

Examining the Evolution of Customer Loyalty in Brand Research

Faizan Abd Jabar^{1*}, Mohd Nazri Mohd Noor²

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Open University Malaysia, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

²Chief Academic Officer, University of Southampton Malaysia, Iskandar Puteri Johor, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400062>

Received: 22 March 2025; Accepted: 26 March 2025; Published: 28 April 2025

ABSTRACT

This study provides a detailed bibliometric analysis of research trends in customer loyalty within brand management. The main goal is to explore current trends, identify key authors and institutions, and examine emerging themes like digital marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and emotional engagement. The analysis uses data from the Scopus database, covering publications from 1994 to 2024. The results show a sharp increase in publications from the mid-2010s, indicating growing academic interest in the topic, especially with the rise of digital transformation and increased focus on sustainability among consumers. The study highlights influential authors like Bilighan and Tanford, and leading institutions, with the majority of research coming from the United States, India, and the United Kingdom. Keyword and co-citation analyses reveal a shift towards integrating CSR and social media marketing into loyalty models, while traditional factors such as brand equity and service quality remain important. These findings highlight the changing nature of brand loyalty in the digital era and the interconnectedness of different research topics. The study suggests that future research should focus on the impact of digital transformation, sustainability, and emotional engagement on customer loyalty, and also explore cultural and regional differences in brand loyalty.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Bibliometrics analysis, Co-Citation analysis, Brand management, Emotional engagement, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Customer loyalty has long been a focus in brand management, with traditional views emphasizing emotional and psychological bonds based on product satisfaction, trust, and service quality. However, recent shifts driven by digital transformation and sustainability concerns have reshaped this understanding. Since the mid-2010s, research has increasingly addressed the role of digital platforms and sustainability in brand loyalty, marking a move towards more comprehensive models (Sun et al., 2021; Channa et al., 2020; Setyaningrum, 2021).

Despite this progress, significant gaps remain. One key area is the impact of digital transformation on loyalty, particularly the long-term effects of strategies like influencer marketing and AI-driven personalization (Vilkaitė-Vaitonė & Skačauskienė, 2020). Additionally, while CSR and sustainability are critical to modern consumer decisions, their influence on long-term brand loyalty remains underexplored (Hà et al., 2024; He et al., 2019). There is also a lack of research on regional and cultural variations in loyalty, as most studies have focused on Western markets (Sedighi et al., 2022; Yusfiarto et al., 2022). Emotional engagement, such as nostalgia and trust, also needs further investigation to understand how specific emotional triggers contribute to loyalty (Panjaitan, 2021; Hollebeek & Rather, 2019). Moreover, there is a need for more qualitative research to explore consumer perceptions of loyalty through methods like interviews and case studies (Bachri et al., 2022).

This study aims to address these gaps through a bibliometric analysis of customer loyalty literature in brand management. The analysis will focus on trends, key authors, institutions, and emerging themes like digital marketing, CSR, and emotional engagement. The study will answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the research trends in customer brand loyalty over time?

RQ2. Who are the most prolific authors in this field?

RQ3. Which institutions contribute most to this research?

- RQ4. Which journals publish the most on customer brand loyalty?
- RQ5. Which countries contribute the most to this research?
- RQ6. What is the dominant subject area in this field?
- RQ7. What are the most frequent keywords in the literature?
- RQ8. What are the main citation clusters in this research area?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a bibliometric analysis approach to examine scientific publications related to customer loyalty in brand management. The analysis primarily focuses on bibliometric mapping to identify and explore trends in the field of brand loyalty.

Search Term

The search was conducted using the Scopus database, encompassing a wide range of social science journals. The search term was chosen to capture a comprehensive scope of customer loyalty and brand. Consequently, the Boolean search string employed for the systematic review process is:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("customer loyalty " AND "brand") AND PUBYEAR > 1994 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCP") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ECON"))

Data Analysis

This study employs a bibliometric approach to analyze trends in customer loyalty research within brand management. Using the Scopus database, the research covered articles from 1994 to 2024, focusing on English-language publications in business, social sciences, and economics. The search yielded over 22,800 records from nearly 5,000 journals, providing a robust dataset for analysis. Descriptive statistics revealed a significant increase in publications starting in 2012, with a sharp rise after 2020, reflecting growing academic interest driven by digital platforms and sustainability. The study identified key authors, institutions, and countries contributing to the field, highlighting its global reach. Visualization techniques, such as keyword co-occurrence maps, revealed key themes like brand equity, service quality, and customer satisfaction, with emerging themes such as social media marketing and CSR becoming more prominent. Co-citation analysis highlighted influential scholars like Hair J.F., Bagozzi, and Anderson, and mapped the interconnectedness of research areas. The findings indicate a shift from traditional loyalty models based on product quality to a broader focus on digital marketing, CSR, and emotional engagement. The geographical distribution of research suggests a need for more insights from emerging markets to fully understand global brand loyalty dynamics.

FINDINGS

What are the research trends in customer brand loyalty according to the year of publication?

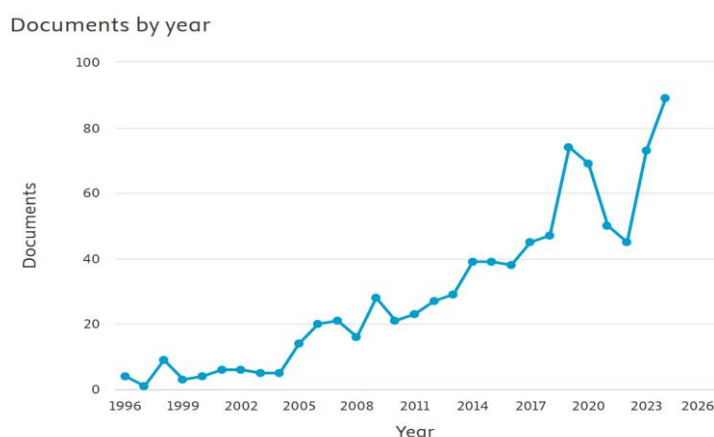


Figure 1: Publication Trends Over Time

The diagram presented in Figure 1 illustrates the publication trends over time, indicating a significant increase in the number of documents published from the mid-2010s onwards. The data shows a steady but slow increase in publications between 1996 and 2010, with a noticeable upward trajectory beginning around 2012. This increase becomes more pronounced after 2020, culminating in a sharp rise in 2023, which suggests a surge in research activity in the recent past. The pattern observed reflects the growing interest and focus on the subject matter in the scholarly community, particularly in the last few years, likely driven by emerging trends and advancements in the field. This trend is expected to continue with projections indicating further growth in the number of publications in the coming years, up to 2026. Such trends are often indicative of the growing relevance and importance of the topic in contemporary research.

Who are the most prolific authors in the field of customer brand loyalty?

Documents by author

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.

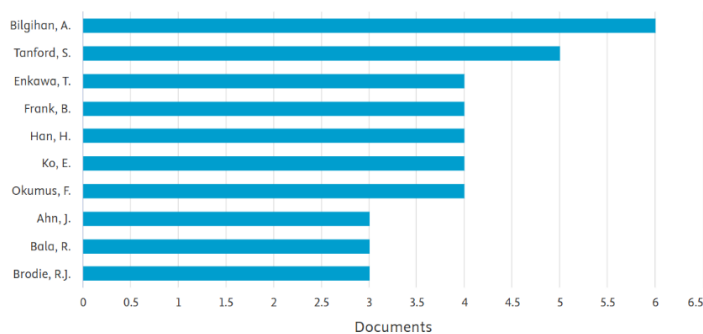


Figure 2: List Of Prolific Authors with Publication Counts and Total Publications.

Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of the most prolific authors in the field, based on the total publication counts. The chart highlights the authors with the highest number of publications, with Bilgihan, A. emerging as the most prolific, closely followed by Tanford, S., who has made substantial contributions to the field. Other authors such as Enkawa, T., and Frank, B., have also made notable contributions, though their publication counts are slightly lower. The bar lengths are proportional to the number of documents published by each author, with the longest bars representing those with the highest publication counts. The chart serves as an insightful overview of the key contributors in the field, offering a clear comparison of publication outputs across the top 15 authors. It also provides a sense of the level of research activity within the discipline, highlighting the prominent figures shaping current scholarly discourse.

Which institutions/affiliation contribute the most to customer brand loyalty?

Documents by affiliation

Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

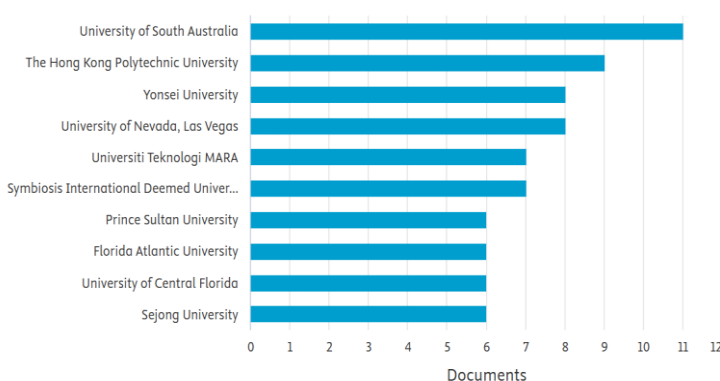


Figure 3: Top Contributing Institutions/Affiliation with Publication Counts.

Figure 3 presents a comparison of the top contributing institutions based on their publication counts. The

University of South Australia stands out as the leading institution, significantly outpacing others with the highest number of published documents. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University follows closely, with Yonsei University and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, also contributing substantial numbers of publications. Other notable institutions include University Technology MARA, Symbiosis International Deemed University, and Prince Sultan University, which are among the top contributors, albeit with lower publication counts. The chart effectively highlights the global nature of research in the field, with institutions from diverse geographical regions such as Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, and the United States playing prominent roles in advancing scholarly work. The data also emphasizes the substantial academic output from these institutions, which could be indicative of their research strength and focus on the subject area.

What are the leading journals publishing on customer brand loyalty?

Documents per year by source

Compare the document counts for up to 10 sources.

[Compare sources and view CiteScore, SJR, and SNIP data](#)

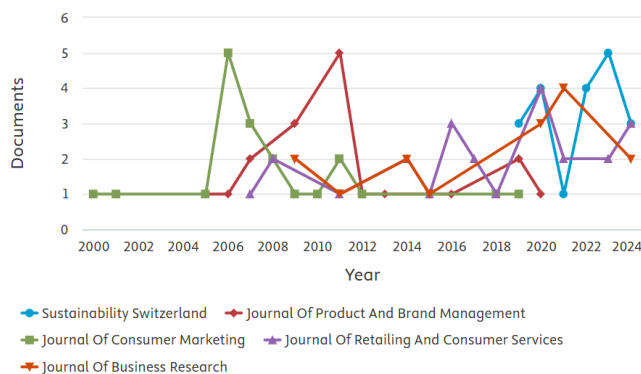


Figure 4: Top Contributing Journals with Publication Counts.

Figure 4 illustrates the publication trends across the top contributing journals over time, showcasing the number of documents published per year from 2000 to 2024. The journals represented in the chart are Sustainability Switzerland (blue), Journal of Product and Brand Management (red), Journal of Consumer Marketing (green), Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (purple), and Journal of Business Research (orange). Notably, Sustainability Switzerland has seen consistent growth in publications, with a significant spike in recent years, particularly around 2023 and 2024. In contrast, Journal of Product and Brand Management shows irregular peaks, with notable bursts of publications around 2012 and 2020. Journal of Consumer Marketing and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services also show fluctuating trends, with some peaks in the mid-2010s. The Journal of Business Research, while not exhibiting as many fluctuations, has contributed steadily over the years. This chart highlights the dynamic nature of academic publishing in this field, with certain journals experiencing periods of increased activity, likely due to shifts in academic interest or emerging research topics.

Which country/territory contribute the most to customer brand loyalty?

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

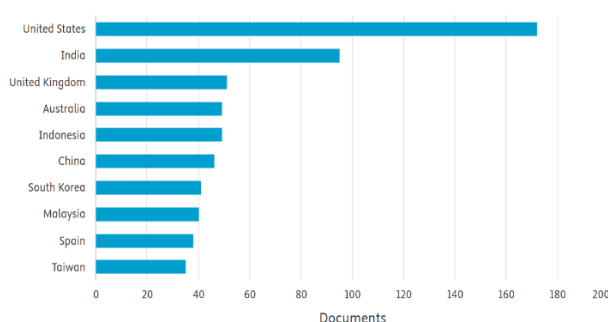


Figure 5: Top Contributing Country/Territory with Publication Counts.

Figure 5 displays the top contributing countries and territories based on their publication counts, providing a clear comparison of the global distribution of research output. The United States leads significantly, with the highest number of documents published, followed by India and the United Kingdom, which also contribute substantial volumes of research. Other notable countries include Australia, Indonesia, and China, each contributing a noteworthy number of documents. South Korea, Malaysia, Spain, and Taiwan round out the top 10 contributors, albeit with relatively smaller counts compared to the leading nations. This chart underscores the international scope of the research field, with a heavy concentration of publications coming from the United States, reflecting its dominant position in global academic research. Additionally, the distribution shows a significant presence of publications from emerging markets such as India and China, highlighting the expanding academic contributions from these regions.

What is the dominant subject area published in customer brand loyalty?

Documents by subject area

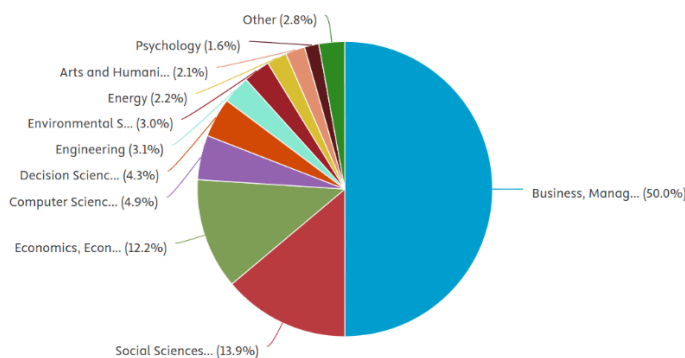


Figure 6: List Of Subject Areas in Customer Brand Loyalty

Figure 6 presents a pie chart illustrating the distribution of documents across various subject areas. The largest proportion of publications (50%) is attributed to *Business and Management*, highlighting the dominant role of this field in the research landscape. Following this, *Social Sciences* accounts for 13.9% of the publications, underscoring its significant contribution to academic discourse. *Economics and Economics* also contributes notably, with 12.2% of the total publications. Other subject areas such as *Computer Science* (4.9%), *Decision Sciences* (4.3%), and *Engineering* (3.1%) contribute smaller but still substantial shares to the overall body of research. The remaining subject areas, including *Environmental Sciences* (3.0%), *Energy* (2.2%), and *Arts and Humanities* (2.1%), each have relatively modest shares in comparison. *Psychology* (1.6%) and *Other* categories (2.8%) represent the smallest contributions. This chart highlights the dominance of business-related research in the dataset, while also reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of academic research, with contributions from a wide range of fields.

What are the most frequently used keywords in research on customer brand loyalty?

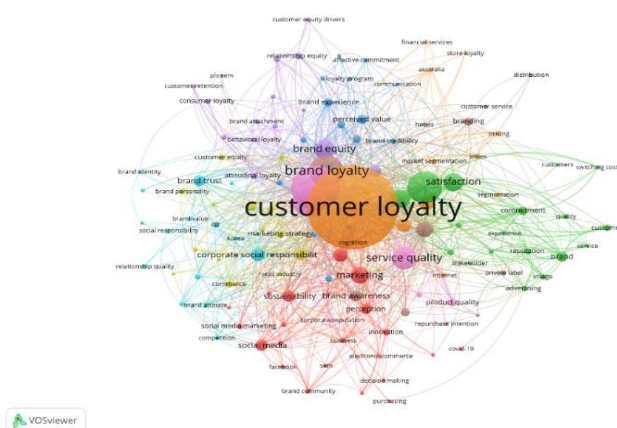


Figure 7: Network Visualization Map of Keywords Co-Occurrence in Customer Brand Loyalty

Figure 7 presents a network visualization map of keyword co-occurrence in the context of customer loyalty in brand research. The central node, labeled "customer loyalty," is surrounded by clusters of interconnected keywords that represent key themes in literature. The largest clusters are associated with concepts such as *brand equity*, *service quality*, and *satisfaction*, indicating their close relationship with customer loyalty in brand studies. Other prominent themes in the visualization include *brand image*, *trust*, *customer satisfaction*, and *relationship marketing*, which all form tightly connected subgroups. Keywords related to *corporate social responsibility*, *social media*, and *financial performance* are also present, though in smaller clusters, suggesting their emerging relevance in the study of brand loyalty. The map highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, with terms spanning areas such as marketing, consumer behavior, service management, and financial outcomes. The strength and proximity of these keyword clusters demonstrate the interconnectedness of various factors influencing customer loyalty in branding, offering insights into current trends and focal points in academic research.

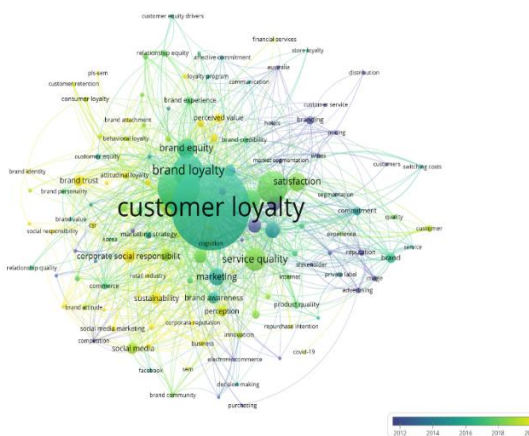


Figure 8: Keywords Co-Occurrence Overlay Visualization Map According to Year Customer Brand Management

Figure 8 presents an overlay visualization map of keyword co-occurrence in the domain of customer loyalty in brand research, with color coding indicating the temporal distribution of the keywords over the years. The central keyword, *customer loyalty*, is surrounded by various thematic clusters, including *brand equity*, *service quality*, and *satisfaction*. The color gradient, ranging from yellow to purple, shows the evolution of these keywords over time, with keywords in yellow representing earlier years (2012), while those in purple indicate more recent years (2020). This temporal variation highlights the shift in research focus, where topics like *sustainability*, *corporate social responsibility*, and *social media* are more prevalent in recent years, reflecting the growing importance of these themes in the study of customer loyalty. The map suggests that while core concepts such as *brand loyalty* and *service quality* remain consistently significant, there has been a noticeable increase in research interest surrounding the intersections of customer loyalty with contemporary issues such as *social media marketing* and *brand community* in the more recent years. This visualization provides valuable insights into how academic research on customer loyalty in brand management has evolved and adapted to new trends and challenges in the business environment.

What are the main citation clusters of customer brand loyalty?

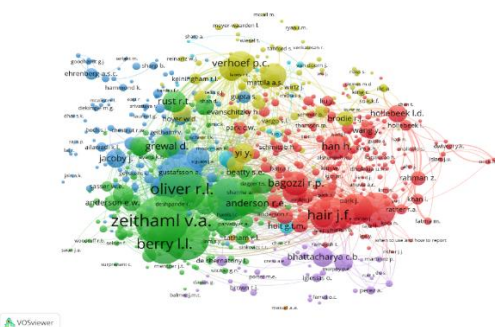


Figure 9: Co-Citation Network of Cited Authors in Customer Brand Loyalty

Figure 9 illustrates the co-citation network of cited authors in the field of customer loyalty in brand research. The network is color-coded to represent different clusters of authors who are frequently cited together in the literature. The large red cluster centered around key authors such as *Hair J.F.*, *Bagozzi*, and *Anderson*, indicates their significant influence in the domain of customer loyalty, particularly in the context of consumer behavior and marketing strategies. The green and blue clusters, associated with *Zeithaml*, *Oliver*, and *Berry*, reflect the foundational theories on service quality and customer satisfaction that underpin much of the research on loyalty. The yellow cluster, containing authors like *Verhoef* and *Rust*, suggests a focus on brand loyalty and relationship management. The strength of the connections between these authors highlights the intersection of their work, revealing how the literature in customer loyalty has been shaped by key figures and their theories over time. The co-citation network visually captures the centrality of certain authors and demonstrates the collaborative nature of research within this field. It also underscores the ongoing influence of seminal works on the continued development of brand loyalty literature.

DISCUSSIONS

Recent shifts in customer loyalty research reflect its growing importance in both academia and industry, driven by globalization, digital platforms, and increasing consumer awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Almohaimmeed, 2019). Consumers now seek brands that align with their ethical values, in addition to meeting functional needs.

Key scholars like Bilighan, Tanford, Hair et al., and Bagozzi have shaped our understanding of brand loyalty, focusing on concepts like brand equity, trust, and emotional connections (Kataria & Saini, 2019; Torres et al., 2021; Smith, 2020). Research from universities in the US, India, and the UK has driven significant advancements, fostering academic and industry collaboration (Hanaysha et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022).

A notable shift in research is the integration of sustainability and CSR into brand loyalty studies, reflecting the growing influence of ethical consumption on consumer behavior (Keni & Japiana, 2022; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019; Danibrata et al., 2023). The role of social media marketing in shaping brand loyalty is also expanding, as it fosters consumer engagement and trust (Simatupang & Purba, 2023; Al-Dmour et al., 2023).

Keyword analysis reveals a shift toward CSR and digital marketing, highlighting the importance of ethical consumption in strengthening loyalty (Hanaysha et al., 2021; Almohaimmeed, 2019). Co-citation analyses underscore the enduring influence of service quality and satisfaction theories, while newer research integrates emerging factors like consumer engagement (Wantah & Mandagi, 2024; Jin et al., 2019). This reflects a more comprehensive understanding of brand loyalty, blending traditional and emerging elements

Implications For Practitioners

This study offers valuable insights for brand management practitioners, emphasizing the need for brands to adapt to evolving consumer behaviors, particularly in the digital age. Digital marketing strategies, such as social media marketing and influencer campaigns, are critical for maintaining and enhancing customer loyalty. AI-driven personalization and mobile loyalty programs are expected to play a significant role in fostering long-term consumer engagement. The increasing importance of CSR and sustainability highlights the need for brands to integrate ethical and environmental considerations into their loyalty strategies. Consumers are more likely to support brands that align with their values, making CSR initiatives vital for strengthening emotional bonds with customers. Emotional engagement also plays a crucial role in brand loyalty. Brands should focus on creating deeper emotional connections with customers by addressing specific emotional triggers, such as trust, joy, and nostalgia, to build lasting relationships. As brand loyalty strategies vary across cultural and regional contexts, brands expanding globally must tailor their strategies to local values and preferences. Loyalty approaches successful in Western markets may not be effective in emerging markets, requiring localized strategies for success. Finally, while service quality and brand equity remain vital, brands should combine these traditional factors with innovative strategies, including digital marketing, sustainability, and emotional engagement, to meet the expectations of today's consumers.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study, while providing a thorough bibliometric analysis of customer loyalty in brand management,

has some limitations. Firstly, relying on the Scopus database excludes publications from other databases like Web of Science or Google Scholar, potentially missing key insights. Focusing only on English-language publications also narrows the scope, omitting important works from non-English journals, especially those offering regional perspectives from emerging markets. Additionally, the temporal filter of 1994-2024 may have excluded earlier or ongoing studies that could contribute valuable insights.

2. The use of bibliometric mapping techniques, primarily citation analysis and keyword co-occurrence, provides quantitative data that may overlook the deeper content or methodological diversity of the studies. This approach emphasizes publication volume but does not fully account for the quality or theoretical contributions of the research. Moreover, identifying prolific authors and institutions based on publication counts may miss influential works that are less cited. A more comprehensive approach, including citation analysis and journal impact factors, would offer a clearer measure of academic influence.
3. The study also does not examine the methodological approaches used in the research, such as qualitative versus quantitative or experimental versus observational methods. Exploring these methodologies would provide a more complete understanding of how research design influences brand loyalty studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study of customer brand loyalty has grown significantly, driven by technological advances and changing consumer behaviors. However, several areas remain underexplored, offering opportunities for future research. One key area is the intersection of **digital transformation** and **customer loyalty**, particularly the impact of social media, AI-driven personalization, influencer campaigns, and digital loyalty programs. Future research should also examine the role of **data privacy** and **consumer trust** in digital loyalty efforts. Another promising area is the **role of sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR)** in brand loyalty. While sustainability has gained importance, more research is needed on how CSR initiatives influence long-term loyalty across different consumer segments and industries, with a focus on regional variations. **Cultural and regional differences** in customer loyalty also require attention. Most studies have focused on western markets, leaving a gap in understanding how loyalty is shaped in emerging markets like Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Research into **localization of brand loyalty strategies** could help brands tailor their approaches to diverse cultural and economic contexts. **Emotional engagement** with brands remains crucial yet underexplored. Future research could investigate specific emotional drivers (e.g., joy, trust, nostalgia) and their impact on loyalty across different consumer profiles. There is also a need for **methodological innovation**, including **qualitative research** and **mixed-methods approaches** to explore consumer perceptions and the mechanisms behind loyalty. Experimental designs could further investigate causal relationships between loyalty drivers and consumer behavior. Finally, **consumer behavior in the post-pandemic era** presents a critical area of research. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered consumer habits, and studying how these shifts influence brand loyalty across industries will provide valuable insights.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis highlights the growing importance of customer loyalty in brand management, particularly driven by the rise of digital transformation and increased focus on sustainability. Key trends reveal a shift from traditional loyalty models to those integrating digital marketing, CSR, and emotional engagement. The study underscores the need for brands to adapt their strategies to evolving consumer behaviors and emphasizes the role of cultural and regional contexts in shaping loyalty strategies. Future research should explore the impact of digital transformation, sustainability, and emotional engagement, as well as consider the influence of emerging markets to further enrich the understanding of customer loyalty in brand management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Open University Malaysia for their invaluable support throughout the development of this paper. Special thanks to all those who contributed both directly and indirectly, providing insights, guidance, and encouragement that helped shape this work. Your assistance and dedication are greatly appreciated.

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