SUSTAINABLE BRAND EQUITY AS A NEW AREA IN BRAND MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

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Purpose: Sustainable branding is an important research area in marketing and management. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the state of research in the field of sustainable brand equity (SuBE) using bibliometric analysis. Particular attention was paid to identifying subject areas.

Design/methodology/approach: The design, compilation, analysis, visualization, and interpretation phases of a bibliometric analysis were all used. The Scopus database provided 340 publications overall after a thorough search. In the examined research, science mapping and performance indicators pertaining to publications and citations were employed.

Findings: Since 1997, when the first article on HBE was released, 340 publications indexed in the Scopus database have been published. These publications have achieved 5671 citations with an h-index of 40. The country with the most affiliations was the United States, followed by India and China. Using the minimum number of documents at level 3, 36 countries were identified in 8 clusters. The SuBE-related studies provided 1,371 keywords in 10 clusters related to brand creation, brand management, and competitiveness in the context of sustainability; green and circular economies; consumer behavior and social media; communication and consumer decisions; and modern research methods in marketing.

Research limitations/implications: SuBE was analysed in general, indicating sustainable management and marketing. First, there is the diversity of regional and cultural contexts. The influence of culture, local economic conditions, and the level of environmental awareness can vary from region to region and was not analysed. Second, time frames were also not analysed.

Practical implications: Theoretical and practical implications for SuBE were formulated. The theoretical implications include the need to integrate theories from marketing, management, sustainability, and communications to understand how brands can meet consumer expectations and achieve environmental goals. As practical implications, companies must include sustainability as a central element of their branding strategy to build lasting relationships with environmentally conscious consumers.

Originality/value: There were no studies demonstrating the present level of development of this field of study; hence our bibliometric analysis study on SuBE closes a research gap. The originality of this study is in the identification of clusters that represent current research areas in the field of SuBE.

Keywords: sustainable brand equity, sustainable brand, sustainable branding, sustainable management, bibliometric analysis.

Category of the paper: literature review.

1. Introduction

Sustainable branding is an important research area in marketing and management (Kaur, Gupta, 2024; Kaur, Monisha, 2023; Meštrović, 2023; Muchenje et al., 2023; Ryals, Macdonald, 2015; Swaroop, Gade, 2023). Both marketing and sustainable branding are related to advancing sustainability through various complementary approaches. While sustainable marketing conveys these ideals to customers, sustainable branding supplies the identity and values (Kumar, Christodoulopoulou, 2014; Popescu et al., 2023). In this aspect, brand loyalty and responsible consumer behavior are subsequently fostered by sustainable marketing, which improves brand image (Jia et al., 2023; Kumar, Christodoulopoulou, 2014). Sustainable branding initiatives can boost customer happiness and engagement through sustainable marketing. This is especially true in industries like sustainable food production, where it is essential to raise awareness and improve the perception of sustainability brands (Franco, Cicatiello, 2018). Through the incorporation of sustainability principles into business operations, creative management techniques, strategic marketing, and effective communication, sustainable branding and sustainable management are closely related. Businesses may create powerful, long-lasting brands that support a more sustainable future and provide them a competitive edge in the market by coordinating these factors (Foroudi, Palazzo, 2020).

The issue of brand equity is widely analyzed in the literature. This includes general aspects (Almestarihi et al., 2021; Rojas-Lamorena et al., 2022; Dropulić et al., 2022) as well as various product and service sectors (Juga et al., 2018; Hazée et al., 2017; Çifci et al., 2016; Dwivedi, Merrilees, 2013; Andéhn et al., 2014; Florek, Kavaratzis, 2014; Górska-Warsewicz, 2020; De Heer, 2020; Gupta et al., 2019; Vijay MallikRaj et al., 2017). Various aspects, including brand equity strategies in the context of customer-brand relationships (Hunt, 2019), the impact of brand strategies on organizational brand equity (Wei, 2022), national brands' equity over store brands (Sethuraman, 2003), and brand equity in relation to employer branding (Theurer et al., 2018), were analyzed. The importance of customer-based brand equity for global brands (Atilgan et al., 2009) and green brand equity for different product categories and various industries (Butt et al., 2017; Dolatabadi et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2019; Ishaq, 2020; Qadir et al., 2021) was also indicated.

A gap in research on sustainable brand equity has been identified due to studies in the form of bibliometric analyses and systematic literature reviews on SuBE. However, there are other studies on green brand equity. Such brand equity has been shown to be linked to Such brand equity has been shown to be linked to greenwashing (Akturan, 2018; Avcilar, Demirgünes, 2016), competitive advantage (Bekk et al., 2016), drivers of green brand equity (Chen, 2010; Deniz, Onder, 2017), and the importance of consumer-based green brand equity (Khandelwal et al., 2019).

Based on the above considerations, the purpose of this study was to identify the state of research in the field of SuBE using bibliometric analysis. Particular attention was paid to identifying subject areas. Three research questions were prepared:

1. What is the state of development of the field of SuBE?
2. Which countries and authors are relevant to the topic on SuBE?
3. What thematic areas are being explored in relation to SuBE?

2. Literature review

The issue of sustainable brands has been studied extensively in the literature. Sustainable brands integrate economic, social, and environmental concerns into their brand management and commercial operations. This all-encompassing strategy guarantees that the brand prioritizes not just financial gain but also the well-being of the environment and society (Fallström et al., 2018; Foroudi, Palazzo, 2020). In this concept, the identity of organizations and their brands reflects a commitment to sustainability, linking management methods to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Caldana et al., 2022). This is because sustainable branding extends above standard brand management by taking into account wider viewpoints, including corporate social responsibility, the circular economy, and environmental ecosystems (Foroudi, Palazzo, 2020). Effective implementation of sustainable branding is demonstrated by best practices from a variety of industries (Fallström et al., 2018; Foroudi, Palazzo, 2020).

Sustainable branding involves integrating brand identity and operations with environmentally friendly values to create interest in eco-aware customers and support a sustainable future (Surmanidze et al., 2024). In this concept, to gain consumers' trust and loyalty, sustainable brands frequently highlight ethical behavior, transparency, and environmental responsibility in their marketing campaigns (Eyada, 2024; Gutiérrez et al., 2024). At the same time, connecting with customers and setting the business apart in a crowded market require effective communication of sustainability initiatives (Caballero-Castaneda et al., 2021; Surmanidze et al., 2024). Brands that effectively promote their sustainability initiatives can observe a rise in consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to pay (Franco, Cicatiello, 2018). Additionally, long-term business success, competitive advantage, and improved company image can all be attributed to sustainable branding (Fallström et al., 2018; Saraiva, 2022).

Sustainable branding is closely related to sustainable marketing, which requires a comprehensive strategy that takes into account the entire life cycle of a product and its broader environmental and social impact (Kaur, Gupta, 2024; Kaur, Monisha, 2023). In this area, designing, advertising, selling, and distributing goods in a way that has the least negative impact on the environment is known as sustainable marketing. Using eco-friendly raw materials,

packaging, and procedures are also part of these activities (Kaur, Gupta, 2024; Ryals, Macdonald, 2015). It emphasizes the entire production process, from sourcing raw materials to disposal, ensuring that each step is environmentally sustainable (Kaur, Gupta, 2024; Kaur, Monisha, 2023; Swaroop, Gade, 2023). Sustainable branding encompasses ethical issues, ensuring that marketing activities positively impact society and respect the needs of future generations (Meštrović, 2023; Ryals, Macdonald, 2015; Swaroop, Gade, 2023). At the same time, sustainable marketing tactics must be profitable and competitive to guarantee long-term corporate success while preserving sustainability standards (Muchenje et al., 2023).

Sustainable brand equity combines traditional brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) with sustainability initiatives to demonstrate a brand's dedication to social and environmental responsibility (Kara et al., 2024). This idea emphasizes how crucial environmental and non-financial activities are in influencing consumer attitudes and brand value. Environmental and non-financial activities have an impact on a company's sustainable brand equity. Businesses use social responsibility and green efforts to show customers how committed they are to sustainability. Compared to other brands, this strategy aids in creating a competitive position in sustainability (Kara et al., 2024). Sustainable brand equity is perceived as the consumer perceptions of a brand's sustainability efforts. In this concept, customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty are influenced by brand identification, brand awareness, physical quality, lifestyle congruence, staff behavior, and ideal self-congruence (Dananjoyo, Udin, 2023). Additionally, by increasing market share, creating barriers to entry for competitors, expanding production and market, offering premium pricing, attracting top talent, guaranteeing customer loyalty, and fostering innovation, sustainable brand equity improves the overall success of the company (Veselinova, Samonikov, 2018).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify the state of research in the field of SuBE using bibliometric analysis. Particular attention was paid to identifying thematic areas. Bibliometric analyses are becoming increasingly common to show the development of a specific field over a specific time period (Donthu et al., 2021; Ellegaard, 2018; Gan et al., 2022; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Five steps of this bibliometric process were applied with design, compilation, analysis, visualization, and interpretation (Zupic, Čater, 2015).

In the first stage, the study was designed, the research gap was identified, and the research questions were formulated. In the second stage, the Scopus database was searched. The search was carried out at the end of December, using the state as of December 31, 2024. The search path employed was as follows: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("brand equity") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY

(sustainable) or TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability) AND (PUBYEAR > 1996 AND PUBYEAR < 2025) (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, *"English"*)).

Science mapping and performance analysis were part of the third step related to data analysis. Publication-related indicators, including the number of publications and lead authors, and citation-related indicators, including the total number of citations and the average number of citations annually, were used (Donthu et al., 2021). The bibliometric analysis examined the subjects discussed in SuBE and Scopus publications by source. The bibliometric counting method of science mapping included charts that display the number of items and groups. The authors who published the most were identified. By mapping the bibliometric counts of SuBE article authors and co-authors, the number of clusters was ascertained. This analysis presents the countries with the highest number of affiliations. Through keyword analysis, the total number of keywords and the order of the most popular terms were disclosed. Using mapping techniques, a study of keyword co-occurrence was discovered. A counting approach covered at least three keyword occurrences. VOSviewer (Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman, Leiden University, version 1.6.17) was used to prepare the co-occurrence analysis and bibliometric counting. A summary of the answers to the research questions was given in the discussion section, which brings the bibliometric study to a conclusion.

4. Results

4.1. Number of SuBE publications and citations

There were 340 publications on SuBE at the end of 2024. One study was published between 1997 and 2000, 17 studies in 2001-2010, 150 studies in 2011-2020, and 170 in 2021-2024, with an average of 12.1 publications per year (Figure 1).

The article *Chocolates El Rey: Industrial modernization and export strategy* is the first publication indexed in the Scopus database (Dominguez, Cirigliano, 1997). The article focuses on the issue of sustainable competitive advantage in developing countries, taking Chocolates El Rey and the Venezuelan cocoa industry as an example. Two issues were analyzed: export strategy and brand value. Under export strategy, ways to differentiate the company from its competitors, market segments planned to be served, and types of distribution channels were analyzed. Under brand value development, possibilities for improving the negative image of goods from underdeveloped countries were studied.
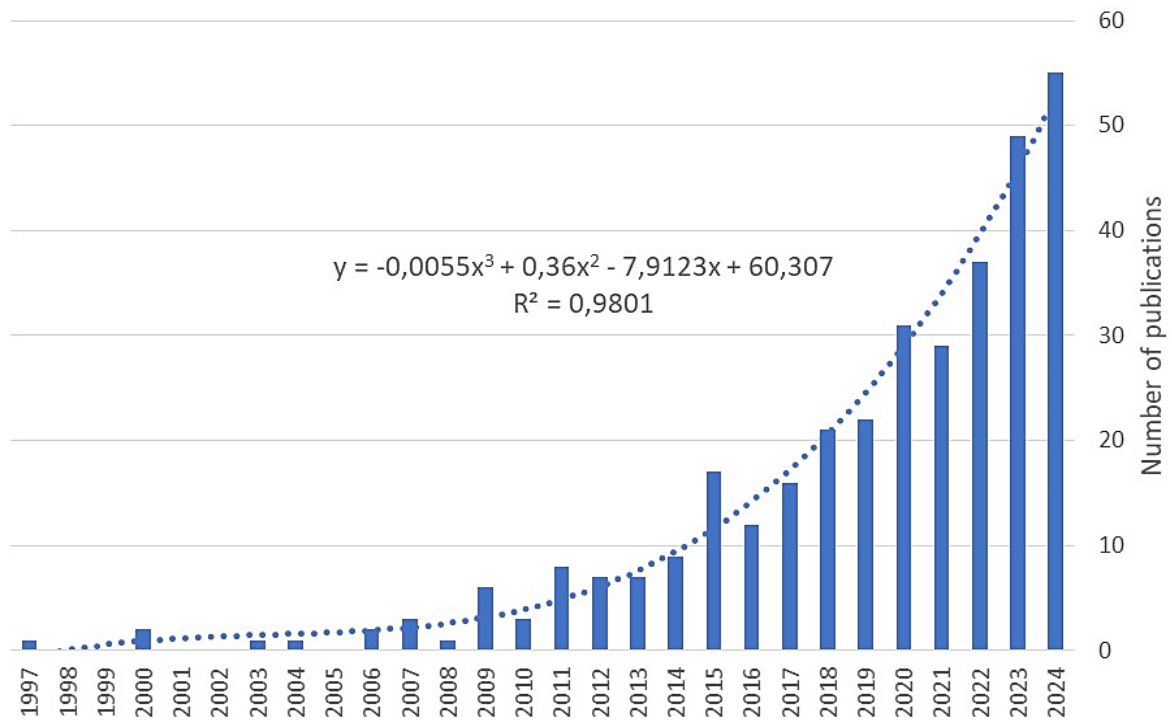
$$y = -0,0055x^3 + 0,36x^2 - 7,9123x + 60,307$$
$$R^2 = 0,9801$$

Figure 1. Number of SuBE publications between 1997 and 2024.

Source: Scopus data with trend line, as of 31.12.2024.

The total number of citations of the SuBE studies amounted to 5671. The average annual number of citations equals 202.5. Of the 340 SuBE publications, 250 were cited with an h-index of 40 and a citation count of 5,720. The number of citations was 74 by 2010, 1749 between 2011 and 2020, and 3848 between 2021 and 2024 (Figure 2).
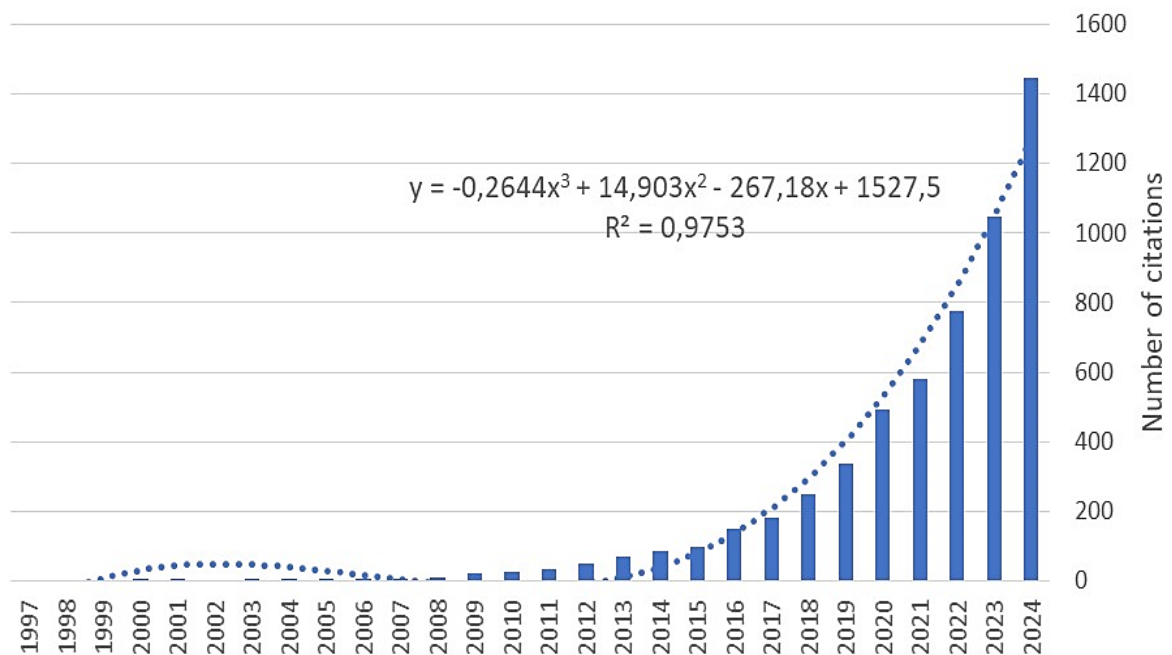

$$y = -0,2644x^3 + 14,903x^2 - 267,18x + 1527,5$$
$$R^2 = 0,9753$$

Figure 2. Number of SuBE citations between 1997 and 2024.

Source: Scopus data with trend line, as of 31.12.2024.

The highest number of citations was noticed for the article *Remanufactured products in closed-loop supply chains for consumer goods* published in 2015 in the Production and Operations Management (Abbey et al., 2015). This article was cited 292 times (Table 1). The study examined consumer perceptions of remanufactured consumer products in closed supply chains. It found that discounting had a positive effect on the attractiveness of remanufactured products. Manipulation of brand equity proved to be less important to consumers than perceptions of the quality of remanufactured products.

Table 1.
Most cited SuBE publications[*]

No.	Title	Authors	Source	Year	Number of citations
1.	Remanufactured products in closed-loop supply chains for consumer goods	Abbey, J.D., Meloy, M.G., Guide, V.D.R., Atalay, S.	Production and Operations Management, 24(3), pp. 488-503	2015	292
2.	Young consumers' insights on brand equity: Effects of brand association, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand image	Sasmita, J., Mohd Suki, N.	International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, 43(3), pp. 276-292	2015	206
3.	Current issue in tourism: The authentic tourist	Yeoman, I., Brass, D., McMahon-Beattie, U.	Tourism Management, 28(4), pp. 1128-1138	2007	195
4.	Towards an identity-based brand equity model	Burmann, C., Jost-Benz, M., Riley, N.	Journal of Business Research, 62(3), pp. 390-397	2009	183
5.	Investigating the antecedents of green brand equity: A sustainable development perspective	Kang, S., Hur, W.-M.	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 19(5), pp. 306-316	2012	161
6.	Internal brand factors driving successful financial services brands	De Chernatony, L., Cottam, S.	European Journal of Marketing, 40(5-6), pp. 611-633	2006	158
7.	"When experience matters": Building and measuring hotel brand equity: The customers' perspective	Kam Fung, K., King, C.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 22(5), pp. 589-608	2010	149
8.	A consumer-perceived consumer-based brand equity scale	Baalbaki, S., Guzmán, F.	Journal of Brand Management, 23(3), pp. 229-251	2016	148
9.	The effect of sensory brand experience and involvement on brand equity directly and indirectly through consumer brand engagement	Hepola, J., Karjaluoto, H., Hintikka, A.	Journal of Product and Brand Management, 26(3), pp. 282-293	2017	141
10.	How CSR reputation, sustainability signals, and country-of-origin sustainability reputation contribute to corporate brand performance: An exploratory study	Cowan, K., Guzman, F.	Journal of Business Research, 117, pp. 683-693	2020	129

[*] 10 publications with the highest number of citations.

Source: Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024.

4.2. Subject areas and authors of DigBE publications

The largest number of publications was classified in the subject area of *business, management, and accounting* (above 200) (Table 2). In second place was the category of *social sciences* with the number of publications of 109. The following subject areas qualified between 50 and 100 publications. These are the following subject areas: *environmental science, economics, econometrics, and finance, energy,* and *computer science. Engineering* is the next highest ranking with 29 publications, while categories such as *decision sciences, arts and humanities, mathematics, and agricultural and biological sciences* included between 10 and 20 publications. The remaining subject areas included fewer than 10 publications.

Table 2.
Subject areas of SuBE publications

Subject areas	Frequencies
Business, management, and accounting	225
Social sciences	109
Environmental Science	83
Economics, econometrics, and finance	75
Energy	56
Computer science	55
Engineering	29
Decision sciences	16
Arts and humanities	12
Mathematics	11
Agricultural and biological sciences	10
Psychology	7
Multidisciplinary	5

Each publication can be classified in the Scopus database into several subject areas.

Source: Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024.

The authors of the largest number of publications were Gil-Saura I., Ruiz-Molina M.E., and Marín-García A., who published 12, nine, and seven studies, respectively. The authors of five publications were Kim K.H. and Kantabutra S., while four publications were published by Bordian M. Three studies each were published by Šerić M., Winit W., Moise M.S., Kim J., and Ishaq, M.I. The authors of two publications were Yu P., Tantawi P., Sun Y., Shen C.C., Shanti J., Saurage-Altenloh S., Rodrigues S., Rehman M., Randall P.M., Puriwat W., Powell S.M., Park J.W., Nilasari I., Nikanloo N., Narayanan S., Moslehpour M., Morrone D., Mohiuddin M., Mohemi M., Martins J., Mamun A.A., Majeed M., Lu W., Lavorata L., Kwon J., Kristanti M.M., Krishnapillai G., Kitchen P.J., Jung H.S., Jones J., Jeon B.J., Hur W.M., Huertas-Garcia R., Hayat N., Guzman F., Gupta S., Gonçalves R., Ebrahim Hosseini S., Di Maria E., Correia R., Chan C.S., Branco F., Berenguer-Contri G., Ahn J., Abazari Y.

4.3. Countries and sources of SuBE publications

The largest number of authors were affiliated in the United States (Table 3). The next country in the ranking was India, while more than 20 publications were affiliated with countries such as China, the United Kingdom, and South Korea. There were 10-20 authors or co-authors from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, Pakistan, and Italy.

Table 3.
Affiliate countries of SuBE publications

Countries	Frequencies
United States	56
India	38
China	28
United Kingdom	26
South Korea	22
Malaysia	19
Indonesia	15
Thailand	15
Taiwan	14
Australia	12
Pakistan	11
Italy	10
Portugal	8
France	8
Turkey	8
South Africa	7
Iran	7
Canada	6
Vietnam	5
Poland	5
Nigeria	5
Brazil	5
Japan	5

does not include countries that have been affiliated 4 times or less.

Source: Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024b.

The bibliographic coupling identified 68 countries. Using the minimum number of documents at level 3, 36 countries were identified in 8 clusters (Figure 3). Eight countries (Hong Kong, India, Peru, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, and Viet Nam) were classified into the first cluster, five countries (Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) in Cluster No. 2, five countries (Netherlands, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) in Cluster No. 3, five countries (Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey, and Zimbabwe) in clusters No. 4, four countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, and Sweden) in cluster No. 5, four countries (China, Iran, Philippines, and Taiwan) in cluster No. 6, three countries (Brazil, France, and Italy) in cluster No. 7, and two countries (Finland and Romania) in Cluster No. 8.
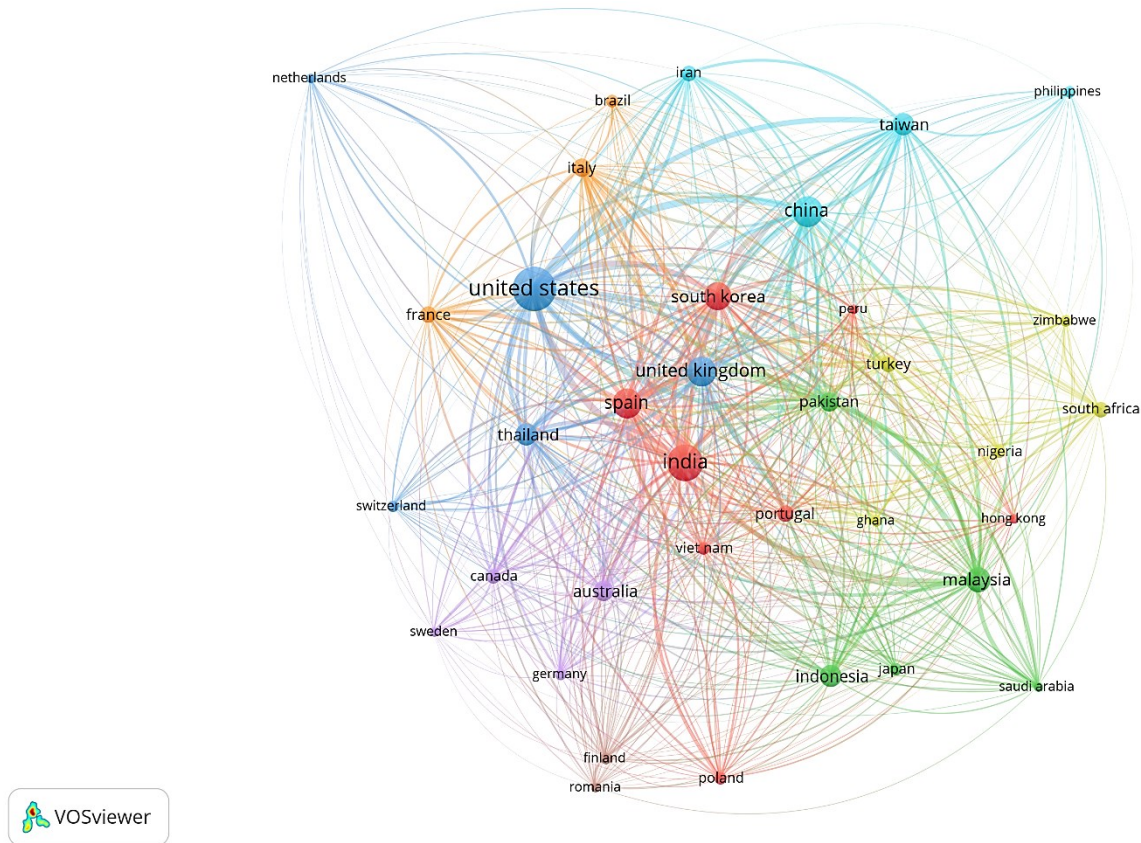
Figure 3. Bibliometric coupling of countries for SuBE publications.

Source: VOSviewer based on Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024.

Publications on SuBE were mainly published as articles in journals (236 studies), book chapters (52), conference papers (19), and reviews (16). Other document types were as follows: conference reviews (7), notes (4), books (3), editorials (2), and erratum (1).

4.4. Thematic areas of DigBE publications

The SuBE-related studies indexed in the Scopus database provided 1,371 keywords. The two phrases *brand equity* and *sustainability* appeared in the largest number of publications (Table 4). Other keywords such *as sustainable development, equity,* and *marketing* appeared in 30-40 publications. The keywords *corporate social responsibility, perception, green brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, green marketing, branding, brand image, brand management*, *social media, consumption behavior,* and *consumer behavior* appeared in 10-20 publications. Other keywords appeared less frequently.

Analysis of keyword co-occurrence discovered ten clusters using the full counting approach with the minimum number of occurrences of three (Figure 4).

Cluster No. 1 (in red) can be titled *Shaping brand and competitiveness*. It contains 28 keywords such as *brand equity, brand experience, brand image, branding, competition, competitive advantage, corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation, csr, customer-based brand equity, green marketing, innovation, marketing, marketing mix,*

marketing strategy, product design, sales, social responsibility, sustainable competitive advantage, and *sustainable tourism.* Publication topics in this cluster focus on the theoretical and practical foundations of brand building and management. Brand equity is analyzed through brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations. Brand image and brand experience, on the other hand, point to the importance of consumers' emotions and perceptions in creating brand relationships. In addition, strategies for shaping competitive advantage through innovation, corporate social responsibility, and strategic planning were analyzed.

Table 4.
The most frequently occurring keywords in SuBE publications

Keywords	Frequencies
Brand equity	118
Sustainability	86
Sustainable development	38
Equity	38
Marketing	36
Corporate social responsibility	19
Perception	17
Green brand equity	17
Brand loyalty	17
Brand awareness	16
Green marketing	14
Branding	14
Brand image	13
Brand management	11
Social media	10
Consumption behavior	10
Consumer behavior	10
Perceived quality	9
Decision making	9
Customer equity	9
Commerce	8
China	8
Trust	7
Tourism	7
Strategic approach	7
Satisfaction	7
Purchase intention	7
Loyalty	7
Innovation	7
Environmental sustainability	7
Customer satisfaction	7
CSR	7
Value co-creation	6
Tourist destination	6
Sustainable competitive advantage	6
Green brand image	6
Business	6

Table does not include keywords that have been mentioned 5 times or less.

Source: Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024.

Cluster No. 2 (in dark green) may have been titled *Brand management with special emphasis on tourism services*. It includes 20 keywords such as *brand, brand attachment, brand personality, customer satisfaction, destination brand, ecotourism, knowledge, loyalty, management practice, profitability, public attitude, tourism, tourism management, tourist behavior,* and *tourist destination*. The issues of brand management in tourism point to many aspects, including building loyalty to the destination, creating a tourist image, or the impact of marketing activities on tourists' perceptions of the destination. Tourist behavior and brand building and promotional strategies were analyzed. Their impact on sustainability in the context of ecotourism and tourism management was pointed out.
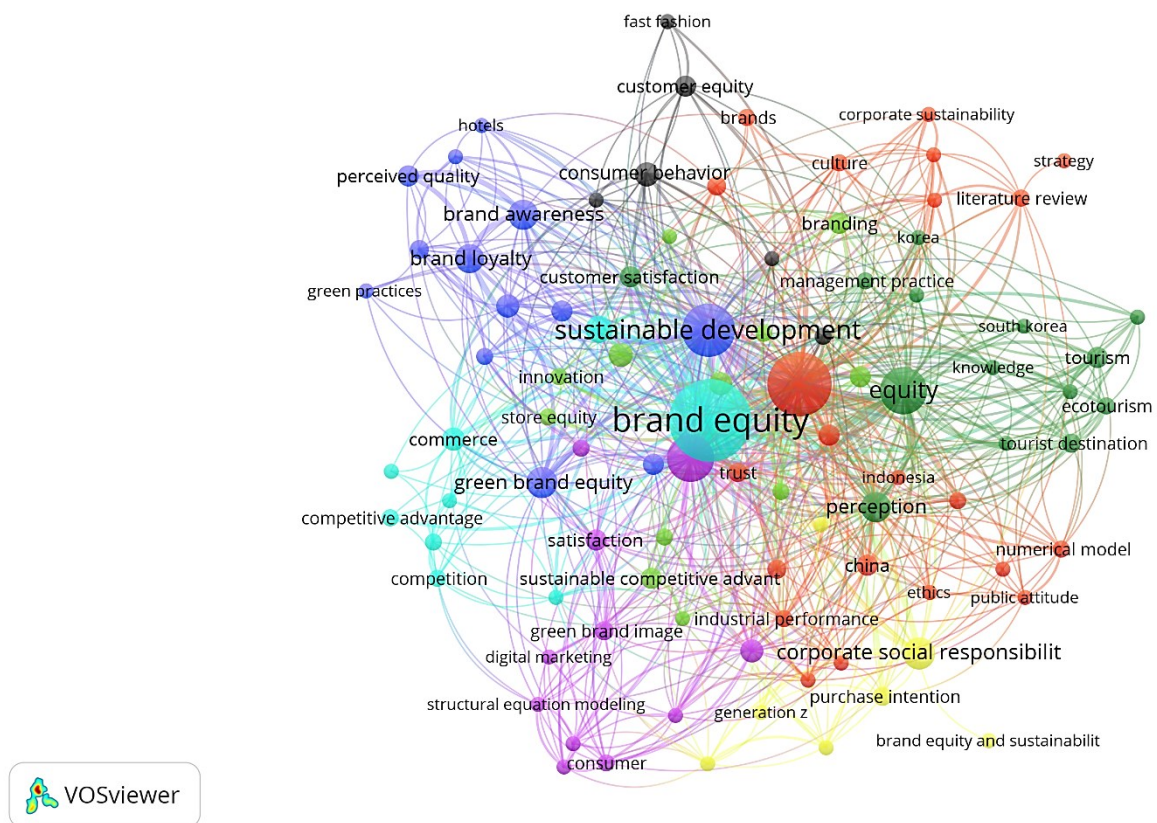

Figure 4. Clusters of keyword co-occurrence using bibliometric mapping of SuBE publications.
Source: VOSviewer based on Scopus data, as of 31.12.2024.

Cluster No. 3 (in dark blue) can be titled as *Sustainability and green economics*. It covers 20 keywords, including *business development, environmental economics, ethics, financial system, green brand equity, green brand image, green purchase intention, green satisfaction, green trust, industrial performance, stakeholder, strategic approach, sustainability, sustainability marketing,* and *trust*. Topics include green brands and sustainability, with special attention given to green purchase intention and green trust. The key role of stakeholders in implementing sustainability practices and creating transparent green communication strategies was pointed out. The role of business ethics, environmental economics, and financial systems in promoting more sustainable business models was also analyzed.

Cluster No. 4 (in light green) titled *Consumer behavior and social media* covers 15 keywords, including *awareness, brand equity and sustainability, brand value, consumer, corporate social responsibility, digital marketing, generation z, human, purchase intention, satisfaction, social media, sustainable consumption,* and *willingness to pay.* The topics of the publications classified in this cluster based on the keyword co-occurrence concern the impact of social media on consumers' purchasing decisions and relationships with brands. Brand awareness and purchase intention proved relevant to analyzing consumer engagement in the digital space. Issues related to digital marketing, influencers of sustainable consumption, corporate social responsibility, social media, and brand value were also studied.

Cluster No. 5 (in violet) titled *Communication and consumer decisions* covers 12 keywords, including, for example, *business, communication, consumer-based brand equity, decision making, perception,* and *price premium.* The publication's topics relate to decision-making processes with aspects such as value perception, willingness to pay a premium price, and consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Product features that influence purchasing decisions were also analyzed.

Cluster No. 6 (in light blue) can be described as *Corporate strategies and consumer behavior.* It contains 11 keywords, for example, *brand management, brands, consumer behavior, corporate strategy, corporate sustainability, culture, strategy, sufficiency economy,* and *value co-creation.* Topics in the publication point to corporate strategies, relating to corporate sustainability and value co-creation, and their impact on consumer perceptions of brands. It also examines consumer behavior in different cultural contexts, with a focus on building relationships with consumers in marketing strategies implemented by global corporations.

Cluster No. 7 (in yellow) can be titled as *Consumer behavior and innovation in circular economy.* It contains 9 keywords, including *advertising, circular economy, consumer behavior, consumption behavior, customer equity,* and *fast fashion.* The publications analyzed consumer behavior in the context of the circular economy. Attention was paid to innovative business models that can promote sustainable consumption. Fast fashion was studied from the point of view of possibilities to reduce its negative impact on the environment. In addition, effective integration of sustainable practices was pointed out.

Cluster No. 8 (in brown) can be described as *Loyalty and sustainability in the hotel industry.* It contains 8 keywords, including *brand awareness, brand loyalty, environmental sustainability, hotels, perceived quality, social sustainability, sustainable development* and *sustainable practices.* Sustainable development strategies in the hotel industry were studied for increasing customer loyalty and improving brand image. In addition, service quality, sustainable practices, and customer perceptions of hotel brands were analyzed.

Cluster No. 9 (in pink) identified as *Modern research methods in marketing* contains 7 keywords, including *brand credibility, covid-19, questionnaire survey, scale development, service quality,* and *social media marketing.* The publications analyze advanced research

techniques for a more thorough understanding of marketing trends. Determinants of service quality and brand credibility were studied in the context of the effectiveness of marketing efforts, including social media marketing.

Cluster No. 10 (in black), titled *City brands and their value,* includes the single keyword *city brand equity.* The topic focuses on city brand equity and its role in attracting tourists. Important in this context is improving the competitiveness of cities in the context of the effectiveness of promotional campaigns.

5. Discussion of results and implications

The purpose of this study was to identify the state of research in the field of SuBE using bibliometric analysis with special attention given to thematic areas. The current level of knowledge on the subject of SuBE, the identification of known authors, countries, and sources, as well as the identification of thematic areas that are significant for SuBE, were all included in the three research questions.

The first question was assessing the level of development of the SuBE field of study. By the end of 2024, 340 publications on SuBE had been published, with an average value of 12.1 publications per year. The largest number of publications was published in the 2021-2024 period; there were 170. In comparison, 150 studies were published in the 2011-2020 period. The difference can be seen in the average number of publications; in the 2011-2020 period, an average of 15 studies per year were published, while in the 2021-2024 period, this average value was 42.5 studies per year. The importance of this area is also evidenced by the number of citations. In total, publications indexed in the Scopus database were cited 5,671 times. This means an average number of citations of 202.5 per year. The highest number of citations was recorded in the 2021-2024 period; there were 3,848 citations. In comparison, in the 2011-2020 period, the number of citations of publications related to SuBE was 1,749. The comparison of the average annual number of citations shows an increase in the importance of the subject. In the 2011-2020 period, the number of citations was 174.9 per year, while in the 2021-2024 period, this number increased to 962 citations per year.

The second research question focused on identifying authors and countries relevant to the SuBE research area. The authors of the largest number of publications were Gil-Saura I., Ruiz-Molina M.E., and Marín-García A., who published 12, 9, and 7 studies, respectively. The United States turned out to be the most affiliated country, followed by India, China, the United Kingdom, and South Korea. These five countries accounted for 50% of all publications on SuBE indexed in the Scopus database. The bibliographic coupling identified 68 countries. However, considering the minimum number of documents at level 3, 8 clusters

were identified. South Korea and India belonged to the first cluster, the United Kingdom and the United States to cluster No. 3, while China was in the sixth cluster.

Answering the third question, analysis of the keyword co-occurrence using mapping analysis allowed the selection of 10 clusters. According to the cluster research, globalization and regional socioeconomic changes present both opportunities and problems for modern brand management, marketing, and communication strategies. An interdisciplinary and dynamic research and practice environment was created by combining issues like consumer behavior, circular economics, sustainable development, branding and competitiveness building, brand management in the context of tourism services, and contemporary marketing research methods (Buckley et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2015).

One crucial area of marketing and management is brand development and competitiveness in relation to sustainable development (Javed et al., 2024; Tung, Vigneron, 2023). Brands must set themselves apart in the face of intense global competition and shifting consumer expectations by being able to connect emotionally with their target audiences in addition to offering high-quality goods and services. In the tourism services industry, where customer experience, authenticity, and a region's or city's image are crucial in fostering enduring loyalty, brand management is especially crucial (Bordian et al., 2024; Chan, 2019).

The circular economy and sustainability are significant components of modern marketing plans. Brands must incorporate social and environmental responsibility into their operations due to the increasing environmental consciousness of societies and global environmental responsibilities. The circular economy, which is founded on the ideas of reducing waste and optimizing resource value, is evolving into both a goal and a chance to develop creative business solutions. Customers expect firms to be open, accountable, and dedicated to eco-friendly practices as they become more conscious of their influence on the environment (Kumar et al., 2022; Matteucci, 2020). A crucial part of this process is communication, which affects customer choices. Since today's consumer is both highly demanding and knowledgeable, effective communication needs to be real-time, authentic, and individualized. Social media has grown to be a significant platform for brand-consumer communication, providing fresh chances to engage audiences, examine behavior, and form connections. Online reviews, suggestions, and opinions frequently influence consumer choices, making reputation management and user-generated content marketing even more crucial (Duh, Uzezi Wara, 2024; Qi et al., 2024).

Additionally, marketing innovations are embracing customer loyalty, particularly in the hotel sector, where a significant difference is the combination of outstanding service and sustainable practices. Consumers are more inclined to select companies that provide contemporary, tailored solutions while exhibiting respect for the environment and local communities. A deeper comprehension of consumer behavior and the efficacy of marketing initiatives is made possible by modern marketing research methodologies. Using social media data, artificial intelligence, and advanced analytics enables the development of tailored tactics in addition to trend forecasting (Golob et al., 2020; Kumar, Bagchi, 2020; Wang et al., 2014).

In summary, the previously mentioned concerns highlight the increasing significance of a multidisciplinary approach in marketing that incorporates consumer behavior analysis, cutting-edge technologies, communication methods, and sustainability. To succeed in a world that is changing quickly, today's brands and organizations must exhibit not only innovation but also social and environmental responsibility.

Based on the bibliometric analysis, theoretical and practical implications for sustainable brand equity can be formulated. The theoretical implications include the need to integrate theories from marketing, management, sustainability and communications to understand how brands can simultaneously meet consumer expectations and achieve environmental goals. This will make it possible to present fresh theoretical frameworks that consider how circular economics affects brand equity, brand value, and brand loyalty. The approach to consumer behavior needs to change, and studies on consumer choices need to consider how social media is becoming a more significant influence on sustainable preferences. When creating analytical models, it is important to consider how sustainability, loyalty, and consumers' perceptions of brand value interact. From the perspective of the development of tools and methodologies using artificial intelligence, big data, and real-time analytics for the analysis of changing consumer sustainable behavior, it is also vital to highlight contemporary research methods in marketing.

Practical implications should be pointed out that companies must include sustainability as a central element of their branding strategy to build lasting relationships with environmentally conscious consumers. To attract clients who are searching for unique and ethical experiences, travel agencies might highlight authenticity and locality in their activities. Additionally, organizations should use social media to assess customer behavior and instantly determine their needs in addition to using it for communication.

To promote sustainability, companies can introduce loyalty programs that promote consumers' green choices, such as discounts for repeated use of goods and services with a low carbon footprint. Implementing circular economy practices in business processes can not only reduce operating costs but also increase consumer involvement in green activities. Additionally, companies should employ sophisticated data analytics in conjunction with contemporary research methods to forecast market trends and make real-time strategy adjustments. In this sense, the creation of digital platforms and mobile applications can aid in the study of customer behavior and make it easier to use creative marketing strategies.

6. Conclusions, limitations, and future research

SuBE is an important issue in the context of management, marketing, and sustainability. It is related to the importance of sustainability in marketing strategies. In this context, sustainability is becoming a key factor in determining the competitiveness of brands.

At the same time, the role of social media and technology is growing dynamically. Social media has significantly influenced the way consumers interact with brands. In turn, new technologies enable precise analysis of their behavior and preferences. Shaping SuBE considered in the context of brand management requires the integration of knowledge from various fields, such as marketing, economics, technology, and social sciences.

This study also has limitations. First, there is the diversity of regional and cultural contexts. The influence of culture, local economic conditions, and the level of environmental awareness can vary from region to region. This issue was not analysed. Second, time frames were not analysed. The dynamics of technological change, evolving consumer behavior, or approaches to sustainability can affect the issues analysed in the context of SuBE.

Several issues should be identified as directions for future research. First, the long-term impact of sustainability strategies should be studied. Research should focus on analysing how brands' pro-environmental and pro-social activities affect their long-term consumer loyalty and market value. Second, loyalty in the context of the circular economy would be an interesting research area. Currently, there is a lack of extensive research indicating how circular strategies affect consumers' brand perceptions and purchase decisions. Third, research analysing the post-pandemic reality should continue. In-depth studies of changes in consumer behavior and brand adaptation in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of sustainability and digitalization would be important.

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