



## Joanna Krywalski Santiago

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1111-5201>

Department of Management  
ISEG – Lisbon School of Economics and  
Management University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal  
joannas@iseg.ulisboa.pt

## The progression in employer branding and employee-based brand equity: Scholar API-based systematic literature review

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### Abstract

**Aim/purpose** – This paper systematically reviews the literature of employer branding (EB) and employee-based brand equity (EBBE) using the Application Programming Interface (API) provided by Google Scholar. While combining EB and EBBE this paper considers both the perspective of current, as well as potential employees and provides a systematization of knowledge related to organizational attractiveness and the impact of employees on the organizational brand.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study reviews the progresses in employer branding since 2009 to 2022, therefore ranging from the time that the concept of employee-based brand equity was proposed by King and Grace (2009). A four-stage process empowered by was used to review the existing literature: 1) to identify the current tendencies Google Trends search was applied; 2) to search the databases and to identify the most active contributors (publishers and authors) the scholar API was used; 3) PRISMA-S checklist was applied to ensure the rigorousness of systematic literature review; 4) to expose the interdependence of the concepts a bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer 1.6.18 software; 5) finally this study proposes a comprehensive framework of employer branding.

**Findings** – The research on employer branding has grown substantially in the past decades and various conceptual and empirical studies have advanced the knowledge of both employer and internal branding. Still, the progression in the literature is narrow due to complexity of the field. This study identifies the main dimensions of employer branding and offers a comprehensive framework to systematize the current state of art.

**Research implications/limitations** – The multidisciplinary nature of employer branding has led to a dispersed understanding of constructs and applications in the academic studies. This study focuses on the marketing/branding perspective and does not consider the studies grounded purely in human resource management.

**Originality/value/contribution** – This study increases our understanding of the current literature and new research trends in employer branding and employee-based brand equity. Additionally, it explains the link between EB and EBBE. While applying the recently developed scholar API and artificial intelligence empowered software to conduct the systematic review, this study creates a procedure that can be used by researchers in an array of fields.

**Keywords:** employer brand, employee-based brand equity, scholar API-based systematic literature review.

**JEL Classification:** M51, M31.

## 1. Introduction

Brands are considered as most valuable assets that an organization can pursue, and brand management is a fundamental endeavor in many firms (Eger et al., 2018). Although organizations traditionally focused their efforts on branding products and services among the customers, the principles of branding can be applied outside the customer-centered spectrum. Departing from the traditional view of customer-centered brand management, Ambler and Barrow (1996) applied the principles of brand management into human resources and induced the interest around employer branding (EB). Unlike customer-centered brand management, which is focusing on growing the lifetime value of customer (Rust et al., 2004b), the employer branding focuses on building a unique employer identity and attractive image among current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004; Eger et al., 2018; Theurer et al., 2016). In this way, employer brands serve to shape the employer's value proposition and reinforce the brand's positioning (Moroko & Uncles, 2009). Despite the different focus, both perspectives, the one centered on customers, as well as the one centered on employees, aim to attain positional advantage. Challenged with increasing competitiveness in employment markets, as well as talent shortage, organizations are constantly seeking new strategies and solutions to attract and retain employees (Theurer et al., 2018). Indeed, employees capable of responding to challenging environment are crucial for the organizational success (Moroko & Uncles, 2009).

Advancing the customer and financial view of brand equity, King and Grace (2009) introduced the concept of employee-based brand equity (EBBE). In the light of this employee-focused perspective, employees must be able to respond to challenging competitive environments. The postulates of EBBE adapt the customer equity perception where the brand knowledge brings a differential effect (Keller, 1993) and perceive employees as internal customers – it is crucial for the employees to have the brand knowledge to assist their behavior (King & Grace, 2009). To assure the delivery of a brand promise passes to be a responsibility of employees, particularly in services. This signifies that employees must comprehend the organization's brand and their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of brand promise (King & Grace, 2009). The employees' perceptions and EBBE are a very relevant matter for many organizations.

Employer branding and employee-based brand equity are two related but distinct concepts within the realm of branding. Employer branding is primarily concerned with how an organization is perceived as an employer by potential candidates, current employees, and other stakeholders. The target audience for employer branding are external stakeholders, such as job seekers, potential recruits, and the general public, as its main objectives are to attract top talent, enhance the organization's reputation as an employer of choice, and create a positive perception of the organization's culture, values, work environment, and employee value proposition (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004; Verčič, 2021). Employee-based brand equity, however, focuses on the impact and influence of employees on the overall brand of the organization and its audience is both internal and external stakeholders including the employees themselves, as well as customers, clients, and other external parties who interact with the organization. The objectives of employee-based brand equity are to develop and maintain a positive and consistent brand image and customer experience by ensuring that employees understand, internalize, and consistently deliver on the brand promise (Boukis & Christodoulides, 2020).

EB is important to companies in the strive to find and retain talented employees, as well as to assist the positioning of the organizations as more reliable and attractive (Ahmad & Daud, 2016). On the other side, employee-based brand equity strategies involve fostering a strong organizational culture aligned with the brand values, providing employee training and development programs, promoting brand advocacy among employees, and empowering employees to deliver exceptional customer experiences which in turn can influence customer-based brand equity (Sürücü et al., 2019).

Throughout the past decades, scholarly attention in employer branding has increased and developed into quite fragmented – applying diverse underlying paradigms (most frequently the social identity, theory of exchange, and organizational identification) and oscillating among diverse fields (human resources, business, brand management, public relations, and psychology). Notwithstanding the growing attention that the employer branding achieved, there are still many questions that need additional clarification. The advance of studies in EB is substantial to ensure the systematization of academic literature, as well as to show the strategic directions for practitioners (Ahmad & Daud, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Addressing those challenges and with the aim to strengthen the foundation for future studies, this paper reviews the literature of EB and EBBE, and identifies the most current trends and developments. Given the extent and complexity of this particular research area, this study applies recent automatic search tools.

As already mentioned, this literature review is based on scholar API which refers to the process of conducting a literature review using the Application Programming Interface (API) provided by Google Scholar. Google Scholar is a web search engine that indexes scholarly literature, including articles, theses, conference papers, and other research publications. By utilizing the Google Scholar API, researchers can access a wealth of academic literature and retrieve specific information programmatically, such as article titles, authors, abstracts, publication dates, and citation data. This allows for a more efficient and automated approach to literature review compared to manually searching and reviewing articles. It is important to note that the Google Scholar API has usage limitations, and the availability of full-text articles may vary. Additionally, while the API can assist with retrieving and organizing literature, the analysis and synthesis of the literature still require human interpretation and critical thinking.

The scope of this study includes the multidisciplinary scholarly works that address the employer brand(ing) and EBBE, particularly in the three main areas: 1) marketing and brand management, 2) human resources, and 3) business. The systematic review initiates with the studies published in 2009 that is when the concept of EBBE was introduced by King and Grace (2009).

The rest of this article is structured in the following order. The second section explains the research method used in this study. Third section provides the discussion on the analysis and results which is further categorized into four subsections: publication activity, research design, contribution of empirical findings, and new trends in the literature of employer branding. Finally, a comprehensive framework linking the EB and EBBE is presented.

## 2. Review method

### 2.1. Research procedure

The focus of this study requires a method which preserves its objective and pragmatic approach. Therefore, a systematic literature review method was chosen as modus for this paper. As a systematic review is a rigorous research methodology, it aims to deliver a comprehensive search conducted in a systematic way and clearly specifies the selection process (Bettany-Saltikov, 2012). This paper follows the systematic literature review rules and procedures specified by Bettany-Saltikov (2012) and practically implemented by Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2016). The methodological phases of this review cover the PRISMA systematic review protocol (2020) and include initial search, extended search (records screened by abstracts), eligibility, inclusion, and analysis. To ensure the rigorousness of the review, this study follows the PRISMA-S a 16-item checklist (Table 1) that assists the reporting of systematic reviews (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** PRISMA-S checklist

<b>PRISMA-S checklist</b>		
<b>INFORMATION SOURCES AND METHODS</b>		
1	Databases	Web of Science, Scopus, Crossref, ProQuest (included in the first search)
2	Multi-database search	lens.org
3	Study registers	do not apply
4	Online resources and browsing	Searching general internet search engines: we also searched the grey literature and conference proceedings using the search string: “employer branding” AND “employee-based brand equity”. The first 40 results (2 search pages) were screened
5	Citation searching	Reference lists of included articles were manually screened to identify additional studies
6	Contacts	Data was also sought via expert requests
7	Other methods	Personal files and records were also searched
<b>SEARCH STRATEGIES</b>		
8	Full search strategies	The databases were searched with the aim to identify scholarly works in the areas of brand management, marketing, human resources, and business
9	Limits and restrictions	Restriction 1: The search was limited to the English language
		Restriction 2: The search included only scholarly works, namely, journal articles, books, book chapters and conference proceedings
		Restriction 3: The search was limited to publications from 2009 to 2022
		Restriction 4: The search included only the publications in the field of brand management, marketing, human resources and business
		Excluded documents: all non-English documents were manually excluded from the search. We have also excluded the studies linked to the area of medicine and clinical tests
10	Search filters	Predefined search terms: 1) “employer” AND “brand(ing)”, 2) “employee” AND “based” AND “brand” AND “equity”

**Table 1 cont.**

11	Prior work	We included search strategies used in other systematic reviews for research design
12	Updates	Four consecutive searches were conducted. All the searches were consistent and served to monitor new publications. Only in the first search (2020) the databases were scrolled manually and also included the ProQuest search (the Lens was not fully developed by that time)
13	Dates of searches	The first search was conducted in December 2020, the second in September 2021, the third in May 2022, and the fourth in November 2022
<b>PEER REVIEW</b>		
14	Peer review	The list of selected articles was peer reviewed by two other researchers
<b>MANAGING RECORDS</b>		
15	Total records	A total of 7623 records was identified for search 1 (employer branding) and 3083 documents were identified in search 2 (EBBE)
16	Deduplication	The automatic function of the platform allowed to exclude all duplicated documents. All the documents ranging from private sources are contacts were verified manually against the duplication.

To proceed with the search for publications, two analytic tools (online platforms) were used. First, the Google Trends assisted the identification of the main topics of interest and the popularity of the search terms. Then, scholar API (the Lens) was used as a multi-database search platform. Additionally, a bibliometric analysis was performed with a use of a software tool to construct and visualize the bibliometric network.

## 2.2. Google Trends in academic research

The initial Google Trends search aided to classify the emerging topics and areas of interest that are experiencing recent developments and breakthroughs and focused on employer branding and employee-based brand equity. Google Trends is an online tool that offers data based on users' search behavior within Google Search and helps to visualize the current trends while using Web-based data (Mavragani et al., 2018). While showing the popularity of "searched-for terms", it can accurately measure the public's interest and is considered as a valid and beneficial tool for forecasting (it has already found many applications in medicine and health). Indeed, using Web-based queries is appropriate to examine topics and issues that would have been difficult or even impossible to explore otherwise.

The provided data is quite simple – the tool shows how frequently a particular search term was entered in comparison with other search terms in different regions and languages (the tool facilitates a global search since 2004). Despite

this simplicity, since its introduction in 2006, the tool has become a quite popular source of data for academics and practitioners. It was estimated that searches on Google Trends reached 2 trillion in 2016 (Sullivan, 2016). Google Trends has become an important tool to assist the recognition of current trends and new areas of research and is used both by marketing managers and academic researchers (Jun et al., 2018).

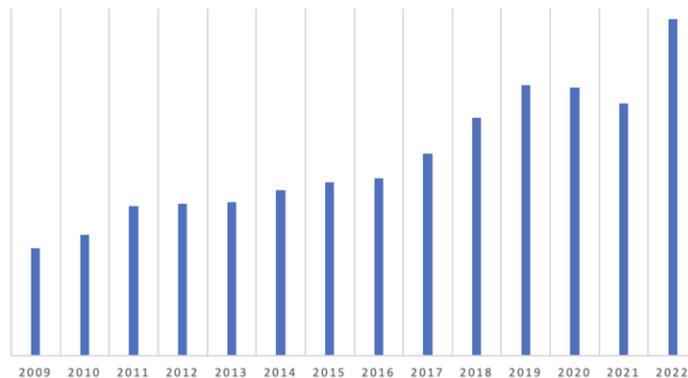
In this study, we explore the search terms (“employer branding” and “employee-based brand equity”) tracked by Google Trends since 2009. Table 2 summarizes the applied Google Trends search conditions.

**Table 2.** Detailed conditions of the Google Trends search

Description	Conditions
Search target DB	Google Trends
Search expression	“employer branding”, “employee-based brand equity”
Search conditions	term, topic, all categories, web search, interest over time, compare, interest by subregion, related topics, related queries
Search period	January 2009–November 2022
Total number of months searched	167

As mentioned before, Google Trends allow to see what topics and queries have been prevalent in searches and show how often specific searches have been made over a certain period (here January 2009 – December 2022). Figure 1 exhibits the search popularity of EB. Although we did not cover the entire 2022 (the search was made in November), it is not difficult to notice that the search term has recently gained more interest.

**Figure 1.** Popularity of employer branding



Source: Google Trends.

As it comes to the raising topics and related searches, Google Trends indicated the raising popularity of the following terms: social media employer branding, LinkedIn employer branding, employer branding meaning, personal branding, and talent acquisition.

Considering the worldwide interest by region, the term was the most popular in Europe, namely in Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark. Asiatic countries have also showed interest in the subject, here Singapore, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka were the countries where the most searches have been done (still it is important to notice that as for China the data are not complete – only Chinese users with proxies show in the statistics).

### 2.3. Search for articles with the Lens

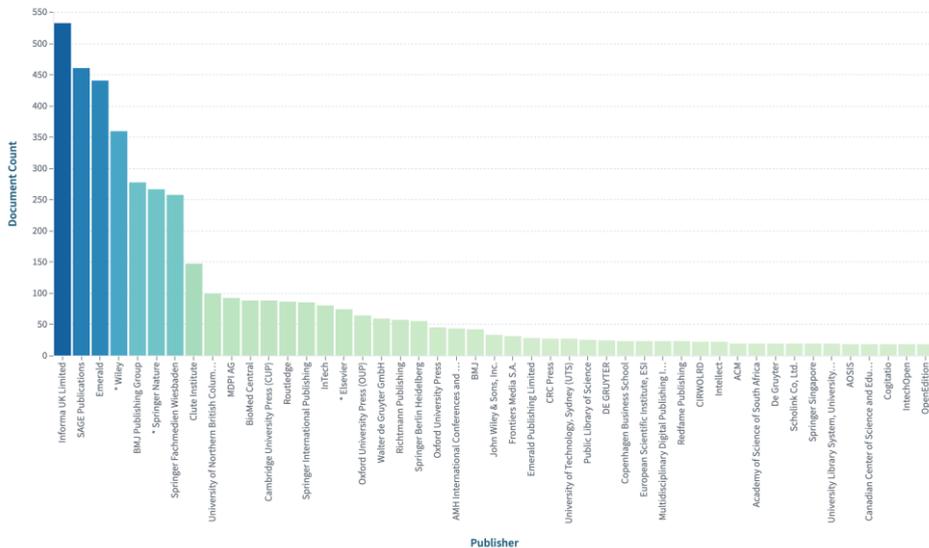
Software has become indispensable in today's business environment, and it begins to find many applications in academic research (Ofoeda et al., 2019). Application Programming Interface (API) the Lens is an online patent and scholarly literature search engine launched in 2000 by non-profit organization (Cambia). Presently, the Lens is the most comprehensive scholarly literature database (Penfold, 2020). It covers two leading academic databases (Web of Science and Scopus) and in addition, it accumulates bibliometric data from PubMed and Crossref, and combines them into unified search syntax. Besides the compilation of many data sources, the advantage of Lens is that it uses automatization to exclude all the duplicated studies. The platform allows the choice from the array of search options, including patents, regulatory data, as well as scholarly knowledge. It also provides a choice of tools facilitating the analysis and reporting.

Focusing on scholarly works the search performed for the needs of this study focused on journal articles, books, book chapters and conference proceedings. We have not included professional reports, datasets, nor dissertations. Table 3 presents the Lens search conditions.

**Table 3.** Detailed conditions of the Lens search

Description	Conditions
Search target DB	Lens.org
Search expression	“employer branding”, “employee-based brand equity”
Search conditions	scholarly work
Document type	journal articles, books, book chapter, conference proceedings
Search period	January 2009 – November 2022



**Figure 4.** Top publishers

## 2.4. Narrowing the scope of the study

With the aim to collect the relevant literature and advance the systematization, two separate searches were conducted. The first search included only the “employer brand” (and “employer branding”), while the second search embraced the “employee-based brand equity”. Interestingly, only one study was found to convey both concepts simultaneously (namely, the study on employer brand equity and recruitment research by Collins & Kanar, 2014). All the studies that mentioned employee-based brand equity, focused rather on brand equity or on corporate branding (e.g., Theurer et al., 2018).

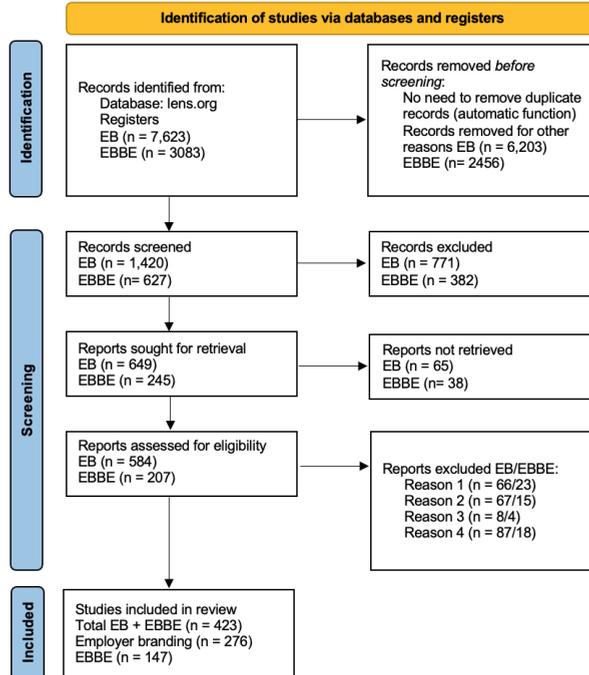
Search was limited to publications available in English. The period of publication included all the publications from the past thirteen years, specifically ranging from 2009, when the concept of employee-based brand equity was first introduced, till 2022. As it was already mentioned, the search included not only journal articles but also books, book chapters and conference proceedings – which can indicate the most recent developments in this area of research. In total, 649 publications were contemplated for further analysis on “employer branding” (EB) (of those, 65 records could not be retrieved), and 245 on EBBE (in this case 38 publications could not be retrieved).

## 2.5. Selection of articles

In this phase, the aim was to identify the articles which are within the scope of the study. Each of the retrieved publications was verified amongst the restrictions defined before (all the restrictions/reasons of exclusion were previously specified in the PRISMA-S checklist). As decision to exclude was not always clear (for instance, some articles included German words in the titles or abstracts), many articles were examined in their all dimension. Only after this additional check the final decision of inclusion or exclusion was made.

In total 584 publications were identified as it comes to EB and 207 publications on EBBE. After one more careful verification against the restrictions/reasons to exclude a final sample consisting of 276 publications on EB and 147 publications on EBBE were selected for the final review and analysis (many publications were excluded as they have not covered the concept or did not belong to specified before areas of research). Figure 5 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for the systematic research of this study.

Figure 5. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram



In summary, 423 publications including both subjects were selected for this investigation, of which 38 were books and book chapters, 126 were conference proceedings and 259 were the peer-reviewed journal articles.

## **2.6. Coding and analysis**

Once the publications were chosen, in the next phase the essential information was extracted from each of the selected papers. In a way to systematize the information, the list of publications was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. For each entrance the extracted information included data relative to the following elements: the name of the journal where the article was published, the year of publication, the title of the study, the type of the study, the keywords and the main areas covered. Additionally, each paper was assessed on its relation to the research scope and the implications of the main findings. As it comes for the characterization of the type of research, five categories were created: 1) conceptual article (with a proposition of a new conceptual framework), 2) quantitative study, 3) qualitative study, 4) literature review, 5) book chapter, 6) conference proceedings.

All the documents were double-checked and tabulated to avoid bias. The verified spreadsheets were organized as following: spreadsheet 1) publications on “employer brand(ing)”, spreadsheet 2) articles on “employee-based brand equity”, spreadsheet 3) articles joining the “employer brand(ing)” and “employee-based brand equity” (first the full list of the articles indicated by the databases, followed by the evaluation of inclusion/exclusion), spreadsheet 4) most cited articles in both areas but outside the chosen time scope, spreadsheet 5) the combination of results, frequencies and main data. This systematization assisted the review presented in this study.

As it comes to the main codes identified (the most frequent keywords and concepts in the analyzed papers), 283 codes were associated with “employer brand/ing”, of which the most frequent: “organizational attractiveness”, “talent management”, “communication”, “engagement”, “firm performance”, “word of mouth”, and the most popular in recent years – “social media employer branding”. As for the employee-based brand equity, 54 codes were identified of which the most frequent ones were: “brand citizenship”, “internal branding”, “brand allegiance”, “brand-related behavior”.

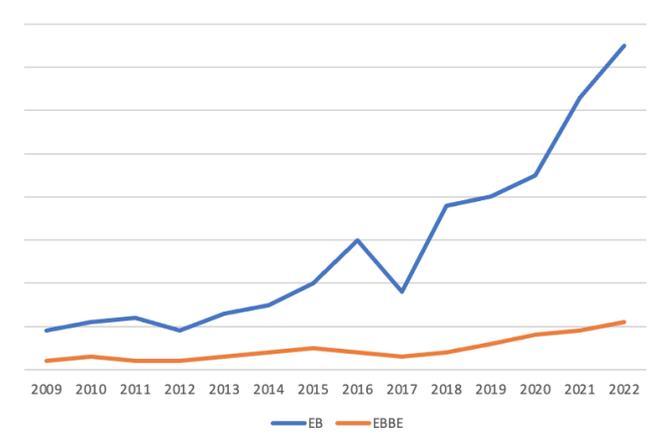




### 3.1. Publication activity

Figure 8 shows the publication frequency by year (from January 2009 to November 2022). Although the employee equity was first mentioned in 2007 (Cardy et al., 2007), in a study seeking a more personal approach towards human resource management (HMR) and adapting the customer equity concept from marketing to human resources, the concept of employee-based brand equity was proposed only in 2009 in a study introducing the third perspective of brand equity based on employee’s perception (King & Grace, 2009).

**Figure 8.** Publication frequency per year

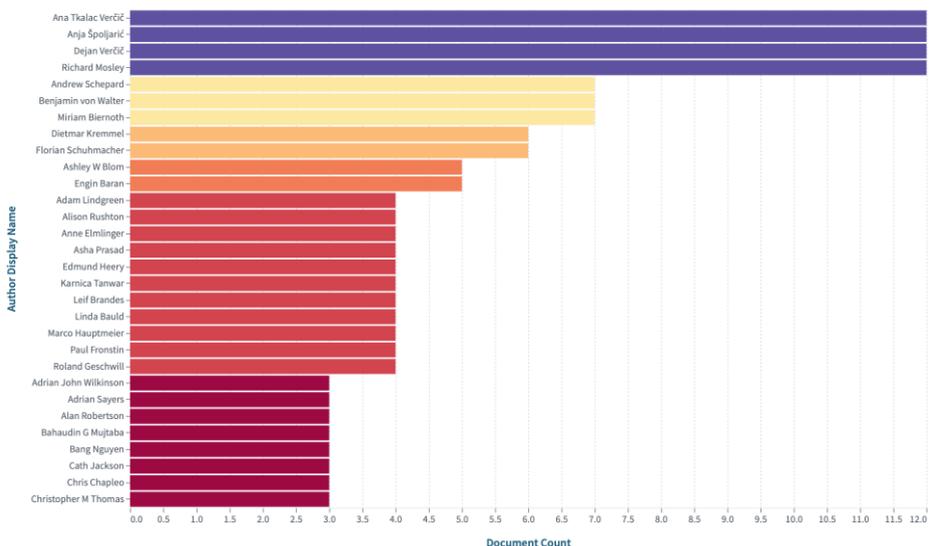


Although this literature search oscillates from the date when employee brand equity was introduced, it is worth to be mentioned that the concept of “employer brand” is a two decades older and has already gained more attention in literature. The concept of employer brand was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996) in their study linking brand management techniques with human resource management. Since then, it gained attention predominantly in the literature of marketing and human resources, and more recently in the field of knowledge and information management. Both subjects experience a gradual growth in their popularity. The brief fall in 2017 can be explained by the changing scope of the area, moving towards the use of the “employer brand” concept in education which was not the scope of the present study (therefore some of the studies were excluded from this analysis). Interestingly, the employee perspective is still not much investigated and most of the studies focus on the organizational view or the customers’ perceptions. This constrains a huge research gap and an opportunity for future interest.

The fields of research that showed the highest number of publications on employer brands and employee perspectives were business studies (13%) with publications in such journals as *Journal of Business Research* (impact factor 7.77) or *Business Horizons* (impact factor 6.68), marketing (12,4% of published articles) with such journals as: *European Journal of Marketing* (impact score 4.57), *Journal of Marketing Management* (impact score 2.74) or *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (impact score 3.62), management (12%) with publications in such journals as: *European Management Journal* (impact score 5.72) or *Management Research Review* (impact score 2.77), and human resource management (11.6%) with publications in such journals as: *Human Resource Management* (impact factor 5.078), *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (impact factor 5.546) or *Human Resource Management Review Journal* (impact factor 6.861). Other sciences and areas with interest in employer branding included economics, innovation, information systems and computing, public health and psychology, logistics and sustainability issues. Suitably, it appears that the journals in marketing, management and human resource management tend to respond to this advancing area of research. In overall, articles on “employer brand(ing)” and “employee-based brand equity” were published in 134 different journals.

Finally, the list of the most active authors in the field is displayed (Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** The most active authors



### **3.2. Research design (types of studies)**

This subsection provides an overview of the research methodology used in the selected studies. From the 423 publications on “employer brand”, 6% were books or book chapters (6%). As it comes to journal articles the majority was composed by the empirical studies, of which 47% used a quantitative methodology and 24% used qualitative methodology. Of the remaining articles, 20% were conceptual and often proposing new conceptual frameworks, and 5% of papers consisted of literature review. As it comes to the articles identified for the subject of employee-based brand equity, the majority was using a quantitative method (65% of the articles), 11,5% were using a qualitative approach (11,5%), and 23,5% were purely conceptual.

Of the articles that used a quantitative approach, several studies applied survey research and structural equation modelling (e.g., Hoppe, 2018; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; Ratnadi et al., 2020), while some others use LISREL software for validation test (e.g., Skandarpour et al., 2016), PLS-SEM (e.g., do Espírito Santo et al., 2019), or sequential mediation models (e.g., Ngo et al., 2019). Some of the quantitative studies used quite simple testing methods as correlations (e.g., Rybaczewska et al., 2020) or analysis of variance (ANOVA) (e.g., Ha & Luan, 2018). Interestingly, some studies used a mixed method and applied an online survey and direct observation of websites (e.g., Wołodźko & Woźniak, 2017).

As it comes to the studies that used a qualitative approach, most chose to conduct in-depth interviews (e.g., Lesenyeho et al., 2018; Wilden et al., 2010) or were based on case studies (e.g., Malik et al., 2018; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

The majority of the studies collected data across Europe: Portugal (Santiago, 2019; Santos et al., 2019), Belgium (Arijs et al., 2018; De Stobbeleir et al., 2018), Germany (Helm et al., 2016; Hoppe, 2018), Poland (Bilińska-Reformat & Stańczyk, 2018), or Asia: China (Liu et al., 2020), Vietnam (Ha & Luan, 2018; Ngo et al., 2019), India (Nawaz, 2019; Patra et al., 2019; Sharma & Prasad, 2018), Taiwan (Lee et al., 2018), Thailand (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009), Sri Lanka (Aldousari et al., 2017). A few studies were set in Australia (Thai & Latta, 2010), Oceania: New Zealand (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019); America: USA (Arijs et al., 2018), Canada (Ito et al., 2013); or South Africa (Lesenyeho et al., 2018; Potgieter & Doubell, 2018).

As for the sectors of analysis, predominant number of studies was set in the sector of services, namely hotels (Chiang et al., 2019; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009; Liu et al., 2020), banks (Altaf & Shahzad, 2018), health care (Heilmann,

2010), hospitals (Hoppe, 2018), or insurance companies (Schlager et al., 2011). Most studies have collected data cross-sectionally, and only a few of the studies were longitudinal (e.g., Bilińska-Reformat & Stańczyk, 2018; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). The largest dataset was employed in study on employer attractiveness and targeted brands containing 33395 separate responses, 2880 individuals and 256 Belgian organizations (Ghielen & De Cooman, 2018).

As it can be noticed, the selected articles offered a wide spectrum of insights originating from different continents and from a variety of segments, making possible to observe how the concepts of employer brand and employee brand perceptions can be implemented in diverse settings.

### **3.3. Discussion of the main findings**

#### **3.3.1. Corporate, employer and internal branding**

*Corporate branding.* Corporate branding serves as a guideline for the concepts of internal branding and employer branding (Hoppe, 2018). Although the role of corporate branding has been well researched, still, studies focusing on brand benefits in intra-organizational areas are limited (Banerjee et al., 2020). Considering the similarity between product choice decisions and job choice decisions, scholars have agreed that branding plays an important role in human resources management (HRM). Indeed, HRM can benefit from branding, as an employer represented by a well-known brand will be more successful in recruiting talented candidates (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2020; Stockman et al., 2020).

*Employer branding.* The concept of EB has been defined as the power “to attract better candidates” (Bondarouk et al., 2013, p. 27) but serves not only to attract the talented job candidates but also to engage and retain the current employees (Eger et al., 2019; Überschaer & Baum, 2020). As argued by Bondarouk et al. (2013), employer branding is much more than “the people within an organization” since it can enhance the corporate image of the company as an employer of choice to current and potential talents. Therefore, EB is a mean to gain competitive advantage, implemented through a long-term strategy to construct an authentic and attractive employer image and to assist human resource practices (Banerjee et al., 2020; Barrow & Mosley, 2006; Bondarouk et al., 2013). Backhaus (2016) revisited the domain of employer branding to conclude that the purpose of employer branding is to present a positive and attractive image to current and potential employees. Accordingly, organizations must unite their change

management function with employer-branding efforts. As “people make the brand”, employees are brand ambassadors, and the development of employer brand requires an assessment of the employment value proposition (Backhaus, 2018). Maxwell and Knox (2009) advocated that employer branding is indeed an effective strategy for motivating employees to “live the brand”. The authors addressed the perceived employer brand attractiveness through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and found that the attributes considered most attractive by employees were employment, organizational accomplishments, external image, and product or service characteristics. The authors argued that managers need to identify their organizational attributes that employees find most attractive. In this way they would be able to relate the EB with the identity of the organization, and with the interests of employees. Weiss et al. (2009) suggested that employee-centric strategies have progressed from employee satisfaction and brand awareness to employee “affinity” or “attachment”. The differentiation (the perception of uniqueness) is the direct result of superior employee interactions, which lead to better employee care, enduring employee relationships, loyal and satisfied employees.

Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) stressed the importance of employee’s commitment to brands and their role to enhance brand equity, mostly in services. Mark and Toelken (2009) suggested that the use of EB portrays the best intentions of human resource development as attracting the talent and engaging an accountable workforce can increase organizational capability and effectiveness. Interestingly, the authors illustrated the toxic effect that employer branding can have in the hands of senior executives who fail to live up to the promise of their own employer brand when they do not follow the company’s organizational narrative and dishonor the contract with employees. Moroko and Uncles (2009) represented a slightly different view and claimed that firms have begun overtly branding themselves as employers. To narrow the focus, the authors examined how market segmentation can be applied in the employer branding context and postulated that using a range of segmentation approaches can strengthen explicit links between employer branding and the broader strategic goals of an organization. In particular, the use of a combination of generic types of market segmentation should help the firm to be more efficient and effective in attracting, retaining, and motivating both current and potential employees.

Many companies have still not completely appreciated the value of adopting employer branding proposals (Banerjee et al., 2020; Oladipo et al., 2013) but an increasing number of organizations embark on employer branding despite the lack of coherent theoretical support (Aldousari et al., 2017).

*Internal branding.* Most of existing research has considered internal branding (the communication of corporate brand values and the education of employees to fulfil the brand promise) and employer branding (communication about the uniqueness of an employer to external and internal stakeholders) as standalone concepts (Burmam et al., 2009; King & Grace, 2012; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Nevertheless, both types of branding (employer and internal) aim to promote the core values incorporated into the corporate brand and shape the intended brand experience for stakeholders (Hoppe, 2018; Kaur et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2005; Minbashrazgah et al., 2021). According to Hoppe (2018), both the corporate brand and the employer brand share considerable similarities and should be considered as being considerably interrelated. Still, most studies do not consider the connections between the employer brand and the corporate brand. Hoppe (2018) linked the concepts of employer branding and internal branding by establishing the symbolic facet of perceived employer brand image and highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to investigate the interdependencies between employer brand and employee attachment.

Lee et al. (2018) presented a similar point of view and in accordance with their postulates:

“...the employer brand includes both internal and external branding and covers the organic integration of internal and external brands. External branding means establishing brand awareness among prospective employees and building an image that the company is a great place to work so as to encourage the prospective employees. Internal branding in turn is the image established by the company’s existing staff with regard to the operations of the firm, and it is closely related with employee retention and stimulation of employee potential.”

(Lee et al., 2018, p. 813)

*Workplace branding.* Some studies use the term “workplace branding” (e.g., Love & Singh, 2011), which was previously defined as “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular organization” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 2). Love and Singh (2011) claimed that workplace branding gives an organization an opportunity to develop a recognized identity and to differentiate itself from the competition and linked it with “best employer research”. According to authors, best employers create a culture by insuring to hire the employees with “the best fit” that assist the company to achieve high levels of performance. In turn the organization implement reward programs to praise the achievement of goals and objectives. Therefore, it becomes crucial for the organization to understand the needs of employees.

### **3.3.2. Employee value proposition**

Often, employer branding is seen as a holistic process, which at its center holds the Employee Value Proposition (EVP), meaning an “attractive job proposal” that captures the essence of what an organization wants to be in the minds of potential and current employees (Arriscado et al., 2018; Maheshwari et al., 2017; Näppä et al., 2014). Through EVP, a set of unique attributes and benefits leads individuals to want to be part of an organization. In accordance with Chhabra and Sharma (2014), EVP provides the central message that is conveyed by the brand and is considered as a first step of employer branding. That goes in pair with previous postulates of Backhouse and Tikko (2004) who suggested that the three steps of employer branding process are: 1) development of value proposition; 2) external marketing with the objective to market the value proposition to the targeted potential employees; 3) internal marketing set to develop a workforce that is committed to organizational values and goals.

### **3.3.3. Employer brand knowledge**

In an older study, Cable and Turban (2001) distinguished three general dimensions of employer knowledge: employer familiarity, employer image, and employer reputation. More recently, Kashive and Khanna (2017) explored the impact of early recruitment activities (such as publicity, sponsorship, word of mouth and advertisement) on employer brand knowledge considering similar dimensions to those proposed by Cable and Turban (2001) (employer familiarity, employer image or job association and employer reputation). Then the authors further explored the impact of recruitment activities and brand knowledge on organization attractiveness and firm performance. The results of Kashive and Khanna’s (2017) study showed that advertisement, publicity, and word of mouth impact all aspects of employer brand knowledge. On its side, employer brand knowledge (mostly employer reputation and job association) impact organizational attractiveness, while brand awareness and job association impact financial performance. According to Kashive and Khanna (2017), the most important sources of employment information were the Internet and networking.

Gardner et al. (2011) investigated “rebranding employment branding” and explored the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of employment brand knowledge. The authors referred to employment knowledge of the current employees (workers) of a firm, and/or individuals not affiliated with the firm but

actively seeking employment. The authors suggested that greater progress can be made in the study of employment branding by positioning workers as consumers of employment and shifting the theoretical foundation from industrial and organizational psychology to consumer psychology. As, in the view of the authors, the definition of employer brand is not consistent with the concept of “brand” as discussed in marketing literature, they opted to use the term “employment brand” instead. Borrowing from Keller (1993), they defined employment brand as “names, terms, signs, symbols, or designs or a combination of them intended to identify the employment offering of one employer and to differentiate it from the offerings of competing employers” (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 261). Accordingly, employment brands, help employees and job candidates make decisions about beginning, ending, and continuing their employment. Correspondingly, the authors use the term “worker-based employment brand equity” associated with the memories that employees have as it comes to different employment brands “identifying and distinguishing various employment offerings” (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 265). Consequently, employment brand knowledge causes superior worker-based employment brand equity, defined as “the manifestation of the differential effects that employment brand knowledge has on workers’ responses to the marketing of that employment brand” (Gardner et al., 2011, p. 265). Based on those premises, the authors proposed a model of the antecedents, components, and consequences of employment brand knowledge, in which the employment branding (activities used to develop workers’ employment brand knowledge) is an antecedent, employment brand knowledge is the core (including both employment brand attitude and familiarity), and the differential response of workers to employment brand knowledge is an outcome. Additionally, this differential response is explained by employee attention and learning about the brand, employee perceptions of the risks, confidence, and loyalty, as well as the job candidates’ intentions. Brand knowledge becomes crucial for the employee-based brand equity as proposed by King and Grace (2009).

On the other side, Ngo et al. (2019) focused on internal brand knowledge and defined it as “results in higher levels of employee brand identification; this sense of identification then motivates employees to engage in both employee-related and brand- and customer-focused behaviors (e.g., brand citizenship behavior [BCB] and customer-oriented behavior), which in turn foster employee performance” (p. 273).

### **3.3.4. Employer branding value chain**

Theurer et al. (2018) have also noticed the fragmentation of EB literature. The authors reviewed the existing literature and proposed an integrative model of employer branding. Using an analytical approach, they identified 187 articles, and integrated them along different employer brand dimensions (conceptual, employer knowledge, employer branding activities and strategies). Based on their review, the authors developed an “employer branding value chain model”. The proposed model represents a very broad conceptualization (overpassing such areas as employer knowledge development, employee mindset, firm performance, and financial market performance). The authors have also presented an interesting distinction between “employer brand” and “employer branding”. To define the employer brand they applied the Ambler’s and Barrow’s perspective that describes the employer brand as the “package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (1996, p. 8). On its side the employer branding is defined as a process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity (Theurer et al., 2018). In this process the communication is crucial and serves to raise awareness and strengthen associations between the brand and its attributes.

### **3.3.5. The principal antecedents and outcomes of employer branding**

A list of antecedents and outcomes of employer branding is observable across many studies. When it comes to antecedents, an array of studies focuses on organizational and product/brand related attributes (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2018; Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Miles & McCamey, 2018), while others consider the social and environmental responsibility (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2018; Cancellieri et al., 2017; Grigore & Stancu, 2011; Verčič & Čorić, 2018). Recent studies underline the influence of career websites, social media, Web and gamification on EB (e.g., Gunesh & Maheshwari, 2018; Küpper et al., 2019; Mičik & Mičudová, 2018; Russell, 2009; Wolf et al., 2017). As for the outcomes of EB, oftenly mentioned are the aspects of organizational and employer brand performance (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2018), various aspects of employee satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement (e.g., Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2020; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017; Vasantha, 2018), as well as firm/organizational/employee performance (e.g., Aldousari et al., 2017; Tumasjan et al., 2019; Xia & Yang, 2010) or organizational identi-

fication (e.g., Kashyap & Chaudhary, 2019). Some studies also investigate the role of EB on the employee satisfaction with internal communication, considering the impact of employee engagement and organizational support (Verčič, 2021) or employees' organizational identification as an outcome of a successful employer branding and internal communication (Santiago, 2020). Recently, Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) developed and validated a scale of employer branding consisting of nine dimensions: corporate social responsibility, work-life balance, promotion, education, behavior-based family interference with work, travel opportunities, work (time-based and strain-based) interference with family, and finally, teamwork. Table 4 exhibits the principal antecedents and outcomes of EB mentioned in reviewed studies.

**Table 4.** The principal antecedents and outcomes of employer branding (EB)

EB Antecedents	References	EB Outcomes	References
Organizational attributes	Chhabra & Sharma (2014)	Organizational performance	Aldousari et al. (2017)
Employer image		Brand awareness	Ratra & Neelam (2018)
Product brand	Banerjee et al. (2020)	Turnover intentions	Kashyap & Verma (2018)
Corporate brand		Intent to join	Sharma & Prasad (2018)
Customer orientation		Person organization fit	Sharma & Tanwar (2021)
Reliable and financially strong organization		Perceived organizational prestige	
Social and environmental responsibility	Banerjee et al. (2020)	Organizational pursuit intention	
Corporate social responsibility	Cancellieri et al. (2017)	Recruitment efficiency	Tumasjan et al. (2019)
	Grigore & Stancu (2011)	Positive affective climate	Aldousari et al. (2017)
	Verčič & Ćorić (2018)	Firm/organizational performance	
Reputation	Verčič & Ćorić (2018)	Organizational identification	Charbonnier-Viorin et al. (2016)
Work culture	Sharma & Tanwar (2021)		Kashyap & Chaudhary (2019)
Company reputation			Maxwell & Knox (2009)
Career enhancement opportunity			Santiago (2020)
Cognitive learning	Küpper et al. (2021)	Employee well-being	Benraïss-Noailles & Viot (2021)
Affective learning		Employee loyalty	

### **3.3.6. Employer brand equity**

In the more recent studies the focus has shifted from EB to Employer Brand Equity (EBE). In accordance with Benraïss-Noailles and Viot (2020), EBE has a deeper meaning than EB as it reflects both the internal and external value resulting from the management of the employer brand. EBE follows the conceptualization similar to the customer brand equity, where brand equity is defined in terms of the value provided to customers (Aaker, 1996). As it comes to EBE, it was first Cable and Turban (2001) who suggested that the brand equity concept can be generalized to recruitment contexts and following the concept of consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), proposed three major dimensions of employer knowledge (or employer brand equity): employer familiarity, employer reputation, employer image. Cable and Turban (2001) defined EBE as “the value attached to a company’s brand name, which derives from applicants’ knowledge about an organization and the reputation or image of that company as an employer” (p. 116).

Bareket-Bojmel and Shuv-Ami (2019) adapted the concept of brand equity as previously proposed by Aaker (1996) to define and measure employer branding through, what they have called “organizational brand equity” (the authors suggested the use of the term “organizational brand equity” as a substitute for the term “brand equity” in the organizational field). The authors postulate that “in the same way that people are influenced by their perception of consumer brands, employees may be influenced by the way in which they perceive their employers” (Bareket-Bojmel & Shuv-Ami, 2019, p. 818). As it can be seen, they adapted an “outside-to-inside perspective” to investigate how external employer branding can influence employee perceptions and behavior. That opposed the mainstream, as most studies to date have focused on the role of employee branding in the attraction stage of the employee cycle and only a smaller number of studies focused on the impact of employer branding on employees within the organization. The results of the empirical study conducted among 602 Israeli employees have showed that organizational brand equity is negatively associated with intentions to leave an organization. That goes in pair with the postulates of Benraïss-Noailles and Viot (2020), who in their empirical study applied the EmpAt scale (developed previously by Berthon et al., 2005) to prove that EBE influences positive employee well-being, which in turn, influences loyalty.

Many studies use the postulates of consumer branding as proposed by Aaker (1996) and where the brand equity consists of brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and associations. Minchington (2011) adapted those dimen-

sions to employer branding: employer brand awareness, associations, loyalty, and perceived employment experience. For Kucherov et al. (2016) employer brand awareness means the level of recognition of the positive and negative employment attributes, while the employer brand associations include “the ideas of current and perspective employees about rational and emotional employment attributes” (p. 30). Employer brand loyalty denotes to “individual’s commitment to join or remain employed with an organization” and perceived employment experience means the “association employees have about work for an organization based upon the online and offline touchpoints” (Kucherov et al., 2016, p. 30).

### **3.3.7. Employee-based brand equity**

The research on EBBE has already granted attention from academia and practitioners. This might be due to the importance of “Human” element to service organizations and the fact that products and services are becoming more commoditized. Indeed, according to Ngo et al. (2019) internal branding efforts are essential in improving employee performance in services marketing.

The term “employee equity” was first mentioned in the study grounded in human resource management by Cardy et al. (2007). The authors adapted the customer equity concept from marketing and shifted the primary unit of analysis from tasks to people and viewed employees as internal customers. The study uses three dimensions: 1) value equity, which “reflects the internal calculations that workers make regarding the exchange of labor for the benefits of working for an organization” (p. 143); 2) brand equity which stands for the employee perception of an organization’s reputation (enhanced by special events, celebrations, and employee recognition); and 3) retention equity, which means “the tendency of employees to stay with an organization” (p. 144). In the proposed model employee equity determines Employee Lifetime Value (ELV), which is a function of both the strength (the value of an employee’s contributions to a firm) and length of the employee-firm relationship.

In the literature of marketing the term “employee-based brand equity” (EBBE) was introduced for the first time by King and Grace (2009) as a third perspective of brand equity (adding to customer and firm-based perspective). King and Grace (2009) defined EBBE as “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on an employee’s response to their work environment” (p. 130) and explained the importance of EBBE as following:

“Consistent with the provision of exceptional service, investment in the organization’s brand is considered to be a strategic weapon in the quest for an edge over competitors (...). As a means by which to define themselves in contrast to the competitors, organizations invest heavily in their brand. In doing so, a bundle of benefits is promoted to consumers with an implied promise that the organization will deliver. Therefore, just as it is the responsibility of the employee to deliver the appropriate service, it is also the responsibility of the employee to ensure that the brand promise is delivered in the manner intended. This means that employees must understand the organization’s brand and what it means to them in relation to their roles and responsibilities. As such, internal brand management has taken on increased prominence, given the pivotal role that employees play in the deliverance of the brand.”

(King & Grace, 2009, pp. 2-3)

This explanation comes on board with “service thinking”, as the role of the employee in a consumer’s evaluation of a service product is fundamental. Later, King et al. (2012) added that EBBE brings the employees’ positive and productive brand behaviors that stem from brand knowledge and that are in accordance with the expected behavior of the brand identity, and presented, as well as validated the first model of EBBE.

Although Tsang et al. (2011) have not mentioned EBBE directly, they considered employee perception toward hotel brand equity (employee’s perception based on their own hotel branded equity) and addressed the employee branding. Tsang et al. (2011) agreed with King and Grace (2008) that managing customer experience with a brand should start with the perspective of the employee, as “the importance of an employee in building a good relationship with customers is apparent” (p. 484). Tsang et al. (2011) noted that perceived quality was greatly related to the perception of employee on brand equity, while perceived brand image and brand awareness had a moderated effect.

Tavassoli et al. (2014) investigated the significance of EBBE to executive salaries. The empirical study was based on a metrics survey with samples of 1,200 or more consumers who are selected each quarter from a panel of 15,000 people and asked to complete a 45-minute survey once a year. In accordance with the study results, executives value being associated with strong brands and, therefore, accept substantially lower pay at firms that own strong brands.

Berger-Remy and Michel (2015) defined EBBE as “employee-based brand equity corresponds to the added meaning the brand may give employees over and above their job or profession and the firm’s corporate reputation, causing positive or negative behavior towards the organization” (p. 33). In accordance with authors the concept of EBBE suggests that brands can trigger employee attitudes and behavior both positive (pride, motivation to work, positive word of mouth), as well as a negative (shame, criticism, disengagement from the company). Using a multiple case study, the authors discovered that most of the inter-

viewed managers do not assimilate the conceptual dichotomy of product brand and corporate brand. In accordance with the interviewed managers, for employees, the brand is often associated with a sense of common good, profession and security, and perceived more as a “tool to work”. Interestingly, only one of the six cases studied identified that the organization under study had started to develop the tools specifically designed to engage employees.

Poulis and Wisker (2016) examined the impact of EBBE and perceived environmental uncertainty (PEU) on firm performance. The EBBE in their study was defined in accordance with King and Grace (2009) and the perceived environmental uncertainty was classified into six areas: 1) the uncertainty of government policies; 2) macroeconomic uncertainties; 3) the uncertainty of the resources and services used by the company; 4) the uncertainty of the product market and demand; 5) the uncertainty of competition; and 6) the uncertainty of the technology in the industry. The empirical cross-country study (UK and UEA) results indicated a strong relation between environmental uncertainty and EBBE, as well as EBBE and firm performance.

More recently, Wisker and Kwiatek (2019) have also conceptualized EBBE in accordance with the King and Grace’s (2009) definition and determined that employee-based brand equity partially mediates environmental orientation – organization performance relationship. The authors operationalized EBBE through three dimensions: brand endorsement, brand allegiance and brand-consistent behavior. The findings of their study across employees of 5-star hotels detected a positive effect of environmental orientation on EBBE. This implies that environmental orientation creates value amongst employees that results in improved internal brand loyalty and endorsement.

In accordance with Lee et al. (2019) EBBE refers to “employees’ internalization of a brand’s core values, which is reflected in employees’ brand endorsement, brand loyalty and brand value congruence” (p. 429). The authors proposed and tested an organizational framework including leadership perspective and organizational mediating mechanisms to broaden the horizon of bank branding. Their study explored how brand-specific Transformational Leadership (TFL) and brand-specific Transactional Leadership (TRL) influence the employees’ perceptions of brand value congruence through the mediation of person-job and person-group fit, to increase EBBE. Using cross-level techniques to link the organizational and individual level, the analyzed mediators were confirmed to play a key role and underscored the importance of TLF and TRL for EBBE.

### **3.3.8. Antecedents and outcomes of employee based brand equity**

Supornpraditchai et al. (2007) advanced the knowledge of branding in employee context and developed a theoretical model that captures the employee's perceptions and behaviors toward the company brand. Consistent with Keller's (1993) cognitive approach to customer-centered brand, the employees learn, understand, remember, make decisions, and actions based on the brand information that they get. Supornpraditchai et al. (2007) applied the postulates of Keller (1993) and integrated them with the signaling theory to notice the importance of internal communication and the flows of information dissemination. Company brand can define the personality of a company as a preferred employer and contributes to its employees' willingness to stay with the company.

On the other side, Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) drew on cognitive psychology and social identity theory to develop and empirically test an integrated model of antecedents and consequences of employee-based brand equity that distinguishes between a cognitive and an affective route for its development via brand knowledge and brand identification. They view EBBE as "the perceived added value that employees receive as a result of employee-based brand-building efforts" (Boukis & Christodoulides, 2020, p. 2), and proposed and tested an integrated model of antecedents and consequences of EBBE that differentiates between a cognitive and an affective pathway to the development of EBBE via brand knowledge and brand identification. The data obtained from the service frontline employees indicated that the employees' cognitive and affective responses to branding emerge as the main determinants of EBBE and brand knowledge is a strong predictor of EBBE. Thus, improving internal stakeholders' awareness and understanding of the brand promise and values should be a key priority of employer branding efforts.

Some studies (e.g., Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2018) use the terms "internal branding" and "internal brand equity" (instead of EBBE) and consider the internal branding as a managerial tool that helps the employees to develop compatible brand-oriented behavior. Vatankhah and Darvishi (2018) claimed that employees with internal branding are likely to internalize brand values in terms of internal brand equity and strongly engage in service encounter, providing customer satisfaction.

In a more recent study Liu (2022) indicated that the brand knowledge and organizational loyalty are antecedents of EBBE. Employees who have the knowledge on the brand's values are more likely to absorb them and pass them on

to clients and to establish a bond with the company. Additionally, the organizational culture is a mediator between brand knowledge, organizational loyalty and EBBE.

Table 5 exhibits the most frequently indicated antecedents and outcomes of EBBE.

**Table 5.** EBBE antecedents and outcomes

EBBE main antecedents	Subdimensions	Reference	EBBE outcomes	Subdimensions	Reference
1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Employee behavior</b>	Role clarity	Altaf et al. (2021); King & Grace (2010)	<b>Employee behavior</b>	Employee/job satisfaction	Kim et al. (2005); Tanwar & Prasad (2016); Vatankhah & Darvishi (2018); Vasantha (2018)
	Candidate's experience	Gupta & Mohan (2019); Miles & McCamey (2018)		Perception of organizational fit	Stysko-Kunkowska & Kwinta (2020); Sharma & Tanwar (2021); Tanwar & Kumar (2019)
	Employees' perceptions of brand value	Lee et al. (2019)		Employee well-being	Benraïss-Noailles & Viot (2020)
	Employee brand	Altaf & Shahazad (2018); Ahmad & Daud (2016)		Employee loyalty/commitment	Benraïss-Noailles & Viot (2020); Kim et al. (2005); Kimpakorn & Tocquer (2009)
	Organizational loyalty	Liu (2022)		Employee attitudes	Berger-Remy & Michel (2015); King & Grace (2012); Schlager et al. (2011)
	Brand commitment	Xiong et al. (2013)		Organizational citizenship behavior	Buil et al. (2016); Boukis & Christodoulides (2020); Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2016); Dalal et al. (2009); Helm et al. (2016); Kaur et al. (2020); Santiago (2020); Skandarpour et al. (2016)

**Table 5 cont.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	
<b>Brand management</b>	Brand strength	Tavassoli et al. (2014)		Employee attraction	Alshathry et al. (2017); Bonaiuto et al. (2013); Chiang & Yu (2021), Ha et al. (2018); Mičík & Mičudová (2018); Näppä et al. (2014); Stockman et al. (2020); Wallace et al. (2014)	
	Brand knowledge	Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010); Gardner et al. (2011); Kashive & Khanna (2017); Liu (2022); Ngo et al. (2014); Xiong et al. (2013)		Intention to apply	Banerjee et al. (2020); Santiago (2019); Sharma & Prasad (2018)	
	Brand role	Xiong et al. (2013)		Employee retention	Alshathry et al. (2017); Arasanmi & Krishna (2019); Arriscado et al. (2018)	
	Brand importance	Xiong et al. (2013)		Attractiveness of salary	Styško-Kunkowska & Kwinta (2020)	
	Brand orientation	Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010)		Work meaningfulness		
	Internal brand commitment	Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010), Vatankhah & Darvishi (2018)		Employee brand engagement	Duncan et al. (2019); Verčič (2021); Welch (2011)	
	Internal brand involvement	Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010)		Employee brand commitment	Altaf et al. (2021)	
	Brand image	Heilmann (2010); Hoppe (2018); Tsang et al. (2011); Kashyap & Chaudhary (2019); Sürücü et al. (2019)		<b>Organizational outcomes</b>	Brand image	Lee et al. (2011)
	Brand awareness	Ratra & Neelam (2018); Tsang et al. (2011)			Customer-based brand equity	Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010)

Table 5 cont.

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
	Perceived quality	Tsang et al. (2011)		Firm performance	Kashive & Khanna (2017); Poulis & Wisker (2016)
	Brand empowerment	Altaf & Shahazad (2018)		Financial/non-financial performance	Biswas & Suar (2016)
	Brand psychological ownership	Altaf & Shahazad (2018)		Firm-based brand equity	Berger-Remy & Michel (2015); Rust et al. (2004a)
	Brand-specific transactional leadership	Lee et al. (2019)		Employee performance	Agarwal et al. (2022); Xia & Yang (2010)
	Brand leadership	Minbashrazgah et al. (2021)		Brand ambassador	Backhaus (2018); Bali & Dixit (2016); Schmidt & Baumgarth (2018); Smith et al. (2021); Xiong et al. (2013)
<b>HRM (Human Resources Management)</b>	HRM functions	Cardy et al. (2007); Kurek (2021); Love & Singh (2011)		Organizational brand equity	Bareket-Bojmel & Shuv-Ami (2019)
	Organizational culture	Cardy et al. (2007)		Employer attractiveness	Berthon et al. (2005); Bonaiuto et al. (2013); Chhabra & Sharma (2014); Eger et al. (2018, 2019); Ghielen & DeCooman (2018); Gomes & Neves (2011); Kashive et al. (2020); Maheshwari et al. (2017); Santos et al. (2019); Maxwell & Knox (2009); Sivertzen et al. (2013)
	E-recruitment	Wołodźko & Woźniak (2017)		Brand performance	Burmann et al. (2009)
				Employee lifetime value	Cardy et al. (2007)
				Brand attractiveness	Santiago (2019)

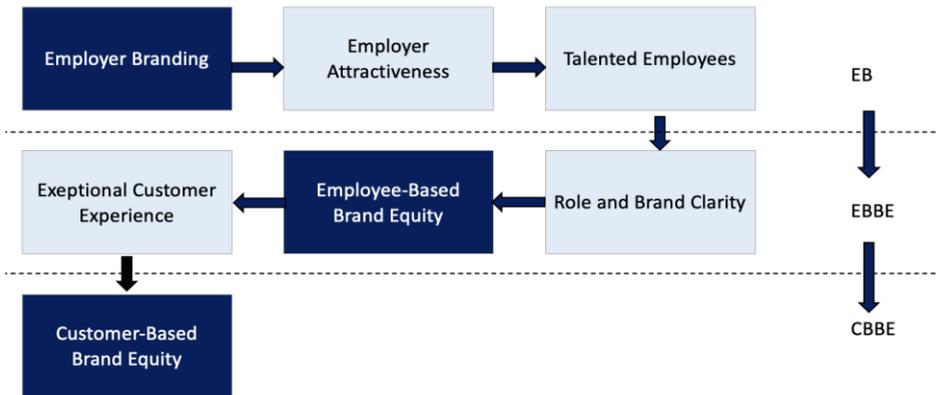
### **3.4. The connection between EB and EBBE**

Employer branding and employee-based brand equity are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing concepts (Figure 10). The first connection is expressed by recruitment and ability to attract talent. As it was already mentioned, employer branding plays a significant role in attracting top talent to an organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A strong employer brand can create a positive perception of the organization as an employer of choice, making it more appealing to potential candidates. When an organization is successful in attracting and hiring top talent, it contributes to building a pool of highly skilled and engaged employees who have the potential to positively impact the organizational brand while delivering exceptional customer experience (King et al., 2012; Sürücü et al., 2019).

The concepts also connect through employee engagement and alignment: EBBE focuses on aligning employees with the brand and empowering them to deliver on the brand promise. When employees are engaged, committed, and aligned with the organization's brand values, they become brand advocates and positively influence customer experiences. A strong employer brand can contribute to higher levels of employee engagement by fostering a sense of pride, purpose, and belonging among employees (Yousf & Khurshid, 2021).

Another connection is observable through brand consistency and customer experience. A consistent brand experience is crucial for building strong brand equity. When employees understand and embrace the brand values and promise, they play a vital role in delivering a consistent brand experience to customers (King et al., 2012; Yousf & Khurshid, 2021). Employee-based brand equity ensures that employees' behaviors, actions, and interactions align with the desired brand image, which in turn enhances customer perceptions and strengthens brand equity.

Finally, EB and EBBE connect through reputation and external perception. A positive employer brand and strong employee-based brand equity collectively contribute to building a positive overall brand reputation (Potgieter & Doubell, 2020). When an organization is known for being a great employer and its employees consistently deliver exceptional customer experiences, it creates a positive perception among external stakeholders, including customers, clients, investors, and the general public. This positive reputation reinforces the employer brand and strengthens the organization's brand equity.

**Figure 10.** The connection between EB and EBBE

### 3.5. New trends in employer branding

The new trends in investigation around employer branding include the following themes: social media (Duncan et al., 2019), career/corporate recruitment websites and video recruitment (Yacine & Karjaluto, 2022), gamified employer branding (Kashive et al., 2022) and artificial intelligence (Baratelli & Colleoni, 2022). In the most recent studies, emerged also the green human resources management applied to corporate social responsibility and environmental management (Yasin et al., 2022), the impact of employer branding on diversity and the infusion of disadvantage groups (Kele & Cassell, 2022), and the impact of coronavirus pandemic (Agrawal et al., 2022; Kuchеров et al., 2022). Probably the most popular new topic related to employer branding is the use of social media.

*Social media.* Russell (2009) was the first to mention the consequences of Web 2.0 and social media impacting the employer brand. More recently, Patra et al. (2019) suggested the importance of digital employer branding for attracting, motivating, and retaining talents. In accordance with authors, today's business environment is shaped by five digital forces such as: social media, mobile (including gamification) analytics, cloud computing, and robotic automation. Accordingly, the digital platforms bring a widespread change to the way how firms operate and interact with their different stakeholders, especially with their customers and employees. On the other side, Duncan et al. (2019) investigated online employee brand engagement and social media interaction to determine whether there were significant differences between the words used by employees who rated their employer brands highly, and those of employees who rated their employer brands as low. Their results show that employees who rate their em-

ployer brands low use significantly more words in their online reviews. They are also significantly less analytic in their reviews. In contrast, employees who rate their employer brands highly write with what sounds to be more authenticity. Similarly, Robertson et al. (2019) explored the brand personalities that employees are creating of their employer brands, in particular business-to-business brands, when describing these brands on social media. The authors examined how the brand personalities, based on written online reviews, differ between high- and low-ranked, and high- and low-rated brands. More recently, Yoganathan et al. (2021) addressed the need for research on social media in relation to employer branding and emphasized the importance of building employee-to-employee and employee-to-employer relationships by social media in the context of employer branding. Authors investigated the competencies of employees in relation to responsible use of social media and the impact of those competencies on online brand citizenship behavior and violation of psychological contract (unwritten beliefs that employees hold in relation to their employer brand's obligations towards them). The empirical study conducted among UK service employees concluded that social media competence does not directly increase employee online brand citizenship, but it decreases feelings of psychological contract violation. Accordingly, the authors suggested that the ability to avoid harmful media usage by employees is favorable towards their coworker connections and the employer brand's reputation. On the other side, Keppeler and Papenfuß (2021) examined the advantages of social media in public employer branding and indicated that targeting is crucial for public employer branding in the digital context as it enhances the organization and helps it to attract qualified specialists. In accordance with the authors, social media platforms offer a possibility to use a micro-segmentation: targeting is not limited to age, gender, or region but can be developed based on other qualifiers depending on the social media platform used. Bondarouk et al. (2013) and Olivas-Lujan and Bandarouk (2013) wondered what was the future of employer branding through social media. Now, ten years later, the role of social media in targeting of audience for recruitment and as a way of communication is undeniable.

*Recruitment websites and electronic HRM.* Corporate recruitment websites are perceived as an effective tool that organizations can use to position themselves as employers of choice through the design and communication of employer branding strategies (Bondarouk et al., 2017). Gunesh and Maheshwari (2019) examined the role of organizational websites for employer brand development and particularly depicted the importance attributed around the utilization of career websites in promoting the employer brand by the human resources across the banking sector. Potential applicants have a propensity to critically

examine employment related information provided on career websites to determine organizational attractiveness but, despite being the most usual channel and employee touchpoint recently, online recruitment has not yet positioned itself as the primary recruitment method. According to the conducted qualitative study some managers “appeared worried that the actual career website is not very effective in communicating the employer brand” (Gunesh & Maheshwari, 2019, p. 155). Honest communication of the employer brand on the career website was recommended, while the overall websites were suggested to be more interactive as it comes to the organization-candidate interactions. The nature of information accessible on organization websites and career web pages has a strong impact on potential applicants perceived “person-organization fit” and “person job fit”, therefore it can impact the intention to apply.

*Gamification.* Küpper et al. (2021) opened a door to a new discussion claiming that one promising approach to employer branding in the digital age is to gamify companies’ employer branding activities by games (i.e., digital games with an educational purpose). The authors claimed that “both games and employer branding share the key characteristic of facilitating learning to create knowledge” (Küpper et al., 2021, p. 1) and proposed a conceptual framework building on a learning-based extension of the affective events theory to advance the understanding of gamifying employer branding in the digitized economy. In accordance with the proposed framework gaming results with cognitive and affective learning and produces employer branding outcomes (employer brand knowledge and attraction). In this approach, learning constitutes the link between games and employer branding and causes a change in behavior due to certain experiences or stimuli. Consequently, games can influence the different components of the learning process in a gamified employer branding context and represent a novel way of building employer brand knowledge for an increasingly digitized workforce.

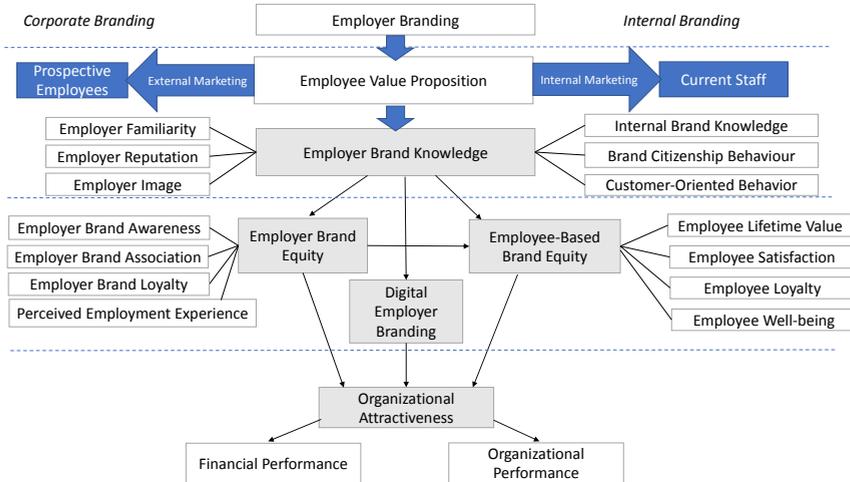
*Artificial Intelligence (AI).* Considering the most recent studies, Nawaz (2019) discussed on AI inference in human resource management, especially in the recruitment process. The study aimed to know how artificial intelligence is changing human involvement in the recruitment process in selected software companies. The results of a quantitative study revealed that artificial intelligence has a positive impact on human replacement in the recruitment process and will lead the fairness in the process. Based on the recent progresses and new applications of machine learning and deep learning, it might be suspected that the application of AI into employer branding will generate further interest both from practitioners as well as from academic. More recently, Kurek (2021) investigated the progressive automation of personnel processes to show what solutions based on AI are used to auto-

mate personnel processes and implement the digital employer branding. Kurek (2021) have noticed that although the use of automation is necessary to ensure organizational effectiveness, most of employers still struggle with its practical implementation. Still, the recent developments and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated its employment. Mostly the organizations that eager to work with generations Y and Z must watch those new technological applications that seem to be more natural and obvious solutions in the eyes of younger employees.

Those new trends offer many opportunities for further studies not only in human resource management but also in marketing.

#### **4. The comprehensive framework of employer branding**

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a comprehensive framework of employer branding (Figure 11). The proposed framework indicates the directions of external and internal marketing and considers both the perspective of current as of potential employees both leading to organizational attractiveness and performance. As in the previous study (Santiago, 2020), the proposed framework anchors in employer brand knowledge but leverages the employer branding process in more detail. In similarity to Biswas and Suar (2016), the framework links employer branding with employer brand equity and attractiveness, as well as with organizational performance. The employer branding is perceived to be as important as corporate and internal branding and strives to convey the value for prospective and current employees. The creation of employer brand knowledge is crucial, similarly as it happens in consumer branding where knowledge is one of the pillars of brand equity (Keller, 1993). The employer brand that covers knowledge can ensure future associations, image, and equity. On its side, employee-based brand equity is also strongly attached in brand knowledge (King & Grace, 2008, 2009, 2010). As employees are crucial to ensure competitive advantage and play an important role in marketing strategies (King & Grace, 2009) their perspective needs to be pondered. Additionally, based on the new trends and most recent developments, the new technologies (social media, websites, gamification, AI) can be successfully applied. Nowadays, focusing on employee value proposition is not enough (Kurek, 2021). Organizations must communicate through the channels most natural to the new generations that entered the workforce and have different expectations as their ancestors. Indeed, the area of employer digitalization and automatization seems to be the most promising for the future research.

**Figure 11.** The comprehensive framework of employer branding

Source: Author's own elaboration based on systematic literature review.

## 5. Conclusions

The present study has systematically reviewed employer brand literature from four major perspectives – publication activity, research design, contribution of empirical findings and new trends in the area. Considering that the progression in the literature on EB and EBBE is minimal due to the fragmentation of the field, the systematization of the concepts and the proposed framework can serve as a roadmap for further research. It can also assist the managers to portray their employer brand strategy. On the left side of the framework, managers can find all the dimensions that need to be covered with the external marketing strategies and addressed to potential employees. On the right side, the effects of successful internal communication are exposed and linked with the current employees' perspective of the organizational brand. The core of the framework indicates the importance of employee value proposition and employer brand knowledge in shaping the employer and employee-based brand equity.

The study in employer branding encompasses three major difficulties. The main difficulty of studies in this area is the fact that the subject is truly multidisciplinary. The remarks of employer branding have been found in human resources management literature (e.g., Backhaus & Tikko, 2004; Cardy et al., 2007), in the studies of marketing and brand management (e.g., Ngo et al., 2019), and most recently employer branding emerges as a new area of interest

for knowledge management and digitally oriented studies (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Stockman et al., 2020).

The integral multidisciplinary nature of employer branding has led to a dispersed understanding of constructs and applications in the academic studies. Frequently, different studies have been labeling similar constructs or concepts with many different names, or in the contrary –an array of concepts has similar designations despite their versatility (Theurer et al., 2018).

The third difficulty resists in the focus of the studies. While some focus on the employer brand as an “identifier” (e.g., Gomes & Never, 2011 – organization in the eyes of potential job candidates), some other focus on the process and the means to build the employer brand (e.g., Bali & Dixit, 2016; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018). Similarly, the difficulty resists on the perspective of the study – while sometimes the concept is investigated through the organizational perspective, some studies mention the employees’ perception (e.g., Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Saini et al., 2014).

Pondering those difficulties, it was essential to integrate existing theoretical and empirical advances and determine a clearer view of what comprises employer branding. This systematization contributes to reinforce future development of the field and indicates the future areas of interest. This paper addresses this demand and assists the literature in three principal ways. First, it exhibits the existing trends and research interest in employer branding and employee-based brand equity in the last decade. Then it clarifies existing research on employer branding and employee-based brand equity by showing the main proposals and findings, it also distillates the antecedents and outcomes of employee-based brand equity. Finally, it identifies the new areas of research to refine and extend employer branding evidence and theory.

*Additional academic contribution.* This study makes another significant contribution to academia. It applied the very recent postulates of PRISMA-S protocol, used scholar API and a software empowered by artificial intelligence to visualise bibliometric networks. Giving the raise in the scientific production, the use of robust methodologies and software is crucial. Artificial intelligence has the potential to address some of the biggest challenges in academic research. Artificial intelligence and multi-search databases can be used to optimize research resources, automate the acquisition of data, and facilitate the analysis of complex datasets. This study used and exposed an array of modern tools that the academic researchers can use to investigate complex environments.

*Study limitations.* Some limitations are present in this study, mostly due to the nature of systematic literature review approach. First, only four databases were used to search for relevant articles. Even though these databases are commonly used in the field, some research work might have been overlooked due to not being indexed in these databases. Second, only articles published in English are included in the search and analysis. Third, literature related to employer branding and employee-based brand equity is also reachable in the books, conference papers and proceedings, magazines, dissertations, and other sources – this study considered a very limited number of those publications. Fourth, the search by the keywords left out the journal articles which have not used any of them in the title, abstract, or keywords. It also might be important to mention that due to the ‘freshness’ of the field an array of journals was included in the analysis, of which some are the “top” journals with high impact factors, while the others are not so well established. However, this also brings some interesting insights as the analyzed papers empirically tested the concepts in various country and industry settings, demonstrating the importance of employer branding and its multidisciplinary. The review of the existing literature demonstrates that the literature has evolved from covering what employer branding is to why it is important for entities. Despite this growing interest from academics and practitioners, research gaps are still visible.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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