



## Exploring the Intellectual Structure of Employer Branding: Mapping Trends and Citations in the Web of Science

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### ABSTRACT

Employer branding plays a distinctive role in attracting qualified employees to organizations and in enhancing the sense of belonging, performance, and productivity of existing staff. In this respect, it provides organizations with a unique and inimitable competitive advantage. Owing to its significant contributions to organizational success, employer branding has received growing attention within academic research. This study evaluates the existing employer branding literature indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database by examining the citation counts of relevant publications and analyzing them across several parameters. A total of 592 studies directly related to employer branding were identified in the WoS database, and 26 of these—those receiving more than 100 WoS-based citations—were included in the detailed analysis. The similarities and differences among the most highly cited studies were examined accordingly. The findings reveal that employer branding studies have appeared in the WoS database since 2000 and that, although conceptual articles are fewer in number, they exhibit relatively high citation rates. The analysis also shows that employer branding is most frequently examined alongside employee-related variables such as human resources management, recruitment, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. Moreover, the results indicate that the most highly cited studies are typically published in SSCI-indexed journals specializing in marketing and human resources. Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered for researchers working in the field of employer branding.

**Keywords:** Employer Branding, Employer Attractiveness, Web of Science, Citation Metrics, WoS Metrics

**JEL Classifications:** M1, M120, M310

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Employer branding refers to the set of practices undertaken by organizations to enhance their attractiveness and desirability among qualified employees (Lloyd, 2002). Unlike the traditional branding, which primarily targets consumers, employer branding focuses on employees, who are regarded as internal customers. This process entails emphasizing the organization's distinctive attributes to create a positive perception among both current and potential employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

In globalized business environment, organizations inevitably face intense competitive pressures. This reality compels firms to adopt differentiation strategies based on human capital to achieve

sustainable success (Kanwal and Van Hoye, 2024). Consequently, the possession of a highly skilled workforce, which constitutes a key factor distinguishing organizations from one another—has become increasingly valuable. In this context, employer branding serves as a crucial mechanism for attracting talented employees, thereby offering organizations a significant competitive advantage over their rivals (Gandasari et al., 2024; Ronda et al., 2018). Moreover, employer branding also functions as a strategic component that externally reflects an organization's identity and reputable brand image, providing an additional advantage in strengthening its overall organizational reputation (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2025).

Employer branding provides organizations with several positive contributions, such as facilitating the recruitment process, retaining

existing employees, and enhancing employee commitment (Hussain et al., 2024). Particularly in labor-intensive industries that rely heavily on qualified human capital, employer branding can be a determining factor influencing organizational performance and productivity (Näppä et al., 2023). In addition, employer branding is associated with reduced costs, financial improvement, and increased customer satisfaction (Špoljarić and Tkalac-Verčič, 2022). Moreover, a strong employer brand is reported to foster greater creativity and productivity among employees, thereby enabling the organization to gain a competitive advantage in its business processes (Edwards, 2009).

Employer branding also has a significant impact on the extent to which current employees act as ambassadors or references for their organization. Employees' positive perceptions and endorsements contribute to the image of the organization as an "ideal place to work," substantially increasing the rate of favorable responses to job offers. Alongside positive referrals, it also helps reduce negative comments about the organization. Consequently, employer branding lowers recruitment costs and facilitates the placement of qualified candidates in suitable positions (Gomes and Neves, 2010). Furthermore, employer branding exerts positive effects on the corporate structure of organizations. A favorable employer brand fosters a sense of value within the organization, contributes to the formation of corporate culture, and promotes the adoption of ethical behaviour (Kaur et al., 2024). Ultimately, it supports the development of a positive corporate image and enhances corporate reputation. Additionally, employer branding encourages practices that strengthen the organization's identity and image in the eyes of both employees and customers—such as social responsibility projects, innovative initiatives, and transparent internal communication (Hillebrandt and Ivens, 2013). The fundamental advantage provided by employer branding lies in its ability to create an authentic corporate identity that is difficult to imitate. While technological, financial, and structural components can be replicated by competitors in a relatively short time, an employer brand culture rooted in employee experience and internal values can only be developed within the organization itself (Rampl, 2014). This makes employer branding one of the most critical components of sustainable competitive advantage.

The recognition of employer branding as a source of competitive advantage for organizations has led to a rapid expansion of studies in this field (Tran et al., 2024). In addition to the foundational conceptual research, numerous empirical studies have examined both the factors influencing employer branding and the variables affected by it (Špoljarić and Ozretić-Došen, 2023). Moreover, employer branding has become a subject of interest across multiple disciplines. Given the growing number of academic studies on employer branding, the present research aims to identify the works that have made the most significant contributions to the field. Specifically, this study focuses on the most highly cited publications related to employer branding indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database, analysing them according to various parameters. Examining the most frequently cited publications within a field is a widely used research approach (Arbaugh, and Hwang, 2015; Sheng et al., 2024). Such analyses provide synthesized insights by compiling and categorizing the most

influential works among a vast body of academic literature. Consequently, they offer a valuable body of knowledge for researchers and readers working in the same domain, facilitating a clearer understanding of the intellectual structure and research trends within the field.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of employer branding was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who defined it as a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits identified with an organization. Accordingly, employer branding provides both tangible and intangible benefits to organizations. While many aspects of a business may be replicated by competitors, the employer brand remains an inimitable and distinctive element that differentiates one company from another. From this perspective, by creating a strong employer brand, organizations can attract employees with the desired qualifications and retain existing talent by fostering a sense of brand loyalty (Rampl, 2014).

For employees, employer branding represents the total set of benefits expected from working for a specific organization. Job seekers compare the employer brands of different companies and choose the one they perceive as most attractive (Edwards, 2009). Ambler and Barrow (1996) emphasize that organizations with strong employer brands receive the best job applications, employ the most qualified workers, and consequently develop superior products—leading to an advantage such as attracting the best customers.

In the current competitive environment, branding has become the fundamental determinant of success at local, regional, and international levels (Tran, 2025). However, it has been argued that the traditional branding approach, which focuses solely on consumers, is no longer sufficient in today's dynamic business context. Instead, organizations must also consider employer branding, which targets employees as a key stakeholder group (Reis et al., 2021; Theurer et al., 2018). Although traditional branding and employer branding are complementary in terms of organizational contribution, they differ in scope and purpose. Traditional branding aims to create loyal customers whose reduced-price sensitivity benefits the organization, whereas employer branding seeks to attract qualified employees, increase organizational commitment, and reduce turnover rates (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016). Moreover, employees working for organizations with strong employer brands tend to show lower sensitivity to salary levels.

Barrow and Mosley (2005) assert that managing the employer brand is a necessity due to the significant advantages it offers organizations. The increasing number of alternative employment opportunities has made it more difficult to ensure employee loyalty and commitment, highlighting the strategic importance of employer branding. As organizational diversity grows, talented employees find it easier to move to better companies, making it essential for firms to retain valuable employees much like they retain valuable customers (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p. 163). Another key factor necessitating employer brand management is

its dual role at the intersection of human resources and marketing. Employee engagement and loyalty are often considered precursors to customer engagement and loyalty (Theurer et al., 2018). Therefore, employer branding directly influences production and sales performance by aligning internal culture with external reputation. Brand management has long been an established field of both academic research and practice (Yalın and Mızrak, 2017). Consequently, the evolution from traditional branding to a more comprehensive framework that also considers employees as internal stakeholders represents an inevitable progression. The sustainability of employer brand management practices is primarily attributed to their capacity to create a lasting competitive advantage (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, p. 163). Recent studies further indicate that sustainable employer brand management enhances trust among both internal and external stakeholders (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2025). This demonstrates that employer branding should be viewed not merely as a recruitment tool but also as a critical component of organizational identity strategy (Kanwal and Van Hoye, 2024).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research covers studies on employer branding indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database, which is recognized as one of the world's leading citation databases (Pranckutė, 2021). Journals indexed in this database maintain high scientific standards, employ rigorous peer-review processes, and provide their publications with broad international visibility (Pech and Delgado, 2020).

To ensure transparency and reporting quality, this study employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram to guide the data screening process. The PRISMA framework is widely used in social science research (Chapman, 2021), helping to maintain focus on the research topic and ensuring the reliability and rigor of the study.

During the screening process, the Advanced Search feature of the Web of Science was utilized. To identify studies related to employer branding, keywords derived from the existing literature were entered into the search field. The following keywords were used: “employer branding,” OR “employer brand,” OR “employer brands,” OR “employer reputation,” OR “employer image,” OR “employer brand equity,” OR “employer brand image,” OR “employer brand attractiveness,” OR “employer attractiveness,” OR “employer brand perception.”

The search was conducted without time restrictions, covering the entire publication range of studies related to employer branding. Furthermore, no limitations were imposed on publication type, and the search included journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings. The data collected between August 7 and September 20, 2025; therefore, the study includes publications that were available in the database during that period.

The keywords related to employer branding were initially searched by limiting the query to the “Topic” field. This process yielded a total of 995 records; however, upon closer examination, it was determined that some of these records were not directly related to employer branding. Therefore, in the second stage, the search was refined

by restricting it to the “Title,” “Abstract,” and “Keywords” fields to ensure that only studies directly addressing employer branding were included. This search returned 963 records that met the criteria.

However, since the review revealed that some studies were still not directly related to employer branding, a third search was conducted. At this stage, the search was limited to the “Title” and “Keywords” fields, resulting in a total of 788 documents. The analysis indicated that, in certain studies, employer branding did not constitute the primary research focus but was instead discussed as a secondary theme. Therefore, a fourth and final search was conducted, limited only to the “Title” field. As a result of this process, 592 documents were identified.

Following these four rigorous screening stages, the research was conducted based on the 592 studies indexed in the Web of Science database. These studies were ranked according to the number of citations they received from the Web of Science Core Collection, and 26 studies that received more than 100 citations were analysed within the scope of the research. The examined studies were categorized based on their research type, research method, investigated variables, year of publication, and the journals in which they were published. The PRISMA process of the study is illustrated in figure 1.

### 4. RESULTS

Primarily, publications pertaining to employer branding within the Web of Science (WoS) database were examined and categorized based on various parameters. Analysis of publication years, as shown in figure 2, reveals a significant upward trend in employer branding literature following the 2010s. Notably, an annual output of approximately 100 studies has been maintained over the past 5 years. Consequently, it can be posited that the construct of employer branding constitutes a relatively nascent field of academic inquiry.

The publications indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database regarding employer branding were analyzed in terms of their respective academic disciplines. The findings indicate that while employer branding is predominantly studied within the fields of management and business, it is also subject to investigation in disciplines such as economics, psychology, and industrial relations. Details of employer branding research regarding academic disciplines are presented in figure 3.

An examination of the authors with the highest number of publications on employer branding within the Web of Science (WoS) database reveals that G. Van Hoye, F. Lievens, and G.K. Saini—each with nearly 20 publications—are the preeminent scholars in this field. Leading authors in the field are presented in figure 4.

Upon analysing the citation topics, it is evident that research on employer branding maintains a primary citation relationship with the field of organizational behavior. Furthermore, a secondary and comparatively weaker citation nexus is observed with areas such as corporate social responsibility, consumer behavior, personality,

and compensation valuation. Figure 5 shows the citation nexus of employer branding.

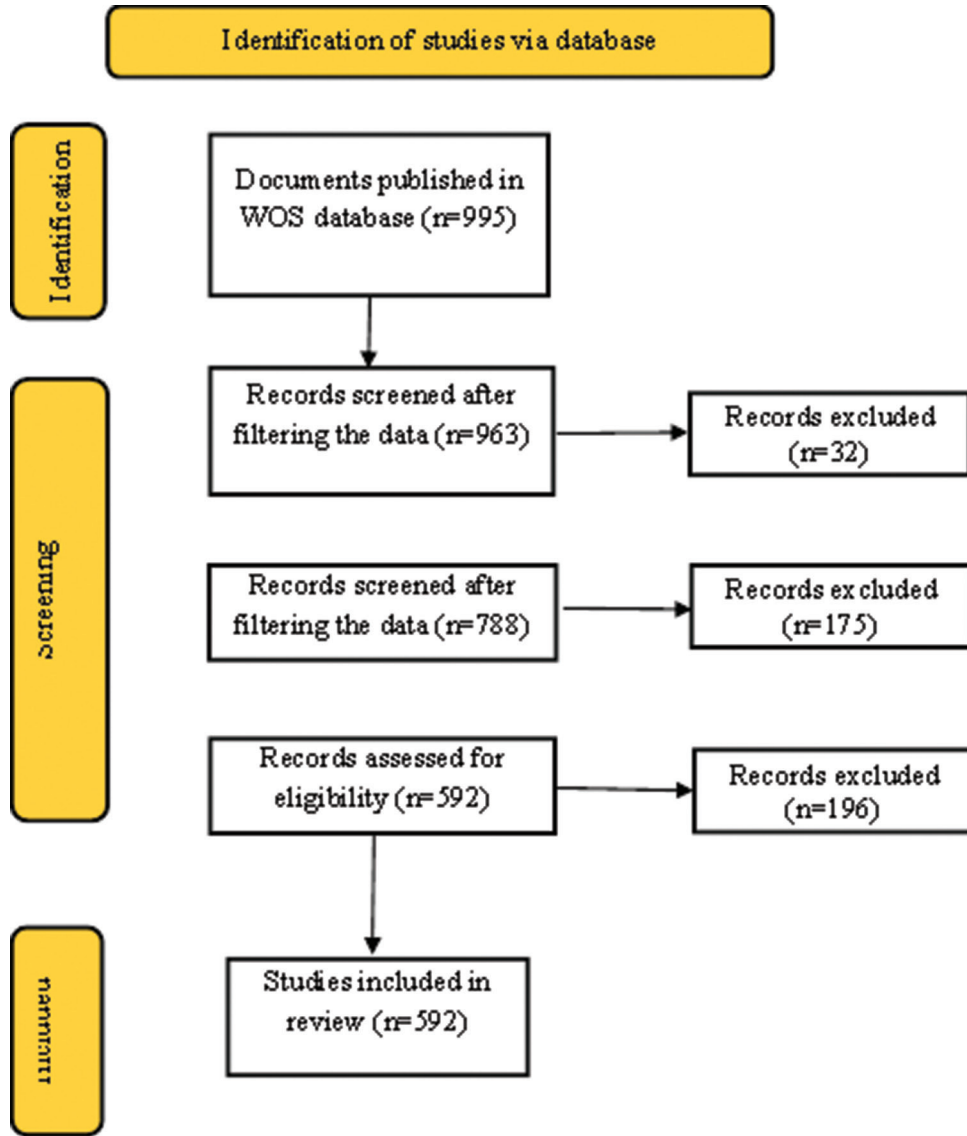
The second stage focused on an analysis of top-cited publications. Articles with 100 or more citations were included in the analysis. All selected studies were published in English between 2000 and 2020. Among the 26 articles analyzed, the highest number of

citations in the Web of Science database was 490, corresponding to a 2003 research article by Lievens and Highhouse that examined the instrumental and symbolic attributes of organizations as determinants of employer attractiveness. This was followed by the earliest article in the dataset, a 2000 publication by Albinger and Freeman, which received 436 citations in the Web of Science. However, when examining the average annual citation counts

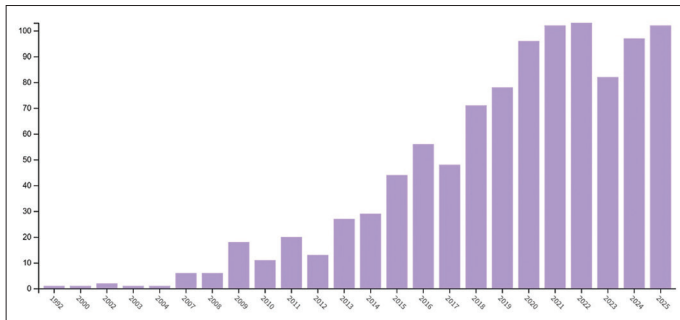
**Table 1: Citation metrics of most influential papers in employer branding**

No	Publication	Total WoS citations	Citations per year
1	Lievens, F., and Highhouse, S. (2003). The relation of instrumental and symbolic attributes to a company's attractiveness as an employer. <i>Personnel psychology</i> , 56 (1), 75-102.	490	22
2	Albinger, H. S., and Freeman, S. J. (2000). Corporate social performance and attractiveness as an employer to different job seeking populations. <i>Journal of business ethics</i> , 28 (3), 243-253.	436	17
3	Collins, C. J., and Stevens, C. K. (2002). The relationship between early recruitment-related activities and the application decisions of new labor-market entrants: A brand equity approach to recruitment. <i>Journal of applied psychology</i> , 87 (6), 1121.	322	14
4	Lievens, F., and Slaughter, J. E. (2016). Employer image and employer branding: What we know and what we need to know. <i>Annual review of organizational psychology and organizational behavior</i> , 3 (1), 407-440.	245	27
5	Edwards, M. R. (2009). An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory. <i>Personnel review</i> , 39 (1), 5-23.	239	15
6	Lievens, F., Van Hoye, G., and Anseel, F. (2007). Organizational identity and employer image: Towards a unifying framework. <i>British journal of management</i> , 18, S45-S59.	235	13
7	Turban, D. B. (2001). Organizational attractiveness as an employer on college campuses: An examination of the applicant population. <i>Journal of vocational behavior</i> , 58 (2), 293-312.	210	13
8	Wilden, R., Gudergan, S., and Lings, I. (2010). Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment. <i>Journal of marketing management</i> , 26 (1-2), 56-73.	200	13
9	Sivertzen, A. M., Nilsen, E. R., and Olafsen, A. H. (2013). Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media. <i>Journal of product and brand management</i> , 22 (7), 473-483.	195	16
10	Theurer, C. P., Tumasjan, A., Welpe, I. M., & Lievens, F. (2018). Employer branding: a brand equity-based literature review and research agenda. <i>International journal of management Reviews</i> , 20 (1), 155-179.	186	27
11	Lievens, F. (2007). Employer branding in the Belgian Army: The importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants, and military employees. <i>Human resource management</i> , 46 (1), 51-69.	186	10
12	Foster, C., Punjaisri, K., and Cheng, R. (2010). Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding. <i>Journal of product and brand management</i> , 19 (6), 401-409.	179	12
13	Mosley, R. W. (2007). Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand. <i>Journal of brand management</i> , 15 (2), 123-134.	177	10
14	Moroko, L., and Uncles, M. D. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. <i>Journal of brand management</i> , 16 (3), 160-175.	158	9
15	Dögl, C., and Holtbrügge, D. (2014). Corporate environmental responsibility, employer reputation and employee commitment: An empirical study in developed and emerging economies. <i>The International journal of human resource management</i> , 25 (12), 1739-1762.	151	14
16	Klimkiewicz, K., and Oltra, V. (2017). Does CSR enhance employer attractiveness? The role of millennial job seekers' attitudes. <i>Corporate social responsibility and environmental management</i> , 24 (5), 449-463.	141	18
17	Knox, S., and Freeman, C. (2006). Measuring and managing employer brand image in the service industry. <i>Journal of marketing management</i> , 22 (7-8), 695-716.	137	7
18	Davies, G. (2008). Employer branding and its influence on managers. <i>European journal of marketing</i> , 42 (5-6), 667-681.	124	7
19	Maxwell, R., and Knox, S. (2009). Motivating employees to "live the brand": A comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm. <i>Journal of marketing management</i> , 25 (9-10), 893-907.	121	8
20	Dabirian, A., Kietzmann, J., and Diba, H. (2017). A great place to work!? Understanding crowdsourced employer branding. <i>Business horizons</i> , 60 (2), 197-205.	112	14
21	Martin, G., Gollan, P. J., and Grigg, K. (2011). Is there a bigger and better future for employer branding? Facing up to innovation, corporate reputations and wicked problems in SHRM. <i>The International journal of human resource management</i> , 22 (17), 3618-3637.	112	8
22	Biswas, M. K., and Suar, D. (2016). Antecedents and consequences of employer branding. <i>Journal of business ethics</i> , 136 (1), 57-72.	111	12
23	Benitez, J., Ruiz, L., Castillo, A., and Llorens, J. (2020). How corporate social responsibility activities influence employer reputation: The role of social media capability. <i>Decision support systems</i> , 129, 113223.	106	21
24	Schlager, T., Bodderas, M., Maas, P., and Luc Cachelin, J. (2011). The influence of the employer brand on employee attitudes relevant for service branding: an empirical investigation. <i>Journal of services marketing</i> , 25 (7), 497-508.	106	8
25	Kryger Aggerholm, H., Esmann Andersen, S., and Thomsen, C. (2011). Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations. <i>Corporate communications: An International journal</i> , 16 (2), 105-123.	104	7
26	Kucherov, D., and Zavyalova, E. (2012). HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand. <i>European journal of training and development</i> , 36 (1), 86-104.	102	8

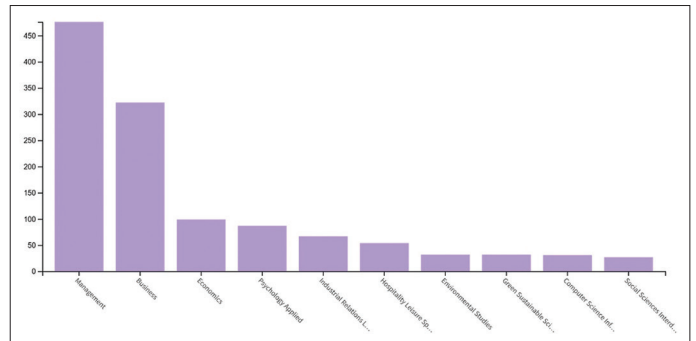
**Figure 1:** PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the inclusion and exclusion process of studies in the review



**Figure 2:** Evolution of employer branding research in the Wos database: 1992-2025



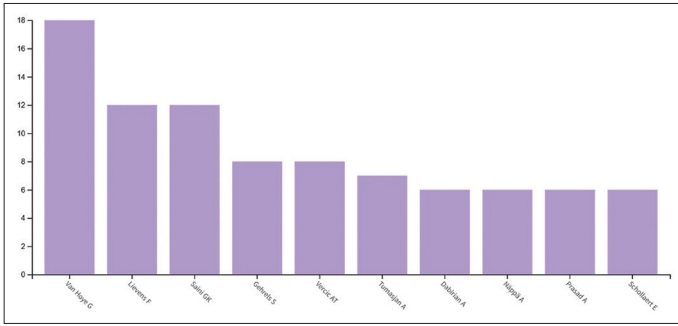
**Figure 3:** Distribution of employer branding publications by academic discipline



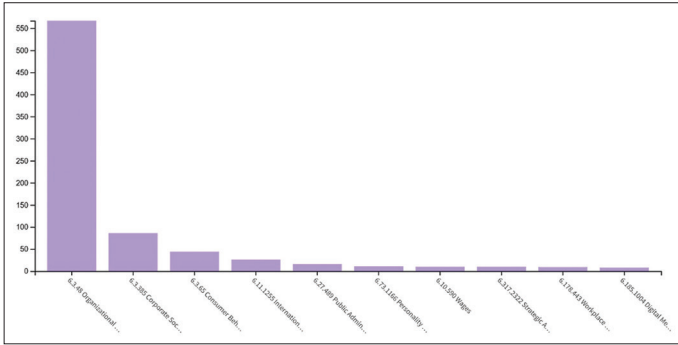
in the Web of Science, the 2016 review article by Lievens and Slaughter and the 2018 review article by Theurer et al. emerge as the leading publications, each receiving an average of 27 citations/year. Table 1 presents the most cited articles, along with details on their research type, method, examined variables, main findings, total citation counts, and annual citation rates.

Figure 6 presents the distribution of the journals in which the most highly cited publications were published. The findings indicate that the 26 most cited articles were published across 20 different journals, with the Journal of Marketing Management ranking first, featuring three articles in this field. While the overall distribution

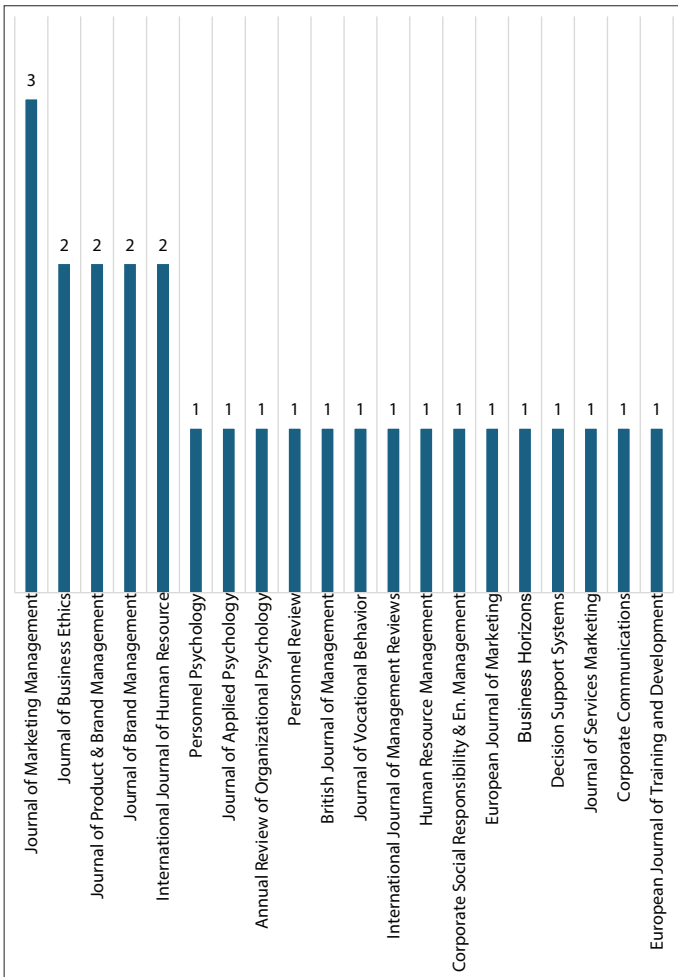
**Figure 4:** Leading authors in employer branding by publication count



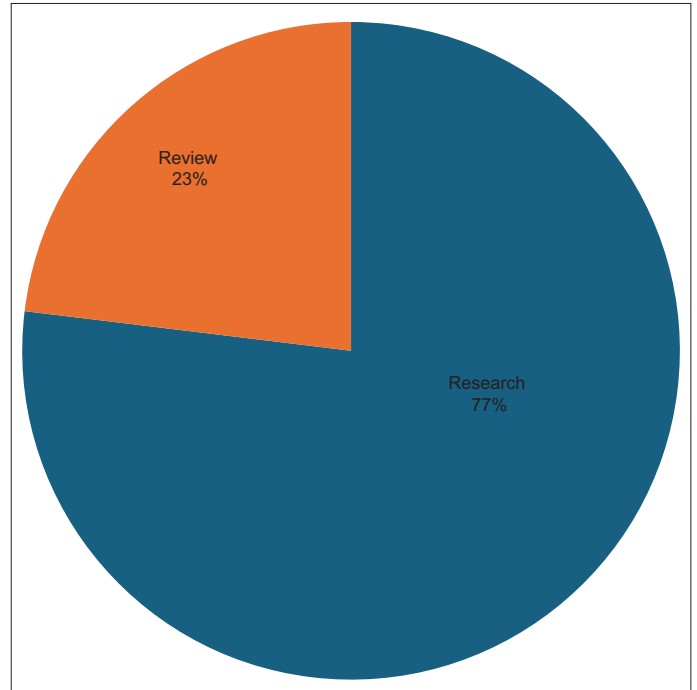
**Figure 5:** The citation nexus of employer branding literature



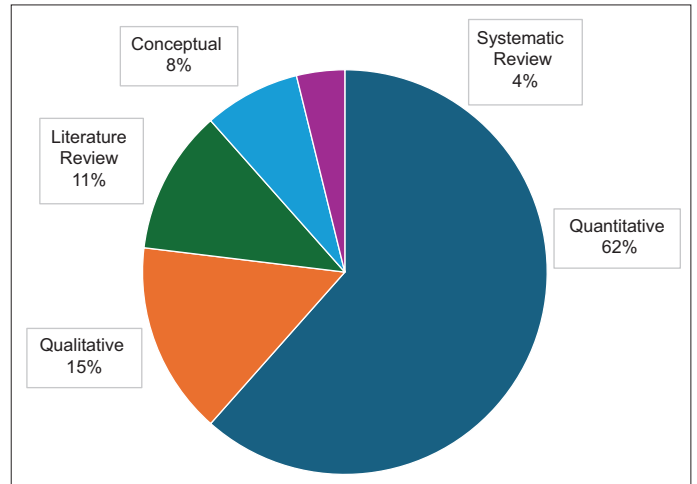
**Figure 6:** Journal distribution of the most cited employer brand studies



**Figure 7:** Study type distribution of the most cited studies



**Figure 8:** Research method distribution of the most cited studies

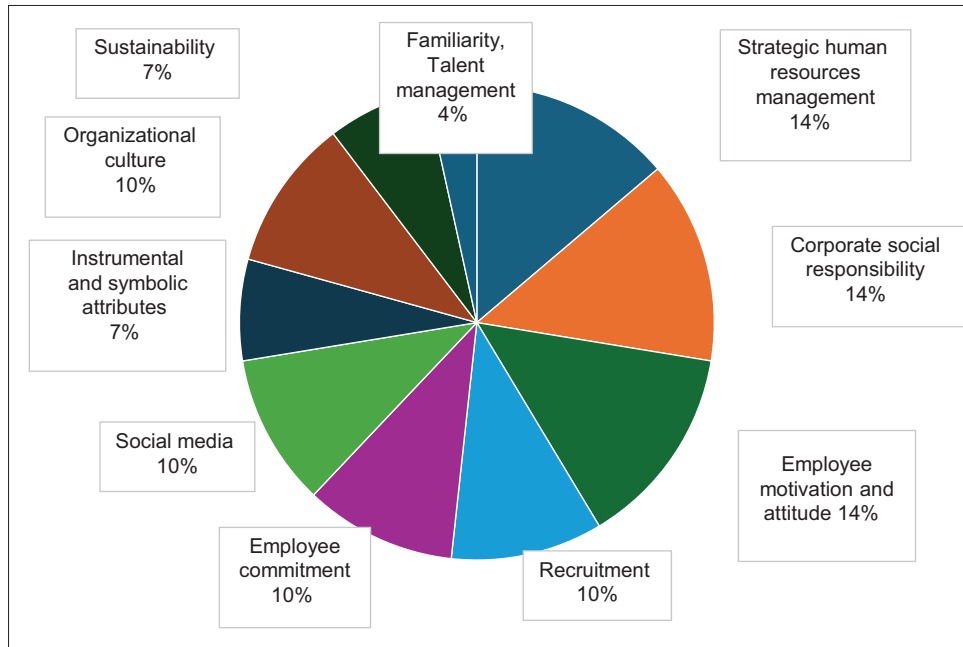


of journals appears to be concentrated in the field of business and management, the publications are primarily clustered in journals focusing on subfields such as marketing, human resources, and brand management. Furthermore, it is observed that the majority of these journals are indexed in the SSCI.

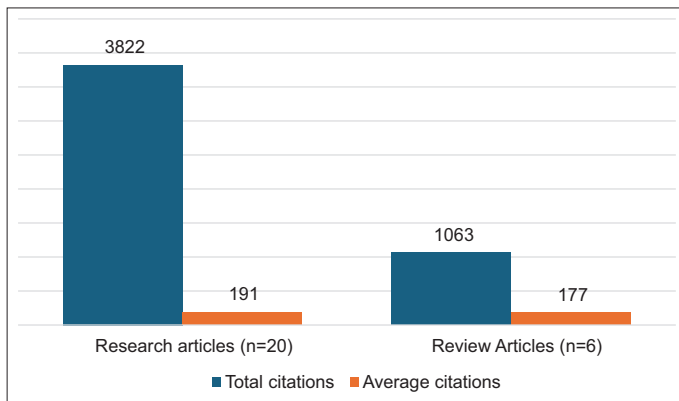
Figure 7 presents the distribution of the 26 analysed studies by research type. The findings indicate that 20 of the studies are research articles, while 6 are review articles.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the most highly cited studies by research method. The findings indicate that 16 studies employed quantitative methods, whereas 4 adopted qualitative approaches. In addition, literature review, systematic literature review, and conceptual methods were among the other research approaches used.

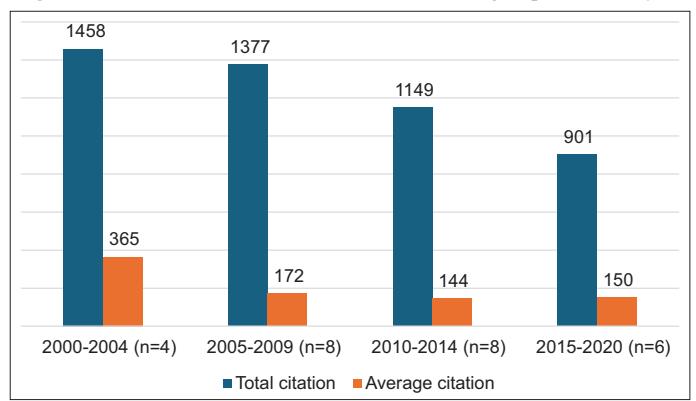
**Figure 9:** Distribution of the most examined variables of the most cited studies



**Figure 10:** The distributions of citations according to study type



**Figure 12:** The distributions of citations according to publication year



**Figure 11:** The distributions of citations according to research method

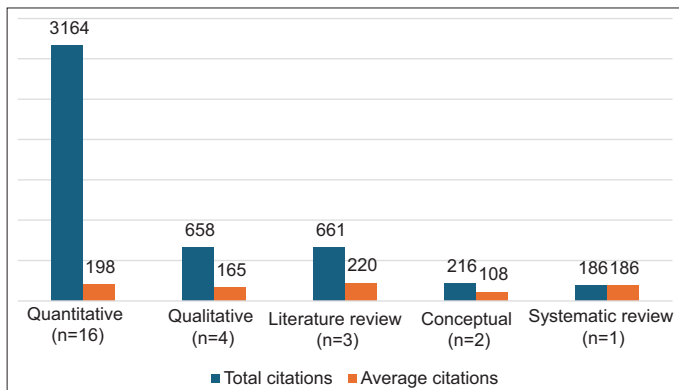


Figure 9 shows the variables examined alongside employer branding in the most highly cited studies. The findings indicate that topics such as human resource management (n = 4), corporate social responsibility (n = 4), employee motivation and attitude (n = 4) recruitment (n = 3), employee commitment (n = 3) and social media (n = 3) are the most frequently investigated variables.

This suggests that employer branding is predominantly studied in relation to factors concerning current and potential employees. Furthermore, organizational variables such as organizational culture, sustainability, innovation, and talent management are also addressed in these studies.

Figure 10 presents the total and average citation counts of the reviewed studies according to study type. The findings indicate that research articles received a total of 3,822 citations, with an average of 191 citations/study. Review articles, by contrast, accumulated 1,063 total citations, with an average of 177 citations. Although the total citation count differs substantially between research and review articles, this discrepancy is largely attributable to the unequal number of studies in each category; the average citation counts show a relatively similar pattern.

With respect to research methods, quantitative studies had the highest total citation count with 3,164 citations, whereas literature review studies exhibited the highest average citation count with 220 citations/study. The total and average citation distributions are presented in detail in Figure 11.

An examination of the publication years shows that the period 2000-2004, despite containing the fewest studies ( $n = 4$ ), yielded the highest citation counts both in total and on average. These results illustrate that earlier studies in the field tend to receive more citations overall. The total and average citation distributions by publication years are presented in detail in Figure 12.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As globalization continues to homogenize production and management practices across organizations, the capacity to cultivate distinctiveness and generate sustained value has become an increasingly decisive element of competitive advantage. Within this strategic landscape, employer branding emerges as a critical and inherently difficult-to-imitate organizational asset. While operational processes may be readily replicated by competitors, the employer brand—shaped by the perceptions of current employees, prospective talent, and external stakeholders—constitutes a unique and enduring source of differentiation. Accordingly, developing a strong and positive employer brand is fundamental for organizations striving to maintain long-term competitiveness in dynamic global markets. It is widely recognized that a robust employer brand offers substantial strategic benefits for service organizations, including enhanced employee retention, higher commitment levels, and stronger feelings of belonging and loyalty (Coaley, 2021). Beyond tangible advantages, the employer brand's intangible dimensions—such as interpersonal relationships, transparent communication, and positive referrals—play a significant role in shaping employment decisions. Employer branding has therefore gained increasing prominence in both practice and scholarship, particularly for its effectiveness in attracting younger generations and emerging talent (Ognjanović, 2020).

The findings of this study, which examined the most frequently cited employer branding research indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database, reveal a consistently rising scholarly interest in the field. Employer branding studies, which began to appear in the early 2000s, have expanded considerably in both scale and thematic scope. The analysis shows that the majority of highly cited publications were featured in SSCI-indexed journals and that review articles, in particular, demonstrate above-average annual citation rates. This trend suggests ongoing theoretical maturation within the field, supported by its engagement with diverse disciplinary perspectives. Additionally, the concentration of highly cited studies in marketing- and human resources-oriented journals indicates that employer branding research has evolved with a strong orientation toward organizational production processes and marketing perspectives.

The review further demonstrates that employer branding is most frequently examined in relation to employee-oriented variables such as strategic human resource management, employee motivation and attitudes, recruitment practices, and organizational commitment. Quantitative studies, in particular, tend to investigate the effects of employer branding on employee motivation, performance, and organizational preferences. However, the absence of studies addressing the potential effects of employer

branding on customers or prospective customers reveals a significant research gap. This raises an important question: does employer branding influence not only employees but also service quality, the working conditions provided to employees, and ultimately customer perceptions and preferences?

The primary contribution of this article lies in its effort to define and systematically synthesize the core attributes of employer branding through a structured methodological approach. By conducting a comprehensive review of employer branding studies indexed in the WoS database and analyzing the most highly cited publications, this study offers valuable insights into the conceptual and empirical landscape of employer branding scholarship.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. It includes only studies indexed in the WoS database. Although the earliest conceptualization of employer branding dates back to 1996, the first related WoS record appears in 2000; thus, future research may benefit from incorporating additional databases to create a more comprehensive and inclusive dataset. Furthermore, relying solely on WoS citation metrics means that citation counts and rankings may differ when alternative indexing systems are considered. Future studies should address these factors to generate more robust and generalizable findings. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of employer branding literature by mapping its most influential works, identifying key thematic trends, and highlighting areas for future scholarly inquiry.

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