Tracing the Evolution of the Self-Brand Connection Concept in Global Marketing Research: A Bibliometric Perspective

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This paper examines the evolution of the self-brand connection concept in global marketing research by adopting a bibliometric approach. The current study maps the important relationships of SBC with related concepts like brand loyalty, brand love, social media, and customer engagement in order to show how SBC has taken a central position in understanding the consumer-brand relationship. Bibliometric methods like co-citation, co-authorship, and keyword analysis will be used to disclose the intellectual structures and thematic trends over time. The findings show that the SBC concept has emerged and further developed with advances in digital engagement and social media, reflecting the greater importance of online platforms in shaping consumer emotions and behaviors. This research contributes to a better theoretical and practical understanding since the study gives a comprehensive overview of SBC literature and indicates emerging areas for future research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary marketing scholarship, the concept of the self has emerged as a central lens through which consumer behavior is understood [1]. Early marketing theories predominantly emphasized functional attributes, price mechanisms, and rational decision-making processes [2]. However, as markets became increasingly saturated and competitive, researchers began to recognize that consumers do not merely purchase products for utilitarian purposes but also for symbolic and expressive reasons. Brands started to function as carriers of meaning, enabling individuals to communicate identity, values, and social belonging [3]. This shift marked a broader movement toward consumer-centric paradigms, where psychological, sociological, and cultural dimensions of consumption gained prominence [4], [5].

Within this evolving discourse, the self-brand connection (SBC) concept has gained significant attention as a framework to explain how consumers integrate brands into their self-concepts [6]–[8]. The SBC construct describes the extent to which a brand becomes linked to an individual's identity, reflecting both personal and social dimensions of the self [9], [10]. When consumers perceive a strong alignment between a brand and their self-image, they are more likely to exhibit favorable attitudes, emotional attachment, and long-term loyalty [11], [12]. As a result, SBC has become a critical explanatory

variable in studies examining brand equity, brand love, engagement, and advocacy [13], [14].

The globalization of markets has further amplified the relevance of the self-brand connection concept [6], [15]. As brands increasingly operate across national and cultural boundaries, understanding how consumers from different cultural contexts relate brands to their sense of self has become essential [16]. Cultural values, social norms, and identity structures influence how individuals interpret brand meanings and incorporate them into their self-concepts. Consequently, global marketing research has expanded the SBC framework to include cross-cultural comparisons, international branding strategies, and the interplay between global and local brand identities [17], [18].

Over time, the SBC concept has evolved alongside methodological and theoretical advancements in marketing research. Early studies primarily relied on survey-based approaches and individual-level analyses, focusing on the strength of self-brand associations. More recent research has adopted diverse perspectives, integrating theories from psychology, sociology, and consumer culture theory. Advances in data analytics and digital platforms have also enabled scholars to explore SBC in online environments, social media contexts, and virtual brand communities. This evolution reflects not only the growing complexity of consumer–brand relationships but also the increasing interdisciplinarity of global marketing research [19].

Given the rapid expansion of SBC-related studies across journals, regions, and time periods, there is a growing need to systematically map and evaluate the intellectual structure of this research domain. Bibliometric analysis offers a powerful methodological approach for examining the development of academic fields by quantitatively analyzing publication patterns, citation networks, and thematic trends. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, bibliometric studies enable researchers to identify influential authors, foundational works, collaborative networks, and emerging research streams in an objective and replicable manner. Applying a bibliometric perspective to the SBC literature can therefore provide valuable insights into how the concept has evolved, diffused globally, and shaped marketing scholarship over time [20].

Despite the substantial growth of literature on self-brand connection in global marketing research, existing studies remain fragmented and dispersed across multiple theoretical traditions, methodologies, and cultural contexts [21], [22]. While prior reviews have addressed specific aspects of consumer–brand relationships, there is a lack of comprehensive bibliometric analysis that traces the historical evolution, intellectual foundations, and global research patterns of the SBC concept. This fragmentation makes it difficult for scholars to fully understand the conceptual trajectory of SBC, identify dominant and emerging themes, and recognize gaps that warrant future investigation. Consequently, a systematic bibliometric examination is needed to synthesize the accumulated knowledge and provide a coherent overview of the field. The objective of this study is to trace the evolution of the self-brand connection concept in global marketing research through a bibliometric perspective.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a bibliometric research design to systematically examine the evolution of the self-brand connection concept in global marketing research. Bibliometric analysis is particularly suitable for mapping the intellectual structure and development of a research field through quantitative examination of academic publications and citation patterns. The dataset for this study was compiled from a major academic database widely recognized for its comprehensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed journals in marketing, management, and related social sciences (Scopus). Publications were retrieved using carefully selected keywords related to the self-brand connection concept, including variations and

closely associated terms, to ensure broad yet relevant coverage. Only journal articles written in English were included to maintain consistency and comparability across sources.

The data collection process involved several screening and refinement stages. Initially, duplicate records and non-relevant documents such as editorials, book reviews, and conference proceedings were excluded. The final dataset was then exported with complete bibliographic information, including authors, titles, abstracts, keywords, citations, and publication years. Co-authorship and country-level analyses were conducted to examine collaboration networks and the global distribution of self-brand connection research.

To further explore the intellectual and thematic structure of the literature, this study employed science mapping techniques, including co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence analyses. These techniques enable the identification of foundational theories, research clusters, and emerging themes related to the self-brand connection concept. VOSviewer was used to generate network maps that illustrate relationships among authors, documents, and keywords, thereby facilitating interpretation of complex bibliometric relationships.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

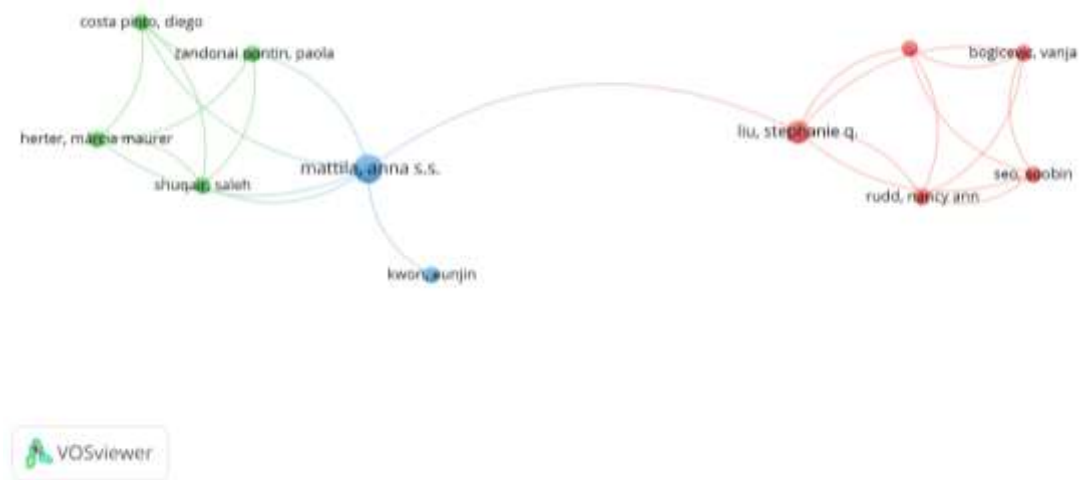### 3.1 Co-Authorship Analysis (Author, Affiliation, and Country)

Figure 1. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 describes a bibliometric study of the relationship of authors to each other in a co-authorship network perhaps by using VOSviewer visualization technique. It can be observed that several authors in the figure are linked by lines representing the co-authorship of various publication outputs by the various authors shown in the network. The nodes in the diagrams represent the authors themselves with their sizes representing how frequent or important they are in the network. The different colors of the nodes show distinctions in the teams of authors who are more related to each other than to others in the network. In the blue-colored cluster authors like "Mattila, Anna S.S." are associated with other authors in the vicinity like "Herter, Marcia Maurer," "Shuqail, Saleh," while in the red-colored cluster "Liu, Stephanie Q." authors like "Rudd, Nancy Ann," are associated with others in the vicinity.
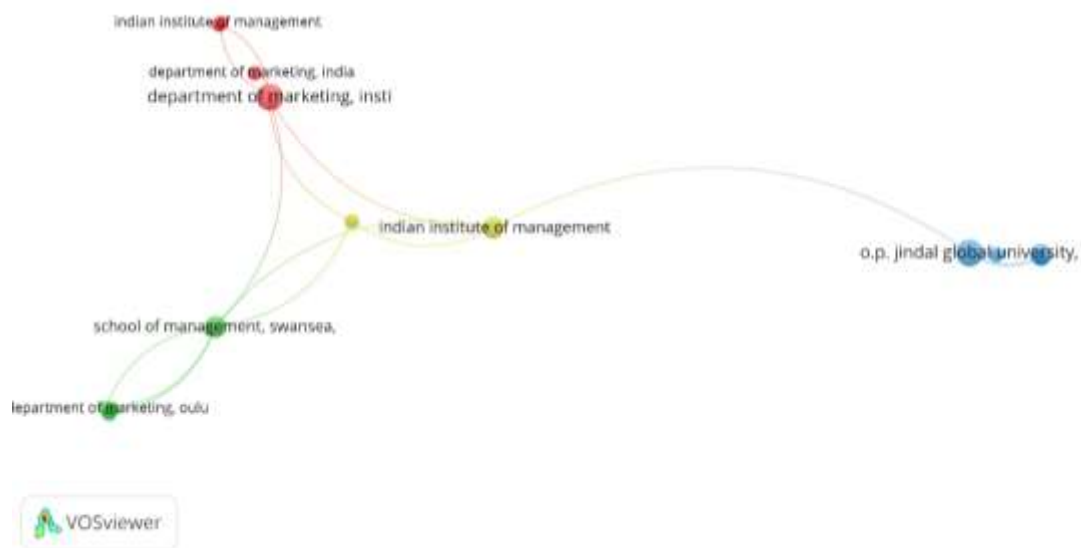
Figure 2. Affiliation Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 illustrates the institutional collaboration of a bibliometric analysis in marketing research through the network of academic institutions. The nodes in the diagram represent different institutions. The lines between them show co-authorship or, rather, research collaborations. The color coding denotes clusters of highly connected institutions. The cluster in red is grouped around the "Department of Marketing, India," and this clearly denotes a number of strong collaborations within this group, including a number of links with the "Indian Institute of Management." Other clusters include "O.P. Jindal Global University" within the blue cluster and "School of Management, Swansea" within the green cluster, hence establishing their respective collaborations. The connections between the nodes show the span of research partners in marketing across different global regions, including those from India, Europe, and elsewhere. The layout reflects the level of integration and shared research output among these different institutions, with stronger ties indicated by closer proximity and thicker lines.
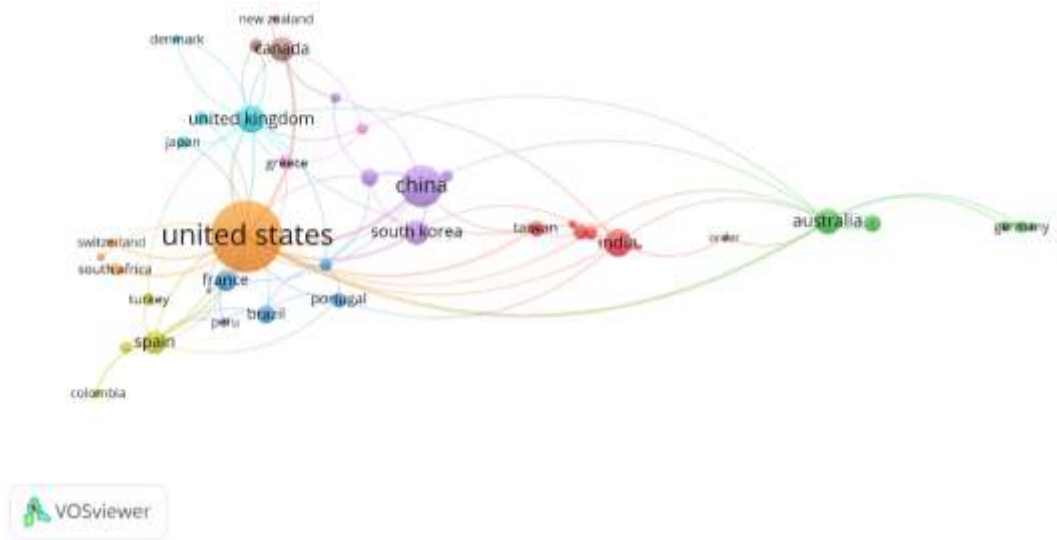

Figure 3. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 shows a bibliometric graph of international collaboration in research, represented in a diagram featuring connections among various nations. This graph shows that each node represents a country, and its size is probably proportional to a country's centralness or dominance in international research collaboration networks. Links among these nodes symbolize research collaboration, with the intensity of these links denoting aspects of these research linkages. The United States, denoted in orange color, is identified as a node that has more links to other nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil, and Japan, symbolizing, in this case, strong research collaboration networks. Other highly dominant nodes include China, India, and Australia, denoted in various colors, symbolizing that these nations have strong research collaboration networks that are distinguished in their own clusters in this diagram. This graph indicates international research distribution covering different continents like Europe, Asia, or Americas, among others.

3.2 Citation Analysis by Number of Citations

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title
2484	[23]	Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation
1435	[24]	Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning
1415	[25]	Brand love
1156	[26]	You Are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumers' Connections to Brands
998	[27]	Narrative Processing: Building Consumer Connections to Brands
671	[28]	The importance of a general measure of brand engagement on market behavior: Development and validation of a scale
425	[29]	Customer engagement and the relationship between involvement, engagement, self-brand connection and brand usage intent
396	[30]	The development of self-brand connections in children and adolescents
326	[31]	Are all out-groups created equal? Consumer identity and dissociative influence
267	[32]	Airbnb: Online targeted advertising, sense of power, and consumer decisions

Source: Scopus, 2026

Table 1 lists the most cited articles related to consumer and brand relationships and engagement. The most cited article by L.D. Hollebeek, M.S. Glynn, and R.J. Brodie (citations = 2484) was the most prominent in terms of influence and related to the conceptualization and validation of consumer brand engagement on social media platforms. Other influential articles related to the subject include that on self-construal and brand meaning by authors J.E. Escalas and J.R. Bettman (citations = 1435) and on "brand love" by R. Batra, A. Ahuvia, and R.P. Bagozzi (citations = 1415). The other articles in Table 1 include those related to consumer relationships and brands through reference groups, narrative processing, and brand usage intentions. Of particular attention are the articles by J.E. Escalas related to the impact of reference groups on consumer behavior (citations = 1156) and narrative processing on consumer behavior as well (citations = 998), which have played an important part in understanding consumer and brand relationships. The development of self-brand relationships in children and the impact of internet advertisements on consumer behavior

and decision-making (citations = 267) indicate that this subject matter encompasses many areas of study.

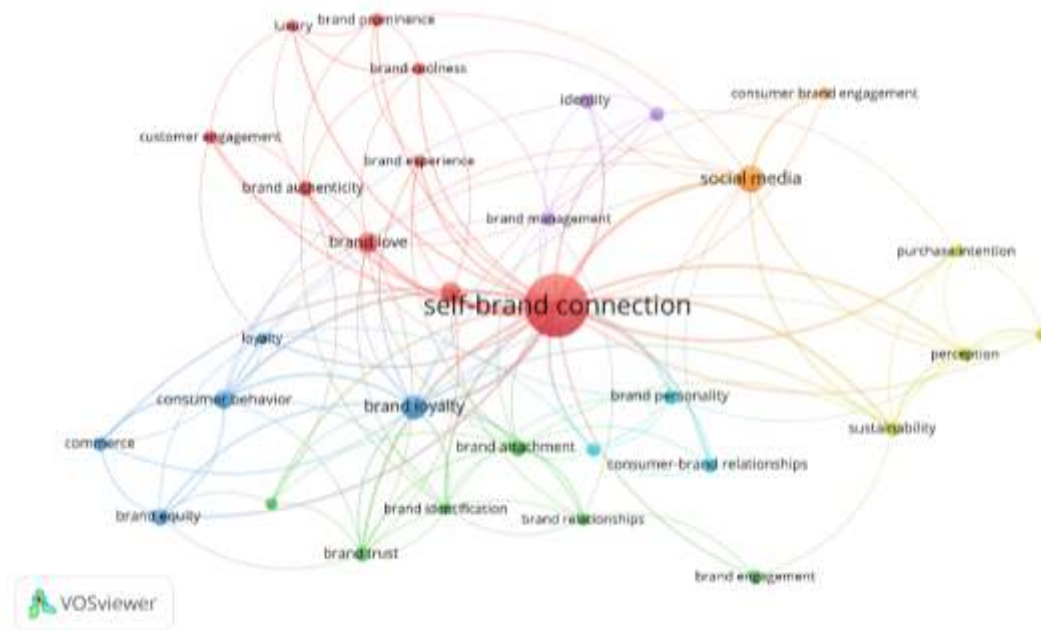### 3.3 *Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis*

Figure 4. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 below shows a bibliometric relationship graph of the concepts surrounding the 'self-brand connection' terminology studied in the literature. The major focus of the study, conceptualized in the central circle of the relationship graph, is the term "self-brand connection." The relationship between the concepts and the central circle of "self-brand connection" indicates the relationship of the study with the surrounding concepts, thus showing the relevance of the study in the field of consumer behavior and brand connection concepts, including the importance of the study in the study of consumer perceptions of brand connections, including love. The major cluster alongside the terminology of "self-brand connection" includes the study of "brand love." This indicates the relationship of the study with the importance of the connection of the brand with the love of the consumer, thus illustrating the importance of the study of consumer perceptions of brand love in the study of consumer behavior concepts in the

market. The red cluster of the relationship graphical representation includes concepts such as "brand experience," "brand authenticity," and "brand coolness."

The figure further points out the role of "social media" and "consumer brand engagement," with both having close relations to "self-brand connection." In other words, contemporary research focuses on how digital platforms and social media influence the formation and intensity of self-brand connections. The cluster of social media, based on consumer engagement and purchase intention, indicates a growth in the importance of online environments for brand-consumer relationships. These connections point out that, through the use of social media platforms, brands are increasingly establishing and enhancing emotional bonding with their consumers. In the green cluster, such terms as "brand loyalty," "consumer behavior," and "brand trust" indicate the importance of the basis in consumer-brand relationships. These linkages underscore

how self-brand connection plays a role in developing long-term loyalty and trust- one that is necessary in maintaining enduring relationships with brands. From this cluster, it emerges that emotional attachment and loyalty to a brand are intimately intertwined with ways in which consumers connect their self-identities with the choice of brands.

The other clusters in the above figure include themes such as "brand equity," "brand management," and

"sustainability." In these themes, self-brand connection plays a crucial role in brand management. The clusters are complemented by the yellow one, which consists of themes such as "perception" and "purchase intention." The yellow cluster therefore supports the idea that self-brand connection has a positive impact on consumers' perception of a brand. The above figure presents a clear overview of the academic field of self-brand connection.
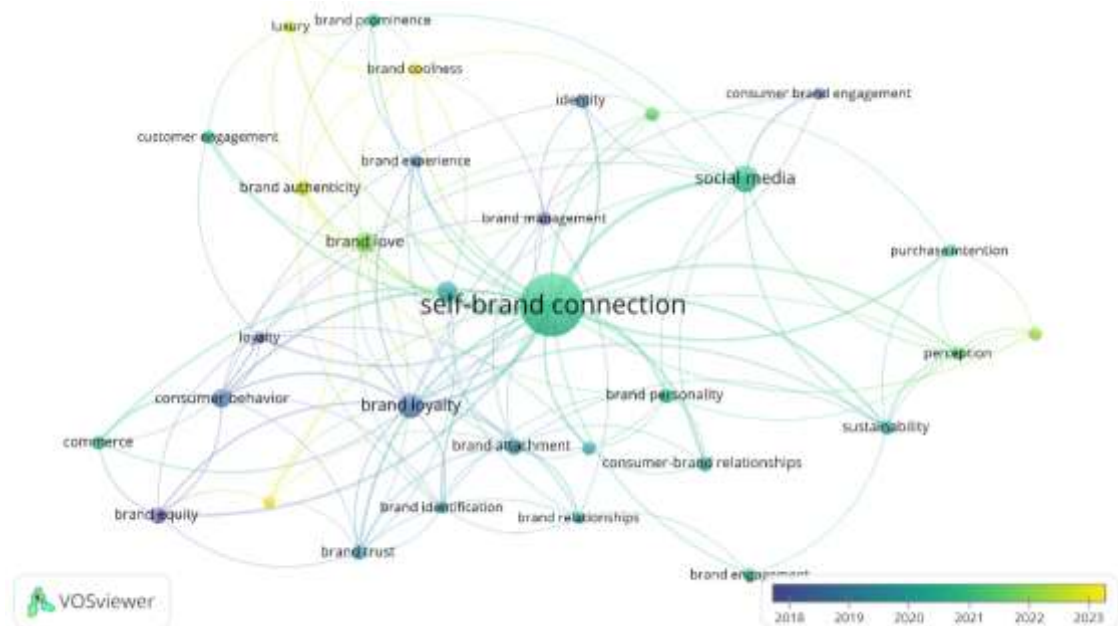

Figure 5. Overlay Visualization
Source; Data Analysis

Figure 5 above depicts a bibliometric network that illustrates the relationships between various concepts in academic research on "self-brand connection." The central node "self-brand connection" is connected with several related terms, while the lines between nodes illustrate the strength of their association. The color gradient used in this figure moves from yellow to blue, showing the evolution of these concepts over time. Yellow is used to represent the earlier years, 2018, while blue represents the more recent years of research, 2023. The closeness of the terms to each other would suggest that some concepts have become increasingly relevant and are researched more in recent literature. This

figure shows the focus of research has been moving toward digital and consumer engagement aspects. Terms such as "social media," "consumer brand engagement," and "purchase intention" have become more central in recent years. Green and blue nodes appeared, which were connected to "self-brand connection," showing that social media and consumer engagement were the key focuses of modern marketing research. This suggests that online platforms are increasingly important in influencing consumer-brand relationships and digital media is being used to enhance self-brand connections. Concepts such as "brand love" and "brand experience" also show close connections, reflecting the

emotional and experiential aspects of consumer-brand interactions that have been increasingly explored in recent studies. Additionally, older themes like "brand loyalty," "consumer behavior," and "brand trust" are still relevant but appear to be less dominant in more recent research. These terms are shown in lighter shades of blue and purple, indicating that while they remain essential to the understanding of consumer-brand dynamics, they have been overshadowed by newer concepts like "brand authenticity" and "brand management."
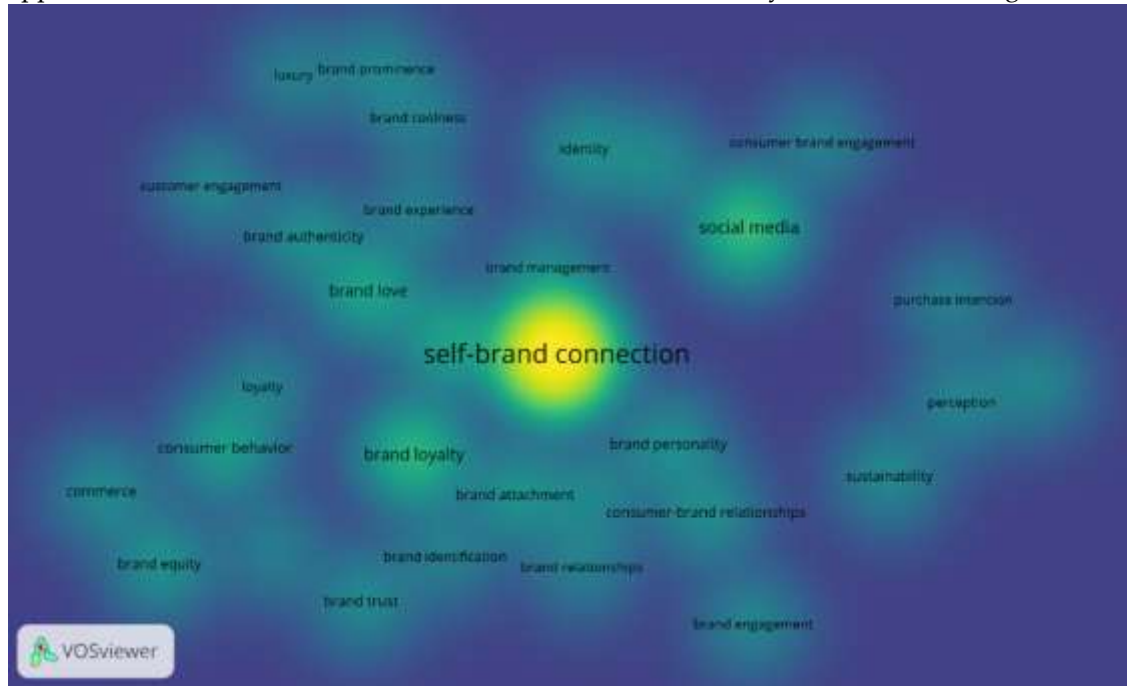

Figure 6. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 6 is a heatmap presentation of connections between different concepts in self-brand connection studies, done through bibliometrics. The core node "self-brand connection" is colored bright yellow, which represents its core importance and strong connections to other concepts in these studies. Other concepts like "brand love," "social media," "consumer brand engagement," and "brand loyalty" are highly related to the core idea, which is shown in bright green areas. The brightness in color is determined by intensity in connection strength, with bright colors like green symbolizing strong connections in these concepts. This implies that these are among the most discussed variables in relation to self-brand connection, which enhances their need in modern branding research. Figure 6 further shows that there is a broad base for research concepts associated with self-brand connection, ranging from emotional connections (e.g., "brand loyalty," "brand attachment") to consumer behavior (e.g., "purchase intention," "consumer-brand relationships"). It also encompasses online connections in the likes of "social media" platforms and "brand engagement." Other concepts like "brand authenticity," "brand experience," or "sustainability" are shown in areas that are moderately bright; hence, they are important but slightly less central in these research concepts.

3.4 Discussion

a. Practical Implications

The results obtained from the study have important practical implications for brand managers and marketers wanting to enhance the relationships that consumers have with brands. Notably, through the

comprehension of the ever-evolving dimension of the "self-brand association," companies will be better equipped to meet the demands of consumers and establish deeper levels of associations that cognitively and emotionally connect consumers and brands. Furthermore, the ever-rising popularity and importance of digital technology, especially social networking, imply that brands will have to center on interacting with consumers through personal and interactive content on social networking sites, among other digital platforms.

b. Theoretical Contribution

The proposed research makes a theoretical contribution to the development of self-brand connection by examining its relationships with other prominent concepts such as consumer loyalty, consumer behavior, and brand engagement. It also makes a theoretical contribution to existing literature on consumer relationships with brands by considering contemporary variables such as social media and digital engagement, which have become an essential aspect of the new branding environment. The application of a network paradigm in this proposed research creates a new mean of exploring the relationships between self-brand connection with other branding concepts, giving academics a holistic view of the interdisciplinary nature of this area of study. Additionally, it can be a premise for future research investigations that focus on how self-brand connection might develop based on changes in consumer behaviors and technological developments.

c. Limitation of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has a number of limitations. First and foremost, the bibliometric analysis is based on existing academic literature that alone may not fully capture emerging trends in consumer behavior and branding practices. As such, this study may not account for the very latest shifts within consumer-brand dynamics, especially within rapidly evolving industries such as technology and social media. Again, the main focus of the study is on published works, which might exclude relevant insights from industry reports, case studies, and other non-academic sources. Future research could embrace a wider variety of data sources, including market research and consumer surveys to create a holistic perspective on the self-brand connection. Finally, since it relies on bibliometric data, the study does not delve into consumer perceptions or experiences directly, which again restricts the capacity of providing deeper insights within individual brand interactions.

4. CONCLUSION

This research work offers a very significant and thorough examination of the dynamic process concerning self-brand relationship concepts in global marketing research issues. Through self-brand relationship mapping processes and their relationship to concepts such as brand loyalty, consumer behavior, and online engagement, the research work is very valuable and insightful concerning emotional processes that result in influencing consumer relationships and experiences concerning brands. The research work findings clearly identify and stress the increasing motivational factors concerning social media influences on global branding processes and concepts. Even though this research work makes a very significant contribution to theoretical knowledge development processes and applications concerning greater branding management, there are a number of limitations mentioned concerning, for instance, not taking into consideration new

trends and non-academic research work
processes and concepts.

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