

# Mapping Brand Cultural Identity: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis of Global Branding Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural identity shapes brand perceptions in the global market. Integrating cultural elements into brand identity is vital for engaging diverse consumers. However, there are gaps in our understanding of how brands manage cultural identity amid globalization and digitalization. This study provides an overview of Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) research by examining its evolution, trends, and research gaps. It also considers how cultural identity influences branding strategies and consumer behavior, offering insights for brand managers. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis were conducted to synthesize studies and identify research patterns. The SLR followed PRISMA guidelines, while bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to visualize citation networks and keyword co-occurrence. The analysis revealed an increase in BCI-related publications from 2022 onwards. Key themes include the influence of cultural heritage, symbolic representation, and the role of digital platforms in communicating cultural identity. Despite the growing body of research, gaps remain in the understanding of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement. This study also identifies sustainability as an emerging theme within the BCI literature. This study contributes to BCI research by clarifying its conceptual boundaries, mapping its intellectual structure, and identifying underdeveloped themes, particularly symbolic representation, stakeholder engagement, digital mediation, and sustainability. These findings emphasize the importance of cultural identity in branding strategies and offer practical insights for brand managers. Brands can foster stronger consumer connections by leveraging cultural elements in their branding.

**Keywords:** Brand Cultural Identity, Branding Strategies, Cultural Heritage, Symbolic Representation, Consumer Behavior.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary globalized market, understanding the role of cultural identity in shaping consumer perceptions of brands has become increasingly vital. With the rise of digital media, social networks, and international trade, brands no longer operate within the confines of a single culture or national identity. Globalization has blurred the lines between local and international markets, creating new challenges and opportunities for brands to maintain their relevance and authenticity. Consequently, cultural identity has emerged as a critical factor in developing branding strategies, influencing how consumers relate to and engage with products and services in global markets. The ability of brands to integrate

cultural elements into their identity while appealing to diverse consumer groups is essential for their success. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of adapting brand identities to align with the values, traditions, and cultural nuances of specific markets (Mahdiraji *et al.*, 2024; Johri *et al.*, 2024).

Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) has been explored in various academic fields, including marketing, sociology, and cultural studies. It refers to the unique cultural characteristics, values, and symbols that define a brand and shape consumers' perceptions and emotional connections. In this study, BCI is defined more specifically as the culturally grounded dimension of brand identity through which a branded entity communicates heritage, symbols, traditions, narratives, and shared meanings that are recognizable to stakeholders. BCI is therefore narrower than general brand identity, which encompasses all functional and symbolic associations of a brand, and it is also distinct from cultural branding, which generally emphasizes the strategic use of cultural myths or ideological positioning. The cultural representation of a brand can influence its success in the global



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marketplace, especially as consumers become more attuned to the cultural relevance of the brands with which they engage. Research has shown that brands that successfully integrate cultural elements into their identity tend to foster stronger emotional bonds with their customers, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024; Voyer *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the impact of cultural identity on consumer behavior is particularly pronounced in regions with strong national identities, where cultural factors play a pivotal role in shaping purchasing decisions (Kushwah *et al.*, 2020).

Despite the growing recognition of BCI's significance, several gaps remain in the research, particularly regarding how brands can effectively manage and incorporate cultural elements into their identity without alienating diverse consumer groups. A major issue in the current literature is the lack of a systematic framework for integrating cultural identity into brand strategy. While many studies acknowledge the importance of cultural elements in branding, few offer concrete solutions or models for brands to implement these strategies in a way that resonates with global audiences. Additionally, research has often focused on specific geographical or cultural contexts, making it difficult to generalize findings across regions and industries. This highlights the need for a more conceptually coherent understanding of how BCI functions across diverse markets and how brands can navigate the complexities of cultural diversity in their branding efforts.

The present review seeks to address these issues by providing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis of current research on BCI. The goal is to synthesize existing knowledge, identify key trends, and highlight gaps in the literature that warrant further exploration. By combining traditional SLR with bibliometric techniques, the review offers a holistic view of the field, mapping the evolution of BCI research and identifying emerging areas of interest. Beyond the use of combined methods, the contribution of this study lies in clarifying the conceptual boundaries of BCI, identifying its core thematic dimensions, and distinguishing BCI from adjacent domains, such as place branding, city branding, and nation branding. The review also highlights underdeveloped themes, particularly symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement, while tracing the growing relevance of digital mediation and sustainability within the BCI discourse. This study also considers how the reviewed literature links cultural identity with consumer behavior, providing insights into how brands can better engage with their target audiences by incorporating cultural elements into their branding strategies. This study seeks to contribute both academic and practical knowledge to the subject, offering brand managers and researchers a clearer framework for understanding the role of culture in branding.

This study addressed the primary research problem of the lack of a comprehensive framework for incorporating cultural identity into

global branding strategies. While previous studies have examined the importance of cultural elements in branding, there is little consensus on how to define, measure, and implement brand cultural identity in a way that resonates with diverse consumer groups. Part of this difficulty arises because BCI is often conflated with adjacent constructs such as place branding, city branding, nation branding, and digital self-branding. In this review, these streams are not treated as synonymous with BCI; rather, they are considered only when they explicitly examine how cultural symbols, heritage, identity narratives, or stakeholder-mediated meanings shape the identity of a branded entity. The lack of a unified approach poses a challenge for brand managers, who often struggle to balance global branding strategies with the need for local relevance. Furthermore, the existing literature fails to adequately address the complexity of managing cultural identity in an increasingly globalized and digital marketplace, where consumer preferences are constantly shifting. This study seeks to address these issues by examining how cultural identity influences brand perception and by offering practical recommendations for brands to adapt their identities to diverse cultural contexts.

A specific challenge in the literature is the lack of attention to the roles of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement in shaping brand cultural identity. Previous studies have primarily focused on cultural heritage and the integration of national identity into branding strategies; however, national or territorial identity is relevant to the present review only when it is mobilized as part of a brand's cultural meaning-making process rather than treated as a purely geopolitical or destination-promotion issue. Symbolic representation, including the use of local traditions, folklore, and national symbols, plays a critical role in consumers' emotional connections with brands. Additionally, involving local communities and stakeholders in the branding process ensures that brand identity is authentic and resonates with the values and expectations of the target audience. These factors are particularly important in markets in which cultural identity is strongly tied to national pride and heritage. Therefore, this study also examined the roles of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement in the development of brand cultural identity, offering a more nuanced understanding of these elements in branding strategies.

The literature review focuses on several key themes central to the development of brand cultural identity. These include the role of cultural identity in shaping consumer behavior, the challenges brands face in navigating cultural differences, and the impact of globalization on brand identity. This review also explores the various methods brands use to incorporate cultural elements into their identity, such as using local symbols, traditions, and heritage in their marketing campaigns. A critical analysis of the existing literature highlights the strengths and weaknesses of current BCI approaches and provides a foundation for the development of new strategies and frameworks. This section also identifies gaps in the literature, particularly in relation to the role

of stakeholder engagement and symbolic representation, and provides a rationale for further research in these areas.

The primary objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on Brand Cultural Identity, identify key trends and gaps in the literature, and offer practical recommendations for brands seeking to develop culturally relevant branding strategies. This study also contributes to academic understanding of how cultural identity influences consumer behavior and how brands can navigate the complexities of cultural diversity in global markets. By combining a systematic literature review with a bibliometric analysis, the review offers valuable insights into the evolution of BCI research, its current state, and future directions. The novelty of this study lies not only in integrating qualitative and quantitative review techniques but also in offering a sharper conceptual delimitation of BCI, synthesizing the main thematic clusters that structure the field, and identifying where BCI converges with and remains distinct from adjacent branding literatures. In substantive terms, the review shows that symbolic representation, stakeholder engagement, digital mediation, and sustainability are important but unevenly developed areas within the literature, thereby providing a clearer agenda for future research. Additionally, the study offers practical insights for brand managers and marketers, helping them to better understand how to incorporate cultural identity into their branding strategies in a way that resonates with diverse consumer groups.

To address this conceptual and methodological fragmentation, the present review organizes existing BCI literature into a more coherent analytical framework, identifies dominant research trends, and highlights underdeveloped areas that require further theoretical and empirical attention. More specifically, the contribution of this review lies in organizing a conceptually fragmented body of literature into a more coherent BCI framework, clarifying which studies are centrally relevant to BCI and which belong only to adjacent domains. It also advances the field by identifying thematic concentrations and underexplored areas that are important for theory development and managerial application. The findings of this study contribute to both academic knowledge and practical applications, helping brands navigate the complexities of cultural identity in a global brand strategy. By addressing the challenges identified in the literature, the review offers valuable insights into how brands can adapt their identities to resonate with diverse consumer groups and remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) has gained considerable attention in recent years as businesses increasingly recognize its importance in shaping consumer perceptions and enhancing brand success in global markets. As globalization continues to blur the lines between local and international markets, understanding how

cultural identity influences consumer behavior has become a critical component of brand strategies. For the purposes of this review, BCI is treated as a focal branding construct that intersects with, but is not equivalent to, place branding, city branding, nation branding, or digital self-presentation. These adjacent literatures are discussed only when they illuminate how cultural meanings, symbols, heritage, or stakeholder participation contribute to the identity of a branded entity. This section reviews the key themes in the existing literature on BCI, focusing on the influence of culture on brand identity, the impact of globalization, the role of cultural heritage in branding, and the roles of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement.

### Cultural Influence on Brand Identity

Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) refers to the distinct characteristics, values, and symbols derived from a brand's cultural background that influence consumer perception and brand loyalty. Unlike broader brand identity constructs, BCI emphasizes specific cultural sources of meaning; similarly, unlike digital self-branding or online self-presentation, it does not refer to individual identity performance unless such performance is explicitly examined as part of a branded cultural identity in a market context. Culture plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' interpretations of and engagement with brands. According to Kushwah *et al.* (2020) Cultural identity significantly affects consumer perceptions because it is closely tied to societal norms, values, and shared experiences. Brands that incorporate elements of cultural identity into their strategies tend to foster stronger emotional connections with their consumers. The literature further suggests that brands that align with the cultural values of their target audiences are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy, leading to higher consumer engagement (Voyer *et al.*, 2017).

Research has highlighted that brands are not simply commercial entities; they are also social symbols that communicate cultural values to consumers (Yeboah-Banin and Quaye, 2021). For instance, in Gulf countries, cultural sensitivity is paramount in brand communication, as local consumers value cultural appropriateness in the brands they choose (Kushwah *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, brands that fail to recognize the cultural context of their markets may face challenges, such as alienating potential customers or failing to resonate emotionally with them. Therefore, understanding consumers' cultural identities is essential for brands to maintain their relevance in diverse markets.

### Globalization and Brand Identity

As globalization fosters greater interconnectedness, it leads to a blend of cultures that brands must navigate. While globalization has opened up opportunities for brands to expand beyond their local markets, it has also presented challenges, particularly in maintaining coherent and authentic brand identities across various cultural contexts. Globalizing a brand involves

incorporating cultural elements from various regions while preserving the brand's core identity (Mahdiraji *et al.*, 2024).

Global brands often face the dilemma of balancing standardization and cultural adaptation. Standardizing branding strategies can enhance efficiency and consistency in international markets. Conversely, adapting branding to local cultural contexts can increase brand relevance and appeal to local consumers (Johri *et al.*, 2024). A key challenge for global brands is to maintain a consistent brand image while addressing cultural nuances in different markets. This issue is particularly prominent in industries such as fashion, food, and technology, where cultural preferences significantly influence consumer behaviors.

To address these challenges, some scholars argue that a hybrid approach, in which global brands retain their core identity but adapt specific elements to suit local cultures, may be the most effective strategy (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2024). This approach allows brands to achieve a balance between global coherence and local relevance, fostering a sense of connection with diverse consumer groups while preserving their identity.

### Cultural Heritage in Branding

Cultural heritage is a fundamental aspect of brand cultural identity, and its integration into branding strategies plays a vital role in establishing authenticity and emotional resonance among consumers. Cultural heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, such as traditional arts, folklore, architecture, and festivals, which brands can leverage to differentiate themselves from the marketplace. According to Ciuculescu and Luca (2024), brands that incorporate cultural heritage into their identity are better positioned to create strong emotional bonds with consumers, particularly in regions where national pride and cultural heritage are highly valued.

For instance, studies of cities such as Istanbul and Isfahan are included in this review not because all city branding automatically constitutes BCI, but because these cases explicitly show how cultural heritage, historical symbolism, and stakeholder-recognized identity markers are mobilized to construct a branded identity. As noted by Zali *et al.* (2014), Isfahan's identity as a symbol of Islamic culture has been deeply intertwined with its historical monuments and traditional crafts, which are central to its branding efforts. Similarly, Istanbul's transformation into a global brand has been fueled by its ability to blend its rich cultural history with modern aspirations, attracting tourists, investors, and residents alike (Karamullaoglu and Sandikci, 2019).

### Symbolic Representation and Stakeholder Engagement

One of the most significant gaps in the literature is the underexplored role of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement in shaping brand cultural identity. While cultural

heritage is widely recognized as an important element of brand identity, the use of symbols, such as local traditions, folklore, and national icons, remains an area in need of further exploration. Symbols are powerful tools for communicating cultural values and fostering emotional connections with consumers (Lam *et al.*, 2011).

Brands that effectively use symbolic representation can tap into deeply held cultural values, enhancing emotional appeal and consumer loyalty. For example, in Hangzhou, integrating soft, graceful, and feminine design elements into local fashion brands has helped strengthen the city's cultural identity and branding efforts (Chen and Ha, 2016). Similarly, brands in Indonesia often incorporate traditional symbols and local heritage into their marketing materials, appealing to consumers' sense of national pride and cultural belonging (Nichter *et al.*, 2009).

In addition to symbolic representation, stakeholder engagement is critical for ensuring that a brand's cultural identity is authentic and resonates with its target audience. Jelinčić *et al.* (2017) emphasized that involving local residents and communities in the branding process ensures that the brand reflects local values and aspirations. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and pride among stakeholders, which can help sustain the brand's identity over time. Moreover, it helps brands avoid the pitfalls of overbranding, in which brand identity becomes detached from local culture and loses authenticity.

### Summary of Literature and Research Gaps

The literature on brand cultural identity underscores the significant role of culture in shaping consumer perceptions and brand success. Cultural identity is deeply embedded in consumer behavior, and brands that successfully integrate cultural elements into their identity are more likely to foster emotional connections and build brand loyalty. Taken together, these studies suggest that BCI should be understood as a culturally inflected dimension of branding rather than an umbrella label for all culturally related branding phenomena. However, the literature also reveals several gaps, particularly in symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement. Although much research has focused on cultural heritage and the integration of national identity into branding, only a subset of place, city, or nation-branding studies directly advances BCI, namely those that explain branding through cultural symbols, heritage, narratives, or stakeholder-mediated cultural meaning.

Additionally, the existing literature often lacks a comprehensive framework for incorporating cultural identity into global branding strategies to address this gap. To maintain conceptual precision, the present review includes studies only when the BCI is conceptually or empirically expressed through cultural symbols, heritage, traditions, identity narratives, or stakeholder participation in branding. While some scholars have suggested a hybrid approach in which global brands adapt specific elements



to local cultures, there is still a need for more concrete models and strategies that brands can apply in practice. This gap is particularly significant in industries that operate in diverse cultural contexts, where cultural sensitivity and authenticity are crucial for brand success.

Responding to these gaps, this review combines systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis to clarify the conceptual boundaries of BCI, map its intellectual structure, and identify underdeveloped areas for future research. Its contribution is threefold. Conceptually, it sharpens the boundary of BCI as a distinct branding construct. Thematically, it identifies the main clusters that organize the literature and highlights underdeveloped areas, such as symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement. Methodologically, it combines systematic review logic with bibliometric mapping to show how these themes have evolved and interconnected over time. By synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying emerging trends, this study offers practical insights into brands seeking to develop culturally relevant branding strategies that resonate with diverse consumer groups. This study also highlights areas for future research, particularly symbolic representation, stakeholder engagement, and the integration of cultural identity into global branding strategies.

Table 1 synthesizes the literature on Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) into a set of core analytical dimensions, including cultural distinctiveness, stakeholder participation, symbolic representation, cultural heritage anchoring, negotiated identity, local aesthetic translation, and digital mediation. Rather than presenting descriptive excerpts from prior studies, the table organizes the literature into concise conceptual categories by outlining the meaning of each dimension, its indicative markers, its relevance to branding, and its representative references. This synthesis helps clarify the conceptual boundaries of BCI and demonstrates that the construct is multidimensional, culturally grounded, and applicable across branding contexts when cultural meaning is integral to brand formation and communication.

As shown in Table 1, BCI is best understood not as a single attribute, but as a multidimensional branding construct shaped by the interaction of cultural meaning, symbolic resources, and stakeholder interpretation. The synthesis also shows that not all culturally related branding studies fall within BCI. Rather, a study is relevant to BCI when it explains how cultural values, heritage, symbols, local aesthetics, or stakeholder-mediated meanings contribute directly to the construction and communication of a branded identity. This analytical framing strengthens the conceptual distinction between BCI and adjacent domains, such as place branding, nation branding, and digital self-presentation, while also highlighting the thematic areas that remain underdeveloped in the literature, particularly symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a combination of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis to examine the current state of research on Brand Cultural Identity (BCI). The objective of this methodology was to synthesize existing knowledge, identify trends, and highlight research gaps in BCI. The literature search was conducted in the Scopus database, which was selected because of its broad coverage of peer-reviewed international publications and its compatibility with bibliometric analysis. The search was designed to maximize recall at the identification stage and was subsequently narrowed through screening for conceptual relevance to BCI. The SLR was designed to comprehensively assess relevant literature to ensure that the study included all pertinent research on the subject. Bibliometric analysis allows for the quantitative examination of publication trends, author collaborations, citation networks, and keyword co-occurrences, thereby providing a detailed overview of the intellectual structure of BCI research. In the present study, bibliometric mapping was conducted using VOSviewer, and the procedure is reported explicitly in terms of the final Scopus dataset used for analysis ( $n=258$  articles), units of analysis (publication output, countries, affiliations, sources, authors, and keyword co-occurrence), keyword source used for mapping (author keywords), counting approach (full counting), minimum occurrence threshold (5), normalization method (association strength), and keyword-cleaning procedure applied to merge equivalent terms before visualization to improve reproducibility. This approach enables a more robust understanding of the field by combining qualitative and quantitative insights to inform future research.

The systematic literature review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines, which are widely recognized for ensuring transparency and replicability in systematic reviews. Figure 1 illustrates the information flow of the SLR process and highlights each stage of the literature selection and analysis. The Scopus search was performed on June 10, 2025, using the search field restrictions TITLE-ABS-KEY and the query TITLE-ABS-KEY (brand AND cultural AND identity). This broad query was intentionally used to capture the widest possible body of potentially relevant studies at the identification stage. Relevance to brand cultural identity was ensured through subsequent screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts against the review objectives. According to the PRISMA guidelines, the process begins with the identification of relevant studies through comprehensive database searches, followed by the screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts to determine the inclusion of studies that meet specific criteria. The final step involved data extraction, in which key findings from the selected studies were synthesized and analyzed to answer the research questions.

The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 provides a clear visualization of the systematic literature review process and

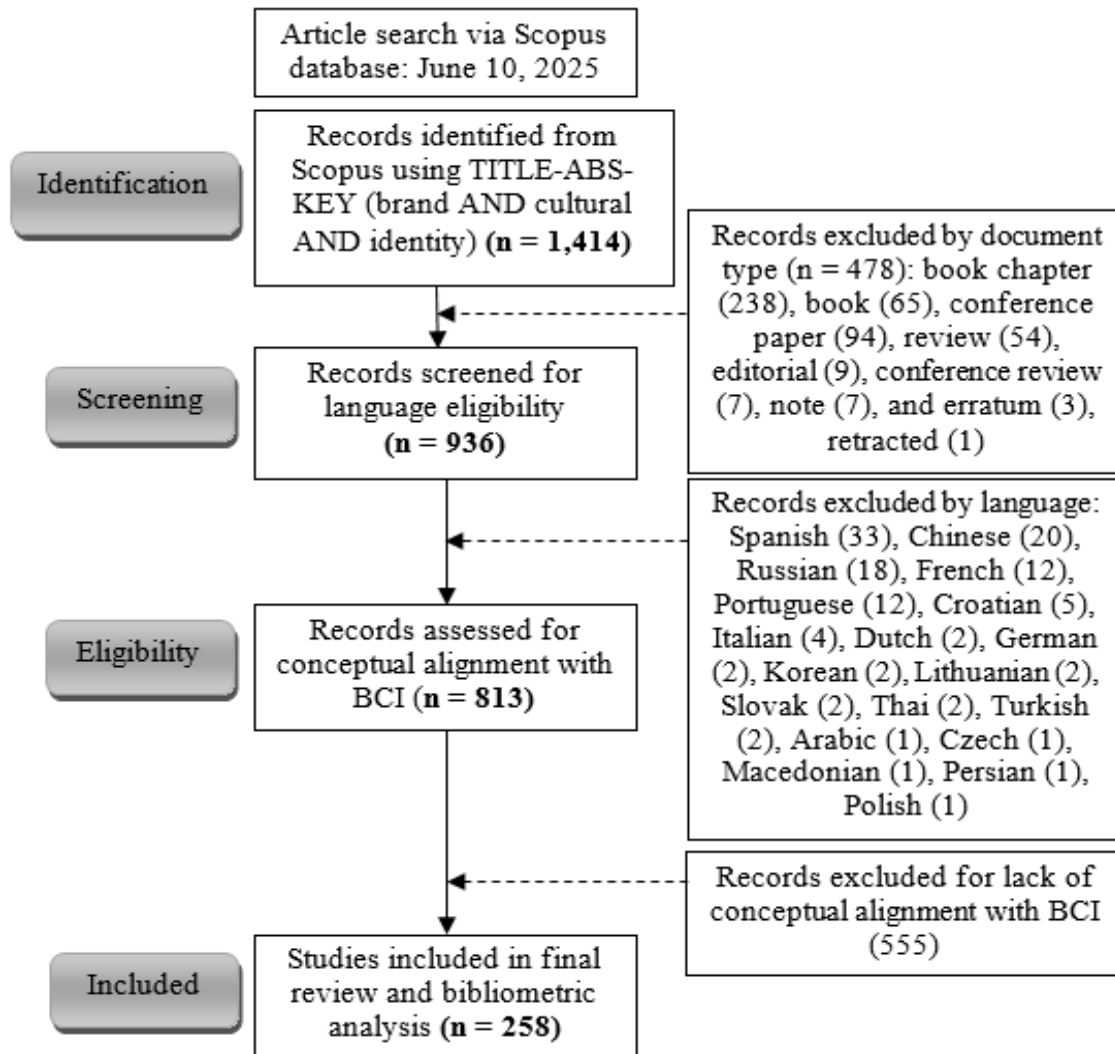
shows the various stages of study selection. Initially, the search yielded 1,414 records from Scopus using the query “brand” AND “cultural” AND “identity” in the Scopus database. As the search was conducted in a single database, no separate duplicate-free stage was applied. Exclusion by document type removed 478 records, leaving 936 records for subsequent screening. These records were then screened by language and conceptual relevance through title, abstract, and full-text assessment, resulting in a final dataset of 258 articles. All intermediate counts follow the verified PRISMA sequence reported in Figure 1. This process ensured

that the selected studies were comprehensive, of high quality, and pertinent to the study objectives.

Bibliometric analysis complements SLR by providing a quantitative examination of research trends and the intellectual structure of the field. Bibliometric techniques, such as citation analysis and co-occurrence mapping, are used to identify patterns in the literature, such as the most frequently cited authors, articles, and journals. VOSviewer was employed to visualize citation networks and co-occurring keywords in BCI research. VOSviewer is a widely used tool for bibliometric analysis that allows the creation

**Table 1: Analytical dimensions of Brand Cultural Identity (BCI).**

| Sl. No. | Dimension of BCI                       | Definition or meaning                                                                                                                        | Indicative Markers                                                                           | Relevance to Branding                                                                                                                     | References                                                                        |
|---------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.      | Cultural distinctiveness               | BCI expresses the culturally specific character of a branded entity through its recognizable beliefs, values, and everyday practices.        | Beliefs, local practices, folklore, cuisine, festivals, public symbols                       | Helps differentiate brands and create emotional recognition in competitive markets.                                                       | Ali and Khayat (2024); Ciuculescu and Luca (2024); Cristòfol <i>et al.</i> (2024) |
| 2.      | Stakeholder participation              | The BCI is strengthened when local actors actively contribute to defining and communicating cultural meaning.                                | Community involvement, resident input, participatory events, local co-creation               | Enhances the authenticity, legitimacy, and stakeholder ownership of brand identity.                                                       | Türkyilmaz (2013); Jelinčić <i>et al.</i> (2017)                                  |
| 3.      | Symbolic representation                | BCI is communicated through symbols that condense cultural meanings into recognizable brand cues.                                            | Myths, flags, monuments, folklore, emblems, aesthetic codes                                  | It builds symbolic resonance and helps stakeholders interpret the brand as culturally meaningful.                                         | Cheregi (2017); Heller (2016); Rodner and Kerrigan (2018)                         |
| 4.      | Cultural heritage anchoring            | BCI draws on historical continuity, local craftsmanship, and inherited traditions to establish brand meaning.                                | Heritage sites, handicrafts, local expertise, traditional production, place-based narratives | Supports authenticity, premium value, and long-term brand credibility.                                                                    | Zali <i>et al.</i> (2014); Kurokawa (2013); Bowen (2020)                          |
| 5.      | Negotiated and dynamic identity        | BCI is not fixed; it is continuously shaped through interactions among communities, institutions, and market actors.                         | Co-creation, negotiation, local discourse, contestation, adaptation over time                | It explains how brand identity evolves while maintaining local legitimacy and relevance.                                                  | Martínez (2016); Rozhkov <i>et al.</i> (2020)                                     |
| 6.      | Local aesthetic translation            | BCI translates local styles and cultural codes into brand design, communication and visual identity.                                         | Traditional symbols, local aesthetics, design vocabulary, spatial imagery                    | It helps brands adapt cultural meanings into recognizable market expressions.                                                             | Nichter <i>et al.</i> (2009); Chen and Ha (2016)                                  |
| 7.      | Digital mediation of cultural identity | Digital platforms can mediate the expression and circulation of cultural identity when identity performance is linked to branding processes. | Platform visibility, algorithmic mediation, online self-presentation, audience interaction   | Relevant to BCI only when digital expression functions as part of a branded cultural identity rather than as a general self-presentation. | Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020)                                                       |



**Figure 1:** Systematic Literature Review Information Flow using PRISMA.

of visual maps that illustrate the relationships between authors, articles, and research topics. Using this tool, this study identified key contributors to the field, including influential authors and journals, as well as emerging research themes and trends.

The selection of articles for bibliometric analysis was based on the same criteria as those for the SLR, ensuring that the studies included in the analysis were relevant to the research questions. The bibliometric analysis involved two main components: identification of the most influential articles and authors in the field of brand cultural identity and examination of the co-occurrence of keywords to map the key research topics within the field. For the keyword co-occurrence analysis, only the studies retained after the PRISMA screening were included, and the map was generated from cleaned author keywords using full counting, a minimum occurrence threshold of five, and association strength normalization in VOSviewer. Equivalent or closely related terms were merged during preprocessing to reduce duplication and improve interpretive clarity. The bibliometric analysis results

revealed the central themes in BCI research, including the roles of culture, globalization, and consumer behavior in shaping brand identity. Additionally, this analysis identified gaps in the literature, particularly in areas such as stakeholder engagement and symbolic representation, which have received limited attention in previous studies.

Figure 1, the PRISMA flow diagram, is essential for understanding the process by which studies were selected for inclusion in the systematic literature review. The diagram illustrates the initial number of records retrieved from the database, subsequent exclusions based on specific criteria, and the final number of articles included in the review. Figure 1 presents a single audited progression from the initial Scopus search to the final corpus of 258 articles. Each stage of exclusion was organized according to document type, language eligibility, and conceptual relevance to Brand Cultural Identity. Full-text and conceptual exclusions were recorded to ensure consistency between the screening process and the final corpus of 258 articles. The flow diagram highlights the

stages of study selection, ensuring transparency in the research process. This visual representation of the SLR methodology provides a clear overview of the study's rigorous approach to identifying and selecting relevant literature.

The data collection process involved identifying articles through database searches and manually screening titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure that only the most relevant studies were included in the review. This process was designed to minimize bias and ensure that the included studies accurately represented the current state of BCI research. The inclusion criteria for the studies were as follows: (1) the record must be a journal article indexed in Scopus; (2) the article must be written in English; (3) the article must have been published between 2003 and 2025; and (4) the article must substantively address branding through cultural identity dimensions relevant to the review. The exclusion criteria were records classified as book chapters, books, conference papers, reviews, editorials, conference reviews, notes, errata, retracted publications, non-English publications, and studies not conceptually aligned with Brand Cultural Identity. These criteria ensured that the studies included in the review were of high quality and relevant to the research question.

Once the studies were selected, data extraction involved identifying the key themes and findings from each article, including the research objectives, methodologies, and conclusions. These findings were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of BCI research, highlighting key trends, gaps and emerging areas of interest. Data synthesis was conducted inductively, allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns in the literature review. The results of the data extraction were analyzed to answer the following primary research question: How has BCI research evolved over time within the review period? What are the current trends in the field, and what gaps remain in the literature?

In addition to the systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis, this study did not apply a formal quality appraisal checklist or scoring framework to rate the included studies. Instead, the selected records were screened for eligibility, relevance, and conceptual alignment with the review objective during the title, abstract, and full-text assessment stages. Therefore, the synthesis was descriptive and mapping-oriented rather than based on formal quality scoring of individual studies.

This study combines a rigorous systematic literature review with a bibliometric analysis to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on brand cultural identity. Using these complementary methods, this study identifies key trends, gaps, and emerging areas of interest in the field, offering valuable insights for future research. The use of the PRISMA flow diagram ensured transparency in the study selection process, while bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer provided a quantitative examination of the intellectual structure of the field.

As a mapping-oriented review, this study emphasizes transparent selection and descriptive synthesis of relevant literature rather than formal appraisal-based quality ranking of individual studies. This methodological approach ensures that the study provides a thorough and unbiased review of the existing literature on BCI, contributing to both academic knowledge and practical applications for brand managers and marketers.

According to the search results obtained on June 10, 2025, from the Scopus database using the TITLE-ABS-KEY query: “brand AND cultural AND identity” across various academic disciplines, the initial search retrieved 1,414 records (Figure 1). This search string was intentionally broad in order to maximize recall and capture studies that may discuss BCI-related phenomena without using the exact phrase “Brand Cultural Identity.” The resulting records were then narrowed down through document type, language, and relevance screening. After excluding non-article document types ( $n=478$ ), 936 records remained for screening. These records were then assessed through title, abstract, and full-text review for English-language eligibility and conceptual alignment with Brand Cultural Identity, resulting in a final corpus of 258 articles. Thus, the PRISMA sequence is based on document type, language eligibility, and conceptual relevance, and not on open-access status or the presence of a specific phrase in the title, abstract, or keywords.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

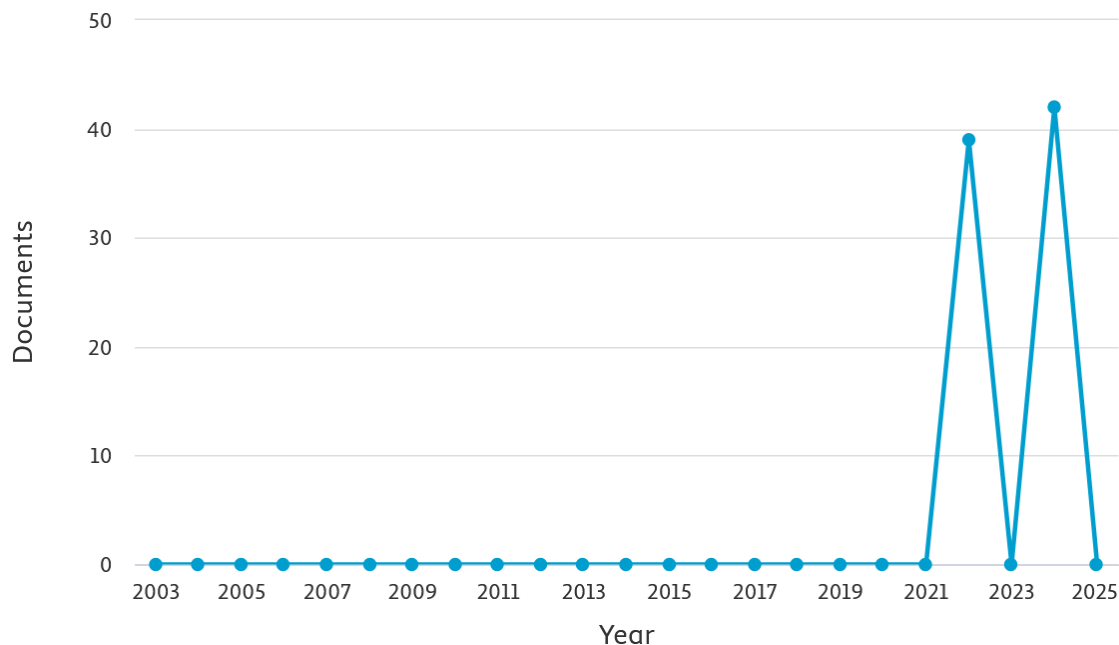
This section presents the findings of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analyses. The results provide a detailed overview of the evolution of BCI research, including publication trends, key contributors, geographical distribution, and emerging themes. The discussion interprets these findings in the context of the existing literature and highlights their theoretical and practical implications.

Bibliometric analysis revealed a significant increase in BCI-related publications, particularly from 2022 onwards. As shown in Figure 2, the number of publications has grown steadily, with a notable spike in the past few years. Prior to 2022, the number of studies on BCI was relatively low; however, this trend has shifted dramatically in recent years, indicating a growing academic interest in the field. This post-2022 increase suggests that BCI is receiving more explicit scholarly attention as branding debates become more responsive to questions of culture, identity, and market heterogeneity.

This surge in publications reflects broader trends in global marketing, in which businesses are increasingly recognizing the need to integrate cultural identity into their branding strategies. According to Rodrigues *et al.* (2024), globalization and digitalization have intensified the need for brands to cater to diverse cultural contexts, driving the demand for research that explores how cultural identity influences consumer behavior. As companies expand into new markets, understanding cultural



## Documents by year



**Figure 2:** Number of publications related to Brand Cultural Identity. Source: Scopus database.

nuances has become a crucial part of their branding strategies, as reflected in the growing body of literature.

The geographical distribution of BCI-related research highlights the leading countries in this field. As shown in Figure 3, the United Kingdom is the most prolific contributor, followed by the United States, China, Australia, and other European countries. The high number of publications from the UK and US may be attributed to their advanced research infrastructure and the global reach of their academic and marketing communities. These countries have long been at the forefront of marketing and branding research, and their contributions to BCI research reflect the increasing recognition of cultural identity in branding.

The results also revealed growing interest in BCI research in other regions, including China and Malaysia. As global markets continue to expand, researchers from emerging markets are likely to play an increasingly important role in shaping future BCI research. This distribution highlights the global nature of the field, with scholars from diverse regions contributing to the growing body of literature on brand cultural identity.

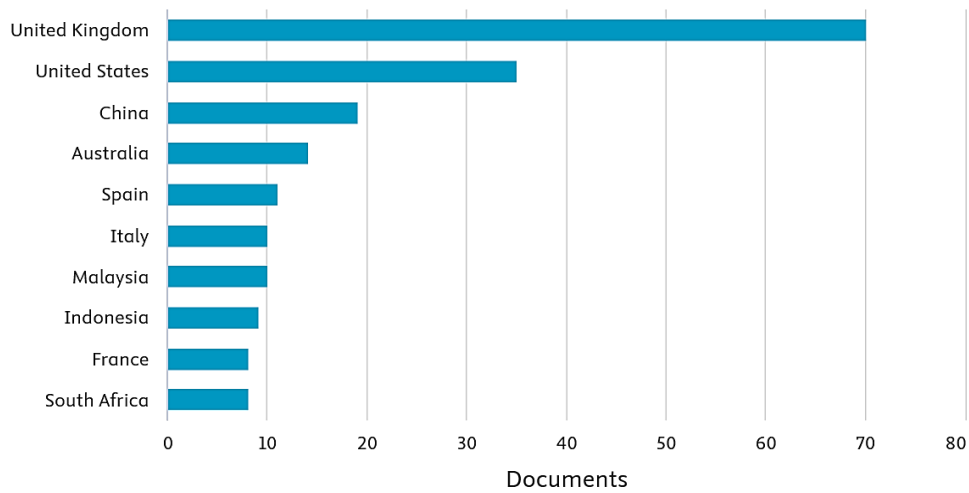
Bibliometric analysis also identified the international network structure of BCI research. As shown in Figure 4, the country network visualization illustrates the relationships among contributing countries, highlighting how research activity is distributed across national contexts. Therefore, the figure should be interpreted at the country level, not at the author level, by showing how national research communities are connected through co-authorship or shared publication activity. The prominent positions of the United Kingdom, the United States,

China, and several European countries indicate that BCI research is concentrated in a limited number of internationally connected national clusters.

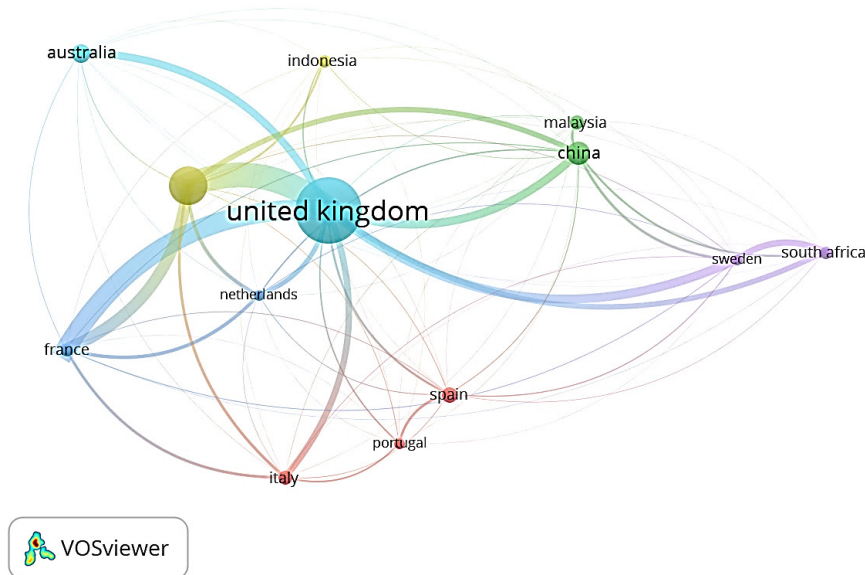
In terms of institutional contribution, Figure 5 reveals that the most productive affiliations in BCI research are concentrated in a relatively limited set of universities and research institutions. This affiliation-level distribution indicates where institutional continuity and research capacity in BCI are strongest and complements the country-level pattern shown in Figure 4.

In terms of publication outlets, Figure 6 presents the top sources in which BCI-related studies have been published. At the source level, journals such as *Sustainability* and *Journal of Business Research* have emerged as leading publication outlets in the dataset, indicating that BCI research is positioned within broader conversations in marketing, branding, sustainability, and cultural strategy.

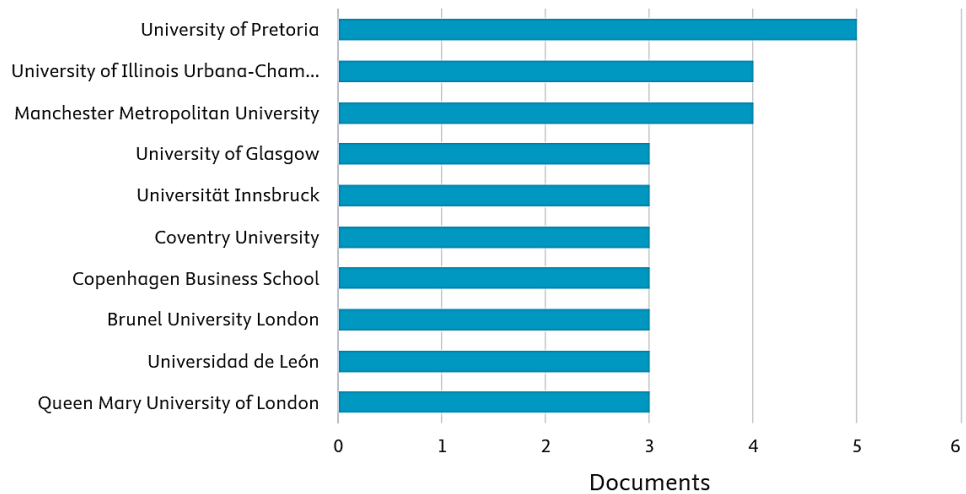
The dominance of "marketing" and "social media" in the keyword analysis highlights that the current BCI literature is anchored in broader marketing discourse while increasingly intersecting with digitally mediated brand communication. Social media have become a visible channel through which brands communicate culturally coded meanings, narratives, and symbols to consumers, allowing direct and interactive engagement with diverse audiences. According to Kim *et al.* (2024), brands that effectively leverage social media platforms can foster a deeper emotional connection with consumers by showcasing their cultural identities and values in real time. However, the prominence of these keywords should be interpreted as an indicator of thematic



**Figure 3:** Distribution of BCI-related publications by country or territory (top 10). Source: Scopus database.



**Figure 4:** Country network visualization. Source: Output VOSviewer software.



**Figure 5:** Distribution of BCI-related publications by institutional affiliation (top 10). Source: Scopus database.

visibility in the literature rather than conclusive evidence that digital platforms are the dominant driver of BCI across contexts.

Additionally, the presence of "sustainability" in the keyword analysis suggests that sustainability is emerging as a visible thematic cluster within BCI-related research rather than as a fully consolidated stream of inquiry. As consumers become more socially and environmentally conscious, brands are increasingly required to integrate cultural and ethical considerations into their identity. This trend reflects the growing need for brands to align their cultural identities with sustainability goals to resonate with modern consumers (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, the current mapping supports an interpretation of thematic convergence, not a definitive conclusion about consistent managerial outcomes across all branding contexts.

A key finding of the literature review is the comparatively limited and uneven treatment of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement in shaping brand cultural identity. While much research has focused on cultural heritage and national identity, few studies have explored in a conceptually direct way how brands use symbols, such as local traditions, folklore, and national icons, to communicate their cultural values. This interpretation is supported not only by the thematic synthesis in Table 1 but also by the broader keyword structure in Table 2, where highly general terms dominate and symbol-related expressions do not emerge as a leading cluster. As shown in Table 2, symbolic representation is a critical aspect of brand communication because it allows brands to connect with consumers emotionally.

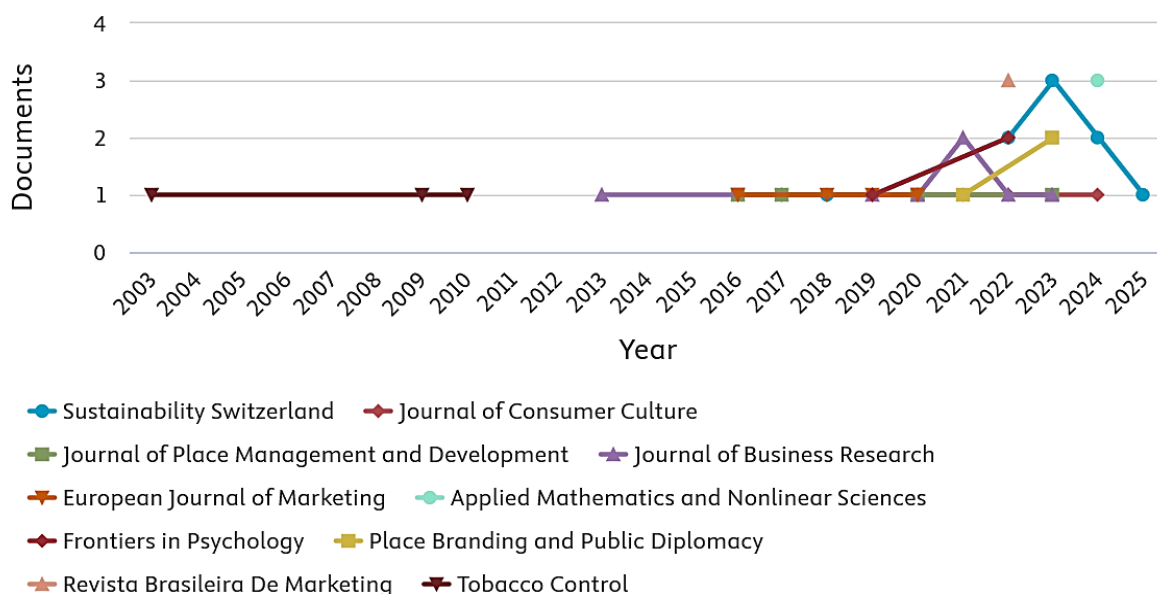
Brands that incorporate cultural symbols into their identity evoke a sense of pride and belonging among consumers, thereby enhancing brand loyalty. According to Lam *et al.* (2011), symbolic representation helps create a visual language that resonates

with the cultural identity of the target audience. This approach strengthens consumer-brand relationships and ensures that brand identity remains authentic and relevant to local communities.

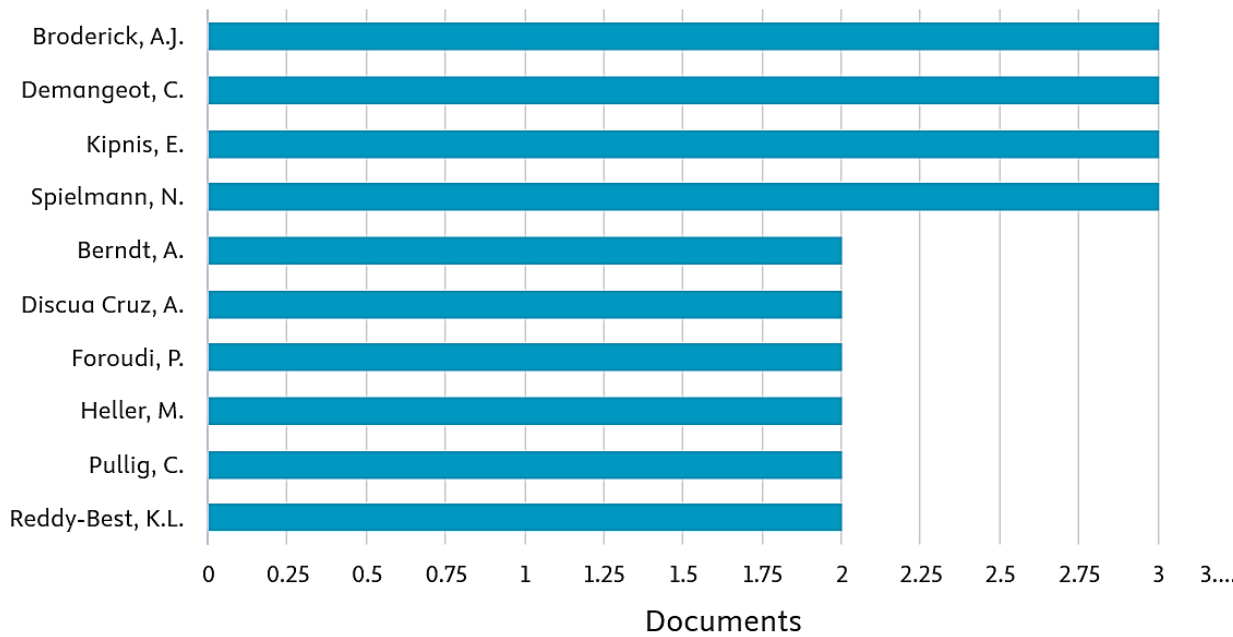
Figure 7 shows the most productive authors in BCI literature. The distribution suggests that the field is shaped by a relatively limited group of recurring contributors, indicating emerging concentration in scholarly output. This author-level pattern complements the country, affiliation, and source analyses by showing where individual publication activity is most visible. Rather than indicating conceptual closure, this concentration suggests that BCI remains a developing field in which a relatively small number of scholars have played a disproportionate role in defining its cases, themes, and conceptual boundaries.

Another emerging theme in the literature is the tension between globalization and local adaptation in brand cultural identity. As Figure 8 illustrates, the co-occurrence framework highlights the relationships among key terms associated with culture, identity, branding, and globalization, showing that the field is structured around an interconnected set of debates on cultural meaning, market positioning, and adaptation rather than around a single dominant explanatory concept. This adaptation is crucial for brands that wish to succeed in diverse markets because it allows them to resonate with local consumers while maintaining a consistent and global identity. The map therefore supports the interpretation that BCI operates as a negotiated balance between global brand coherence and locally intelligible cultural expression.

The concept of "glocalization" has been widely discussed in the literature, with brands striving to strike a balance between global coherence and local relevance. According to Johri *et al.* (2024), glocalization involves modifying certain aspects of a brand's identity, such as language, imagery, and product design,



**Figure 6:** Distribution of BCI-related publications by source title (top 10 sources). Source: Scopus database.



**Figure 7:** Distribution of BCI-related publications by author (top 10 authors). Source: Scopus database.

**Table 2: Keywords by authors.**

| Rank | Keyword               | Total link strength |
|------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1    | Marketing             | 160                 |
| 2    | Social media          | 75                  |
| 3    | Identity              | 71                  |
| 4    | Culture               | 58                  |
| 5    | Sustainability        | 57                  |
| 6    | Cultural identity     | 50                  |
| 7    | Cultural anthropology | 46                  |
| 8    | Branding              | 42                  |
| 9    | Cultural heritage     | 39                  |
| 10   | Place branding        | 38                  |

Source: Output VOSviewer software.

while retaining the core values that define the brand. Within the present review, this should be understood not merely as a tactical localization device, but as a central mechanism through which BCI is translated, negotiated, and made meaningful across different cultural settings. This strategy allows brands to connect with local audiences without losing their global appeal or identity.

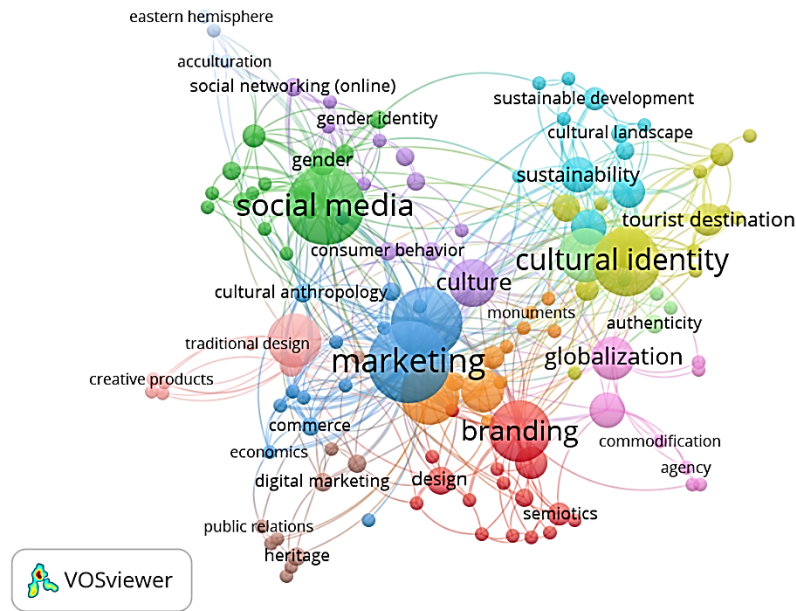
The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications for the field of brand cultural identity. Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural identity influences brand perception and consumer behavior. More specifically, the study contributes by refining the conceptual scope of BCI, mapping its principal thematic clusters, and demonstrating how the field intersects with but should not be collapsed into adjacent branding literatures. It also demonstrates that symbolic representation, stakeholder engagement, digital mediation, and sustainability constitute important directions

for the next stage of BCI research. Taken together, these results suggest that the BCI literature is expanding more rapidly than it is consolidating conceptually. The main theoretical implication is therefore not only that BCI is an emerging topic, but that it requires sharper construct delimitation and more cumulative explanations across cases, levels of branding, and cultural contexts. By synthesizing the existing research and identifying key trends, the review offers a comprehensive framework for future BCI research. Identifying research gaps, such as the role of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement, offers new directions for scholars to explore in future research.

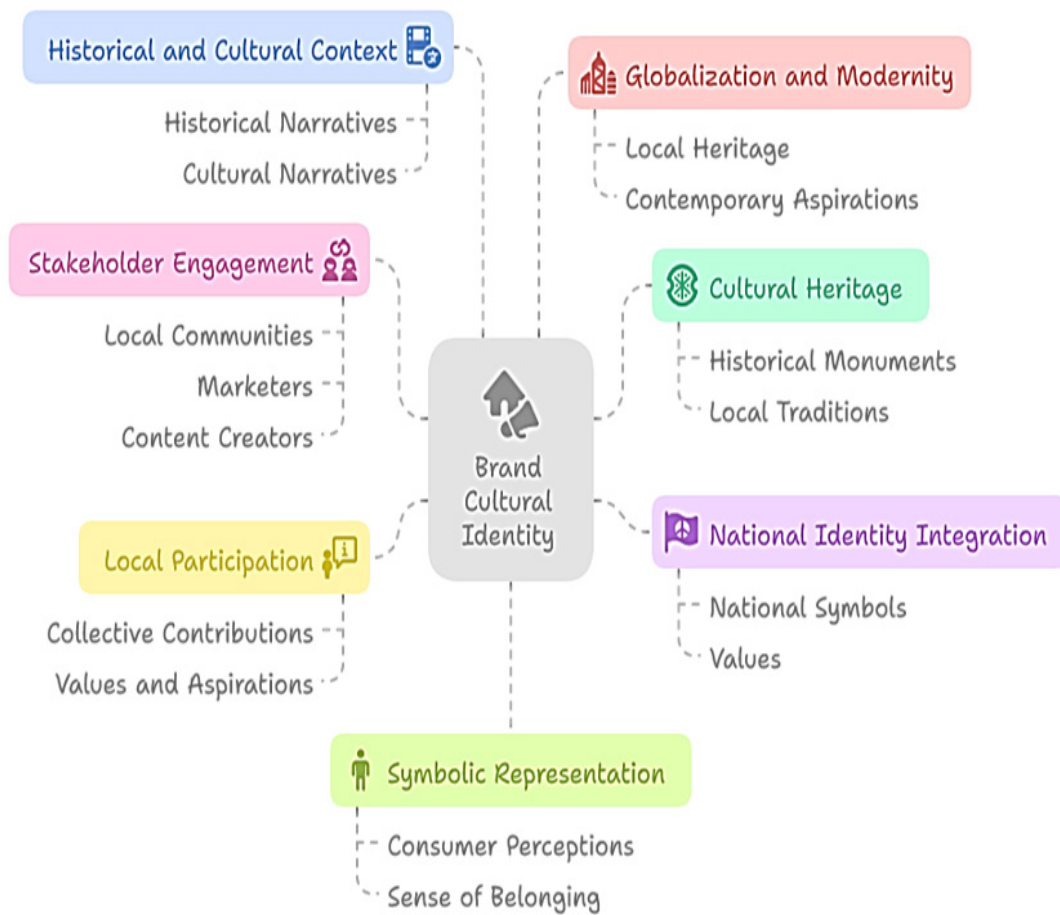
Based on the systematic literature review and bibliometric synthesis, this study develops a conceptual framework of Brand Cultural Identity that integrates the main cultural, symbolic, participatory, and mediating dimensions identified in the literature. The framework positions BCI as a culturally grounded dimension of brand identity that is shaped by cultural heritage, symbolic representation, stakeholder participation, negotiated identity, local aesthetic translation, and digital mediation. These components interact to form culturally meaningful brand identities that support authenticity, emotional resonance, local legitimacy, and cross-cultural relevance. The framework also clarifies that BCI is not equivalent to place branding, nation branding, or digital self-presentation, although these adjacent domains may contribute to BCI when they explain how cultural meanings are embedded in brand identity construction.

As illustrated in Figure 9, BCI emerges from the interaction between inherited cultural resources and contemporary branding processes. Cultural heritage and symbolic representation provide the substantive cultural content of the brand, while stakeholder





**Figure 8:** Co-occurrence framework and representation of key terms.



**Figure 9:** Conceptual framework of Brand Cultural Identity based on SLR and bibliometric synthesis. Source: (Ali and Khayat, 2024; Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020; Bowen, 2020; Chen and Ha, 2016; Cheregi, 2017; Cristòfol *et al.*, 2024; Heller, 2016; Jelinčić *et al.*, 2017; Martínez, 2016; Nichter *et al.*, 2009; Zali *et al.*, 2014).

participation and negotiated identity ensure that this cultural meaning remains authentic and socially legitimate. Local aesthetic translation transforms cultural meanings into visible design, communication, and brand experience, whereas digital mediation expands the circulation of BCI across online and global audiences. This framework therefore provides a structured basis for future research to examine how cultural identity is constructed, communicated, and sustained within branding practices.

These findings provide valuable insights for brand managers seeking to develop culturally relevant branding strategies that resonate with consumers. First, managers should identify which elements of heritage, symbolism, and local narratives are central to the brand's cultural meaning, rather than treating culture as a decorative communication layer. Second, stakeholder participation should be incorporated early through consultation, co-creation, or local validation, so that the resulting identity is perceived as legitimate rather than imposed. Third, digital platforms should be used not only for promotion but also for the careful circulation of culturally resonant meanings across audiences and among markets. Fourth, when sustainability is integrated into branding, it should be linked substantively to culturally grounded practices and values, rather than being presented as a generic claim. The integration of cultural symbols and the active involvement of local stakeholders in the branding process can help brands create authentic and emotionally resonant identities that foster long-term consumer loyalty.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines the concept of Brand Cultural Identity (BCI) by integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis to explore key trends, theoretical developments, and practical implications in the field. The results highlight the growing significance of BCI in modern branding, particularly in the context of globalization and digital transformation. Based on the reviewed literature, the analysis indicates that cultural identity is increasingly discussed as an important element in shaping brand perception and in helping brands connect with diverse consumer groups.

The findings of this study indicate that BCI has become an increasingly visible topic in branding research. As demonstrated by the rapid increase in publications on the topic since 2022, the recognition of the importance of cultural identity in shaping consumer behavior is gaining traction among scholars. The study also illustrates that cultural identity is frequently associated with brand perception, loyalty, and engagement in the reviewed literature, with brands that effectively incorporate cultural elements into their identity being better positioned to establish authentic and emotionally resonant relationships with consumers. The results suggest that cultural heritage, symbolic representation, and stakeholder engagement are recurrent

components identified in the reviewed literature, offering brands a means to differentiate themselves and foster consumer loyalty.

One of the key findings of the analysis is the increasing prevalence of digital and social media platforms in shaping discussions about brand cultural identity. As noted in the results, the keywords "social media" and "marketing" appeared frequently in the bibliometric analysis, indicating that digital platforms are an increasingly visible theme in the literature. Social media enables brands to engage directly with consumers, allowing for more personalized and interactive brand communication. This shift underscores the importance of understanding cultural nuances in the digital space, where brand messages must be tailored to resonate with local cultural contexts while maintaining global coherence. At the same time, this result should be interpreted as evidence of thematic prominence in the literature rather than as proof that all forms of BCI are primarily digital in nature.

Another important insight is the underexplored role of symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement in shaping BCI. Although cultural heritage and national identity have received significant attention in the literature, few studies have examined the use of cultural symbols and the involvement of local stakeholders in branding. Accordingly, these areas emerge in the present review as research gaps rather than as conclusively established managerial effects. Symbolic representation appears in the reviewed literature as a potentially important mechanism for fostering authenticity and trust because consumers are more likely to engage with brands that reflect their cultural values and beliefs. Similarly, stakeholder participation appears in the reviewed studies as an important theme for future investigation into how brand identity remains relevant and culturally grounded.

The results also indicate a growing interest in the intersection between BCI and sustainability. This pattern is inferred from the prominence of "sustainability" in the keyword analysis and suggests that the topic is gaining visibility in the literature. As consumer preferences continue to shift towards more socially and environmentally conscious choices, brands are expected to integrate cultural identity with sustainability initiatives. However, within the scope of this review, sustainability should be interpreted as an emerging research theme rather than a fully developed conclusion about branding outcomes. Future studies are therefore needed to determine whether this thematic convergence translates into stable conceptual models and empirically demonstrated branding effects.

This review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by clarifying the conceptual scope of BCI, mapping its intellectual structure, and identifying underdeveloped areas for future research. Through the integration of SLR and bibliometric analyses, this study identified key trends, gaps, and emerging areas of interest in the field. In particular, the review clarifies the conceptual scope of BCI, identifies its main thematic

concentrations, and points to underdeveloped areas that require further study. This study also offers practical insights for brand managers and marketers, highlighting the importance of cultural identity in shaping brand strategies and consumer behavior. By combining conceptual delimitation with bibliometric mapping, the study provides a more disciplined basis for distinguishing BCI from adjacent branding literatures while also identifying areas where future empirical development is still needed.

One of the primary contributions of this study is the identification of gaps in the literature, particularly regarding symbolic representation and stakeholder engagement. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of cultural heritage and national identity, research on how brands use cultural symbols to communicate their identity or engage local communities in the branding process is lacking. These gaps present opportunities for future research to explore the role of symbolic representation and stakeholder involvement within the BCI more systematically. Future studies should investigate the role of specific cultural symbols, such as traditional art forms or national landmarks, in shaping consumer brand perceptions. Additionally, research on stakeholder engagement could examine how brands collaborate with local communities, cultural organizations, and consumers to co-create brand identities that resonate more deeply at the cultural level.

Furthermore, this study suggests that further research is needed on the integration of BCI with sustainability and ethical branding to enhance brand loyalty. Because sustainability emerged primarily through keyword-level mapping, future studies are needed to examine this relationship in greater conceptual and empirical detail in the future. Future studies should explore how brands can combine cultural identity and sustainability goals to create authentic and socially responsible brand images that resonate with consumers. This could include examining how brands incorporate cultural heritage into sustainable product design, packaging, and marketing campaigns to ensure that their brand identities align with cultural values and ethical considerations.

Another area for future research is the exploration of BCI in emerging markets. While this study identified strong publication visibility from countries such as the UK and the US, emerging economies also appear in the dataset and warrant a closer examination. Research on how brands adapt their cultural identities to suit consumers' values and expectations in emerging markets provides valuable insights into the complexities of global branding. Additionally, studies could explore how local cultural identities in emerging markets influence brand perception and consumer behavior, offering a more nuanced understanding of the BCI across different cultural contexts.

This study emphasizes the critical role of BCI in contemporary branding strategies. As the global market continues to evolve, an understanding of cultural identity is essential for brand

success. These findings underscore the importance of cultural heritage, symbolic representation, and stakeholder engagement in creating authentic and emotionally resonant brand identities. Overall, the review shows that BCI is an expanding research area characterized by growing publication activity, identifiable thematic concentrations, and several important gaps. Accordingly, this study offers a clearer platform for future research and a more disciplined basis for practitioners seeking culturally relevant branding strategies.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**BCI:** Brand Cultural Identity; **SLR:** Systematic Literature Review; **PRISMA:** Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; **VOSviewer:** Visualization of Similarities Viewer; **TITLE-ABS-KEY:** Title, Abstract, and Keywords (Scopus search field); **SME:** Small and Medium-sized Enterprise; **ECoC:** European Capital of Culture.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

**Defin Shahrial Putra:** Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Data Curation, Investigation, Visualization and Project Administration. **Astrid Puspaningrum:** Conceptualization, Writing - Review and Editing, Supervision, Project Administration, Methodology. **Rofiaty Rofiaty:** Conceptualization, Writing - Review and Editing, Methodology and Supervision. **Raditha Dwi Vata Hapsari:** Conceptualization, Writing - Review and Editing, Methodology and Validation.

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