity (Cluster 1)

Cluster 1 delves into the pivotal articles scrutinizing the adaptation of the consumer-based brand equity model within B2B branding. Co-citation analysis underscores the robust association between Cluster 1 and Group 5, emphasizing brand equity, which comprises influential publications (Aaker, 2009; Beverland et al., 2007; Gordon et al., 1993; Hutton, 1997; Keller, 2003; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Initially centered on the brand's name and symbols in early B2B research (Gordon et al., 1993; Hutton, 1997), the brand equity model has evolved, examining beneficiary perspectives, notably the firm and the customer. Keller (2003) notably identifies brand identity, meaning, response, and

relationships as pivotal factors in fortifying a brand, elucidating its significance from the consumer's viewpoint.

Understanding the distinctions between B2B (Business-to-Business) and B2C (Business-to-Consumer) branding strategies is crucial for grasping the complexities of global brand management. Taking inspiration from Aaker & Joachimsthaler's (2000) framework, Beverland et al. (2007) explored global brand leadership in the B2B context, identifying unique capabilities that add value to global brands. These include entrepreneurial initiative, reflexive monitoring of brand alignment with market dynamics, innovation in brand communication, support for brand-centric culture within the firm, and meticulous execution capability. These elements are distinct from B2C strategies, where emotional appeal and mass market communication often play a larger role. Additionally, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) highlighted the need for long-term branding strategies in B2B markets to enhance financial performance. Unlike B2C, where quick consumer responses can be elicited through tactical marketing, B2B strategies require a sustained effort focusing on building deep relationships and trust, reflecting the complex decision-making processes in business purchasing.

4.2. Industrial branding (Cluster 2)

Cluster 2 embodies the foundational contributions within the realm of B2B branding, originating from industrial branding literature. Within the HCA map, it assumes a central role amid five research groups, encompassing three distinct research cliques (Groups 2–3 and 5) and two interlinked groups (Groups 4 and 6). This cluster distinctly focuses on expanding the horizons of brand equity theory into the domain of industrial B2B branding, leveraging diverse tools like brand names, logos, and social media platforms to distinguish brands from competitors and exert influence over the organizational buyer behaviour process. Notably, the prevalent theories within this domain are rooted in buyer behaviour, consumer-based brand equity, and consumer value theories, shaping the discourse and direction of inquiry.

Mudambi's (2002) research, grounded in the theory of buyer behaviour, pioneered the recognition of branding strategies' significance within B2B contexts. This seminal work not only laid the foundation for an industrial branding model tailored for B2B marketers but also revealed a crucial insight: the differential importance of B2B branding among buyers. This importance is contingent upon distinct buyer characteristics—ranging from branding receptivity to varying levels of tangibility and interest—each exerting a unique influence on the buyer decision-making process (Webster & Keller, 2004). This paradigm-shifting study established that B2B branding's impact is contingent upon nuanced buyer attributes, challenging the notion of its universal significance and highlighting the complexity inherent in buyer-brand interactions within B2B realms.

To gain a deeper understanding of the ways brands are applied and communicated in industrial markets, Lynch and De Chernatony (2004) proposed a brand communication model in B2B markets and revealed the importance of training employees in the decision-making process. While Mudambi et al. (1997) adopted customer value theory and identified the intangible value of a product/service in a company that can maintain differentiation from others such as brand name. Similarly, Bendixen et al. (2004) and Michell et al. (2001) found that intangible value plays a more important role than tangible value, such as price and delivery, in the decision-making process ultimately resulting in suppliers paying a premium price in industrial purchasing.

To extend Keller (1993) customer-based brand equity model, Kuhn et al. (2008) revealed that among organizational buyers, there is a much greater focus on the selling organisation, such as its corporate brand, credibility and staff than on individual brands and their associated dimensions. Davis et al. (2008) and Cretu and Brodie (2007) confirmed Keller's model in the logistic service context in the B2B context. Overall, cluster 2 focuses on the extension of brand equity theory in the B2B context and how to integrate it with other management theories, such as

organizational buying behaviour and value theories, to understand the key drivers that influence brand performance outcomes.

4.3. Brand value (Cluster 3)

Cluster 3 illuminates the pivotal role of value literature within B2B branding discourse, encompassing three seminal articles (Homburg et al., 2010; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012; Zablah et al., 2010). Leek and Christodoulides (2012) delineate a B2B model of brand value, emphasizing the significance of functional and emotional attributes in cultivating industrial brand equity. In parallel, Homburg et al. (2010) and Zablah et al. (2010) apply information processing theory, exploring the nuanced impact of market characteristics and typical traits of organizational buyers on the intricacies of value creation processes. These articles collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of value dynamics within B2B branding, spotlighting the interplay between attributes, market traits, and buyer characteristics in shaping brand equity and value creation paradigms.

4.4. Global brand leadership (Cluster 4)

Cluster 4 articles underscore the critical role of global brand leadership within B2B branding decision-making (Brown et al., 2011; Kotler et al., 2006; Michaelidou et al., 2011). Brown et al. (2011) substantiates the link between purchase risk and the brand sensitivity of buying centres, where competitive intensity emerges as a pivotal moderator. By integrating risk and information processing theories, their work contributes actionable directives for firms, offering strategic guidance on managing crucial brand performance aspects like loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and associations. Additionally, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) propose a comprehensive set of recommendations geared towards enhancing B2B global brand management strategies. Meanwhile, Michaelidou et al. (2011) leverage social media lense, unveiling its substantial impact on B2B SMEs by correlating social media strategies with heightened customer acquisition and improved financial performance. These seminal contributions underscore the vital connection between global brand leadership, risk dynamics, and the strategic utilization of contemporary platforms, significantly influencing B2B branding decisions and outcomes.

To address the unique challenges of global B2B branding effectively, it is essential to differentiate these strategies from general global branding or standard B2B approaches. Global B2B branding demands a tailored approach that considers not only the multifaceted nature of international markets but also the specific needs of business customers within these environments. Unlike general global branding, which targets universal consumer appeal and broad visibility, global B2B branding strategies must navigate complex regulatory landscapes, diverse cultural nuances, and varying organizational norms. Furthermore, while traditional B2B branding focuses on cultivating direct and personal business relationships, global B2B branding extends this by integrating localized engagement strategies to maintain relevance in each distinct market. This dual focus on local adaptation within a global framework is crucial for maintaining competitive advantage and ensuring brand consistency across borders, thereby enhancing the manuscript's contribution by delineating clear, strategic distinctions that are critical for successful global B2B branding.

4.5. Industrial Relationship marketing (Cluster 5)

Cluster 5 delineates the pivotal role of relationship marketing within B2B branding, encapsulating two seminal articles by Aaker (1996) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). These articles centre on fostering enduring buyer-seller or supplier-and-buyer relationships to establish brand equity in both short-term and long-term perspectives. They notably underscore the significance of commitment and trust as pivotal psychological concepts acting as proxies for brand equity. Aaker (1996)

work, "Measuring Brand Equity Across Products and Markets," meticulously offers ten sets of brand equity measurement scales tailored for B2B settings, categorizing them into five distinct groups (loyalty, perceived quality, association, awareness, and market behaviour). This strategic market-oriented approach redefines and gauges brand equity, differing from Keller (1993) customer-brand equity model.

Furthermore, Morgan and Hunt (1994) contribution introduces firm performance within B2B relationship-building processes, specifically highlighting customer commitment and trust. Their commitment-trust theory within the industrial branding context reflects a company's inclination to sustain relationships and its confidence in these B2B interactions. This theory emerges as a fundamental driver of B2B brand equity, influencing aspects such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, perceived quality, and market behaviour. Cluster 5 distinctly underscores the pivotal influence of relationship marketing literature in shaping B2B branding outcomes, highlighting the intricate interplay between enduring relationships and brand equity creation within the industrial domain.

5. Text mining

In the second stage of analysis, text mining is employed to gain a deeper understanding of the important topics in the global B2B branding literature from the databases. For this purpose, we utilized Leximancer (a Bayesian learning algorithm) to develop a graphical image that demonstrates the linkage between key concepts (Colmekcioglu et al., 2022); it enabled us to identify the key themes and concepts based on the size of each circle, and the relationship between concepts indicates how they are connected to the database (Fig. 3).

The analysis of Fig. 3 reveals significant insights into the industrial brand equity domain, notably emphasizing the pivotal connection between brand and product, depicted in bright red and green, respectively. This connection signifies the central themes within the pertinent literature, emphasizing the impact of buyers, suppliers, and consumers on product and industrial brand equity. The linkage suggests a profound influence on aspects like reputation, international branding, and competitiveness. Moreover, the overlap between brand and marketing activities underscores the critical role of effective marketing endeavors in shaping positive industrial branding outcomes, particularly brand identity. This underlines the dependency of brand success on internal stakeholders' strategic decision-making processes. Additionally, the significance of global brand leadership, encapsulating leaders' roles, highlights the imperative for companies to consider both tangible and intangible resources and capabilities when formulating brand strategies. This revelation underscores the necessity for further research to integrate these perspectives, aiming to comprehend how diverse company capabilities facilitate brands in leveraging resources for a competitive edge in the market.

Advertising emerges as a significant theme in the literature, underscoring its role as a key communication tool for B2B marketers to meet the challenges of achieving performance goals and engaging their customers through both traditional and non-traditional media. This emphasizes the necessity for further research to explore methods of measuring the effectiveness of various B2B advertising strategies and selecting the most appropriate media to reach the target audience, taking into account the company's resources and capabilities. Particularly in the era of digital transformation, technologies (e.g., the metaverse), offering virtual events, provide an immersive buying experience that can significantly enhance brand value. This insight underlines the importance of advertising in B2B branding outcomes, prompting a deeper examination into how different advertising methods can be effectively leveraged to connect with target audiences in a meaningful way, especially considering the evolving digital landscape.

In the digital and interconnected realms of B2B, AI-Chatbots are revolutionizing customer experience and engagement by streamlining operations, enhancing transparency, providing personalized

interactions, and offering 24/7 availability. These tools not only facilitate quicker responses to customer inquiries, thereby improving operational efficiency, but also foster trust through constant transparency. By analyzing customer interactions, AI-Chatbots personalize communication and generate valuable market insights, enabling B2B brands to tailor their offerings more effectively. This round-the-clock support ensures that customer needs are met promptly, significantly boosting satisfaction and deepening brand-customer relationships. Consequently, AI-Chatbots play a crucial role in enhancing brand value by elevating the customer service experience and contributing to informed market knowledge creation. For instance, Tradera, a company owned by PayPal, saw a 125% rise in total revenue from its website thanks to predictive recommendations. In similar line, a company finding success with CAPS is Artesian Solutions, a sales insights firm based in the UK. Artesian employs technology that constantly scans millions of online sources for information on markets, companies, individuals, and subjects, extracting insights to enhance relationship-building and promote effective sales strategies, all powered by AI.

Furthermore, leveraging emerging technologies promotes the establishment of global brand communities that engage both B2B brands and their clients worldwide. By including clients in decision-making processes, B2B brands are fostering a sense of belonging and significance in their involvement, thereby nurturing a sense of global community (Schweitzer et al., 2023).

While Öberg (2023) highlights the potential of the metaverse for virtual hosting of meetings and networking events for global brand communities, it is crucial to critically examine the broader implications and effectiveness of these virtual environments. The metaverse, as noted by Hadi et al. (2023), does indeed eliminate geographical constraints, facilitating activities like product testing and significant meetings in a virtual space. However, this narrative often glosses over the substantial technological and accessibility barriers that could limit participation from diverse global audiences. The assumption that the metaverse inherently enhances accessibility and collaboration needs a more nuanced analysis. There are significant concerns regarding the digital divide and the practical challenges in ensuring equitable access to advanced technologies. Moreover, the impact of reduced physical interactions on relationship building and trust in B2B contexts has not been sufficiently addressed. While the metaverse offers intriguing possibilities for immersive experiences, its actual utility in fostering effective international collaboration remains to be critically evaluated against these challenges. This strategy not only overcomes geographical barriers but also enhances the sense of belonging and importance among clients participating in decision-making, thus creating a more interconnected and engaged global brand community.

Additionally, the product price, product quality, and experience themes have a significant impact on customer-brand relationships. This finding shows that both functional and hedonic elements are important concepts that affect positive and negative customer experience, service quality, and behavioural intentions, and these ultimately influence buyer/consumer/supplier satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

Our text mining analysis, therefore, goes beyond identifying

Table 1
Overview of selected relevant B2B branding reviews.

Publication	Aim	Method/Database	Key findings	Contributions	Limitations
Leek and Christodoulides (2011) *Industrial Marketing Management*	To review the B2B branding literature and propose future research agenda	Selected literature review	Identifies gaps in five themes of B2B branding literature (1) branding benefits, (2) the role of B2B brands in the decision-making process, (3) B2B brand architecture, (4) B2B brands as communication enablers and relationship builders, and (5) industrial brand equity	• Identified key themes and gaps in the existing literature • Proposed future research. • agenda	• Limited to five themes of B2B branding • Does not analyze the B2B branding literature • Focuses on specific areas of B2B branding
Keränen et al. (2012) *Journal of Product & Brand Management*	To review the B2B branding literature and identify gaps that propose future research direction	Systematic review (73 articles; 1973–2010)	Identifies five gaps in current B2B branding: (1) lack of theoretical development, (2) the transference of consumer concepts, (3) quantitative research dominant, (3) lack of longitudinal research, (3) focus on sole industries	• Identified key literature in B2B branding • Identified the emerging issues in B2B branding	• Limited to the theoretical and methodological perspectives • Focuses on research issues • Does not propose some new insights
Seyedghorban et al. (2016) *Journal of Business Research*	To examine the intellectual structure, development, and evolution of B2B branding literature	Systematic review (bibliometric, 169 articles and 10,270 citations from 33 academic journals, 1972–2015)	Identifies major areas of B2B branding research	• Advanced knowledge in B2B branding • Proposed the emerging trends in B2B branding research	• Limited to the identification of most cited articles, keywords, authors, institutions and countries in B2B branding • Focuses on key areas of this research • Does not critical examine the literature from different theoretical perspectives
Tiwary et al. (2021) *Journal of Business Research*	To review social media research in the B2B context	Systematic review (bibliometrics and text-mining, 294 articles)	Identifies social media contributions to brand presence and trust building internationally, consequently building consumer-brand relationships with global supply chain	• Proposed potential opportunities and benefits by using social media activities to ensure effective marketing strategies in B2B branding	• Limited to the impact of social media on B2B branding • Focus on social networking sites • Does not consider other factors influence B2B branding
Voola et al. (2022) *Industrial Marketing Management*	To develop a B2B brands legitimacy model by applying rhetorical and discursive perspectives	Selected literature review	Identifies B2B brand reputation, awareness, and credibility among the benefits of having a brand legitimacy within a network of actors and offers propositions within a framework for future research	• Develop various approaches • and specific questions to understand the relationship between B2B Marketing and sustainable development goals	• Focuses on brand legitimacy in B2B settings • Does not test the foundational knowledge of B2B branding • Does not have consider psychological perspective

prevalent terms to unearth the strategic concepts and relationships that are shaping the global B2B branding landscape. This deeper understanding underscores the importance of strategic marketing practices, the potential of digital transformation, and the emerging significance of technologies in creating immersive customer experiences and facilitating global collaboration. These insights form a foundation for future research to explore the dynamic interplay between technology, strategy, and customer engagement in the B2B branding context.

6. Discussion: Unveiling the B2B branding landscape

While previous studies (Table 1) have reviewed the branding literature in a range of contexts, this current research sheds light on a neglected but important research domain, namely, branding in the B2B context. The exploration of global branding in B2B settings hasn't received enough attention in academic research, leaving significant gaps that need thorough investigation. Our research aims to fill these gaps by using co-citation and text mining methods to analyze and comprehend the fundamental ideas in this field. By using these techniques, we aim not only to reveal but also to assess the existing frameworks that shape our understanding of this subject. Doing so can result in having broader implications such as how global B2B branding dynamic can impact on managerial decisions, business competitiveness, and marketing decision strategies.

Additionally, the comprehensive multi-method analysis employed offers deeper perspectives. Initially, our examination linked seven groups and five clusters within the global B2B branding literature, utilizing text mining to delve into intricate concepts and outcomes. Through the identification of representative articles and a thorough reading of their texts, crucial themes were extracted. This meticulous process facilitated the researchers in synthesizing the literature effectively. Moreover, in alignment with prior methodologies employing bibliometric analysis, this study aimed to identify the most impactful articles pertinent to global B2B branding. Our investigation, detailed in Table 4, scrutinized recent publications from the past three years, contributing to a more holistic grasp of potentially influential articles shaping the future of this research domain (Burrell, 2002).

In this line, following previous studies (e.g., Samiee et al., 2015), setting the threshold based on the total number of citations can put

recent publications at a disadvantage. It's more advisable to rank publications based on citations per year. Therefore, by reviewing the most recent articles and observing when there is a change in themes of these articles, we chose threshold of 1.33 citation per year. By applying a threshold of 1.33 citations per year, a list of 17 articles that had appeared in the recently published influential branding literature in the B2B context can provide a comprehensive view of the trends in the recent scholarly works (Foroudi et al., 2021; Zha et al., 2024). Table 4 provides greater detail on the most influential recently published articles on branding in the B2B setting.

Afterward, building on previous studies (e.g., Chabowski et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Martínez-López et al., 2020), key themes were consolidated into knowledge blocks within our domain. Furthermore, we assessed recent findings to enrich our model, assigning dimensions based on the distinct outcomes of each method. Consequently, by identifying correlations in each phase—industrial branding strategy, industrial relationship marketing, brand performance—we've constructed a forthcoming conceptual framework (refer to Fig. 4), providing guidance for future researchers in exploring our proposed research questions (see Table 5). Web Appendix 1 summarises the different components of the proposed conceptual future framework. In our proposed model, the relationship between different components suggests how these elements collectively contribute to or influence brand performance in international market. This could involves showing how the strategies and brand identity management, architecture, and industrial relationship aligns or interconnect to impact overall performance of brand in global setting. Subsequent sections delve deeply into the components of this model.

6.1. Industrial branding strategy

Reviewing the findings and recent articles showed that the process of branding in the B2B context can be conceptualized in four stages. Following our C2 (industrial branding), the first stage of our model is referred to as industrial branding, which incorporates all B2B strategic branding decisions. Initially, any branding strategy in the B2B context is dependent on brand identity management.

The principal elements of brand identity management encompass structure, internal culture, and internal actors' behavioural aspects.

Table 2
Summary of five knowledge fields.

Knowledge fields	MDS and HCA	Definition	Scope	Key theories/ model	Representative articles
Brand performance	Cluster 1: Group 1	It is a brand's unique attributes including tangible and intangible outcomes that are influenced by marketing activities.	Focus on the role of brand drivers and different components of brand equity	Consumer-brand equity Brand leadership framework Resource-based view	Aaker, 2009 Beverland et al., 2007 Gordon et al., 1993 Hutton, 1997 Keller, 2003 Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007
Industrial branding strategy	Groups 2–6	It is a strategy controlled by brands that is used to position the brand, ultimately achieving the brand value in B2B contexts.	Focus on use branding activities as a tool to deliver the brand to business in B2B settings.	Theory of buyer behaviour Consumer-based brand equity Consumer value	Keller, 1993; Michell et al., 2011; Mudambi et al., 1997. Van Riel et al., 2005; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Bendixen et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2008; Webster 2004; Mudambi, 2002; Kuhn et al., 2008; Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004
Brand performance	Cluster 3: Group 7	It reflects the value of products and services and also the added functional and emotional values influenced from branding activities.	Focus on the creation of brand value by using tools such as brand name, brand logo, or services and products in B2B contexts.	Brand value Information processing theory	Zablah et al., 2010; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012; Homburg et al., 2010
Brand performance	Cluster 4	It is the global brand management and decision-making influence by brand leaders.	Focus on the differentiation and competitive advantage for B2B marketers from a global perspective.	Social media theory	Brown et al., 2011; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007
Industrial relationship strategy	Cluster 5	A marketing field focusing on the creation of the relationship between buyer and business and business to business.	Focus on building buyer-seller or supplier-and-buyer relationships to achieve long-term brand equity.	Commitment-trust theory	Aaker, 1996 Morgan & Hunt, 1994

Table 3

The most frequently cited B2B branding publications.

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations	Aim / objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Type of paper	Implications
1	Bendixen et al. (2004)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	89	- To understand brand equity in a ● particular B2B context	- Brand equity	- Brand Equity	- Empirical	- Identifies price and delivery plays a more important role ● than brand equity, but a price premium can be obtained when a company has a high level of brand equity
2	Mudambi (2002)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	89	- To develop an industrial branding ● model	- Need benefit sought - Attribute importance - Choice - Buyer characteristics - Purchase characteristics	- Theory of buyer ● behaviour	- Empirical	- Finds three key buyer characteristics - branding receptive, highly tangible, and low interest.
3	Keller (1993)	*Journal of Marketing*	81	- To develop a conceptual framework - of customer-based brand equity	- Brand knowledge - Brand awareness - Brand image	- Consumer behaviour theory	- Conceptual	- Defines customer-based brand equity as the differential ● impact of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand - Defines two attributes of brand knowledge are brand awareness and brand image based on an associative network memory model
4	Mudambi et al. (1997)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	62	- To develop a conceptual model ● of industrial brand value to the customer	- Product performance - Distribution (ordering and delivery) - Performance - Support services performance - Company performance	- Brand value	- Conceptual - Qualitative	- Identifies the importance of intangible product and ● company attributes on brand value creation - Highlights branding as an important factor for company to maintain differentiation
5	Michell et al. (2001)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	61	- To examine to what extent operating ● managers in industrial firms perceive their products to embody specific value-laden propositions, and if brand value associations can gain extra leverage such as firm performance	- Brand name - Brand awareness - Brand sponsor ● strategy - Brand associations - Perceived company performance - Derivations of brand equity - Customer loyalty - Brand loyalty - Perceived quality	- Consumer-driven equity theory	- Empirical	- Identifies what product and corporate branding contribute to ● brand performance - Intangible brand associations have greater impact on brand equity
6	Van Riel et al. (2005)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	55	- To propose, measure and test a model of brand equity, its antecedents and its consequences for industrial products	- Value - Distribution - Product - Product brand ● equity - Loyalty intention - Service - Information - Personnel - Corporate brand equity	N/A	- Empirical	- Identifies how physical product attributes and distribution ● influence product brand - Corporate brand equity is mostly influenced by service attributes, and employees

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations	Aim / objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Type of paper	Implications
7	Morgan and Hunt (1994)	*Journal of Marketing*	54	- To theorize the relationship marketing - To test the commitment-trust of Relationship marketing model	- Relationship commitment - Trust	- Commitment-trust theory	- Empirical - Conceptual	- Identifies commitment and trust are key mediating concepts of Relationship marketing
8	Davis et al. (2008)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	53	- To investigate B2B branding in the logistics service contexts	- Brand awareness - Brand image - Relationship role - Brand equity	Brand equity	- Empirical	- Identifies logistics service providers and their customers have different point of views on the relative impact of brand image and brand awareness on brand equity - Confirms Keller (1993) brand equity framework into the Logistics services contexts
9	Webster & Keller (2004)	*Journal of Brand Management*	52	- To investigate the similarities in, and • differences between consumer and industrial brands - To examine the unique role of branding in the B2B sectors to guide B2B branding	- Brand equity	N/A	- Review	- Identifies unique role of industrial branding characteristic in B2B branding
10	Cretu and Brodie (2007)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	50	- To test the impact of brand • image and company reputation on • customers' perceptions of product • and service quality, customer value, • and customer loyalty in a business • market where there are three • manufacturers marketing their brands • directly to a large number of small firms	- Brand image - Company reputation - Product and • service quality - Customer value - Customer loyalty - Prices and costs	Customer value model	- Empirical	- Brand image has a significant impact on customers' • perceptions towards product and service quality - Company reputation has a greater impact on the • customer's perceptions of value and loyalty
11	Kuhn et al. (2008)	*Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*	46	- To explain the suitability and • limitations of Keller's • customer-based brand equity model • and examine its applicability in a B2B • market	- Resonance - Judgements - Feelings - Performance - Imagery - Salience	- Customer-based • brand equity	- Qualitative	- Identifies among organizational buyers there is • many focuses on the selling organisation, • such as its corporate brand, credibility and staff, • than on individual brands and their associated • dimensions
12	Leek and Christodoulides (2011)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	45	- To develop a framework of brand Value in B2B markets	- Functional value - Emotional value	N/A	- Qualitative	- Identifies functional and emotional qualities • play important role in industrial brand equity development

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations	Aim / objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Type of paper	Implications
								- Identifies situational and environmental factors influencing suppliers' perceptions of the importance of brand in a B2B context and the role of functional versus
								- emotional brand qualities are discussed
13	Lynch and De Chernatony (2004)	*Journal of Brand Management*	44	- To gain a deeper understanding • of the way brands are applied and • communicated in industrial markets	- Internal brand development • and communication - External brand communication - Brand information processing in the buying centres - Brand Choice - Function values - Emotional values	- Branding and • organizational buying • behaviour theory	- Conceptual	- Proposes a brand communication model in B2B • markets with future research questions
14	Beverland et al. (2007)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	43	- To examine international branding • programs of 5 New Zealand • industrial companies also • identify the salient attributes • and capabilities underpinning • such programmes	- Global brand leadership - Components (brand identity/ • position; brand architecture) - Capabilities (brand-building • programs; organizational • structure and process)	- Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (000) brand leadership framework	- Empirical	- Differentiate global brand leadership in the B2C and B2B settings by identifying 5 supportive capabilities at organizational level: entrepreneurial, reflexive, innovative, brand supportive dominant logic, and executional capabilities.
15	Homburg et al. (2010)	*International Journal of Research in Marketing*	42	- To examine under which conditions • brand awareness is associated • with market performance in a B2B • setting	- Brand awareness - Market performance - Return on sales - Moderators (market • characteristics and • buyer characteristics)	- Information economics theory	- Empirical	- Identifies brand awareness has a significant impact on market performance. - Market characteristics (product homogeneity and technological turbulence) and typical characteristics of organizational buyers (buying centre heterogeneity and time pressure in the buying process) play the moderating role in the relationship between brand awareness and • market performance
16	Hutton (1997)	*Journal of Product and Brand Management*	41	- To explore organizational-buying • situations or the conditions under • which buyers are most influenced by • the brand name rather than by price • or other factors	- Brand name - Brand equity	- Models of organizational buying, decision processes in organizational buying, and brand sensitivity	- Empirical	- Identifies the awareness of brand more likely engage in the • brand equity behaviours - Identifies that brand equity exists in B2B markets - Identifies a halo effect of brand equity
17	Gordon et al. (1993)	*Journal of Product and Brand Management*	40	- To understand the brand equity in • the B2B sector	- Brand loyalty - Brand awareness - Perceived quality - Brand	Brand equity	- Conceptual	- Proposes a model of the evolution of brand equity

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Table 3 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations	Aim / objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Type of paper	Implications
					associations - Other proprietary brand assets			- Differs brand equity in B2B settings - from consumer brand equity
18	Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007)	*Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*	39	- To investigate the need of B2B firms for branding and examine the options for success by means of the stock performance	- Branding dimensions - Stock - Business performance	N/A	- Mixed method (interview • and survey)	- Long-term branding strategies, brand performance and • firm's business performance has a positive impact on stock increase - Current brand focus and use of guiding principles can improve business performance
19	Zablah et al. (2010)	*International Journal of Research in Marketing*	39	- To examine the moderated • relationships between brand • consciousness, brand preference, • brand sensitivity, and brand • importance	- Brand consciousness - Brand preference - Brand sensitivity - Brand importance	- Information processing • theory - Resource availability theory	- Quantitative	- Introduces 4 constructs showing a belief-attitude-intention - -Behaviour hierarchy of effects (HOE) capable of • explaining why the relative importance of brands • differs across purchase situations
20	Aaker (1996)	*California Management Review*	38	- To measure brand equity across • products and markets	- Satisfaction/ loyalty - Price premium - Perceived quality - Leadership - Perceived value - Brand personality - Organizational associations - Brand awareness - Market share - Price and distribution indices	- Brand equity	- Conceptual	- Proposes ten brand equity measurement scales - Offers the specific measures for firms to build and nurture brands
21	Keller (2003)	*Book*	37	- To understand how to achieve - branding goals	- Brand equity	N/A	- Book	- Proposes ideas how to address the important issues in • planning, implementing and evaluating brand • strategies
22	Michaelidou et al. (2011)	*Industrial Marketing Management*	37	- To investigate the social networking • practices in B2B SMEs	- Social networking sits - Brand performance	- Social networking theory	- Empirical (survey)	- Identifies thatB2B SMEs applying social networking sites in • the UK do so significantly to attract new customers - About 50% of the B2B SEMs applying social networking • sites show they tend to increase social networking sites • spending - B2B SMEs not applying social networking sites because of the lack of perceived relevance of social networking sites for specific industry settings

Table 3 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations	Aim / objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Type of paper	Implications
23	Kotler et al. (2006)	*Book*	37	- To understand B2B brand • management	Branding dimensions	N/A	- Book	- Offers strategies to develop the brand successfully for • business markets - Provides practical suggestions for B2B brand management
24	Brown et al. (2011)	*International Journal of Research in Marketing*	36	- To investigate the linkage between • purchase risk and a buying • centre's level of brand sensitivity	- Purchase risk - A buying centre's brand sensitivity - Competitive intensity	- Risk and information • processing theories	- Empirical (Interviews with practitioners and survey-based field study)	- Confirms both risk and information processing perspectives • support the proposed relationships - Identifies the moderating role of competitive intensity on • the risk-brand sensitivity relationship
25	Aaker (2009)	*Book*	35	- To provide ideas on how to manage • brand equity	- Brand equity	- Brand equity	- Book	- Provides the guideline for firms on how to manage brand • equity with four dimensions: brand loyalty, name awareness, • perceived quality, and brand associations

These components include the brand's essence, which reflects the intentions of the brand founders (Heding et al., 2020), as well as a shared cultural model shaped by multiple stakeholders, which may evolve over time (Iglesias et al., 2020; Veloutsou & Taylor, 2012). The core of the brand identity is the strategic identity, established during the initial stages of branding. It defines the brand's concept and style, incorporating elements such as vision, mission, top management's strategic intent, values, brand promise, strategic formulation and implementation, and end internal actor behaviour (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Kapferer, 2012; Suvatjis et al., 2012; Tourky et al., 2020). Efficient brand identity management fosters a deep emotional connection and sense of loyalty among different employees towards the organisation (Wang et al., 2019). Simultaneously, it empowers other stakeholders to form favourable opinions, attitudes, and conduct towards the company.

Evidence of this is the result of our text mining (identity theme) and group 6 (brand information processing and theory of buyer behaviour). Reviewing the articles revealed that studies that are focused on brand identity in the B2B context can be categorized into three groups including structure, culture, and behaviour studies. The first aspect that can have an impact on brand identity in the B2B context is the organizational framework and hierarchy of a company (industrial structure in our mode) (Koch & Gyrd-Jones, 2019). A review of the articles in this category (corporate concept in the strategy theme) suggests that industrial structure is closely related to brand strategies in B2B settings. Industrial structure belongs to different phases in the life cycle of a company and the evolutionary paths in corporate positioning tactics (Balmer, 2023; Galvagno et al., 2023). Studies investigate structure in two main streams. The first stream is focused on either the branding of a business or unit (Chang, 2020; Urde & Greyser, 2016), while the second stream, organizational, focuses on how B2B brands mix and match their service offerings on their products and business units (Eva et al., 2018).

Studies in B2B branding also suggest that culture has to reinforce and support the brand identity configuration and management (Gebauer et al., 2010; Lexutt, 2020). Previous studies (Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020; Brodie, 2017; Liu et al., 2020) have highlighted that different element, such as subculture or vision and value, can have an impact on the formation of this culture, which subsequently affects the

formation of brand identity in a B2B setting. As such, as discussed in Group 6 in MDS findings, brand culture is the driving force behind a company's brand identity. It shapes the way the brand presents itself, interacts with different stakeholders, and distinguishes itself from competitors (Essamri et al., 2019). As noted in Groups 5, different actor behaviours, including employees (Guenther & Guenther, 2019; Nyadzayo et al., 2011) and key decision makers (Coleman et al., 2011; Iglesias et al., 2023), can also shape the formation of brand identity in a B2B setting. In this line, an increasing number of studies suggest that a brand with a strong identity often is the result of a co-creating process of different stakeholders (Chung & Byrom, 2021; Kaufmann et al., 2012).

Future researchers are advised to investigate how different configurations of brand identity management can affect branding decisions in the B2B context. While previous studies have focused on how different actors, like consumers, can affect the formation of brand identity, the role of internal actors in the co-creation of brand identity has not been investigated thoroughly in the branding literature in the B2B context. Furthermore, a strong brand identity has the potential to drive a number of positive consequences, but there is still only limited understanding of which elements of brand identity management can have the most important outcomes for overall band strength (Iglesias et al., 2020; Nyadzayo et al., 2016). In line with this, previous researchers (Hao et al., 2021; Lahrech et al., 2023; Rojas-Méndez & Khoshnevis, 2023) have noted that empirical studies in various contexts (e.g., *meso*, macro, and national) are required to investigate how different sub-elements of brand identity management, such as overcoming this research gap, can allow B2B brand managers to effectively leverage their strategic resources.

In summary, despite recognizing the potential of a robust brand identity for positive outcomes, there remains limited understanding of which elements of brand identity management significantly contribute to overall brand strength, highlighting the need for empirical studies across diverse contexts to bridge this research gap and aid B2B brand managers in maximizing strategic resources. Future studies also can investigate how different configurations of brand identity management can have an impact on brand identity as a whole, for instance, how the subculture of top managers can affect brand structure, which

Table 4
Recent highly cited articles.

Rank	Publication	Title	Source	Average per year	Aim / objective	Key supporting theory	Type of paper	Findings
1	Dwivedi et al. (2021)	Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions	International Journal of Information Management	113.33	To understand the opportunities, challenges and future research direction relate to digital and social media marketing from the experts' perspective	Social media Marketing	Qualitative	- Offers important topics related to artificial intelligence, augmented reality marketing, digital content management, mobile marketing and advertising, B2B marketing, electronic word of mouth, and the ethical issues therein.
2	Vesal et al. (2021)	Strengthening B2B brands by signalling environmental sustainability and managing customer relationships	Industrial Marketing Management	13	To develop and test a model of B2B branding by integrating signalling environmental sustainability and customer relationship perspectives	Signalling theory - Customer relationship management - Attitude theory	Empirical	Identifies how environmental sustainability practices have a positive impact on B2B manufacturers' brand image, ultimately improving market performance. - Identifies effective CRM and works with business customers with positive environmental attitudes, which are fundamental to strengthen environmentally sustainability practices for market performance.
3	Yuan et al. (2021)	Study on the influencing of B2B parasocial relationship on repeat purchase intention in the online purchasing environment: An empirical study of B2B *E*-commerce platform	Industrial Marketing Management	10.33	To develop a framework of cognitive and emotional impacts on customer firms' behaviour and test the impact of features of entrepreneur endorser and online purchasing platform on B2B parasocial relationship, and how this linkage can influence repeat purchase intention. Also explored the moderating role of trust in the relationship between B2B parasocial relationship and repeat purchase intention	- Parasocial relationship and dual-process theory	Empirical	Shows perceived interactivity and trustworthiness of the entrepreneur endorser and the service and product quality of online purchasing platform impact on B2B parasocial relationship positively. - B2B parasocial relationship affects repeat purchase intention Positively. - Trust moderates the linkage between B2B parasocial relationship and repeat purchase intention.
4	Kushwaha et al. (2021)	What impacts customer experience for B2B enterprises on using AI-enabled chatbots? Insights from Big data analytics	Industrial Marketing Management	10	To examine the impacting elements of AI-based chatbots from customer experience theories for B2B firms	Diffusion of innovation theory - Trust commitment theory - Information systems success model - Hoffman & Novak's flow model	Empirical	Identifies chatbots' overall system design, customers' ability to use Technology, and customer trust towards brands and system influence on customer experience in B2B enterprises using chatbots
5	Gelderman et al. (2021)	Green marketing as an environmental practice: The impact on green satisfaction and green	Business Strategy and the Environment	9.67	To test the influence of green marketing strategies on the satisfaction and	N/A	Quantitative	Identifies how product quality, product price, and corporate image have a significant

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Table 4 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Title	Source	Average per year	Aim / objective	Key supporting theory	Type of paper	Findings
		loyalty in a business-to-business context			loyalty of professional buyers in a B2B setting			impact on satisfaction and loyalty; salesperson expertise has the most notable impact on satisfaction and loyalty.
6	Gustafson and Pomirleanu (2021)	A discursive framework of B2B brand legitimacy	Industrial Marketing Management	5.67	To develop a model integrates several levels of social discourse, from brand texts to stories and narratives, to understand how the relationships between these and brand legitimacy are made via language	Rhetorical and discursive approach	Qualitative	Identifies B2B brand reputation, awareness, and credibility among the benefits of having a brand legitimacy within a network of actors
7	He and Zhang (2022)	How digitalized interactive platforms create new value for customers by integrating B2B and B2C models? An empirical study in China	Journal of Business Research	5.5	To develop and test a model of B2B and B2C models in digitalized Interactive platforms	Customer relationship management	Quantitative	Identifies that multi-dimensional platform value has a positive impact on overall platform value; ultimately affects platform brand engagement. Platform brand engagement has a positive impact on platform brand loyalty, consequently improving customer share
8	Rose et al. (2021)	Sharing is the name of the game: Exploring the role of social media communication practices on B2B customer relationships in the life sciences industry	Industrial Marketing Management	5.33	To develop and investigate a model to understand the impact of vendor social media communication practices upon trust and loyalty in B2B customer relationships	Theory of social capital	Quantitative	Loyalty directly affected by a) the social media shared beliefs between the vendor and the customer, b) the nature of the vendor's social media communication with the customer, and c) the extent to which the vendor's social media communication practices enable effective customer-to-customer communication, and trust plays a mediating role between these relationships
9	Cortez and Dastidar (2022)	A longitudinal study of B2B customer engagement in LinkedIn: The role of brand personality	Journal of Business Research	4.5	To investigate the impact of brand personality dimensions on customer engagement	Digital communication theory	Quantitative	Identifies that impression can increase in likes, clicks and shares and the increase in the clicks is more likely to result in increase in new followers, leading to an increase in impressions. Also, the increase in a post's excitement more likely to increase the impression and likes, but the increase in a post's competence leads to an increase in clicks, and an increase in post's robustness can increase in new followers.
10	Runfola et al. (2021)	Rethinking interactions in social distancing times: implications for business-to-business companies	Journal of Business & Industry Marketing	4	To test the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the B2B setting	Interaction theory	Qualitative	Identifies 4 effects are freezing effect, ripple effect, rebound effect, vicious effect in terms of relational dynamics

Table 4 (*continued*)

Rank	Publication	Title	Source	Average per year	Aim / objective	Key supporting theory	Type of paper	Findings
11	He et al. (2021)	What can we learn from #StopHateForProfit boycott regarding corporate social irresponsibility and corporate social responsibility?	Journal of Business Research	4	To propose a model to understand elements influence customer response to transgressing brands and boycotting brands	Social contract theory, expectancy violation theory, categorization theory	Conceptual	Propose a model with propositions that integrating transgressing brands and boycotting brands and consumers to understand core issues behind the campaign.
12	Deng et al. (2021)	Speak to head and heart: The effects of linguistic features on B2B brand engagement on social media	Industrial Marketing Management	3.33	To investigate the impact of post language on B2B brand engagement	Dual-process theory, Metafunction theory	Empirical	Identifies the important role of post language on B2B brand Engagement.
13	Sands et al. (2022)	Buffering B2B service failure: The role of customer engagement	Industrial Marketing Management	2.5	To test the impact of industrial customer engagement on customer's response to service failure	Social exchange theory	Empirical	Identifies the low degree of industrial customer engagement due to the customer received service failure.
14	Zhou et al. (2021)	Extending B2B brands into the B2C market: Whether, when, and how brands should emphasize	Journal of Business Research	2	To examine when, whether, and how the B2B brands' background in ads of the B2C products affects brand extension evaluation	N/A	Empirical	Identifies that the presenting information on B2B brand's background can influence consumer evaluate the extend B2C products.
15	Kapitan et al. (2022)	Strategic B2B brand activism: Building conscientious purpose for social impact	Industrial Marketing Management	2	To understand the accelerator and Decelerators of B2B brand activism	B2B brand value and B2B brand legitimacy	Qualitative	Identifies the importance of maintaining stakeholder communications, capacity to track and use customer data, respond to the power of end-consumer, B2B partners, competitors and regulators on B2B brand activism adoption.
16	Lu et al. (2022)	Supply-Demand Docking Joint Decision of Cross-border E-commerce under the Influence of Internet Celebrity	Journal of Global Information Technology Management	1.5	To develop a model of cross-border e-commerce supply chain (CBEC) vertical integration	N/A	Empirical	Identifies that the higher degree of commission proportion of CBEC results in lower quality improvement level of demand and higher sale price and consumer experience level.
17	Mehdikhani and Valmohammadi (2022)	The effects of green brand equity on green word of mouth: the mediating roles of three green factors	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	1.33	To examine the impact of green brand equity (GBE) on green brand attachment, (GBA), green self-brand connection (GSBC), green brand attitude (GBA) and green word-of-mouth (GWOM)	Brand equity	Empirical	GBE influences GBA, GSBC, GBAT AND GWOM positively; GWOM has influenced by GBA, GSBC and GBAT, and GBA, GSBC, and GBA mediating the linkage between GBE and GWOM

subsequently has an impact on brand identity (e.g., Schroeder et al., 2015).

Similarly, currently, there is a lack of extensive knowledge regarding the interplay of stakeholder identity and brand identity co-creation, where two parties interact and contribute symbolic meanings to establish identity (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). Understanding the dynamics of meaning exchange between these parties and the impact they have on one another is crucial in comprehending how each identity evolves. From a managerial standpoint, this understanding may shed light on brand ownership and the process of brand value development. Further, since global B2B brands are often compete in a very crowded and competitive market, answering the proposed questions can help global B2B brand to differentiate themselves and establish unique position in the industry which can be helpful for corporate decision makers when thinking of entering a global market (Aghaie et al., 2023). Further,

global B2B brand interactions are often more complicated and involves number of key decision makers (Ozdemir et al., 2020). Therefore, answering these potential future questions can help B2B managers to establish a clear brand identity in help of creating a consistent and cohesive narrative which facilitate relationship building among across different stakeholders.

6.2. Brand architecture

The second component of industrial marketing that is revealed in our findings is brand architecture. These different elements of brand architecture in a B2B setting are pervasive in our findings. A brand positioning in relation to product offering has been discussed to varying degrees in the text mining results (see Product, process, price, and advertising themes). Frequently, B2B firms do not employ a single brand

Table 5
Managerial conceptual future framework: research agenda.

Four stages of B2B branding process	Exemplary Related MDS, HCA, and text mining findings	Potential new research areas
Stage 1: Industry branding strategy	Cluster 2 Brand theme Identity theme Concept in the strategy theme	How do different internal actors within B2B organizations contribute to the co-creation of brand identity, and what roles do they play in shaping branding decisions? What are the distinct configurations of brand identity management in B2B contexts, and how do these configurations impact overall brand strength and performance? Which specific elements or aspects of brand identity management exert the most significant influence on enhancing brand strength in B2B environments? In what ways can the collaboration between internal actors and external stakeholders influence the development and management of brand identity in B2B settings? How do the sub-elements of brand identity management, such as messaging consistency, visual identity, or brand storytelling, individually contribute to the overall perception and strength of a B2B brand? What empirical evidence exists across various scales (e.g., *meso*, macro, national) regarding the impact of brand identity management on B2B branding decisions and outcomes? How does the process of brand value development intertwine with stakeholder-brand identity co-creation, and what managerial insights can be derived from this interplay in the context of global B2B brands? In what ways do the complexities of global B2B brand interactions, involving multiple decision makers, impact the establishment of a clear and consistent brand identity across diverse stakeholder groups? How does a cohesive narrative, formed through a consistent brand identity, facilitate relationship-building among diverse stakeholders in global B2B settings, and what role does it play in fostering long-term business relationships?
Stage 2: Brand architecture strategy	Groups 1–6 process, price, and, advertising them	How do non-firm-controlled communication touchpoints, such as social media, industry forums, or third-party collaborations, influence the development and execution of industrial branding strategies in the B2B context? What are the specific mechanisms through which interactions with non-firm-controlled platforms impact stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards B2B brands? Under what conditions do

Table 5 (*continued*)

Four stages of B2B branding process	Exemplary Related MDS, HCA, and text mining findings	Potential new research areas
		engagements with non-firm-controlled touchpoints lead to positive outcomes (e.g., enhanced brand visibility, trust) versus negative consequences (e.g., brand dilution, conflicting messages) for industrial brands? Are there differences in the impact of non-firm-controlled touchpoints on industrial branding across various industries or sectors within the B2B landscape? How do various stakeholders in the B2B purchase journey influence brand communication strategies differently for brands with different origins of service/product offerings, and how can brands effectively navigate these diverse influences? What are the specific influences of service/product offering origins on the formulation and execution of brand positioning strategies for global B2B brands, and how do these strategies vary across different industries or sectors?
Stage 3: Industrial relationship Strategy	Cluster 5 social, customer, product, and online themes	How does social media utilization impact partner involvement and information handling globally, and what is the resultant influence on both the financial and non-financial performance of global brands operating in various industries? What are the key determinants influencing the adoption and effectiveness of emerging technologies, such as the metaverse, in facilitating global brand partner engagement and collaboration across diverse markets? To what extent can social media platforms be leveraged to influence different stages of relationship formation in the context of global brands, and what strategies prove most effective in utilizing these platforms for relationship building? Can the integration of AI-driven technologies within social media platforms enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of relationship formation processes between global brands and their diverse stakeholders? What role does personalize content and engagement strategies on social media play in influencing stakeholder perceptions and fostering stronger relationships with global brands at different stages of the customer journey or partnership development? How does the integration of emerging technologies like AI agents, bots, and systems impact the relationship between global brand partner engagement and brand performance, particularly

Table 5 (*continued*)

Four stages of B2B branding process	Exemplary Related MDS, HCA, and text mining findings	Potential new research areas
Stage 4: Brand performance	Clusters 1, 3 Quality, experience, price theme	in the pursuit of sustainable competitive advantages within these technological innovations? How does an industrial branding strategy that emphasizes relationship growth stages impact B2B market share, and how does this impact vary across diverse global markets? What are the temporal dynamics associated with focusing on relationship growth stages within an industrial branding strategy, and how does this strategy affect market share over different time periods in various global markets? To what extent do methods facilitating the collection of long-term data, such as case studies, extended experiments, ethnographic studies, and linguistic analyses, contribute to understanding the impact of relationship-focused branding strategies on market share in the B2B context? (method related research questions) Can a comparative analysis across different industries or sectors shed light on the relative importance and impact of relationship-focused branding strategies versus other branding strategic factors on B2B market share?

to encompass all their diverse products and services. Instead, they often utilize multiple brands, assigning different brands to different products. Additionally, they may combine various brands in different ways for a single product, essentially creating sub-brands. A brand architecture strategy is responsible for determining the number and types of shared and distinct brand elements, such as names, logos, and symbols, that are used across the company's products (Keller, 2014; Keller & Richey, 2006). As such, global B2B brands such as Milliken & Company, the

structure of brand architecture will serve as the core framework housing the brand strategy. It delineates the structure, connections, and prioritization of global service offerings. In this line, global corporate client of Milliken anticipates uniform product language and terms for the items they purchase, essential for their production processes worldwide. Thus, Milliken consolidates its global brand by adopting a unified structure and nomenclature across different geographical locations across the globe.

This strategy provides a clear structure for organizing these elements, guiding the application of brand elements to both new and existing products and services. By doing so, it elucidates the similarities and differences between the various entities involved within the company (Keller, 2014; Strebinger, 2014). Industrial firms could adopt different brand architectures depending on their industrial branding strategies. These strategies are mostly dependent on the strategic structure of the industrial brand and how they are related to one another. Such a strategic relationship can provide a framework for all future brand relationship decisions (Aureli & Forlani, 2016; Hsu et al., 2016).

Although it is still unclear what specific brand architecture an industrial brand should employ (Liu et al., 2018), some important patterns have been identified in the literature. According to the branding literature and our findings, developing an industrial brand architecture strategy involves defining the potential of the brand in terms of its country of origin (Talay et al., 2015), specifying the brand positioning (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017) and brand design elements (Hsu et al., 2016) associated with the brand.

Signalling theory suggests that the service/product offering origin (International and competitive themes in brand concept) serves as a positive indicator that enhances brand credibility, which refers to a brand's capability and willingness to fulfil its promises (e.g., Erdem & Swait, 2004; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008); this holds significant importance, as it plays a central role in consumer-based brand equity (Erdem & Swait, 2004). This, in turn, influences consumers' readiness to pay for a brand and also affects the company's future profits and long-term cash flows (e.g., Datta et al., 2017; Keller, 1993; Srivastava & Shocker, 1991).

Brand positioning is a significant aspect of research in B2B branding in both the recent literature and in our findings. It serves as a means of enhancing capabilities and plays a crucial role in how a brand is perceived in the marketplace. Extensive attention has been given to the examination of promotion and advertising as essential tools for positioning brands internationally (Iyer et al., 2019; Mogaji et al., 2023;
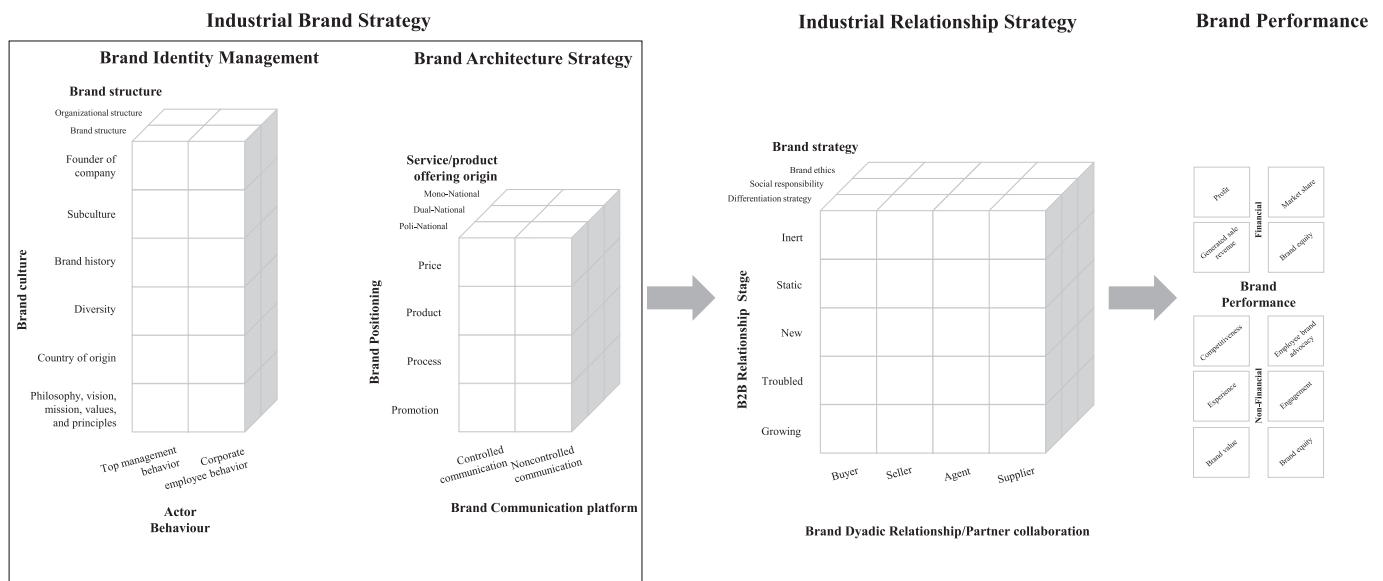

Fig. 4. Managerial conceptual future framework.

Williams et al., 2019). Additionally, other elements of brand positioning, such as product, distribution and pricing strategies, have also been discussed to varying extents in the branding literature (Amrouche & Yan, 2017; Iyer et al., 2019; Tsao et al., 2019). These discussions emphasize the importance of further exploring and understanding these aspects of brand positioning and development in the context of a proposed future model.

While the study identifies the significance of brand communication platforms within brand architecture strategies, as supported by the findings in the marketing theme, a more critical examination of these platforms is necessary to understand their influence comprehensively in the B2B context. The distinction between platforms that firms can control (like corporate websites and branded social media accounts) and those they cannot (such as independent review sites and user-generated content) presents an intriguing area for deeper analysis. Although Lowry et al. (2014) highlight the role of these platforms in communicating industrial branding decisions, and Ohme and Boshoff (2019) as well as Foroudi, Kitchen, et al. (2020) discuss their impact on brand differentiation and customer acquisition, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced effects of these communication tools. The literature suggests that controlled platforms allow for curated brand messaging and tighter strategic alignment, while uncontrolled platforms may offer greater authenticity that could resonate more effectively with certain segments of the B2B market. However, the existing research primarily provides a surface-level view without delving into how these platforms interact to shape perceptions of brand credibility and trust, particularly under varying market conditions or within different industrial sectors.

Furthermore, the call by Foroudi, Nazarian, et al. (2020) for future research to explore various brand architecture strategies in the B2B context underscores a critical gap: there is limited empirical evidence on how different configurations of visual and non-visual communication tools can specifically aid B2B brands in communicating their uniqueness. This suggests a pressing need for comprehensive studies that not only explore these configurations but also examine their effectiveness in enhancing brand visibility and differentiation across diverse market scenarios. A critical question arises from this discussion: How do different brand communication platforms, both controlled and uncontrolled by the firm, influence the effectiveness of brand architecture strategies in differentiating and enhancing the visibility of B2B brands among potential customers? This question invites a deeper investigation into the strategic interplay between these platforms, requiring a methodological approach that can dissect the differential impacts on brand perception and customer engagement within the complex B2B purchasing landscape.

Secondly, B2B researchers are advised to investigate how different brand communication platforms affect industrial brand management. B2B brand managers are increasingly recognizing that a single brand or firm cannot fully control the stakeholder journey in the B2B setting (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). This observation highlights the increasing complexity of the purchase journey, as various stakeholders can significantly influence the industrial branding decisions. Additionally, B2B brands often form partnerships with other entities, which gives these external actors some level of control over brand communication platforms. To better understand this complexity, further investigation is needed. Some questions to explore include the following: How do non-firm-controlled touchpoints affect a firm's overall industrial branding strategy? Under what conditions do interactions with non-controlled platforms result in positive or negative outcomes? And, finally, how can a brand effectively deal with this complexity?

Further, there is only limited knowledge regarding how the service/product offering origin is treated concerning brand positioning and branding strategy. Are dual-national brands more likely to use particular positioning strategies? Can this vary based on the service/product offering origin? Are firms more likely to use visual tools for mono-national service/product offerings, or should this remain the same? In summary, B2B brand researchers need to study how different brand

communication platforms affect industrial brand management given that various stakeholders influence the global purchase journey, helping global brands understand and handle this complexity better. As shown in Fig. 3, there are numerous possibilities to explore and assess this broad research topic in future branding in the B2B context.

6.3. Industrial relationship strategy

Following our cluster 5 findings, building and maintaining relationships is important in developing branding strategies in the B2B context. In an essence, relationship strategy work hand in hand with brand identity and structure in order to foster a meaningful relationship and connection. Integrating these components cohesively results in the creation of a consistent and powerful brand presence, thereby establishing global brand relationships in the global market. Relationship marketing includes establishing, developing, and maintaining the ongoing relationship between different parties (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Such relationships in the long term can bring immense both intangible and intangible benefits for the firms. While it is anticipated that relationships will change as time passes, and specific characteristics and actions will be relevant to different stages, not all relationships follow the same trajectory.

Regardless of their duration, relationships can exhibit various states including new, developing, troubled, stagnant, or unresponsive (Ford & Rosson, 1982) highlighted by our customer theme. As such in each stage of relationship, behaviour between different parties varies accordingly. For instance, relationship building behaviour in the B2B setting, such as being timely, accurate, and adequate, is important in the initial stage of relationship development (Claycomb & Frankwick, 2010; Sarmento et al., 2015). Such a relationship in the B2B context takes place between dyadic relationship actors (Hartmann & Herb, 2015). This proposal regarding different brand dyadic relationships can take place between different actors where both parties will be mutually affected. This was highlighted in our text mining findings (social, customer, product, and online themes) where dyadic relationships are characterized by a balance of welfare between two interacting entities (Yami & Nemeh, 2014). As such, when transitioning from self-benefit to mutual benefit or other-oriented benefit depending on the relationship dynamics and conditions, a brand community's welfare stems from group membership and social identity within different actors who take part in the brand dyadic relationship (Bagozzi et al., 2021; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016).

The relationship between different parties in the B2B setting is significantly influenced by the nature of firm responsiveness to external pressure. This relationship between different actors can be influenced by the overall industrial strategy as suggested by our findings in Group 1, and Strategy theme, each corporation follows. Such a strategy provides a comprehensive blueprint of a company, outlining its product offerings, target markets, and overarching objectives, and the approaches it employs to compete effectively in its selected markets (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

Any unethical approaches or misconduct by brands in the B2B context can be associated with negative consequences. Therefore, as found in previous studies, CSR activities and ethical business decisions can be seen as important and as integrated with the corporate strategy (Ferrell et al., 2019; Vallaster et al., 2019). Further, to address both social needs and industry actor needs, differentiation enables firms to identify distinctive prospects, and enhancing their competitive standing enables companies to generate advantages for both society and their own interests (Barney, 1991; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Zhang et al., 2020).

With such a background, the use of different platforms for communication and engagement plays a crucial role in establishing and nurturing relationships, leading to increased brand performance (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Liu & Bakici, 2019). However, despite its potential benefits in supporting sales functions, B2B organizations still approach relationship building on social media with caution due to the

lack of any clear strategic direction and difficulties in effectively leveraging these platforms to achieve a return on investment (ROI) (Lashgari et al., 2018).

Although there is growing research on the advantages of using social media in sales, there is still only limited understanding of how and why buyer-seller relationships are initiated online and later transition to an offline setting. In summary, Research needs to explore how corporate strategies influence trust and commitment across different brand relationships and stages, aiming for a deeper understanding of their evolution and outcomes. As a result, future research needs to delve deeply into how organizations utilize social media. This investigation should include the development of a comprehensive framework and managerial strategies that treat social media as a strategic tool at every stage of the relationship cycle.

Future researchers are advised to investigate how different corporate strategies can affect different brand dyadic relationship and relationship stages. Since relationships develop and evolve through different stages, and shared values are typically limited in the initial stages, the question arises of whether trust and commitment grow from an overall company-wide emphasis or from individual initiatives that are linked together over time. Morgan and Hunt (1994) proposed various types of partnerships in their commitment-trust model, and each of these partnerships might lead to different outcomes. Hence, to gain a deeper understanding, a more comprehensive analysis is required in the context of how trust and commitment evolve between different brand dyadic relationships through implementing different corporate strategies.

These future studies can help global corporate brands to enhance the level of trust and commitment across the global market. In this regard, trust can serve as a groundwork for establishing commitment which result in mitigating risks and encouraging global collaborative efforts. Conversely, commitment to high quality global service offerings further cement the foundation of trust between global partners with bot equally important for establishing an ensuring and successful partnership in the global market. In this line, Deliveroo stands out as a dominant brand within the food and beverage B2B sector. Apart from being recognized as a reliable and trustworthy global brand delivery firm, they've forged robust alliances with restaurants across the globe. This global collaboration ensures a holistic service, benefiting both sides - catering to the needs of B2B buyers and satisfying different stakeholders needs.

Importantly in this regard, with the growth of social media platforms, different brand dyadic relationship partners can create content and share it within community. In this line, B2B relationships involve multiple complex stakeholders, necessitating further research to comprehend how audience-oriented content creation influences online relationships with specific actors like suppliers, government, customers, and end-users. Unlike B2C single-purchase relationships, developing valuable and long-term B2B relationships can be a prolonged process, often happening discreetly behind the scenes (Grönroos, 1996; Gummesson, 1987). While some research indicates that personal content with emotional appeal tends to be more successful than promotional content, there remains a scarcity of studies exploring the nature and implementation of content activities in the B2B domain, especially on social media. This entails examining content visible on different public platforms, content exclusive to closed groups, and content tailored for diverse stakeholders.

In this line future researchers can investigate future questions such as How could social media influence partner involvement and information handling globally, and how these activities can impact on financial and non-financial performance? Moreover, considering the prior conversation regarding the significance of emerging technologies, there arises the question of which factors are pivotal in the adoption and efficacy of emerging technologies, particularly concerning global brand partner engagement. Similarly, what effect does the integration of emerging technologies like AI agents, AI bots, and AI systems have on the correlation between global brand partner engagement and brand performance, specifically in achieving sustainable competitiveness within

these innovative technologies? Furthermore, it is vital for future researchers to understand how social media platforms can be used for influencing different stages of relationship formation. Hence, it's crucial to comprehend how different types of stakeholders in global brands utilize specific social media platforms during various stages of relationship development.

7. Brand performance: non-financial and financial

Overall, the impact of branding decisions on brand performance outcome is important since it can aid firms to develop brand relationship strategies based on what really matters to the consumers. A review of our findings in our text mining and our MDS and HCA analysis (Clusters 1–3) along with text mining (quality, experience and price themes) reveals that the branding literature in the B2B context indicates that there are two aspects to performance: financial (Clusters 1, and 3, and quality, experience theme) and non-financial (Group 7, Price theme, sale concept in process theme). The non-financial dimension of performance relates to measures such as experience (Kushwaha et al., 2021), engagement (Deng et al., 2021), value (He et al., 2018), or brand competitiveness (Raddats et al., 2019).

Previous studies defined experience as corporate response to global B2B brands offering in the purchasing cycle (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Zha et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2019; Marvi & Foroudi, 2024) have defined engagement as the manifestation of voluntary resource allocation among global stakeholders, aimed at co-creating value. Value in our proposed model denotes the customer's holistic evaluation of a product's usefulness, considering what they receive and what they give in return, forms the basis of their assessment. Lastly, Competitive advantage arises from the capacity to provide target global corporate decision makers an offer that holds a greater perceived value compared to offerings from other global competitors (Lindgreen et al., 2012).

Taken together, these non-financial elements form the foundation for fostering enduring, robust relationships and driving future growth. They often result in long-term global partnerships that benefit various stakeholders involved worldwide. The financial part of brand performance, on the other hand, focuses on how branding decisions can affect firm performance including measures such as profit (Kumar et al., 2018; Tsao et al., 2019), brand equity (Nyadzayo et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2015), or market share (Rahman & Lambkin, 2015; Velu, 2016). These financial measures can serve as important vital merit which inform global decision-making process. For instance, by analyzing profitability and market share, global B2B brands can allocate resources more efficiently across globe. Further, these measures can help identify risks associated with global market fluctuations, corporate customer perception enabling adjustment and more agile decisions for better financial performance (Hajli et al., 2020). Future studies are advised to conduct a more thorough and all-encompassing evaluation of the correlation between the industrial branding strategy, industrial relationship strategy, and process and value is yet to be achieved as proposed in our future model. Consequently, forthcoming studies could explore the following question: What aspects of the industrial relationship strategy and industrial branding strategy have the most significant impact on non-financial and financial brand performance? Further, global B2B brands have the option to adopt a multi-branding strategy as proposed by our model. Future researchers need to provide guidance on which approach might be more appropriate for such firms. As such, we advise future researchers to investigate how these different strategies can influence a B2B brand market share or profit. Further, by integrating different parts of our model, future research are advise to investigate additional questions such as.

How does an industrial branding strategy focus on growing relationship stage aspect impact market share in the B2B context? How can this differ across different global markets? And how such focus can change the market share across different time periods. In order to

response to these proposed research questions, we advise future researchers to apply diverse methods. Methods facilitating the collection of long-term data, like case studies, extended experiments, ethnographic studies, and semantic or linguistic analyses, will be especially beneficial in this context. Although the literature indicates that selecting the right branding strategy is a crucial and fundamental decision for global B2B brands, there are other branding strategic factors to consider (such as premiumizing offerings through higher price points) whose financial value contribution has not been empirically established. Such a tangible brand performance can aid global B2B brand managers in making more informed decisions regarding their branding strategy decisions.

8. Limitation

Similar to any bibliometric study, there are several limitations associated with this research. Bibliometric analyses often rely on citation counts, which may not always reflect the quality or relevance of a study to the research question at hand. Future studies could investigate alternative metrics beyond citation counts to assess the quality and relevance of research in the B2B branding field. These could include engagement metrics such as downloads, shares, and mentions on social media and professional platforms. A relevant question for future research is: How do alternative metrics of research impact (e.g., social media engagement, download counts) correlate with traditional citation counts in evaluating the significance of B2B branding literature?

Another primary limitation of our study is related to the selection of articles for data analysis. We used a reputable and well-established source, the Academic Journal Guide (ABS, 2020), for ranking journal articles. However, the process was influenced by the subjective opinions of scholars, which affected the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. This subjectivity may introduce biases, such as the over-representation of popular viewpoints at the expense of potentially valuable but less well-known research. Consequently, the ABS ranking's inclusion and exclusion criteria could have influenced our main database, which forms the foundation of the themes identified in our analysis. Therefore, employing different ranking lists could result in a diverse article database, potentially altering our findings. Given this limitation of relying solely on ABS and the Web of Science (WOS) database, future research could benefit from a more inclusive selection approach. This approach might involve integrating multiple databases and considering journals beyond the conventional ranking systems to capture a broader spectrum of perspectives. A pertinent question for future research is: How does the inclusion of broader journal sources and databases (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar) affect the identification of key themes and trends in global B2B branding research?

Another limitation of our study is its exclusive reliance on the Web of Science (WOS) for data collection, which could affect the comprehensiveness and representativeness of our findings. Additionally, WOS predominantly features journals from the natural sciences, potentially overlooking valuable contributions from social science journals. To address this limitation, future studies could incorporate additional databases such as Scopus to broaden the scope of their research and enable a comparison of findings. Furthermore, while bibliometric analysis serves as a valuable method for exploring literature across different domains, it is essential to acknowledge that the process of investigating research themes often relies on subjective interpretation, potentially introducing bias in identifying broader and related themes. To mitigate the influence of subjective interpretation in identifying research themes, future studies could utilize machine learning and natural language processing (NLP) techniques to automate the analysis, thereby potentially reducing bias. A relevant question for future research is: Can advanced NLP and machine learning techniques offer a more objective and comprehensive identification of themes in B2B branding literature compared to traditional bibliometric methods?

The limitation of focusing predominantly on journals from the natural sciences highlights the necessity for a more interdisciplinary approach. Future research could systematically compare findings from various disciplinary perspectives, including the social sciences and humanities, to deepen the understanding of B2B branding. An important question to explore is: How do perspectives on B2B branding differ across disciplines, and what insights can be gained from an interdisciplinary analysis of branding literature?

To gain a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of the research domain, it might be beneficial to conduct a thorough analysis of cited scholarly works using various approaches. This study exclusively relied on one co-citation technique, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), to identify groups within the domain. While MDS effectively captures the strength of relationships between cited works, it may not reveal nuanced thematic or methodological connections among them. Furthermore, although MDS provides a detailed breakdown of the intellectual structure within the research domain, other bibliometric methods such as citation analysis, co-word analysis, and keyword co-occurrence can efficiently present an overview of relevant themes. These methods can enrich future researchers' understanding by helping to identify relationships and significant themes within scholarly works, thus facilitating a deeper comprehension of the dynamics and evolution of the research field.

To overcome the limitations associated with using a single co-citation technique (MDS), future studies could employ a combination of bibliometric methods, including citation analysis, co-word analysis, and keyword co-occurrence, to provide a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual structure of B2B branding research. A pertinent question for future research is: How do different bibliometric techniques, such as co-word analysis and keyword co-occurrence, complement co-citation analysis in mapping the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of global B2B branding literature?

Acknowledging the limitations of our study, it is important to note the specific constraints associated with using Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) in co-citation analysis. While MDS is valuable for visualizing the relationships among cited works, it may not fully capture the complexity of these relationships due to its reliance on spatial representations, which can sometimes oversimplify connections or misrepresent the closeness of concepts. This limitation underscores the need for future research to employ a more diverse array of co-citation techniques, potentially incorporating methods like network analysis to provide a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual structure of B2B branding. Further research should continue to explore the evolution of B2B branding over the past decade through comprehensive co-citation analysis. This method can effectively trace the intellectual progression of the field, revealing how theories and methodologies have evolved and interacted over time. Adopting this approach will aid in identifying seminal works and significant shifts, thereby deepening our understanding of the trajectory of B2B branding and highlighting trends and gaps that warrant further investigation. Such focused inquiry is essential for providing scholars with a roadmap for advancing the domain, firmly establishing co-citation analysis as a crucial tool for grasping the historical and conceptual development of B2B branding. A pertinent question for future research might be: How has the conceptualization of B2B branding evolved over the last decade as evidenced by co-citation analysis, and what emerging trends and research gaps can be discerned from the intellectual and thematic developments within the field?

A longitudinal analysis could offer insights into how the themes and focus areas in B2B branding have evolved, identifying emerging trends and shifts in research emphasis. An important question to explore is: How have the themes and focus areas within global B2B branding literature evolved over the past decade, and what does this indicate about the future direction of the field? Given the complexities and evolving nature of global B2B branding, future research should delve deeper into the strategic application and effectiveness of brand communication tools across different market segments. Employing a longitudinal study design would be beneficial to track the long-term

effects of these tools on brand loyalty and customer retention. Additionally, comparative studies analyzing the impact of digital versus traditional communication platforms could offer valuable insights into optimizing marketing strategies in a digital-first business environment. To better understand the interplay of global cultural dynamics on brand perception, cross-cultural research methodologies should be utilized to examine how brands can tailor their communication strategies to effectively resonate with diverse business audiences. Furthermore, the integration of advanced analytics and machine learning techniques in studying big data from B2B interactions can uncover new patterns and trends, providing a richer understanding of customer behaviour and brand interaction dynamics in the digital age. Pertinent methodological questions for future research might include: What methodologies can be applied to most effectively measure the impact of digital tools over traditional ones in B2B branding? How can longitudinal research designs be structured to provide actionable insights into B2B brand loyalty and customer retention? In what ways can cross-cultural research methodologies be optimized to assess the global effectiveness of B2B branding strategies? How can machine learning be integrated into the analysis of big data to predict and adapt to evolving trends in B2B customer behaviour?

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Reza Marvi: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Dongmei Zha:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation. **Pantea Foroudi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix 1

Definitions of different components of the proposed conceptual future framework.

Four Stages of the B2B branding process	Definitions of key components	Key references	Link to Model example
Stage 1: Industry branding strategy which incorporates all global B2B strategic branding decisions	**Brand culture** – is the driving force behind a B2B global brand identity and it shapes the way the brand presents itself, interacts with different stakeholders, and distinguishes itself from competitors, including different elements such as subculture, philosophy, vision, mission, values, and principles.	Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020; Liu et al., 2020	Group 6
	Industrial structure – industrial structure belongs to different phases in the life cycle of a B2B brand and the evolutionary paths in corporate positioning tactics in a global context include two main streams, organizational structures focusing on how B2B brands mix and match their service offerings on their products and business units and brand structure focuses on the branding of a business or unit.	Balmer, 2023; Galvagno et al., 2023	corporate concept in the strategy theme
	Actor behaviour - a B2B brand with a strong identity often is the result of a co-creating process of different stakeholders' behaviour in a global context including employees and key decision makers.	Chung & Byrom, 2021; Iglesias et al., 2020	Groups 5
Stage 2: Brand architecture strategy is responsible for determining the number of types of shared and distinct global B2B brand elements, such as names, logos, and symbols that used across the company's products	**Brand positioning** – it serves as a means of enhancing capabilities and plays a crucial role in how a B2B brand is perceived in the global marketplace, such as the examination of promotion, product, distribution and pricing and strategies as essential tools for positioning brands internationally.	Iyer et al., 2019; Mogaji et al., 2023	Product, process, price, and advertising themes
	Service/product offering origin - service/product offering origin serves as a positive indicator that enhances B2B brand credibility, which refers to a brand's capability and willingness to fulfil its promises and plays a central role in B2B brand equity in a global context.	Datta et al., 2017; Keller, 1993	International and competitive themes in brand concept
	Brand communication platforms - which take place through either platform that the B2B firm can control or those that it cannot control and play a crucial role in communicating industrial global branding decisions to an external audience, communicating global brand strategic decisions, differentiating a brand and attracting new customers.	Foroudi et al., 2014; Foroudi, Kitchen, et al., 2020	Marketing theme
Stage 3: Industrial relationship strategy includes establishing, developing, and maintaining the ongoing relationship between different parties in B2B global branding process	**Brand strategy –** 3 key strategies are brand ethics, social responsibility and differentiation strategies **B2B relationship stage** – B2B relationships can exhibit various states including new, inert, static, troubled or growing, so being timely, accurate, and adequate, is important in the initial stage of relationship development in the global B2B branding.	Ferrell et al., 2019; Vallaster et al., 2019 Claycomb & Frankwick, 2010; Sarmento et al., 2015	Group 1, Strategy theme Cluster 5
	Brand dyadic relationship/partner collaboration - takes place between different actors where both parties will be mutually affected, such as buyer, seller, agent and supplies elements where dyadic relationships are characterized by a balance of welfare between two interacting entities.	Bagozzi et al., 2021; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016	Customer theme

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(*continued*)

Four Stages of the B2B branding process	Definitions of key components	Key references	Link to Model example
Stage 4: Brand performance is a way to measure the outcomes of B2B global branding activities including both non-financial and financial performance	***Non-financial performance*** - relates to measures such as experience, engagement, brand value or brand competitiveness and employee brand advocacy	Deng et al., 2021; Marvi & Foroudi, 2024	Clusters 1, and 3 quality, experience theme
	Financial performance – *relates to measures such as profit, market share, brand equity and generated sales revenue.*	Kumar et al., 2018; Tsao et al., 2019	Group 7, Price theme sale concept in process theme

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