

## TRENDS AND EVOLUTION OF AGILE BRANDING: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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**Abstract.** As today's environment constantly changes, scientific and practical literature suggests that brands must be managed more agilely. Agile branding, characterized by stakeholder involvement, adaptability, and flexibility, emerges as an innovative approach for companies to navigate dynamic markets to ensure that they remain sustainably relevant and competitive. Yet, no bibliometric analysis has been conducted on agility related to branding to date. This paper aims to illustrate and analyze the trends and evolution of agile branding by applying bibliometric methods to the scientific article literature produced between 1996 and 2023. The results of a systematic literature review are presented, and the findings of the bibliometric analysis of 70 publications listed in the Web of Science Core Collection database are evaluated. Furthermore, visualization and interpretation of bibliometric networks related to citations and publications, publication titles, keywords, authorship, and affiliations with the software VOSviewer is included. This bibliometric analysis shows that the number of scientific studies on agility related to branding has increased mainly since 2008, reaching its peak in 2022, indicating a growing research interest. The study reveals that much more research needs to be conducted on how brands can be managed more agilely and dynamically to compete in a fast-moving world.

**Keywords:** agility, agile branding, brand agility, branding process, strategic brand management, agile marketing, bibliometric analysis.

**JEL Classification:** M1, M3, O3.

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### 1. Introduction and literature review

We live in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, where companies must respond agilely and quickly to changing circumstances, and adapt their branding accordingly (Baran & Woznyj, 2021; Bruce & Jeromin, 2016; Capoano et al., 2024; Peterson, 2019; Schoemaker et al., 2018). By adopting an agile approach, companies can effectively respond to consumer needs, navigate competitive landscapes, and maintain a strong brand presence in an ever-evolving market environment (Keller & Richey, 2006; Yazıcı, 2024). While the agile approach has been scientifically applied to various business areas, such as IT, project management, supply chain management, human resources or marketing, literature on integrating agility into brand management is scarce (Hattendorf, 2021; Kalaignanam et al., 2021; Noteboom et al., 2021; Osei et al., 2019; Pöhlmann et al., 2024a, 2024b; Roy et al., 2017).

The authors Kalaignanam et al. (2021) emphasize that maintaining brand consistency is one of the main challenges when implementing marketing agility and point out that this concept may not be suitable for all businesses and all marketing activities. Brand image consistency is vital to maintaining strong brand associations (Kalaignanam et al., 2021). However, in an age where collaboration is the essence of business success, establishing a genuinely consistent and agile brand lived by employees and communicated to external stakeholders has become a significant challenge (O'Keeffe et al., 2016). Kalaignanam et al. (2021) draw attention to the challenges of agile marketing as it can affect customer brand perceptions and attitudes, and blur brand associations as a result of frequent experiments, and can even have a damaging effect on brands. The authors Kalaignanam et al. (2021) believe that brand management decisions are less suited for market experimentation and recommend traditional methods of planning and supervision. Kalaignanam et al. (2021), and

Özsomer et al. (2023) therefore propose future research to find out which activities are especially suitable for agile branding.

Agile branding is defined as:

“the integration of agility into strategic brand management to enhance companies’ market relevance and competitiveness in a dynamic environment. The brand is seen as a living resource regularly reflected, proactively evolved, and dynamically adapted to market changes, always focusing on customer value. Decisions are based on collected data and stakeholder feedback. Agile methods are integrated both in the initial phase of brand creation and in the long-term care of the brand. The brand manager leads the brand with an openness to experimentation and is empowered to test and adapt it – always with the explicit goal of continuous improvement while balancing brand continuity and change” (Pöhlmann et al., 2024b, pp. 14–15).

The analyzed literature exposes a need for and growing interest in agility related to branding due to ongoing change and environmental challenges. Rego et al. (2022) argue that agile and resilient brands are more able to withstand, recover, and reinvent during periods of turbulence. Keller and Richey (2006) identify agility and collaboration as the main characteristics of a corporate brand personality. To achieve long-term success, companies must embrace agile strategies that allow them to adapt to changing conditions and seize new market opportunities proactively (Keller & Richey, 2006). This requires anticipating future changes and swiftly adjusting brand strategies to stay relevant and innovative (Keller & Richey, 2006). The shift in consumer behavior towards prioritizing sustainable and environmentally friendly products (Pant et al., 2020; Purcarea et al., 2022; Towers et al., 2013; Zhang & Watson, 2020) has challenged companies to be agile in their branding and adapt to this evolution (Purcarea et al., 2022). Focusing on agile trends in corporate branding may become incrementally crucial as new technologies, social and political changes as well as media influence the present and future of branding (Schmidt & Redler, 2018; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

Agility influences the perception of an employer brand and thus impacts employer attractiveness for employees and potential applicants (Koch & Schermuly, 2021; Mahmoud et al., 2021; Martinez-Moran et al., 2021). The research of Koch and Schermuly (2021) implies that applying agile project management methods impacts employer branding, attracting new professionals, and increasing employee commitment. Thus, companies that use agile project management methods can use this fact in advertisements as an employer branding tool (Koch & Schermuly, 2021). The authors Mahmoud et al. (2021) suggest creating an inclusive and empathetic multigenerational work environment and increasing workplace flexibility to attract new talents and to overcome external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. O’Keeffe et al. (2016), Tandon et al. (2024), and Mardian (2024) argue that agility is an essential leadership skill in today’s volatile world and changing environment.

In the literature analyzed, agility is often investigated in the context of social media (Chauhan et al., 2023; Chuah

et al., 2021; Miquel-Segarra, 2018; Ram & Liu, 2018; Stone & Woodcock, 2013). The studies of Chauhan and Pillai (2013) as well as of Miquel-Segarra (2018), indicate that the extent of posting and content agility on the social media platforms of a brand does have a major impact on customer engagement and satisfaction. The sharp rise in internet usage has pushed healthcare brands to increase their agile visibility on multiple digital platforms and raise customer engagement online to grow their profitability as competition has intensified (Chauhan et al., 2023). While it is vital for customer engagement and satisfaction to create attractive content and interactions on fan pages, it is equally essential for brands’ fan pages to be agile and react responsively to the evolving needs of customers and the competitive landscape (Chuah et al., 2021). The hospitality industry, for instance, needs to become more dynamic and agile (King et al., 2019; Lam & Law, 2019) to deliver a meaningful service experience, especially given the emergence of disruptive innovations such as the sharing economy (King et al., 2019). The findings of Ram and Liu (2018) suggest that social media enables agile product testing, agile product development teams, and the integration of customer feedback inter alia. Companies should engage customers more in this agile process through institutionalized online brand communities (OBCs) while using them as an influential platform to improve the service experience (King et al., 2019).

In the literature reviewed, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been explored often in the context of agility and branding (Alsulami et al., 2021; Rozak et al., 2021; Villegas-Ch. et al., 2022). The literature indicates that SMEs are exceptionally well positioned and need to implement agility (Rozak et al., 2021; Villegas-Ch. et al., 2022). According to Alsulami et al. (2021), SMEs favor agile approaches over resource-intensive ones. According to Gupta et al. (2020), agility is one of the four capabilities that contribute to a company’s competitive advantage, along with technology, marketing, and human resources. The authors stress that business agility is a capability that deals with the operational speed of a company in adapting its processes and procedures to external changes and is, therefore, crucial for a brand to remain competitive in dynamic markets.

The systematic analysis reveals that agility is particularly relevant for brands and their supply chain strategy (Bindi et al., 2023; Boardman et al., 2020; Brun et al., 2008; Caniato et al., 2011; Carmona & Quintero, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2023; Martinez et al., 2015; Purcarea et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2017; Towers et al., 2013; Vaagen et al., 2011). In the literature considered for the bibliometric study, luxury, textile, fashion, and hospitality brands are frequently investigated concerning agility (Bindi et al., 2023; Boardman et al., 2020; Brun et al., 2008; Carmona & Quintero, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2023; Lam & Law, 2019; Martinez et al., 2015; Riedmeier & Kreuzer, 2022; Towers et al., 2013; Vaagen et al., 2011). Consumers worldwide, and at any income level, want more and more luxury, which requires brands to strive for higher positioning and offer more valuable

features for their products and services (Brun et al., 2008). Agility in the supply chain strategy impacts luxury fashion brands' performance (Bindi et al., 2023). For multi-brand fashion retailers to successfully adopt the see-now-buy-now model, they need to focus on improving their agility, to remain competitive in the face of time-based competition (Boardman et al., 2020). Riedmeier and Kreuzer (2022) suggest that luxury brand managers should see themselves as an agile facilitator pursuing a more dynamic and flexible approach to brand building and development while being aware of the urge for stakeholder co-creation.

The value of bibliometric analysis as a methodological approach to identify and better understand trends and developments throughout a defined research area has been demonstrated in several scientific articles in recent years (Blažun Vošner et al., 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Pirri et al., 2020; Rando-Cueto et al., 2022, 2023; Thümler, 2023) and gained a massive reputation in research (Donthu et al., 2021; Ellegaard, 2018). This method is particularly suitable for analyzing and exploring large amounts of scientific data (Donthu et al., 2021; Phoong et al., 2022). Recently, the research areas in which bibliometric analysis has been applied, have expanded (Ellegaard, 2018; Ülker et al., 2023), and there is a growing number of guiding articles on how to carry out the method (Donthu et al., 2021). Thümler (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis on agile marketing in 2023. However, the study focuses on marketing and does not allow any explicit conclusions to be drawn about agile branding. To our knowledge, no bibliometric analysis exists on the topic of agility concerning branding. The following research objectives are discussed in this article:

1. To present and visualize the current state of scientific research activities on agility connected to branding.
2. To understand the concepts and research streams that shape and relate to agile branding.

The outline of this paper is as follows. The introduction chapter gave an overview of the current literature on agile branding, which was derived from the bibliometric literature research. The materials and methods used to conduct this study are explained, followed by the presentation of the results. The findings are then compared with previous scientific studies and embedded in the existing theory. The article concludes with implications for science and practice as well as the limitations of this study, directions for further research, and a general summary.

## 2. Materials and methods

The articles of Donthu et al. (2021), Rando-Cueto et al. (2022), and Thümler (2023) served as an overview and guideline for conducting the bibliometric analysis. To perform the bibliometric analysis, the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) database was used as the basis for further research. This database is considered a precise, reliable, and primary source for scientific analysis (Cabeza

Ramírez et al., 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2015). No other databases like Scopus were included additionally, as no significant differences in the data sets were found after a manual screening. After the bibliometric analysis, the literature was systematically reviewed, evaluated, and categorized with the software MAXQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019).

The direct search in WoS for "agile branding" (Query String: TS=("Agile Brand\*") OR TS=("Brand\* Agility") resulted in four articles only, which do not capture the complex understanding or had no correlation to the research topic after manual review. While the term agile branding is frequently used in practitioner literature (Landor, 2015), the authors conclude that it is not yet established within academic research, in contrast to other business areas such as social media, IT, project management, supply chain management, or marketing (Hattendorf, 2021; Kalaigianam et al., 2021; Noteboom et al., 2021; Osei et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2017). Consequently, the authors followed the strategy of Gilliam and Voss (2013) and enlarged the literature search to retrieve all articles on agility related to branding, which resulted in the following query string: TS=(Brand\*) AND TS=(Agil'\*). Thümler (2023, p. 174) used a similar search strategy for the bibliometric analysis on agile marketing which was TS=(agil\*) AND (marketing).

The search for suitable literature was conducted in three stages (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The first search generated 152 results. The search was further narrowed and refined to obtain more rigorous results and align with the research objectives. Only scientific peer-reviewed articles were included in the analysis, and WoS categories unrelated to the research area, such as dermatology, were excluded. The language was not filtered to receive the most relevant articles possible. As step number three, the content of all articles was manually checked to ensure that they were applicable to the topics of agility and branding. In the end, 70 articles were assessed as eligible and included in the subsequent evaluation. For this analysis, the VOSviewer software was used as a systematic tool for creating bibliometric maps that assist in interpreting the semantic and conceptual structure of the research field (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

**Table 1.** Results of the WoS Core Collection searches

| No. | Date       | Query String   | Publications |
|-----|------------|--|--------------|
| 1   | 2023-05-29 | Brand* (Topic) and Agil* (Topic)   | 152          |
| 2   | 2023-05-29 | Brand* (Topic) and Agil* (Topic) and Article (Document Types) and Chemistry Applied or Dermatology or Genetics Heredity or Zoology or Biotechnology Applied Microbiology or Medicine General Internal or Orthopedics or Plant Sciences (Exclude – Web of Science Categories) | 105          |
| 3   | 2023-05-29 | Articles after manual review for eligibility   | 70           |

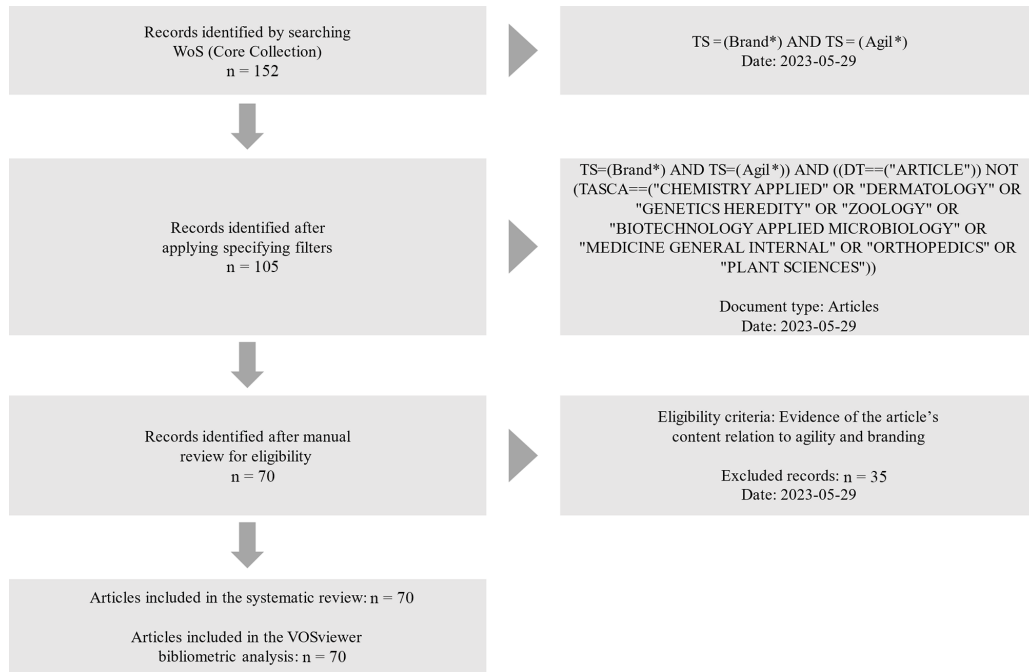


Figure 1. Flowchart of the bibliographic search and selection process

Visual bibliometric maps were generated using the VOSviewer software. With the help of VOSviewer, extensive bibliometric maps can be displayed graphically and easily interpreted (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Thus, bibliometric networks were extracted from VOSviewer with emphasis on author keyword co-occurrence to identify prevailing and most prominent areas in the field of research, the most influential researchers and authorship co-occurrence, as well as countries and organizations with the highest scientific production and their co-occurrence (Sanchez-Nunez et al., 2020; van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

### 3. Results

This chapter illustrates the study's results. It presents citations and publications per year, the main research cat-

egories, an analysis of publication titles, author keywords, authorships, and co-authorships.

#### 3.1. Analysis of citations and publications per year

As shown in Figure 2, the analysis of articles on the combination of the search terms Agil\* and Brand\*, shows a significant increase in citations and published articles since 2008 with a noticeable and steady expansion. Before 2008, almost no research was published in WoS on this topic. In 2022, the peak was reached with eleven publications and 222 citations per year. As six articles have already been published as of May 29, 2023, it can be assumed that the increase in research and the interest in agility and branding will continue to grow.

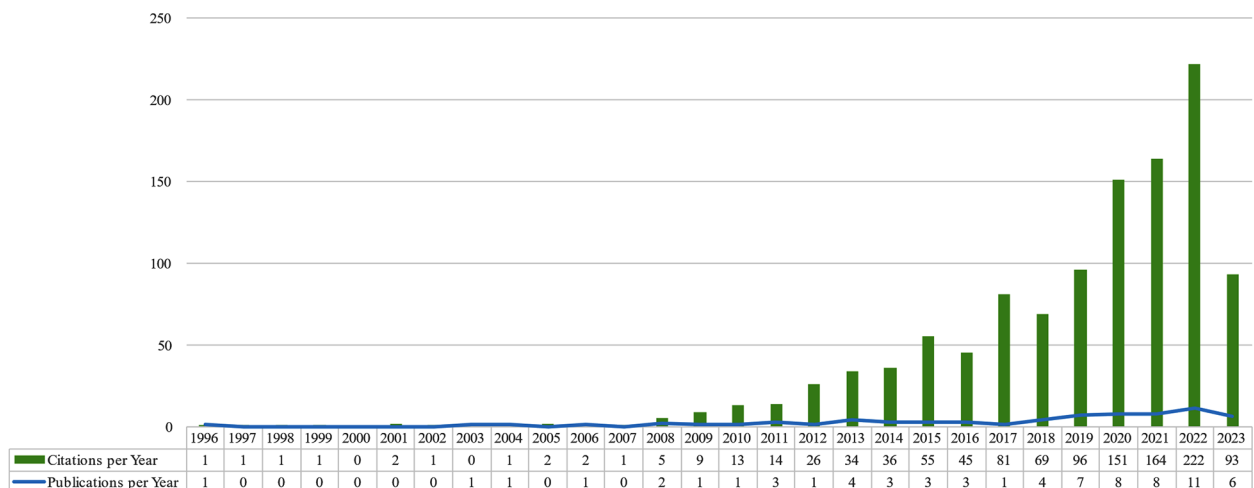


Figure 2. Citations and publications with a minimum record of one from 1996–2023

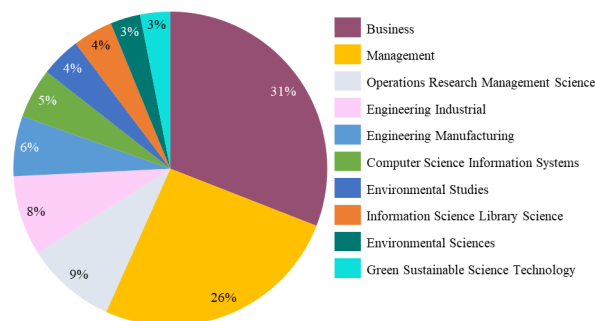
The Citation Report in Table 2 shows that the 70 articles analyzed were cited 1,126 times, with an average citation per article of 16.09 and an overall h-index of 18.

**Table 2.** Citation report from 1996 to 2023

| Citation Report            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Publications               | 70    |
| Sum of the times cited     | 1,126 |
| Average citations per item | 16.09 |
| H-index                    | 18    |

### 3.2. Analysis of main research categories

Figure 3 illustrates the allocation of articles according to the primary research categories classified by WoS. The graph only shows results with a minimum record of three items. This results in the top ten main research categories presented in the graphic. Most articles are in the research category "business" with 30 articles (31%), and the category "management" with 25 articles (26%). Since they already cover 57% together, these are the most important categories for the research area. This is followed by the categories "operations research management science" (9 articles; 9%), "engineering industrial" (8 records, 8%), "engineering manufacturing" (6 records, 6%), "computer science information systems" (5 records, 5%), "environmental studies" (4 records, 4%), "information science library science" (4 records, 4%), "environmental sciences" (3 records, 3%), "green sustainable science technology" (3 records, 3%).



**Figure 3.** The ten main research categories with a minimum record of three



**Figure 4.** Articles published per journal with a minimum record of two

that most journals are ranked Q1 in the Journal Impact Report and the Journal Citation Indicator.

**Table 3.** Journal impact report with a minimum record of two

| Publication Title  | Journal Impact Report (Scopus) | Journal Citation Indicator (JCI) |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Journal of Business Research                                 | Q1                             | Q1                               |
| Sustainability   | Q1                             | Q2                               |
| Industrial Marketing Management                              | Q1                             | Q1                               |
| International Journal of Production Economics                | Q1                             | Q1                               |
| International Journal of Production Research                 | Q1                             | Q1                               |
| Journal of Global Operations and Strategic Sourcing          | Q2                             | Q3                               |
| Journal of Product and Brand Management                      | Q1                             | Q2                               |
| Journal of Strategic Marketing                               | Q1                             | Q2                               |
| Management Decision  | Q1                             | Q1                               |
| Palgrave Studies in Practice Global Fashion Brand Management | Q4                             | not indicated                    |
| Process Innovation in The Global Fashion Industry            | not indicated                  | not indicated                    |
| Production Planning & Control                                | Q1                             | Q1                               |

### 3.4. Author keywords analysis

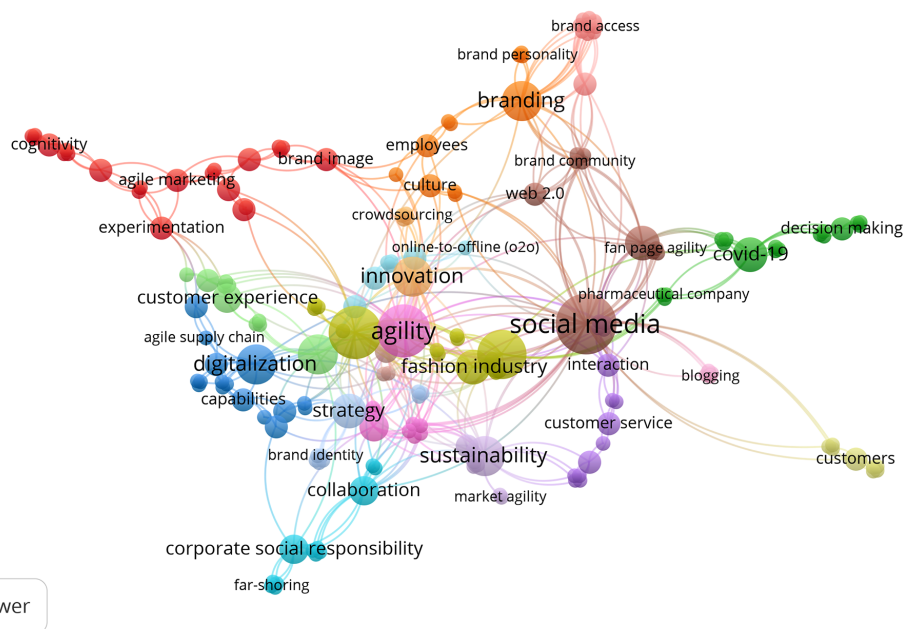
The VOSviewer software makes it possible to identify the keywords authors have assigned to their articles and to visualize their co-occurrence. This enables the identification of dominant and outstanding research streams within

the research area. The keywords are grouped into clusters, and their co-occurrence is displayed in a network. The author keywords of the 70 articles from the WoS database were imported into VOSviewer, and a map with a minimum co-occurrence of one term is visualized in Figure 5. To improve visibility, keywords with identical meanings were replaced by one term that represents both. The relationship between the terms is illustrated by word groups or clusters. The keywords “agility” and “social media”, followed by “branding”, “innovation”, “digitalization”, “fashion industry” and “sustainability”, among others, stand out as the most frequently repeated keywords with the strongest relationship. Other clusters with high word repetition and strong co-occurrence to these clusters are “agile marketing”, “experimentation”, “employees”, “culture”, “covid-19”, “decision making”, “customers”, “interaction”, “capabilities”, “collaboration”, “strategy”, and “corporate social responsibility”.

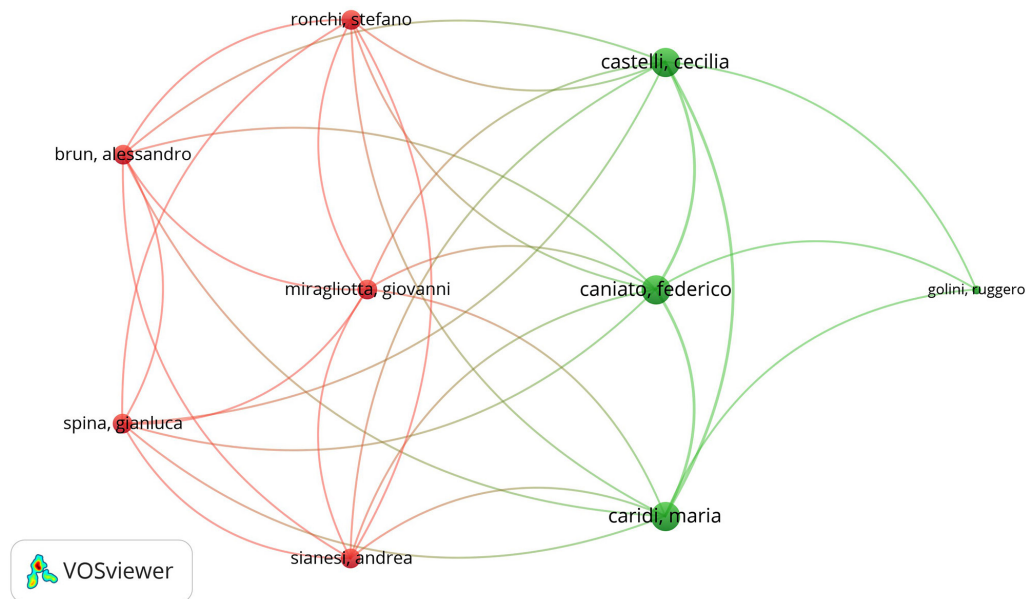
### 3.5. Authorship analysis

In the research area of agility and branding, several authors are influential in the number of articles they have published and the number of citations their works have received. Figure 6 shows the co-occurrence of authorship created with the VOSviewer software. Only authors are included with a minimum of one publication and a minimum number of 50 citations. Maria Caridi (164 citations), Cecilia Castelli (164 citations), and Federico Caniato (164 citations) are the most cited authors while also having published most articles (two articles each). They are followed by and interconnected with other well-cited authors, such as Alessandro Brun (113 citations), Giovanni Miragliotta (113 citations), and Stefano Ronchi (113 citations).

In addition to author influence and authorship co-occurrence, Table 4 presents the 20 scientific journal articles



**Figure 5.** Author keyword co-occurrence map



**Figure 6.** Authorship co-occurrence map

with the most citations in the WoS database. 18 articles are published in highly ranked journals (JCI Q1 and Q2). The twelve most cited authors focus their research on: Agility and collaboration as critical traits to successfully manage a brand personality in the 21st century (Keller & Richey, 2006); the role of supply chain management in the process of moving luxury brands towards a higher positioning and added value (Brun et al., 2008; Caniato et al., 2011); the cultivation of business model agility through focused capabilities (Battistella et al., 2017); the impact of content agility in social media brand communities (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013); social networking in the workplace and its capability of reshaping a brand as well as its impact

on employee satisfaction (Bennett et al., 2010); Original equipment manufacturers (OEM) manufacturing strategy for network innovation agility (Lin, 2004); the concept of marketing agility and the corresponding challenge of ensuring brand consistency (Kalaiganam et al., 2021); Generational differences in workplace motivation among Generation X, Y, and Z (Mahmoud et al., 2021); digital transformation in luxury-branded hotels to meet the changing demands of customers and stay ahead of the evolving competitive environment (Lam & Law, 2019); the use of new technologies to interact with customers in terms of personalization and customer engagement (Gupta et al., 2020); network agility as a booster for firm performance

**Table 4.** The twenty articles with the highest number of citations in WoS

| Authors and Year          | Article Title and DOI  | Source Title                                  | JCI | Times Cited, WoS Core |
|---------------------------|--|---|-----|-----------------------|
| Keller and Richey (2006)  | The importance of corporate brand personality traits to a successful 21st century business; 10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550055  | Journal of Brand Management                   | Q2  | 115                   |
| Brun et al. (2008)        | Logistics and supply chain management in luxury fashion retail: Empirical investigation of Italian firms; 10.1016/j.ijpe.2008.02.003                                     | International Journal of Production Economics | Q1  | 113                   |
| Battistella et al. (2017) | Cultivating business model agility through focused capabilities: A multiple case study; 10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.12.007  | Journal of Business Research                  | Q1  | 105                   |
| Chauhan and Pillai (2013) | Role of content strategy in social media brand communities: a case of higher education institutes in India; 10.1108/10610421311298687                                    | Journal of Product and Brand Management       | Q2  | 75                    |
| Bennett et al. (2010)     | Workplace impact of social networking; 10.1108/02637471011051282   | Property Management                           | Q4  | 61                    |
| Lin (2004)                | Original equipment manufacturers (OEM) manufacturing strategy for network innovation agility: the case of Taiwanese manufacturing networks; 10.1080/00207540310001622449 | International Journal of Production Research  | Q1  | 53                    |
| Caniato et al. (2011)     | Supply chain management in the luxury industry: A first classification of companies and their strategies; 10.1016/j.ijpe.2011.04.030                                     | International Journal of Production Economics | Q1  | 51                    |
| Kalaiganam et al. (2021)  | Marketing Agility: The Concept, Antecedents, and a Research Agenda; 10.1177/0022242920952760   | Journal of Marketing                          | Q1  | 49                    |

End of Table 4

| Authors and Year          | Article Title and DOI  | Source Title   | JCI | Times Cited, WoS Core |
|---------------------------|--|--|-----|-----------------------|
| Mahmoud et al. (2021)     | We aren't your reincarnation! workplace motivation across X, Y and Z generations; 10.1108/IJM-09-2019-0448   | International Journal of Manpower                      | Q2  | 36                    |
| Lam and Law (2019)        | Readiness of upscale and luxury-branded hotels for digital transformation; 10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.12.015  | International Journal of Hospitality Management        | Q1  | 34                    |
| Gupta et al. (2020)       | Digital Analytics: Modeling for Insights and New Methods; 10.1016/j.intmar.2020.04.003   | Journal of Interactive Marketing                       | Q1  | 31                    |
| Chen and Chiang (2011)    | Network agility as a trigger for enhancing firm performance: A case study of a high-tech firm implementing the mixed channel strategy; 10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.01.001 | Industrial Marketing Management                        | Q1  | 29                    |
| Kerin et al. (1996)       | Product hierarchy and brand strategy influences on the order of entry effect for consumer packaged goods; 10.1016/0737-6782(95)00088-7                                 | Journal of Product Innovation Management               | Q1  | 29                    |
| Zhang and Watson (2020)   | Marketing ecosystem: An outside-in view for sustainable advantage; 10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.04.023   | Industrial Marketing Management                        | Q1  | 28                    |
| Moliner-Tena (2019)       | Customer engagement, non-transactional behaviors and experience in services A study in the bank sector; 10.1108/IJBM-04-2018-0107                                      | International Journal of Bank Marketing                | Q1  | 26                    |
| Melegati et al. (2019)    | A model of requirements engineering in software startups; 10.1016/j.infsof.2019.02.001   | Information and Software Technology                    | Q1  | 24                    |
| Rozak et al. (2021)       | Social Media Engagement, Organizational Agility and Digitalization Strategic Plan to Improve SMEs' Performance; 10.1109/TEM.2021.3085977                               | IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management            | Q1  | 23                    |
| Koch and Schermuly (2021) | Who is attracted and why? How agile project management influences employee's attraction and commitment; 10.1108/IJMPB-02-2020-0063                                     | International Journal of Managing Projects in Business | Q3  | 18                    |
| Zhang et al. (2014)       | Transnational practices in urban China: Spatiality and localization of western fast food chains; 10.1016/j.habitatint.2014.01.003                                      | Habitat International                                  | Q1  | 17                    |
| Stone and Woodcock (2013) | Social intelligence in customer engagement; 10.1080/0965254X.2013.801613   | Journal of Strategic Marketing                         | Q1  | 17                    |

(Chen & Chiang, 2011) as well as influencing factors of the order-of-entry effect for new consumer packaged goods (Kerin et al., 1996).

The word cloud in Figure 7 displays the terms that occur most frequently in the abstracts of the 20 most cited articles in Table 4. The 75 words were identified and appeared at least five times in the abstracts. The software MAXQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019) was used for both identification and visualization. The three most prominent and, therefore, most frequent words are "brand" (41 counts), "strategy" (33 counts) and "marketing" (29 counts). They are followed by "social", "generation", "product", "firm", "agility", and "customer". The words "consumer", "employee" and "capabilities" are also frequently used.

### 3.6. Analysis of main co-authorships – countries/organizations and number of records

Figure 8 shows the analysis of the geographical areas with the most extensive scientific production and the links between them. The larger the circle, the higher the number of scientific publications. The colors indicate the average number of publications per year. The USA (15 publications,

315 citations), Italy (11 publications, 320 citations), and England (10 publications, 262 citations) stand out. They are followed by India, China and Taiwan, Australia, Spain, France, and Germany. Looking at the average publications per year, England and Wales were the first to publish articles on agility concerning branding. China and Taiwan, the USA, and Italy follow them. The most recent publications are produced by South Korea, Romania, Costa Rica and Ecuador.

Figure 9 shows a biographical coupling of organizations with a minimum number of published articles. The network offers high international cooperation in research on the subject. The Polytechnic University of Milan in Italy (three articles) and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong (three articles) published the most scientific articles on the research area of branding in combination with agility. In terms of citation frequency from the network, the Polytechnic University of Milan in Italy (176), Dartmouth College in the USA (115), the London School of Economics & Political Science in England (115), and the University of Southern California in the USA (115) are in the lead. The Polytechnic University of Milan in Italy also forms a strong network with various international





authors and their interrelationships were reviewed, and the 20 most cited articles in WoS were assessed. A word cloud analysis was conducted to complement the investigation to identify additional emergent research areas related to agility and branding. Additionally, the countries and the organizations with the highest production and their contexts were explored.

The results of the bibliometric analysis and the literature analysis indicate that agility has gained research interest in the context of branding in the last few years. However, with 70 articles considered relevant for the study, there is still a great need for further research on agility and its application to the creation and management of brands. This resonates with several authors, whose studies found that the topic of agile branding is largely unexplored (Bruce & Jeromin, 2016; Hattendorf, 2021; Kalaig-nanam et al., 2021; Pöhlmann et al., 2024b; Preece et al., 2019; Toniatti et al., 2023). The research of Thümler (2023) on agile marketing resulted in an equally low number of relevant articles with 75 publications. Rando-Cueto et al. (2022) used 1,365 articles in their bibliometric analysis of women's entrepreneurship and communication. The 70 articles analyzed were referenced 1,126 times, with an average citation per publication of 16.09 and an overall h-index of 18. While the average citation per article is higher in the present research compared to the bibliometric analysis of Rando-Cueto et al. (2022) (12.86 citations per article), the h-index of 18 is significantly lower than that of the articles analyzed by Rando-Cueto et al. (2022) (h-index of 61). This could mean that although the articles in the present research were cited more frequently on average, they may have less overall influence or recognition in the academic environment.

The analysis revealed that the number of scientific studies on agility concerning branding had increased significantly since 2008, with the highest peak of publications observed in 2022. This indicates a growing interest in research in this area. 55 publications are allocated to the WoS research categories "business" and "management" (see Figure 3). Thus, these two categories represent the most relevant in the research field of agility concerning branding. The most articles per journal were published in the publication titles "Journal of Business Research" and "Sustainability" (see Figure 4). Only three articles were published in each of the two journals, which is a comparatively small number. Noteworthy is the high impact value of the publication titles in which the 70 articles appeared. Nine of twelve journals with a minimum of two publications, are ranked Q1 in the Journal Impact Report of Scopus (see Table 3).

The authors keyword analysis revealed that "agility", "social media", and "branding", are the three most repeated keywords with the strongest correlation. This leads to the conclusion that agile branding plays a significant role especially around social media on which future investigation activities could deliberately focus to close potential research gaps. Based on the analysis of the word cloud generated with the software MAXQDA, the words "brand,"

"strategy," and "marketing" were most frequently mentioned in the abstracts of the twenty most cited articles from Table 4 (see Figure 7). Even though research on agile marketing is still in the early stages (Alghamdi & Agag, 2024), conducting an in-depth exploration of the concept is suggested to explore if any overlaps or insights can be derived for agile branding. Although Thümler (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis on agile marketing, his study does not focus on the specific insights gained for branding.

Maria Caridi (164 citations), Cecilia Castelli (164 citations) and Federico Caniato (164 citations) are the most influential authors in the research field in terms of the number of their publications along with their citations. The countries with the highest scientific production in this field are USA, Italy, and England. At the same time, the Polytechnic University of Milan in Italy (three articles) and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong (three articles) produced the most scientific articles. The three most frequently cited authors focus their research on agility and collaboration concerning brand personality management (Keller & Richey, 2006), supply chain management of luxury brands (Brun et al., 2008) and business model agility (Battistella et al., 2017) (see Table 4).

The systematic literature analysis revealed the following focal topics in connection to agility and branding that overlapped across the articles: dealing with ongoing change and environmental challenges, the influence on employer branding, the challenge of brand consistency, social media management, SMEs, and supply chain strategy. In the following, the results of the content literature analysis are compared to further literature that was not part of the bibliometric analysis. While several authors agree that agile branding is necessary today (Baran & Woznyj, 2021; Bruce & Jeromin, 2016; Eilers et al., 2022; Golant, 2012; Iyer et al., 2020; Peterson, 2019; Swaminathan et al., 2020), there is a lack of research on agile branding (Pöhlmann et al., 2024b).

The literature analysis of the 70 articles indicated that applying agile methods in a company influences the perception of an employer brand, while agility became a crucial leadership skill. Hattendorf's (2021) study of the recent adoption of agility in organizations, however, finds that there is still no consistent definition of agility. Hattendorf (2021) observes that there is hardly any academic research on whether the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) are still up to date. Ulrich and Yeung (2019), Tandon et al. (2024), and Mardian (2024) agree with the authors of the bibliometric analysis, stating that agility should extend to leadership style, requiring leaders to sense change, rapidly learn, anticipate opportunities, and swiftly reallocate resources. The authors emphasize that leaders themselves must embody agility as a prerequisite for fostering an organizational culture where agile attitudes can be adopted by employees. When analyzing the literature, only the research of Pöhlmann et al. (2024b), could be found that started examining the skills and competencies of leaders and employees necessary to

develop and lead a brand agilely. Future research could address this topic and expand the research of Pöhlmann et al. (2024b).

While the above-mentioned authors emphasize the necessity and value of agile branding, the review indicated that the maintenance of brand consistency is a significant challenge that can even have a damaging effect on the customer brand perception (Kalaiganam et al., 2021). Further investigation could focus on when agile brand management reaches its limits being too agile resulting in a negative effect on customer perceptions.

This study further indicated that SMEs are well suited and need to apply agile branding. Chaudhri et al. (2022) complement that start-ups need to establish a flexible and iterative branding process, as they often have few financial, human and time resources and their business model is constantly changing. Chaudhri et al. (2022) additionally emphasize that the branding of start-ups differs from that of established companies. No literature could be identified that focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of agile branding. Additional investigation could, therefore, close this research gap by investigating the advantages and disadvantages of agile branding, starting with a focus on SMEs or start-ups.

The study holds some limitations. Using the thesaurus function of VOSviewer may create a subjective bias in the investigators who conducted the analysis. To achieve the most precise and focused results, this study limits itself to the search terms "agil\*" and "brand\*". The volume of results and, thus, the number of analyzed articles is modest, totaling 70. To further analyze the concept agile branding and to gather additional results, it is recommended that future investigations explore the research more broadly and include synonyms for agility. These could encompass "flexibility," "dynamic," or "adaptability." Additionally, searching for articles focusing on the application of agile methods to branding, such as "Scrum," "Kanban," "Lean," or "Design Thinking" could be valuable.

An additional constraint of this research is that WoS was the only database used for the bibliometric analysis. Yet, this database is suitable for achieving the research objectives, as great emphasis was placed on high-quality publications. Another limitation of this study is that only peer-reviewed articles were utilized. Future studies could also consider incorporating books, conference papers, or websites to gain a broader insight into the state of research.

The findings emphasize the importance of researching how brands can be created and managed more agilely to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. This research aims to contribute to understanding agile branding in today's fast-moving world and its implications for brand success.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; methodology, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; software, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; validation, M. P.,

C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; formal analysis, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; investigation, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; resources, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; data curation, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; writing – original draft preparation, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; writing – review and editing, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; visualization, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; supervision, M. P., C. J.-M., C. d. I. H.-P., and J. S.; project administration, M. P., C. d. I. H.-P., J. S., and C. J.-M.; funding acquisition, C. J.-M. and C. d. I. H.-P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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