

Introduction

In contemporary conditions characterized by increasing complexity and global competition, universities have begun to place stronger emphasis on branding strategies as a means to address emerging international challenges ([Lomer et al., 2018](#)). A brand, which reflects an institution's reputation, constitutes a critical element that enhances the competitive capacity of higher education institutions ([Valitov, 2014](#)). Within an environment marked by intense rivalry, developing brand equity with distinctive value propositions has become a central strategic priority. The escalating demands of competition in the era of globalization also prompt universities to adopt marketing-oriented practices through the reinforcement of institutional branding ([Chapleo, 2015](#)). The formation of the brand represents a strategic initiative designed to strengthen the relationship between educational institutions and their student populations within the highly competitive realm of higher education ([Casidy, 2013](#)). A favorable reputation serves as a positive signal for prospective students and becomes a key differentiator during the university selection process. A strong brand image or institutional reputation is further associated with higher student satisfaction, which may encourage positive word-of-mouth communication and foster long-term loyalty to the alma mater. Changes in communication styles and differences in the characteristics of educational institutions encourage universities to turn to branding to survive and thrive ([Panda et al., 2018](#)).

The growing awareness of branding's importance in higher education stems partly from the limitations of earlier, relatively simple marketing communication tools and from the service-oriented nature of universities. Shifts in communication patterns and the distinct characteristics of educational institutions have encouraged universities to adopt branding as a strategy to maintain relevance and achieve sustainable development ([Pinar et al., 2014](#)). Within this context, brands function as an effective communication mechanism in the higher education sector ([Royo-Vela & Hünermund, 2016](#)). Moreover, brands embody consumers' assessments and emotional responses toward a product and its performance ([Kotler & Keller, 2006](#); [Zhang, 2015](#)), positioning branding as a strategic concern for universities in articulating

and conveying their unique differentiation ([Jevons, 2006](#); [Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016](#)).

Higher education, as a service-oriented institution, possesses characteristics that distinguish it from organizations in other sectors. Compared with the market for tangible goods, the service sector is inherently more complex and presents greater challenges due to its intangible nature, where evaluation prior to consumption is limited. Services rely heavily on experiential elements and the establishment of trust. Moreover, service-related decisions tend to carry higher levels of perceived risk because the quality of services is more difficult for consumers to assess before they are actually delivered ([Laing, 2002](#); [Lovelock & Patterson, 2015](#)). These distinctive features of services, when contrasted with goods, shape consumer considerations and decision-making processes in unique ways. In such contexts, brands play a crucial role by serving as evaluative cues that help reduce uncertainty and enhance consumer confidence when making choices ([Erdem & Swait, 1998](#); [Lassoued & Hobbs, 2015](#)). A brand functions as a signal or promise of value regarding the services an institution offers, thereby helping to mitigate risks associated with judgments about service quality, experience, and trustworthiness ([McDonald et al., 2001](#)). Beyond minimizing perceived risk, brands also operate as sources of information and indicators of value differentiation that simplify consumer decision-making ([Gabbott & Hogg, 1998](#)). Within higher education, branding becomes an important reference point for students and parents in identifying institutional offerings, ultimately serving as a key determinant in their selection decisions ([Sultan & Wong, 2012](#)). The growing recognition of brand strength as a decisive factor in decision-making within the service sector ([Turley & Moore, 1995](#); [Jeng, 2016](#)) underscores the relevance of brand equity as a central concept for understanding consumer behavior ([Vukasovic, 2014](#)).

The significance of brand equity research within the higher education sector is reflected in the growing body of literature that focuses on developing measurement frameworks and identifying key dimensions that support the formulation of effective branding strategies for universities ([Pinar et al., 2014](#)). The multifaceted nature of brand equity is further demonstrated by the wide range of scholarly

investigations devoted to this topic. Numerous studies have proposed various dimensions and measurement models aimed at conceptualizing brand equity in higher education – often referred to as the higher education brand ecosystem (Pinar et al., 2011; 2014; Girard & Pinar, 2021). Research in this domain also examines the functional role of brand equity, including its influence on fostering brand loyalty (Girard & Pinar, 2021). Strong brand equity has been shown to contribute significantly to the development of loyalty (Nam et al., 2011; Ebrahim, 2020), which in turn is crucial for enhancing global competitiveness among universities (Susilawati et al., 2021).

Loyalty is considered vital for organizations because it drives consumers' willingness to generate positive outcomes such as electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) (Casidy & Wymer, 2015; Carvalho et al., 2021), which is closely linked to brand performance and plays a substantive role in overall organizational success (Akbari et al., 2022). Understanding the attitudinal and behavioral mechanisms that underpin student engagement – including loyalty – provides valuable insights for higher education institutions (Buttle & Maklan, 2019). A strong institutional reputation can encourage positive recommendations and cultivate sustained brand loyalty among alumni (Panda et al., 2018).

Research on the antecedents of brand equity has also received substantial attention from scholars (Ng & Forbes, 2009; Waqas, 2022). In the context of higher education, brand equity is shaped in part by students' learning experiences (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Interactions and experiences associated with the institutional brand influence students' perceptions of brand equity, and empirical findings indicate that positive brand experience enhances these perceptions (Waqas, 2022). Furthermore, discussions regarding brand equity in higher education must also consider the evolving characteristics of the student population – for example, Generation Z, who generally display high levels of responsiveness and interactivity through social media platforms (Dobre et al., 2021; Król & Zdonek, 2021).

Higher education brand equity carries unique attributes that distinguish it from that of other types of organizations (Pinar et al., 2011; 2014; Girard & Pinar, 2021), indicating the need for further validation and comprehensive exami-

nation. The study of brand equity within higher education remains both complex and relatively underdeveloped, which makes it an increasingly appealing topic for continued scholarly inquiry. Existing research is constrained in several ways; for instance, many studies have focused solely on exploring the relationships and contributions of core and supporting brand equity components (Girard & Pinar, 2021). Moreover, most brand equity research has traditionally concentrated on the business sector (Rojas-Lamorenna et al., 2022), leaving investigations within the education sector comparatively limited (Rahmawati et al., 2022). Research specifically examining developmental trends in higher education brand equity also remains scarce (Alam & Saeed, 2016; Mourad et al., 2020). Bibliometric analyses related to branding are similarly limited, with studies such as Rahmawati et al. (2022) addressing branding in education only in a broad, generalized manner. The importance of conducting bibliometric analyses on branding within non-profit-oriented sectors, including education, is underscored by Sepulcri et al. (2020).

Objectives of the Study

Overall, this study aims to review the literature concerning the evolution and potential of higher education brand equity research. More specifically, the objectives of this literature review are formulated to address the following research questions:

1. What trends can be observed in the development of research on brand equity in higher education?
2. What potential avenues exist for future research related to brand equity in higher education?

Research Methods

The research conducted attempted to conduct a literature review. The research was conducted bibliometrically by referring to a reputable international journal publication database. The research population used in this study were all studies related to brand equity and higher education that had been published in reputable international journals. The sample in the study was a study in the form of a journal on brand equity and higher education that had been published in a reputable international journal in the years 2000-2023. The database that

was the source of the data was Scopus. The form of published data used was journals, excluding book chapters, books, and proceedings/conference papers. The data used were secondary in the form of articles published in reputable international journals. The keywords used were (university OR college OR higher AND education) AND “brand equity.” The data used as the unit of analysis was selected from data that had completeness from the title, author, journal name, and abstract. The data obtained was sorted, assessed, filtered, and analyzed according to the research plan. The data filtering process is shown in Figure 1, which shows several stages of data filtering, including aspects of inclusion and exclusion.

The data analysis methodology employed in this study is bibliometrics. Data is processed with the help of the VosViewer program.

Analysis and Interpretation

Based on the Scopus database search, 96 publication data were found related to the keywords (university OR college OR higher AND education) AND “brand equity.” There are 96 publication data consisting of 75 publication data in the form of articles, 7 data in the form of book chapters, 6 in the form of conference papers, 3 conference reviews, 2 books, and 1 review, editorial, and note each. Data based on publication type as a whole is shown in Figure 2.

Identification ↓	Data Search with keywords: University OR college OR higher AND education AND "brand equity" in the Scopus database (n=96)
Screening ↓	Excluded data: book chapter, editorial, erratum, note, book, proceeding/conference paper/conference review (n=21)
Eligibility ↓	Complete data: title, abstract, authors (n=75)
Included	Data that meet the criteria (n=75)

Figure 1: Data Screening Stages

Documents by type

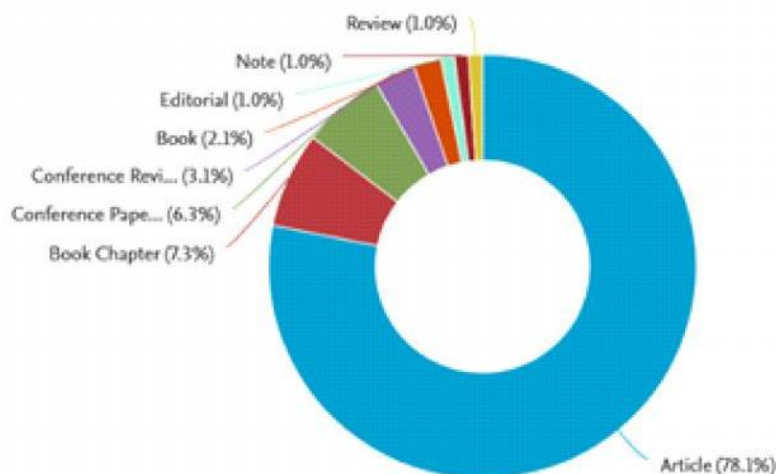


Figure 2: Document by Type

a) Trend of Publication

Through an examination of brand equity publication data in the higher education context spanning from 2008 to 2024, a total of 96 documents were amassed, including articles, conference papers, book chapters, conference reviews, books, reviews, editorials, and notes. The trend results are depicted in the following graph:

Based on Figure 3, the trend of publications from 2008 to July 2024 shows an increasing trend, with the most significant number of publications in

2020, with 15 publication documents. The direction of the publication trend tends to increase from 2008 to 2024, although it looks fluctuating. This data shows an increase in academic attention regarding brand equity for universities, so this study is interesting. When viewed based on the subject of the study of the existing publication trend, the dominant focus of the study is in the field of business management and accounting, namely 56 documents (32.9%), followed by studies in the field of social sciences, namely 45 documents (26.5%) and the field of computer science as many as 14 documents (8.2%) as shown in Figure 4.

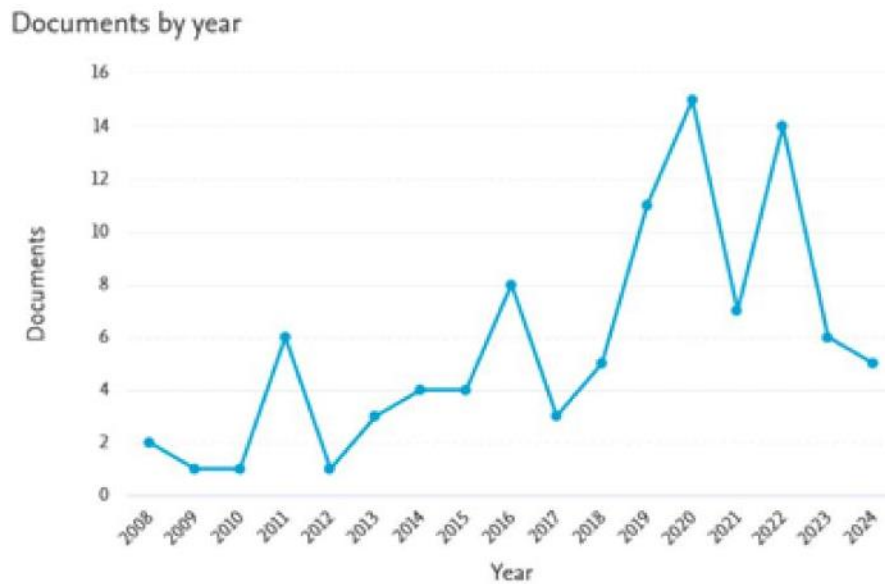


Figure 3: Publication Trends

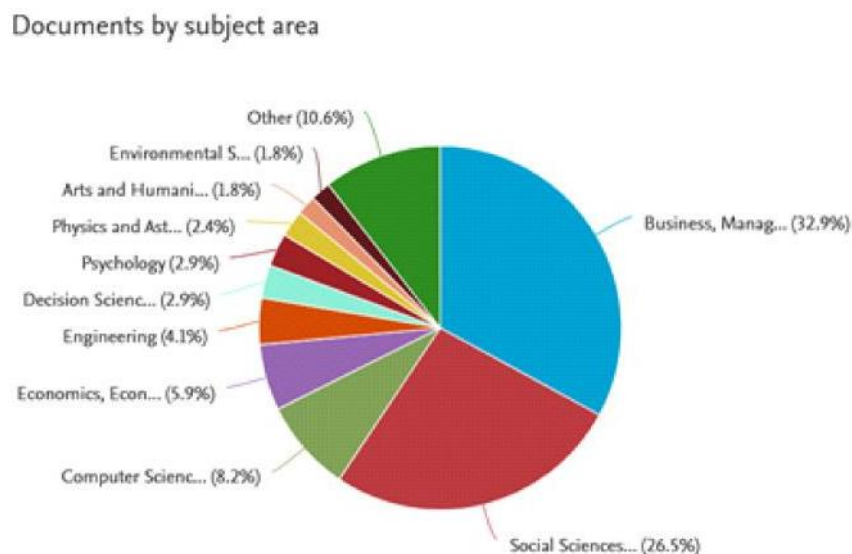


Figure 4: Document by Subject Area

b) Leading Sources Publications

A significant contribution of bibliometric analysis is its ability to furnish insights regarding the most prolific sources. Prominent sources and publications yield valuable information for researchers and associated stakeholders, facilitating further inquiry into the discourse surrounding brand equity within higher education. Data pertaining to the foremost leading sources of publications from 2008 to 2024 is organized as follows.

Based on Figure 5, the top leading sources publications showing journals that produced articles with more than 10 documents from 2008 to July 2024, the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education is ranked first, producing a total of 14 documents with 3 article documents in 2020 with a Citescore of 7.8, SJR 0.608 and SNIP 1.485. This journal plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of scholarly articles related to brand equity in higher education. The journal is a journal published by Routledge, which is in quartile 2 with educational studies. Other journals that have made major contributions with a record of producing publication documents are the International Journal of Educational Management, with 6 documents, Developments in Marketing Science Proceedings

of the Academy of Marketing Science, which produced 5 documents, Frontiers of Business Research in China, with 3 documents, and Communications in Computer and Information Science, with 2 documents.

Another contribution from bibliometric analysis is providing information about sources by affiliation. Based on the data considering documents produced by more than 15 affiliates, 10 affiliates were found, dominated by Cairo University, Valparaíso University, Penn State Altoona, and RMIT University Vietnam, with 4 documents each. University of Northumbria, International Islamic University Malaysia, The American University in Cairo, AUC School of Business, and Faculty of Commerce each contributed 3 documents. The University of Cape Town produced 2 documents, as shown in Figure 6.

Other helpful information is related to contributions based on regions or countries that contributed published documents related to brand equity studies in higher education from 2008 to July 2024, namely the United States, the Netherlands, Malaysia, China, India, Vietnam, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Australia, Spain, Taiwan, Pakistan, and South Africa. The three countries that mostly pay

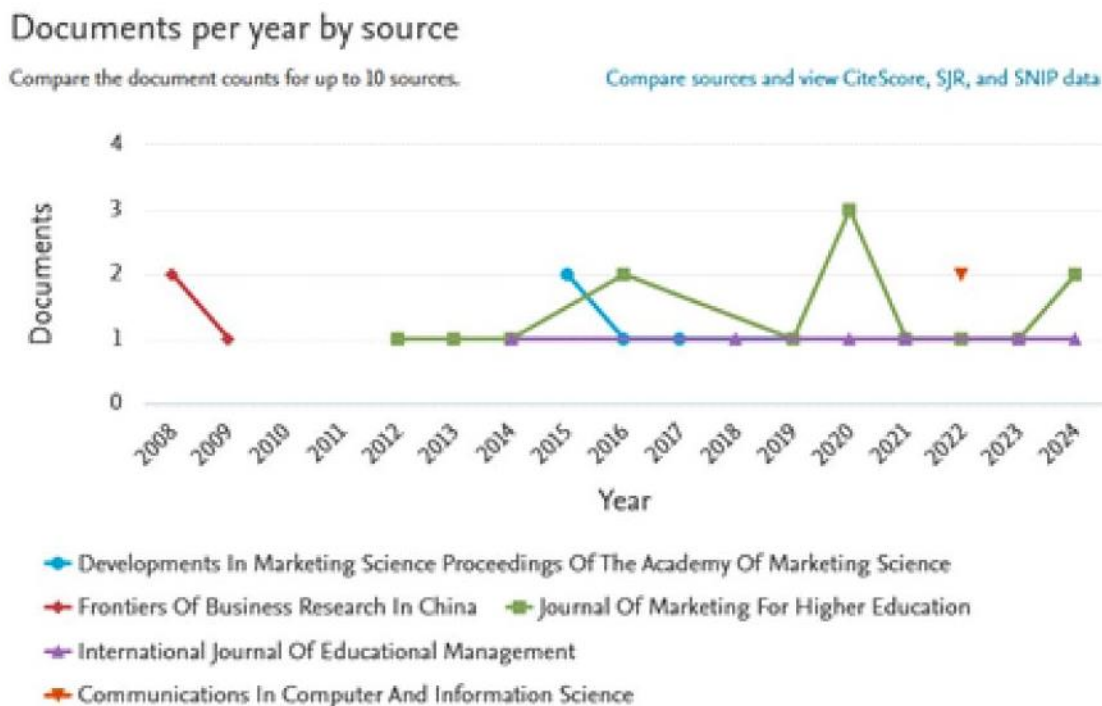


Figure 5: Top Leading Sources Publication

Documents by affiliation

Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

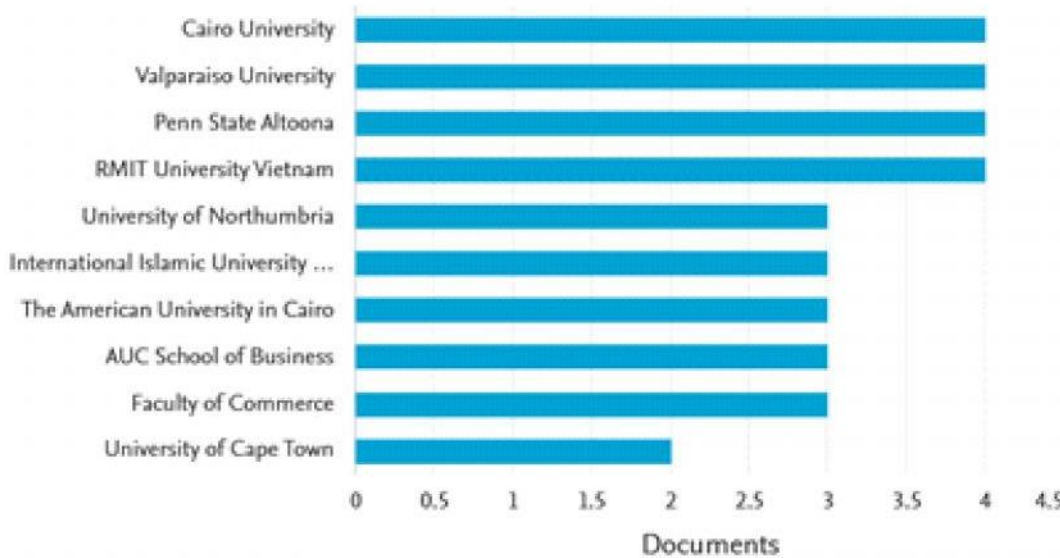


Figure 6: Document by Affiliation

attention to brand equity studies in higher education are the United States, with 16 documents. The Netherlands contributed 15 documents, and Malaysia 10 documents. The following countries that also contributed to studies in the field of the higher education brand equity are

China with 9 documents, India and Vietnam with 7 documents, Egypt and Indonesia with 6 documents, Turkey with 5 documents, Australia, Spain, and Taiwan with 4 documents, Pakistan and South Africa with 3 documents, as shown in Figure 7.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

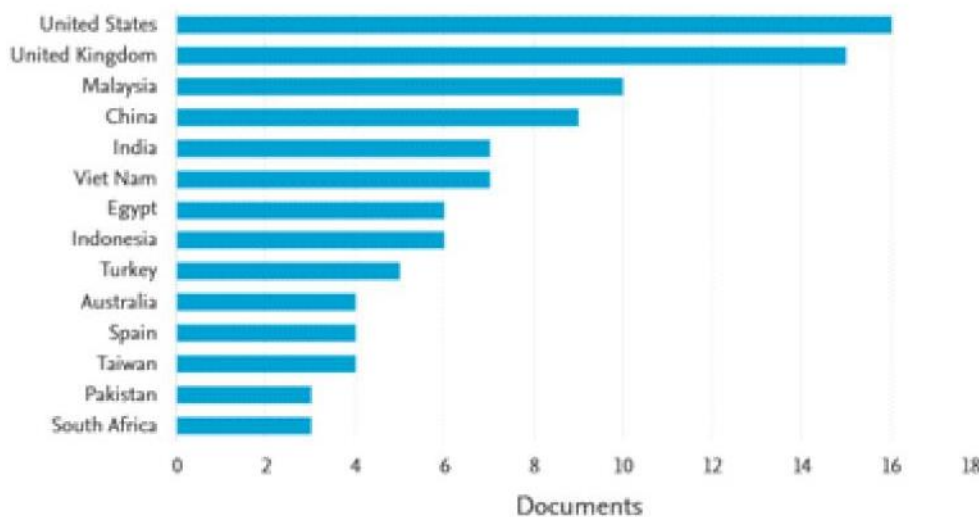


Figure 7: Document by Territory

c) Most Productive Authors

The most prolific authors are those who demonstrate high productivity in generating scholarly papers and receiving citations from their peers. An overview of authors who exhibit notable productivity in the realm of brand equity research within higher education is illustrated in Figure 8. The following information is related to data on ownership of publication documents or authors who have made major contributions by considering the topic of brand equity studies in higher education, or the most productive author. Authors who have contributed to this study are determined based on ownership of publication documents

related to this. Authors who have made major contributions to this study are Girard, T; Kortam, W; Noyak, R; Perera, C. H, and Pinar, M, who contributed 4 publication documents each. Other authors who also have contributions related to brand equity studies in higher education are Mourad, M; Aaker, D.A; Alamanos, E; Ali, N and Awan, M.A.

Based on co-authorship data on brand equity studies in universities, it was identified that there were 3 co-authorship groups formed based on the pattern of cooperation networks between authors, as shown in Figure 9. The first group consists of Wael Kortam (Professor of Marketing, Cairo

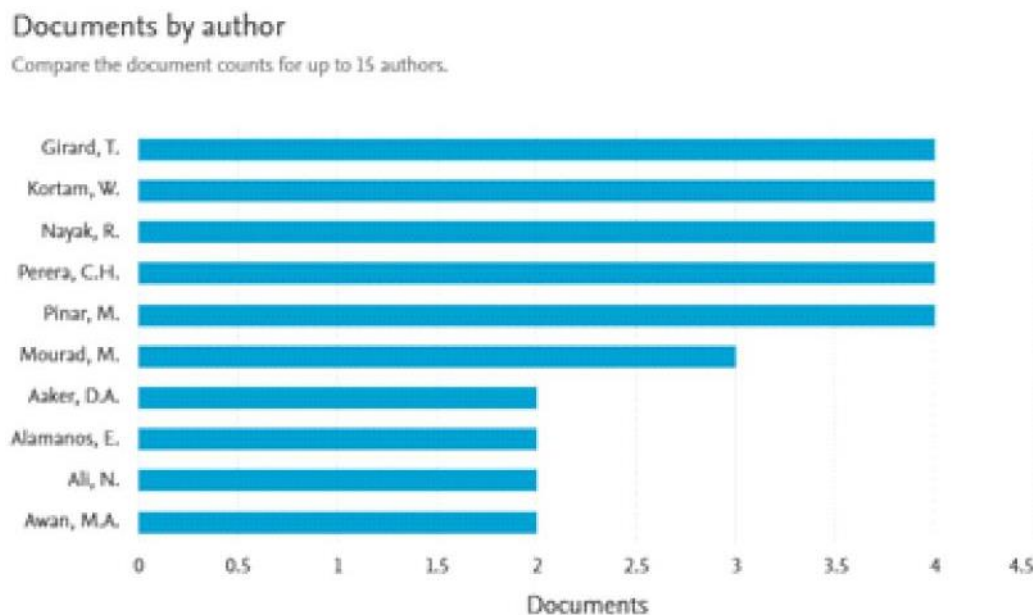


Figure 8: Most Productive Authors

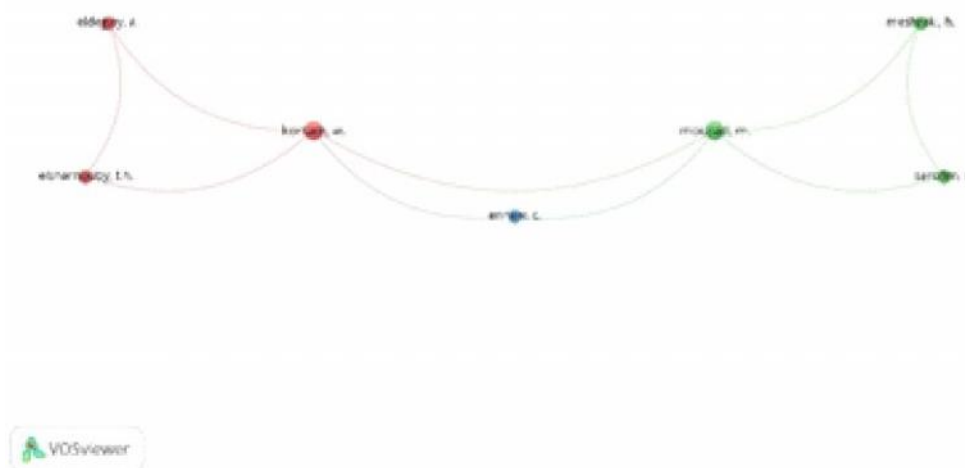


Figure 9: Co-Authorship

University, Egypt), Ahmed Eldegwy (Department of Management Sciences, October University for Modern Sciences and Arts, Giza, Egypt) and Tamer Elsharnouby (Qatar University). The next group is Wael Kortam (Cairo University, Egypt), Christine Ennew (University of Warwick), and Maha Mourad (The American University in Cairo). The third group is Maha Mourad (The American University in Cairo), Hakim Meshreki (American University in Cairo), and Samer Sarofim (California State University – Fresno). Based on the co-authorship network, it can be seen that the authors who have a role in connecting the research groups are Wael Kortam (Cairo University, Egypt) and Maha Mourad (The American University in Cairo).

d) Most Cited Publication

The most cited paper shows the one that is most often used as a reference in higher education brand equity studies. The results of the most cited paper are obtained from the Scopus database, which is presented in Table 1.

According to tracking data, it is established that the article titled “The role of brand attachment strength in higher education” has the most citations (130 citations). This paper was published in the *Journal of Business Research*, 2016, 69(8), pp. 3049-3057. The next most cited paper is entitled “Projecting corporate brand image and behavioral response in business schools: Cognitive or affective brand attributes?” with citations of 111. This paper was published in the *Journal of Business Research*, 2014, 67(11), pp. 2324-2336. The third most cited paper is entitled “Brand equity in higher education,” with citations of 99. This paper was published in *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 2011, 29(4), pp. 403-420.

d) Theme Co-occurrence Network of Publication

The theme co-occurrence network analysis has a contribution related to the relevance of the main topic or the most frequently studied topic to minor aspects of the topic that still have research opportunities. This analysis uses co-occurrence on keywords and titles of articles discussing brand equity in higher education. The occurrence value and total link strength are shown in Table 2. The theme of brand equity has an occurrence value of 33 with a total link strength of 7. The university branding theme has an occurrence value of 16 with

a total link strength of 4. The higher education theme has an occurrence value of 14 with a total link strength of 3. The themes related to these keywords are dominant in brand equity studies in higher education. Several themes are seen from keywords that have quite a high link strength but are still rarely raised as research themes, including brand awareness, higher education marketing, decision-making process, higher education institution, inbound marketing, marketing communication, brand equity scale, co-curricular activities, and emerging markets. These themes can be an opportunity to be explored widely and deeply by subsequent researchers related to brand equity studies in higher education.

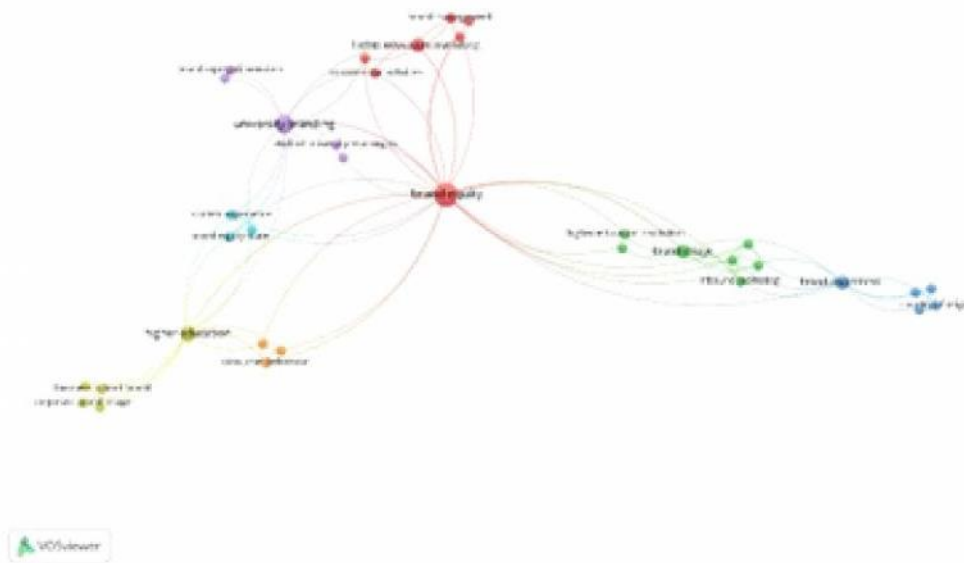
In general, the equity theme associated with higher education issues forms 7 theme clusters containing several keywords, as depicted in Figure 10. The first cluster consists of brand equity, brand management, co-curricular activities, higher education management, higher education marketing, mixed research approach, and university social augmentation. The second cluster consists of brand attachment strength, brand image, decision-making process, higher education institutional, inbound marketing, and marketing communication. The third cluster consists of brand awareness, brand co-recognition, country of origin, cross-classified hierarchical, and international marketing. The fourth cluster consists of business school brand, consumer loyalty attitude, corporate brand image, higher education, and word of mouth. The fifth cluster consists of the brand equity dimension, higher education branding, student university learning, university brand equity, and university branding. The sixth cluster consists of brand equity scale, branding, and student experience. The last cluster consists of consumer behavior, emerging markets, and services marketing. Each cluster has major and minor themes that are connected based on the network of connections between themes. Based on the aspect of topic novelty seen from the development of the year, it can be traced in Figure 11. The movement of themes from 2012 to 2020 shows new themes, namely brand equity dimension, higher education marketing, and brand management. Minor themes that have the opportunity to be studied related to brand equity studies in higher education are brand awareness, higher education marketing, decision-making process, higher education institution, inbound marketing,

Table No 1: Most Cited Paper

Rank	Paper	Sources	Citations
1	The role of brand attachment strength in higher education	<i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 2016, 69(8), pp. 3049-3057	130
2	Projecting corporate brand image and behavioral response in business schools: Cognitive or affective brand attributes?	<i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 2014, 67(11), pp. 2324-2336	111
3	Brand equity in higher education	<i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i> 2011, 29(4), pp. 403-420	99
4	University brand equity: An empirical investigation of its dimensions	<i>International Journal of Educational Management</i> , 2014, 28(6), pp. 616-634	60
5	How branding process activities impact brand equity within Higher Education Institutions	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2014, 24(1), pp. 1-10	44
6	How sociable is your university brand? An empirical investigation of university social augmenters' brand equity	<i>International Journal of Educational Management</i> , 2018, 32(5), pp. 912-930	42
7	Effects of inbound marketing communications on HEIs' brand equity: The mediating role of the student's decision-making process. An exploratory research	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2016, 26(2), pp. 143-167	42
8	The impact of brand equity dimensions on university reputation: An empirical study of Georgian higher education	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2020, 30(2), pp. 239-255	36
9	Brand equity in higher education: Comparative analysis	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i> , 2020, 45(1), pp. 209-231	35
10	Towards an integrative framework of brand country of origin recognition determinants: A cross-classified hierarchical model	<i>International Marketing Review</i> , 2011, 28(6), pp. 530-558	35
11	Examining the relationship between brand equity dimensions and university brand equity: An empirical study in Turkey	<i>International Journal of Educational Management</i> , 2020, 34(7), pp. 1119-1141	33
12	Influence of country image on country brand equity: Application to higher education services	<i>International Marketing Review</i> , 2016, 33(5), pp. 691-714	32
13	Measuring consumer-based brand equity for Indian business schools	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2013, 23(2), pp. 175-203	31
14	Understanding the importance of eWOM on Higher Education	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2020, pp. 1-19	28
15	Role of brand experience and brand affect in creating brand engagement: a case of higher education institutions (HEIs)	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i> , 2021, 31(1), pp. 107-135	27

Table 2: Keywords Related Publication

Rank	Keywords	Occurances	Total link strength
1	Brand equity	7	33
2	University branding	4	16
3	Higher education	3	14
4	Brand awareness	2	10
5	Higher education marketing	2	9
6	Decision making process	1	6
7	Higher education institution	1	6
8	Inbound marketing	1	6
9	Marketing communication	1	6
10	Brand equity scale	1	5
11	Co-curricular activities	1	5
12	Emerging markets	1	5

**Figure 10: Theme Network of Publication**

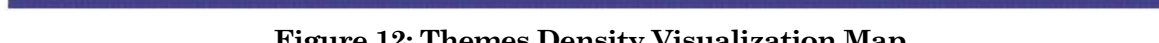
marketing communication, brand equity scale, co-curricular activities, and emerging markets. This description can also be seen from the density map level of each theme, as depicted in Figure 12.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Bibliometric analysis serves a pivotal function in identifying and categorizing scholarly investigations within a specific domain, while also delineating avenues for subsequent research

endeavors. This study delineates various aspects pertaining to the evolution of research, sources of journals, contributing authors, thematic elements relative to extant research, and potential avenues for future inquiry. Through bibliometric analysis utilizing the Scopus database concerning studies on brand equity within higher education, one may infer that the trajectory of research development in this area demonstrates a propensity for growth, albeit with observable fluctuations. When viewed

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based on the subject of the study from the existing publication trend, the dominant focus of the study is in the fields of business management and accounting. The theme of brand equity in higher education forms 7 theme clusters that contain several keywords. The first cluster is higher education brand management, consisting of brand equity, brand management, co-curricular activities, higher education management, higher education marketing, mixed research approach, and university social augmentation. The second cluster is brand communication management, consisting of brand attachment strength, brand image, decision-making process, higher education institutions, inbound marketing, and marketing communication. The third cluster is building brand awareness and internationalization consisting of brand awareness, brand co-recognition, country of origin, cross-classified hierarchical, and international marketing. The fourth cluster is building brand loyalty, consisting of business school brand, consumer loyalty attitude, corporate brand image, higher education, and word of mouth. The fifth cluster is the dimension of university brand equity, consisting of brand equity dimension, higher education branding, student university learning, university brand equity, and university branding. The sixth cluster measures brand equity from the student aspect, consisting of brand equity scale, branding, and student experience. The last cluster is consumer behavior in developing markets, consisting of consumer behavior, emerging markets, and services marketing. The theme cluster can be part of scientific development or research based on the clusters formed.

Based on the analysis of themes formed in seven clusters and research theme opportunities that have strong connections between themes but are still rarely studied or minor, namely brand awareness, higher education marketing, decision-making process, higher education institution, inbound marketing, marketing communication, brand equity scale, co-curricular activities and emerging markets that are related to university brand equity. Prospective research may delve into these thematic areas. The discourse presented in this paper is confined to the examination of brand equity within the context of higher education, thereby inviting further exploration of additional dimensions with greater depth, such as the

consideration of geographical and socio-economic factors that influence the formation of brand equity. There is a requisite for continued bibliometric research to update or enhance the existing analysis.

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