

Original Research

Analyzing the Intellectual Paradigm of Fashion Branding in International Research

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Received: 08 August 2020

Accepted: 27 November 2020

Abstract

Fashion branding is decisive to create a distinctive image of a product. It is more important in the fashion apparel industry. Despite the existing studies, there is a need for a comprehensive investigation that can accurately portray the realities regarding fashion branding. In this regard, to provide a complete image and a deep understanding of the state of research in this field, the visualization technique of scientific networks was used. The research population consisted of all articles indexed on the Web of Science (WoS) database using the keywords such as "branding" and "fashion" from 1900 to 2019. The data was collected via a systematic review and analyzed by VOSviewer software. The research results included the data on identifying top scientific researchers and most influential countries; analyzing the relationships among researchers and countries, identifying keyword occurrences; and identifying research hotspots and subjects on which little research had been done. 1679 researchers, 64 countries, and 2522 keywords were obtained from 906 articles in total. This research seeks to explore and present emerging research topics. The research new insights and instruments emphasize the intellectual paradigm governing branding in international research for managers and owners of the fashion apparel industry. The intellectual paradigm investigated in this study by providing a comprehensive image of research conducted over the past thirty years in the field of fashion branding guides researchers to select research fields, keywords and also cite international articles and thus make Iranian research outputs more valuable. Managers of the fashion and clothing industry are also advised to use the fashion branding intellectual paradigm, which has been studied in detail in this research, in order to gain a comprehensive insight into the research background and scientific management of their brand.

Keywords: Business Strategy, Branding, Fashion, Scientometrics, Co-occurrence, Systematic Review.

JEL Classification: M31, L21, L67, C80, D83

Introduction

Widely known in consumer markets, branding is one of the key processes in fashion marketing (Koivisto & Mattila, 2018). As it creates a symbolic and emotional text with the brand identity and is a distinguishing point for it, branding in the fashion apparel industry is considered very significant and can be a common product for consumers to communicate and satisfy their needs to be defined by it (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Rashid, 2017). Fashion is an activity that uses the individuals' appearance for displaying clothes, fabrics, and accessories. Research in fashion branding has been considered both in the field of fashion marketing and brand management (Rahman, Hossain, Rushan, Hoque & Hassan, 2020). So far, many authors have done research on branding in the fashion apparel industry (Bridson & Evans, 2004; Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005; McColl & Moore, 2011). For a fashion retailer or supplier, achieving a sustainable competitive advantage depends on values that are relevant to the brand strategy. If a brand is successful, it can make more profit for the seller by offering a higher price (Ruzinskaite, 2015). As much research on branding in the fashion apparel industry shows (Choi, 2017; Fernández Hidalgo, Mikano & Vermeersch, 2016; Jelinek, 2018; P. Kim, 2015; McColl & Moore, 2011; Rashid, 2017; Ruzinskaite, 2015; Salti, 2017; Thomas, 2014; Ion, 2018), successful fashion branding creates a distinctive image for the product. When a brand communicates with customers through advertising, packaging, and marketing, it creates a sense of confidence and reduces the risk of buying for consumers. This is especially important when it comes to buying products related to the fashion and clothing industry (Baker, 2003; De Chernatony & McDonald, 1994). Despite much research done in this field, the need for comprehensive research that can accurately depict the existing facts and provide a deep understanding of them for future studies is felt. In this research, a new instrument called scientometrics was employed. Scientometrics is a valid tool for evaluating information resources, identifying research areas, and drawing the connections between these areas, in the form of a thematic map.

The purpose of scientometric studies and illustration of scientific networks, known as scientific maps, is to provide an overview of the research state, how different fields relate, and how to grow and develop over time. Analyzing scientometric networks as social networks, to analyze the structural patterns in networks provides a systematic way to explain and test the processes of knowledge sharing and identify bottlenecks in information flow. Many scientists and researchers have drawn the structure of science in different fields based on the scientific texts of that field and using cluster analysis (Neufeld, Fang & Huff, 2007). Scientometric researchers have also found that the words in texts are special entities. As a result, with a set of important keywords or their combination, it is possible to identify the scientific field and list its concepts in the form of several keywords (NikKar, Alijani & Karami, 2018). Besides, the omnipresence of words can extract scientific topics and discover the connection between them directly from the subject content. In other words, scientometric analyses support the quantitative interpretations of social developments and dynamics that are necessary for the advancement of science. According to Lara-Rodríguez, Rojas-Contreras & Oliva (2019), to develop scientific concepts, we need to use various and new methods to identify research gaps. Thus, this tool was employed for scientific mapping in the field of fashion branding. Using this technique to gain a comprehensive insight into fashion branding research has been a new step providing researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the vast body of published research articles. Studying fashion branding, without knowing the research background in this field, can be like

driving with your eyes closed.

With a new perspective, this study emphasizes the intellectual paradigm governing branding in international research for fashion apparel industry managers and its main purpose is to identify emerging research topics related to fashion branding through the use of science tools. It is a measurement. This study analyzes the social networks related to fashion branding researchers, the network of scientific collaborations between countries in this field, the peer-to-peer network of keywords used in articles, and the co-researchers network between researchers during 1900 to 2019. The main sources used in this regard are the articles indexed in the authoritative scientific and Web of Science (WoS) in the field of fashion branding.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Emotional branding is a strategy that builds strong connections between consumers and brands. This form of branding leads to the creation and development of brand loyalty, which leads to a long-term partnership between consumers and brands, creating a deep commitment and impact between them, and ultimately increasing consumer benefits. The result of using such a strategy can increase brand sales (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). According to Otley (2016), consumers who are emotionally connected to the brand are 52% more valuable than satisfied consumers, which increase the brand's profit share of the market. Thus, fashion has long been dependent on experimental, symbolic, and enjoyable products (Noh, Li, Martin & Purpura, 2015). As a result, emotional branding is a vital approach to communicating directly with fashion consumers. Since the focus of marketing has shifted from productivism to the creation of consumer experience, sensory marketing is a strategy that seeks not only to stimulate the five senses of consumers, but also on emotions and their feelings of pleasure, perception, judgment, and behavioral responses to a brand. Meanwhile, fashion retailers have been successful in providing such experiences in stores and online shopping for consumers. In retail technology, the implementation of such a strategy for fashion brands has increased more than ever. Regarding the issue of consumer attention and loyalty to the brand, creating an emotional connection between the brand and its consumers through causal branding has been provided. Branding is the cause of a strategy that provides consumers with opportunities to make purchases and positive changes concerning social issues. It also causes these issues, in addition to their focus on personal gain, provides a long-term image of the brand (Kim & Sullivan, 2019).

Engagement of fashion brands with social issues and their support for these issues in society and relation to consumers are good strategies in the emotional branding of fashion products. In the luxury goods industry, the shift in conscious consumption towards meaningful experiences by consumers has created a new concept called "new luxury". It not only led to changes in lifestyle branding but also conveys sensory cognitive and logical values to consumers. As some researchers believe, the term luxury is obsolete and the "new" approach to gaining experiences includes physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual engagement that causes a sense of pleasure and ultimately keeps the brand in consumers' minds. The creation of a strong distinguishable image in the product, influence on consumers' after-purchase decisions, innovation promotion, increase in consumers' purchase amount and loyalty, as well as the establishment of emotional communication with customers, are some of the benefits of using this strategy (Jelinek, 2018). Corporate branding is a brand alliance strategy in which two or more brands work together to launch their brand. The goal of this strategy is the ability to respond quickly to rapidly growing

market developments as well as increase loyalty to partner brands in the fashion and luxury products industry (Shen, Choi & Chow, 2017).

Materials and Methods

The present study employed an interpretive paradigm. It is a fundamental research study. The research approach is inductive its research data collection and analysis methods are quantitative. It also used the library research technique and exploratory cross-sectional research design. According to this protocol, in this research, the structure of science-based on scientific texts, clustering, and illustrating topics according to the frequency and occurrence of words in the titles of articles in the field of fashion apparel branding was drawn using scientometrics technique. VOSviewer software version 1.6.11 was used for data analysis. The research population consisted of all scientific products of the type of reviewed and indexed scientific articles, at the international level, available in the Web and Science (WoS) database, during the period from 1900 to 2019. To collect research data, a systematic review method was used. According to Aliaga-Isla & Huybrechts (2018), the review should include a comprehensive search of all related articles and scientific documents and obtain practical and usable excerpts. The search results in the database were reviewed based on the PRISMA method and in 3 steps. In the first step, by entering the WoS database, the search terms, including branding and fashion, are entered in the subject section in the simple search field, which is given below the exact sentence of the search term;

Topic: (branding) AND Topic: (fashion)

The number of articles obtained from the search was 1591. In the next step, during a systematic review and based on specific steps, the results were screened. In the first step of the systematic review, the review articles and texts were selected based on the type of documentation available in this database. Then, topics related to the study field were selected via the thematic classification in the database. In the final step, the filter was performed based on articles in English. In the end, using this search strategy, 906 scientific and indexed articles in the field of fashion and clothing branding were extracted and used for further investigations. To analyze the data obtained using the coexistence method of keywords, their relationship with each other in the software and server, and the analysis of the result section of the web-science database have been examined. It should be noted that the above search was conducted on September 23, 2019.

Findings

The data in Table 1 is a descriptive analysis provided by the WoS database. The findings of this database in the analysis section show the thematic classification of search results in Table 2. This table illustrates the five groups of topics with the highest number of articles in the field of fashion branding. Out of a total of 906 articles extracted, more than half of the articles (65.44%) are in these five groups of thematic classification of the database.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the WoS database

Total Publications	H-index	Average citation per item	Sum of times cited	Sum of times cited without self-citations	Total number of article citations	Total number of citations to articles without self-citations
906	41	8.75	7931	7047	6331	5940

Table 2

Thematic classification

Row	Thematic classification	Percentage of articles in the class relative to the total
1	Business	35.79
2	Management	15.76
3	Humanities multidisciplinary	6.86
4	Materials science textiles	4.19
5	Economics	2.82
	Total	65.44

In addition to the thematic classification, the data of the extracted articles based on the research area is shown in Table 3 where the five areas that have the highest percentage of articles among the published articles are listed. More than half of the articles (71.599%) are located in these five areas. As Tables 2 and 3 show, articles are overlapped based on two classified types in this database. For example, in the business class in Table 1, there are 35.79% of the articles and in the economics class; there are 2.82% of the articles, which together comprise 38.61%. In Table 3, the Business Economics class covers 49.74% of the articles, which is about the sum of percentages of articles in the two classes mentioned in Table 2.

Table 3

Classification by research area

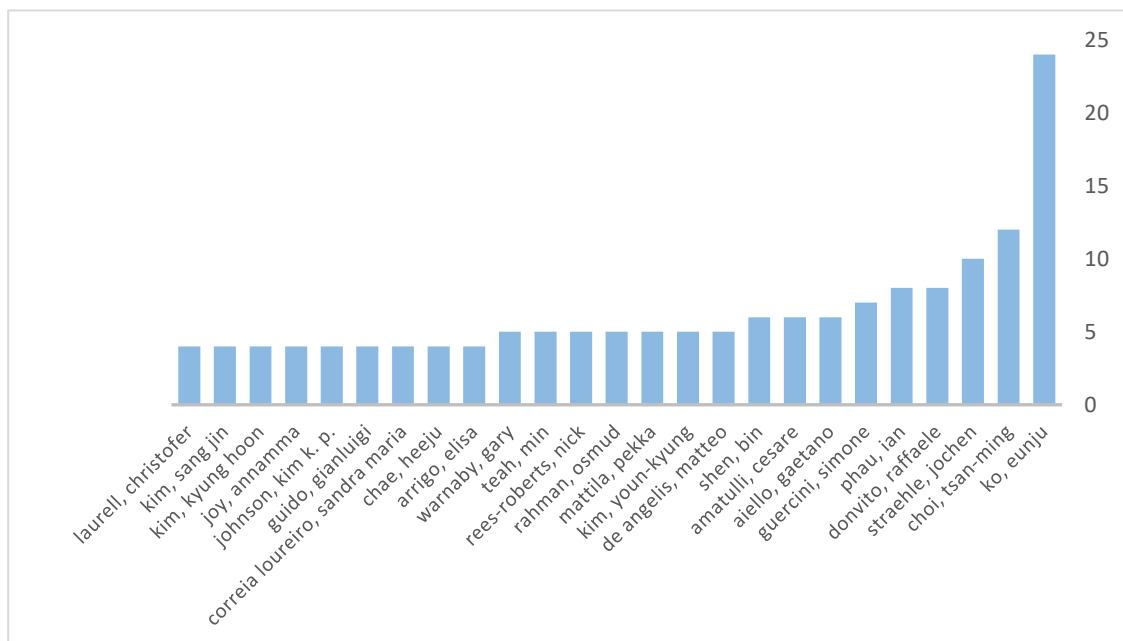
Row	Classification by research area	Percentage of articles in the class relative to the total
1	Business economics	49.74
2	Arts humanities other topics	8.07
3	Materials science	5.10
4	Social sciences other topics	5.10
5	Psychology	3.57
	Total	71.599

As the results of software analysis show, researchers of fashion apparel branding have so far recorded 906 scientific documents in WoS, among whom Eunju Ko with 24 articles, Tsan-Ming Choi with 12 articles, Jochen Straehle with 10 articles, Rafaele Donvito with 8 articles, and Ian Phau with 8 articles are the top five researchers in the field of fashion apparel branding. Table 4 illustrates the data about these researchers, and Figure 1 shows the frequency of the number of articles written by them.

Table 4

The top five researchers in the field of fashion apparel branding

Row	Top researchers	Country	H-index	Number of articles	Number of citations	Average citation per year
1	Eunju Ko	South Korea	17	24	608	25.3
2	Tsan-Ming Choi	China	35	12	100	8.3
3	Jochen Straehle	Germany	3	10	4	0.4
4	Raffaele Donvito	Italy	5	8	33	4.1
5	Ian Phau	Australia	13	8	55	6.8
	Total			62	800	45.06

*Figure 1: Frequency of articles written by 25 researchers*

Most articles in this field, in terms of numbers, are from 2015 to 2019. Among them, the highest number of articles is related to 2018 (a total of 71.12% of the articles). The rest were written between 1993 and 2014. Since the search in this database was done on 23-09-2019, so there may be articles in this field in 2019 that have not been finalized and indexed in this database until the mentioned date, hence the number of articles in 2019 is less than previous years. The frequency of the maximum number of articles in the mentioned years is shown in Table 5 and its bar chart is shown in Figure 2.

Table 5
Frequency of the published and indexed articles

Percentage of articles	Number of articles	Publication year
18.28%	164	2018
16.49%	148	2017
13.48%	121	2016
12.26%	110	2015
10.59%	95	2019
71.125%	638	Total

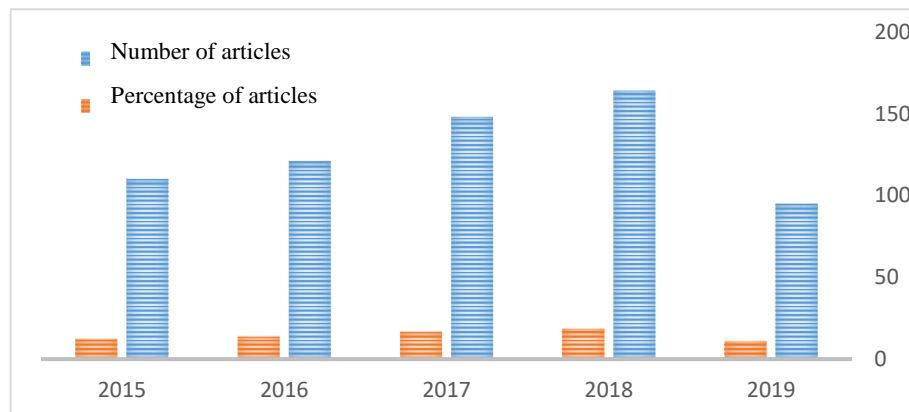


Figure 2: Frequency of the articles by year

In total, among the articles published and the results of the analysis, researchers in 64 countries presented more than half of the articles in the field of fashion branding, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, China, and South Korea. According to the numerical values obtained from the search of 906 articles, these five countries have a contribution of 52.83% of the total articles. These statistics show that these countries are known as the most influential countries in the field of fashion branding so that they can control the flow of information among social networks in countries.

In the role and position of article producing countries, Table 6 shows the list of the 10 top countries, the number of articles, and the number of citations of the researchers in these countries.

Table 6
Frequency of the ten top countries

Row	Country	Number of articles	Number of citations	Number of links
1	The US	230	3307	28
2	The UK	132	1125	26
3	Italy	90	453	25
4	China	75	637	24
5	South Korea	73	928	28

Row	Country	Number of articles	Number of citations	Number of links
6	Australia	54	520	24
7	Germany	46	418	22
8	Canada	38	896	22
9	France	36	415	21
10	India	31	88	17

To draw the graphic map of the communication network of the countries by the software, the minimum number of articles belonging to each country to be 10 and out of 64 countries was considered, and 21 final nodes were obtained. The resulting

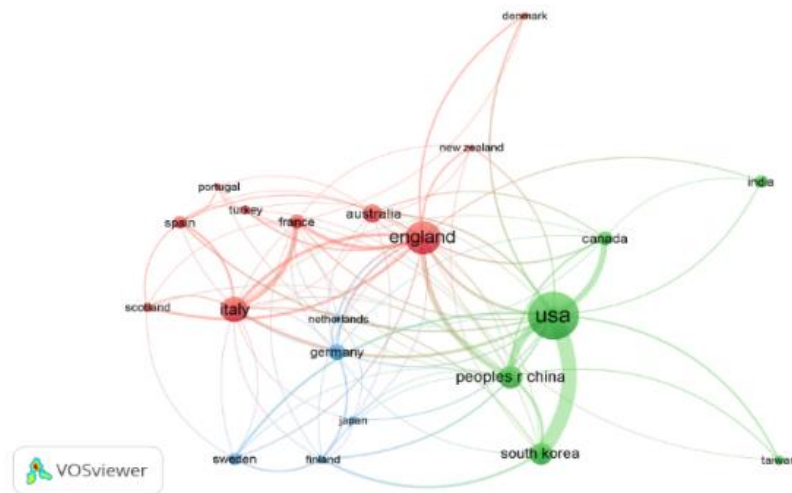


Figure 3: The graphic map of the countries

Graphic map is shown in Figure 3.

As shown in Table 6, the US, the UK, Italy, China, and South Korea accounted for the largest number of published articles in the field of fashion branding, covering more than 61% of all published articles. In addition to the number of articles published by researchers, the extent to which other researchers use and cite their work displays the effectiveness of a researcher and the productivity of scientific articles published by him in scientific circles. As a result, through this index, these countries can be identified as the most influential countries.

In Figure 3, these countries are shown in larger circles, confirming their greater influence as well as their wider contribution to the production and publication of scientific articles in this field. Also, the thickness of the lines between the circles in Figure 3 indicates the extent and proximity of research connections between the social entities of the network of countries. For example, the extensive scientific relationship between researchers in the US and South Korea can be shown with a strength link of 29, the US and China with a strength link of 14, and the US and Canada with a strength link of 11.

Conversely, in the case of countries such as Italy and Sweden, South Korea and France, etc., the level of strength link is equal to 1 and very low. Besides, the dispersion between countries in the graphic map indicates a lack of coordination between countries in the field of research in the field under study. This can be seen in the density map of Figure 4. The hotspots in this map are limited and these spots are located at a distance from each other. Therefore, if more extensive studies are conducted in other countries, the field of communication, coordination and more research activities among universities and research centers in different countries can be provided, and researchers can consider citing each other's works, ultimately more dense maps can be obtained and the strength link of the network can be strengthened.

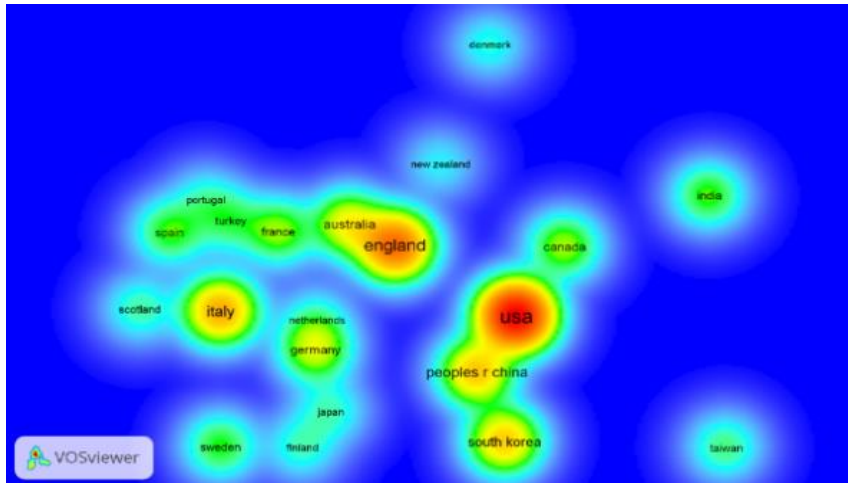


Figure 4: The density map of the countries

Then, the clustering of fashion branding topics was done based on the keywords that the researchers had presented in their scientific articles. Accordingly, the software showed 2522 keywords. Assuming 7 as the lowest number of occurrences of each keyword in the existing articles, 63 keywords were obtained. Words such as fashion, luxury, social media, branding, sustainability, luxury brands, brand loyalty, the fashion industry, and China were commonly used words by authors in articles. The list of 30 extracted keywords is shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Frequency of keywords

Row	Keywords	Number of occurrences	Number of links	Average of citations	Number of clusters	Row	Keywords	Number of occurrences	Number of links	Average of citations	Number of clusters
1	Fashion	127	47	6.5	5	16	Sustainable fashion	17	10	5.4	2
2	Luxury	50	30	7.7	4	17	Retailer	16	19	20.4	2
3	Social media	41	28	7.7	1	18	Identity	16	18	5.3	5
4	Branding	40	23	5.3	5	19	Brand	15	21	8.4	2
5	Sustainability	37	26	8.6	2	20	India	14	17	3.3	4
6	Luxury brands	27	20	25.8	3	21	Consumer behavior	14	14	3.8	4
7	Fashion loyalty	22	22	6.9	1	22	Y generation	14	14	8	1
8	The fashion industry	20	20	8.7	2	23	Advertisements	14	13	10.9	5
9	China	20	18	5.1	5	24	Brand value	14	13	35.7	1
10	Brand image	19	21	9.1	3	25	Fashion marketing	13	16	4.7	4
11	Gender	19	15	11.8	2	26	Marketing	13	15	6.8	5
12	Fast fashion	19	14	9.8	1	27	Culture	13	15	9	4
13	Purchase intention	18	15	24.5	1	28	Brand personality	13	14	7.3	3
14	Consumer behavior	17	17	9.4	4	29	Brand management	12	16	11.7	4
15	Retailer	17	13	3.7	2	30	Instagram	12	10	10	1

Figure 5 illustrates a graphic map of keywords based on the number of occurrences. In this figure, some keywords are shown by large circles and some by small ones, indicating the use of

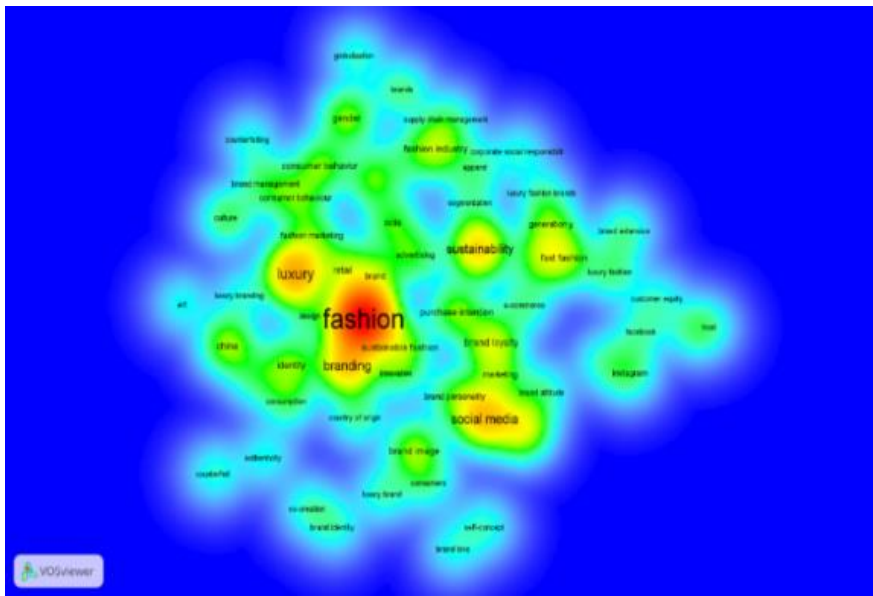


Figure 6: The density map of keywords

Keyword clustering analysis

The social network resulting from the keywords includes 5 thematic clusters, 63 social entities that are the keywords here, and 407 links. The criterion for selecting keywords from 2522 words extracted in the total number of articles was the occurrence of at least 7 times each word among the articles. The first and largest cluster in this network, shown in Figure 5 in red, contains 17 keywords whose list in Table 7 is separated from the rest of the keywords in the other four clusters by cluster#1. Keywords such as social media, brand loyalty, fast fashion, and purchase intention are the keywords at occurring most frequently in this cluster. However, keywords such as satisfaction, organizational social responsibility, and trust are the least frequently occurring ones.

The second cluster in this network contains 13 keywords distinguished from the other clusters in Figure 5 in green, and in Table 7 by cluster#2. Keywords such as sustainability, fashion industry, and gender are the most frequently occurring ones, and terms such as segmentation, globalization, supply chain management, and innovation are the least frequently occurring keywords. The third cluster in the graphic grid contains 11 keywords that are highlighted in blue in Figure 5 and cluster#3 in Table 7. The most frequently occurring keywords in this cluster are luxury brands, brand image, brand personality, and least frequently occurring ones such as brand love, authenticity, and self-concept are in this cluster. The fourth cluster contains 11 keywords among which keywords such as luxury, consumer behavior, and culture are the most frequently occurring ones, and those such as materialism, forgery, and art are the least frequently occurring keywords. Figure 5 shows this cluster in yellow, and Table 7 marks it with cluster#4. The fifth cluster, shown in purple in Figure 5 and cluster#5 in Table 7, includes most frequently occurring keywords such as fashion, branding, China, retail, and identity, and least frequently occurring keywords such as fashion design, country of origin, and consumption.

Co-authorship network analysis among researchers of fashion branding articles

Co-authorship networks include authors and researchers of articles so that if they co-author one or more articles, they can relate to each other through references to each other's work in their research (Khasseh, Soosaraei & Fakhar, 2016). As shown in Figure 7, the co-authorship network consists of four clusters distinguished by color. The first cluster consists of 87 authors marked in red on the map, and authors such as Keller, Aaker, Fornell, and Hair are among the researchers with the highest number of citations in fashion branding research. This means that the researchers pay more attention to the works of these authors in their articles, have the highest level of co-authorship and communication with other researchers, and are the most active members of the co-authorship network in fashion branding. In the second cluster, marked in green on the map, there are 56 authors, showing that dispersion in this cluster is high. Dispersion and fragmentation in this cluster indicate a lack of coordination and cooperation between the authors of the articles with each other.

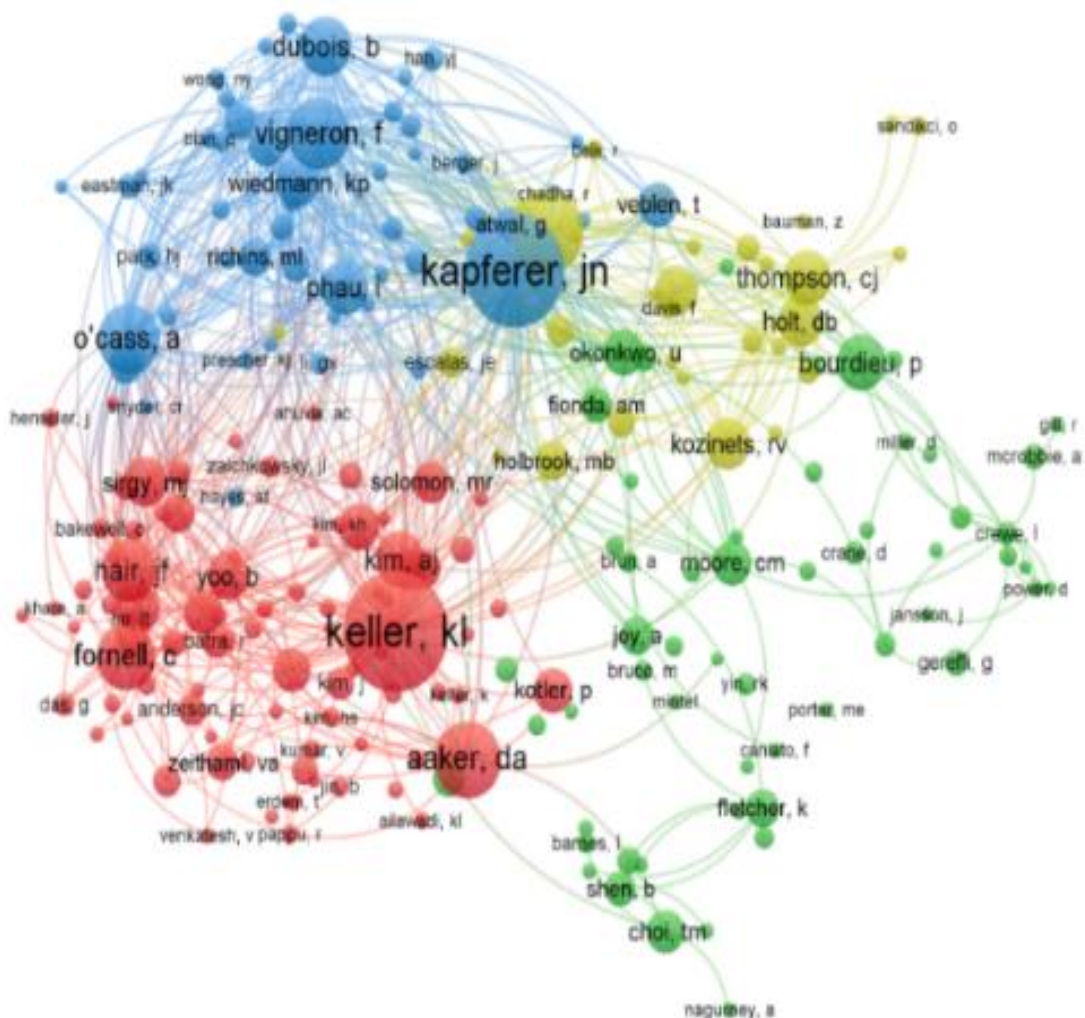


Figure 7: Graphic map of the co-authorship network

Authors such as Belk, Bourdieu, Thompson, kozinets, and Holt are among the most active authors in this cluster. In the third cluster, with 51 authors highlighted in blue, kapferer, Vigneron, O'cass, Dubois, and Fao are among the most active authors in the cluster. Highlighted in yellow on the map, the fourth cluster contains 30 authors, the most active of whom are Choi, Fletcher, Joy, and Kim. The active authors in these four clusters are represented in a graphic map with large circles. Figure 8 illustrates the density map of the authors' co-authorship network. As it turns out, the hotspots in this map belong to the first, third, and fourth clusters due to the presence of authors such as Keller, Aaker, and Fornell in the first cluster, kapferer and Vigneron in the third cluster, and Thompson in the fourth cluster. In the second cluster, due to the lack of necessary cooperation, no significant hotspot is observed.

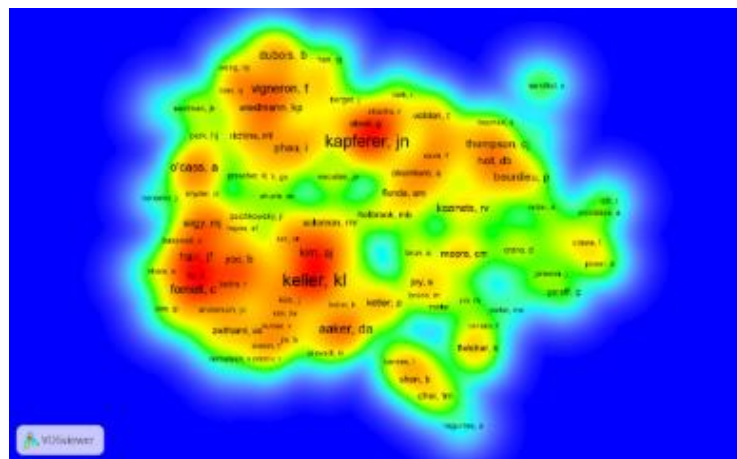


Figure 8. Density map of the co-authorship Network

Discussion

As an important activity and performance, branding can bring many benefits to organizations. Research literature shows that as an essential part of business strategy, strong brands are tools for corporate success (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2013; Ion, 2018). The essential characteristics of the best brands include strong vision, clear meanings, credibility, stability, coherence, flexibility, distinctiveness, commitment, and value creation (Ion, 2018). Due to the significance of this process on the proper performance of brands and its influence on corporate success in the field of fashion apparel brands, scientometrics was employed to identify areas of influential scientific fields and also to identify thematic gaps for introducing future researchers to determine new research topics.

The results indicate that the spring of the subject is in 2017 with 164 articles, and the cradle of the subject is the US with 230 articles and 3307 citations. The most extensive links were identified between the US and South Korea, the US and China, and the US and Canada. In other words, South Korea, China, and Canada have the most extensive connections with the cradle of the subject (the US). As a result, there is a close link between research, academic centers, and authors in these countries. The best author in this field is Eunju Ko, from South Korea with 24 articles and 608 citations. In the co-authorship network, most citations have been given to Keller, Kapferer, Belk, and Choi. In sum, there is a kind of consensus between them in the fashion branding field of research. Keller has the highest rate of co-authorship with other authors. If the authors want to increase the citation rate of their articles, it is better to cite the

works and results obtained from the research of the mentioned authors in their articles. Besides, according to Kogut (2000), co-authorship with researchers in these countries can increase the centrality of a country.

Generally speaking, as the graphic map resulting from the analysis of research articles in VOSviewer software shows, the keywords fashion (127 occurrences), luxury (50 occurrences), social media (41 occurrences), branding (40 occurrences), and sustainability (37 occurrences) are among the most popular ones among 2522 keywords extracted from articles. The average number of citations to the articles in which these keywords are mentioned is 6.5, 7.72, 7.78, 3.5, and 8.6, respectively. These articles are those in which the word sustainability has been given more citations. Therefore, it can be concluded that this keyword is very important in the field of fashion branding and has a great effect on this field. According to the research results, researchers, for future research, can focus on the most frequently occurring keywords if they want to get more citations, and on the least frequently occurring keywords such as organizational social responsibility, trust, satisfaction, brand generalization if they are looking for new research topics. These keywords can be discussed in the field of fashion branding as emerging and central topics, providing a new field of research in this regard. Eventually, these new fields may be able to lead to some solutions and new approaches concerning the field of fashion apparel branding. The results of this study help researchers to identify structural gaps in the study area and create a competitive advantage for those who fill these gaps. Also, in this regard, these authors connect others who, in the absence of such a structure, would not be able to access each other. . Additionally, to study the thematic of articles done in the field of fashion branding causes researchers to become more aware of the status of researches, the relationship between them and information about thematic gaps. It can also help researchers to understand the overview of the scientific framework in the field of fashion branding and also to select hot and important topics in this field. Scientific policymakers in each country can, and should, consider the advantages of cooperation with countries, academic and research centers. Moreover, influential authors in a particular field of study should provide facilities to create areas of cooperation and synergy.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the present study, more attention to the scientific mapping of published studies, choosing repetitive keywords, using the results of studies conducted in more active countries, citing active authors in the field of fashion branding around the world is recommended. This approach will lead to provide more scientific branding studies, and thus filling research empty spaces in this field in Iran. In this way, the Iranian business managers of fashion and clothing industry can compensate the weaknesses of branding and smooth the scientific path of their brands to globalization and also strength the competitive advantages. Managers that take the steps forward to strengthen the value of their brands will be able to deal with environmental threats and take advantage of business opportunities.

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