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# Consumer Brand Relationships Research: A Bibliometric Citation Meta-Analysis

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# Consumer Brand Relationships Research: A Bibliometric Citation Meta-Analysis

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades the number of academic journal articles dealing with research on consumer brand relationships (CBR) has increased rapidly thus reflecting the tremendous relevance of this research area in the literature. The beginning of this research area is marked by Fournier's seminal work on consumer and their brands published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1998. With good cause we have chosen Fournier's work as a starting point for a bibliometric meta-analysis for the following reasons. First, also Blackston's book chapter in 1993 "Beyond Brand Personality: Building Brand Relationships" and later Fajer and Schouten's (1995) paper "Breakdown and Dissolution of Person-Brand Relationships " already discussed consumer brand relationships, it was not until Fournier's (1998) article which provides a theoretical foundation and explanation for consumer brand relationships. Second, while there were very few papers written prior 1998, they either did not specifically focus on consumer brand relationships (e.g. Fournier & Yao, 1997) or were book chapters like the one by Blackston (1993) or Heilbrunn (1998), and therefore, like any other book chapters, didn't get as frequently distributed and cited than journal articles. Third and equally important, our bibliometric analysis is based on citations and therefore any uncovered but important paper published prior 1998 would still be considered and identified in our analysis.

Since 1998 a variety of different perspectives, concepts, models and various theories have been developed and introduced to understand consumers' relationships to their brands, including research on self-brand connections (Escalas & Bettman, 2005), brands in the self-concept (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009; Hamilton & Hassan, 2010), brand attachment (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisengerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005; Belaid & Behi, 2011; Malär et al., 2011), brand passion (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2012; Bauer, Heinrich, & Martin, 2007), brand romance (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011), brand relationship

orientation (Aurier & Lanauze, 2012), brand commitment (Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010), or brand love (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Heinrich, Albrecht, & Bauer, 2012) to name just a few. The published articles distinguish various types and intensities of emotions and relationships consumers can have with their brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). However, a clear understanding how all these different concepts relate to or built on each other is still missing in academic literature.

While frequently new concepts and their underlying constructs are introduced to literature to explore and explain consumer brand relationships (e.g., brand authenticity, brand fanaticism, brand extreme desire, brand cult, or brand evangelism, amongst others) surprisingly little attention has been spent so far on examine existing work and reflecting how research has evolved and shaped the research field of consumer brand relationships so far. Since research can be cyclical (Daniels, 1991), one needs to take an occasional step back and analyze existing consumer brand relationships literature. Our work seeks to fill this gap by conducting a literature review by means of a bibliometric author co-citation meta-analysis of articles related to consumer brand relationships.

This longitudinal approach is especially valuable and important as consumer brand relationships are based on a wide range of theories and concepts from multiple disciplines. Due to the complex nature of this research field, we conducted an interdisciplinary meta- analysis of the literature that addresses three main research questions: (1) How has consumer brand relationship research evolved in the past, what are the underlying research streams, and which need further attention? (2) Which journals, articles, and authors are the most cited ones and therefore relevant for future research in this field? (3) Which institutions (as defined by universities or business schools) focusing and the most influential ones, and thus contributed most to the field of consumer brand relationships?

In that respect, we make an important contribution for scholars interested in consumer brand relationships because we outline, structure, and identify the key universities, journals, articles and

authors to be taken in consideration when doing future research on consumer brand relationships. We also provide a valuable overview of the research history and synthesize and identify established and emerging research streams. In that respect, we provide a quick reference guide for interdisciplinary researchers, business consultants, and marketers who want to become familiar with the topic of consumers and their relationships to brands. The later of this paper is structured as followed: next we introduce the concept and method of bibliometric citation meta-analysis. Then we present detailed results of the empirical analysis. Following that, we describe structure and clusters of consumer brand research and finally conclude with limitations and implications for future research.

## **2. Bibliometric Citation Meta-Analysis**

Bibliometric citation analysis is a well-established form of meta-analytical research or a so called “meta-review” of literature (Garfield, 1983; Cote, Leong, & Cote, 1991; Harsanyi, 1993; Kim & McMillan, 2008). It was initially used in different disciplines in science and the humanities (Price, 1976; White & McCain, 1989; Wiberley, 2003). Later it has also been applied in the social science disciplines (Glanzel, 1996) such as international business (Fetscherin, Voss, & Gugler, 2010), international management (Acedo & Casillas, 2005), marketing (Arnott, 2007; Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012), advertising (Kim & McMillan, 2008) and communications (Pasadeos, Renfro, & Hanily, 1999). Bibliometric analysis unveils pivotal articles and objectively illustrates the linkages between and among articles about a certain research topic or filed by analyzing how many times they have been co-cited by other published articles (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). Data from these analyses can be used not only to determine the popularity but also the impact of specific authors and their publications. Consequently bibliometric citation analysis allows evaluating meta-analytically the development of a given research field or discipline as well as it helps to identify key research streams and their underlying theoretical frameworks (Borgman, 2000; Vassinen, 2006).

Bibliometric analysis is based on the assumption that researchers publish their most important findings in scholarly journals and predominantly base their research on articles previously published in similar journals (Van Raan, 2003), a reasonable assumption which is also applicable for branding research (Chabowski, Samiee, & Hult, 2013). Citation analysis considers a citation to be the basic unit of analysis (Kim & McMillan, 2008) and therefore goes beyond a simple counting of publications to include centers of influence and maps out the linkages between and among articles of a certain research field (Kim & McMillan, 2008). Consequently, a meta-analysis of citations reflects the usefulness of research to other researchers conducting related work (Garfield, 1983). As the focus of our study is to shed light on the research stream of consumer brand relationships, bibliometric citation analysis is an appropriate meta-analytic approach to reach the three outlined goals of this research.

### **3. Method**

Citation data are available for a wide range of publications. For this study we collected data from the most well-known academic database *ISI Web of Knowledge* called also web of science which includes the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). The *ISI Web of Knowledge* was suitable for this work as one of the main objectives is to conduct an interdisciplinary literature review and many notable bibliometric analyses have accessed this database before (e.g., Biehl, Kim, & Wade, 2006; Kim & McMillan, 2008; Nerur, Rasheed, & Natarajan, 2008). We searched for publications that appeared from January 1998 to October 2010. The year 1998 was chosen as cut-off year as it was the year Fournier (1998) wrote the seminal work “*Consumers and their brands: developing relationship theory in consumer research*” published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* which we choose as the jump start for the consumer brand relationships research field as discussed earlier. October 2010 marked the most recent date for which we got complete citation data from the *ISI Web of Knowledge*.

To collect comprehensive data, we used a two-step approach. First, we identified articles that had referenced Fournier's work (1998). Second, for each relevant article we recorded author name(s), the journal it is published in, title, volume, number, pages, publication date, as well as the abstract, and cited references. Inspired by the work of Roper and Parker (2006), we used bibliometric computer software to facilitate the process of identifying the citation and co-citation relationships of articles. We chose to use the *HistCite<sup>TM</sup>* computer software which is a specific bibliometric software tool for analyzing and visualizing direct and indirect citation linkages between scientific articles<sup>1</sup>. The software's inputs are bibliographic records (with cited references) from *ISI Web of Knowledge* and its outputs are various tables and graphs with indicators about the knowledge domain under study (Garfield, Paris, & Stock, 2006).

#### **4. Results**

In this section, we present the results of the bibliometric citation analysis. This provides an evaluation of which institutions (as defined as universities) are leading with regard to articles published in the field of consumer brand relationships as well as an evaluation of highly cited published articles and journals, and thus allows us to introduce a research agenda in the following section. To start with, we identified 392 articles in total which referred to Fournier's (1998) work on consumer brand relationships. On closer examination the key disciplines of those 392 articles identified are business (61%), management (16%), applied psychology (9%), communications (4%) and hospitality, as well as leisure, sports, and tourism (3%) research.

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<sup>1</sup> Direct citation linkages are articles that are cited by a paper in their reference. Indirect citation linkages are those citations which are not in the original paper cited, but are citations of citations. In other words, publication A cites publication B and publication B cites publication C but publication A does not cite publication C. We have a direct citation link between A and B and B and C and an indirect citation link between A and C.

#### 4.1. Centers of excellence

In order to identify centers of excellence in research of consumer brand relationships, we measure the importance and academic weight of different institutions (on the aggregate level of universities) by their output measured by the total number of published articles related to consumer brand relationships research ( $P_{CBR}$ ) and impact in terms of citation received. In the following, we provide two scores for citation received. First, the total local citation (TLC) score represents the total number of times a paper has been cited by other papers from the retrieved sample (i.e., in our case the 392 articles). Second, the total global citation (TGC) score is the total number of times a paper has been cited based on the full *ISI Web of Knowledge* count.

This approach is similar to the one in the study of Moed, Burger, Frankfort, and Van Raan (1985), Carpenter, Gibb, Harris, Irvine, Martin, and Narin (1988), Van Raan (2008) or Fetscherin and Usunier (2012) and thus a well-established procedure. Our results show a diversity of institutions and centers of excellence which lead this research field. The most influential institutions are located in the USA and UK, and some in Canada, Australia, Netherlands, France and Germany. Most influential researchers are from diverse institutions such as (alphabetical order): *Boston College*, *Boston University*, *Columbia University*, *University of Connecticut*, *Ohio State University*, *University of Minnesota*, *University of Illinois*, or *University of Wisconsin* among others. The following Table 1 provides an overview of the most influential institutions doing research on consumer brand relationships in terms of number of published articles related to consumer brand relationships (left side of the table) as well as number of overall citation received from their publications (right side of the table). These institutions can be seen as ‘centers of excellence’ for consumer brand relationships research in the past. This helps prospective Ph.D. students, post-doctoral students or academics in the job market to target those institutions for potential collaboration or employment.

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Table 1 here  
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#### 4.2 Most influential journals

For some years, researchers have used bibliometric citation analysis to assess journal performance, including studies by Reeves and Borgman (1983) and Schubert, Glanzel, and Braun (1989). As Baumgartner and Pieters (2003) noted, “different journals are most influential in different subareas” (p. 123). We therefore want to identify which journals “shape” and “lead” the field of consumer brand relationships. Table 2 summarizes the top 20 journals in terms of total number of articles published related to CBR ( $P_{CBR}$ ) and impact measured on one hand by the average number of local citations received within the 392 retrieved articles per year ( $TLC/t$ ) and the average number of citations received from all articles, respectively total global citations received per year ( $TGC/t$ ).

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Table 2 here  
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Overall, marketing journals, especially those with a focus on consumer research (e.g. *Journal of Consumer Research* and *Advances in Consumer Research*) and psychology (e.g. *Psychology & Marketing* and *Journal of Consumer Psychology*) dominate the lists of the most influential journals in the field of consumer brand relationships next to a few other top tier marketing journals like *Journal of Marketing* or *Journal of Marketing Research*. Moreover, the top tier ranking comprehends also journals with a more holistic focus in general, like the *Journal of Business Research*.



To investigate the results further, we take the number of articles published as a proxy of output, and the total local citations received per year (TLC/t) as a proxy for the impact on the field of consumer brand relationships. Figure 1 illustrates a 2x2 matrix where the x-axis represents the total local citation received by year (TLC/t) and the y-axis represents the number of articles published by each journal related to consumer brand relationships ( $P_{\text{CBR}}$ ). By calculating and evaluating the mean values of both variables ( $P_{\text{CBR}} M=4.04$ ;  $\text{TLC/t } M=1.26$ ), four main groups of journals can be distinguished: quadrant A: high focus on consumer brand relationships field and high impact; quadrant B: low focus on consumer brand relationships field – high impact; quadrant C: low focus on consumer brand relationships field - low impact; quadrant D: high focus on consumer brand relationships field - low impact.). From 97 journals in our dataset, 87 journals are in quadrant B, C, D, meaning below the average output ( $P_{\text{CBR}} M=4.04$ ) and below the average impact ( $\text{TLC/t } M=1.26$ ). There are only 10 journals which are located in quadrant A, meaning above average output and impact. There are 12 journals which are above average impact (quadrant A and B) and 18 journals which are above average output (quadrant C and D). For illustrative purposes, Figure 1 provides a broad illustration of the 4 identified main groups respectively quadrants. This figure illustrates the findings at a first glance. The purpose of this “big picture map” is also to shed light on the differences regarding the journals’ impact and focus on consumer brand relationship research. For illustrative purposes and to give more details to the reader, we also constructed Figure 2 which shows the details for those journals which are in quadrant B, C and D and thus are located on the low end of the axes of coordinates.

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Figure 1 here

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Figure 2 here  
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Beside the ranked journals (c.f. Table 2, Figure 1 and 2) there is quite a number of other journals that also contribute to the field of consumer brand relationships research, like the *Journal of Brand Management* or the *Journal of Product and Brand Management* which have recently published work in this domain. Though, the focus of our bibliometric citation meta-analysis was not to identify every single outlet for articles dealing with research on consumer brand relationships but to assess the most influential journals. Hence, future research could investigate this phenomenon more in detail. However, to address our next research question a closer look on how influential single articles have been is necessary. The corresponding examination is reported in the following paragraph.

#### 4.3. Most Influential Articles and Trending Papers

To address the question which articles and authors are the most cited and thus relevant ones in the field of consumer brand relationships research a multistep procedure was operated. The results of this procedure are featured in Table 3. The table shows the total citations received within (local) the retrieved articles (TLC), the total local citations received per year (TLC/t), the total global citations received (TGC), and the corresponding yearly average (TGC/t). A closer look on the ranking uncovers, that all articles listed can be considered highly influential in shaping the research field of consumer brand relationships. However, please note that some articles are broad literature reviews (e.g. Oliver, 1999 or Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and are therefore not part in the narrow sense to consumer brand relationship research but contribute in a broader sense to the research field. While such papers are not focused specifically on CBR, they still provide foundations and contributions to

the CBR field or are related to consumer brand relationship research. This exemplifies again the interdisciplinary of the consumer brand relationships field.

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Table 3 here

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Nonetheless it is of utmost interest not only to identify the roots and fundamentals of consumer brand relationships research but also uncover up and coming papers. The identification of those trending articles is a next step in our analysis in order to provide insights not only where consumer brand relationships research came from but also where it is heading to. For this purpose we compute the ratio of local citations in the ending (LCSe). Meaning, this ratio shows whether an article acquired more of its citations at the end of the time period studied. By doing this, it allows us to not only assess which papers have been cited over a fix period of timer studied but if those papers have been cited most recently. With this approach also emerging topics can be identified. Table 4 ranks the articles in descending values for LCSe thus reflecting trending papers.

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Table 4 here

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The next section discussed in more details the content of the various research streams identified.

## 5. Citation Mapping

We used a co-citation mapping technique to visualize how articles on consumer brand relationships have been co-cited and cited each other reciprocally over time. This technique enables to identify the broader group of articles published and helps to uncover groups of themes or research streams. This procedure helps to examine the origin and direction of future research (Small, 1999). To get meaningful results and be able to visualize co-citation networks and relationships between articles, our analysis has been limited to those articles which have been cited at least five times since 1998 ( $TLC > 5$ ). In fact, we did look at competing models with  $TLC > 1$ ,  $TLC > 2$ ,  $TLC > 3$  and  $TLC > 4$  but the results of these alternative analyses were the same as they outlined, just with different level of details in terms of number of articles, the main research streams. As we aim to identify the core structure or the ‘skeleton’ behind consumer brand relationships research, we choose the threshold of  $TLC > 5$  as cutoff criteria. Other studies have also used similar thresholds (e.g. Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012) and it also allows us to focus on the most important articles. This leaves us with the 42 most cited articles out of the total number of 392 analyzed papers, representing roughly the 10% of the most influential work. On Figure 3, the vertical axis represents the year of publication. Each article represents a node and the size of each node circle depends on the number of total local citations received where the bigger the circle the more citations received and the more influential this work. An arrow pointing from one node to another indicates a citation relationship between articles; that is the paper from which the arrow originates cites the paper the arrow points to. In order to identify the central research streams, this process was facilitated by using *HistCite<sup>TM</sup>*, specialized bibliometric software. Next, we conducted a content analysis of those papers and identified seven distinct but interrelated research streams on consumer brand relationship research as outlined in Figure 3. These are: (1) the study of the relationships between various consumer brand relationship constructs such as brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, brand trust, brand attachment, brand commitment, and brand personality; (2) effects of consumer brand relationships on consumer

behavior and attitude; (3) brand love; (4) brand communities; (5) brand cult and brand relationships and culture; (6) self-brand-connections like self-congruence, self-presentation, and reference group; and finally (7) storytelling and brand relationships. We will discuss each stream by giving the key articles and topics discussed. Moreover we describe how these streams develop and point out their relevance for future research.

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Figure 3 here.  
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### *5.1. Relationships between various consumer brand relationships constructs*

The first group of papers studies the relationships between various branding concepts. As a theoretical basis those articles often refer and build on to various theories ranging from psychology, anthropology, sociology or neuroscience. Social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978), interdependence theory, and investment theory (Rusbult, 1983) provide a rich avenue for explaining brand loyalty. In addition behavioral science theories like risk theory and theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) help to explain why consumers build relationships with brands and how brand satisfaction and trust evokes (Vesel & Zabkar, 2010). The most influential articles are those from Oliver (1999) [#8 in Figure 3]<sup>2</sup>, who analyses the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. To explain the satisfaction-loyalty conundrum the author investigates what aspect of the consumer satisfaction response has implications for loyalty and what portion of the loyalty response is due to this satisfaction component. The results show that satisfaction is a necessary step in loyalty formation but becomes less significant as loyalty begins to set through other mechanisms.

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<sup>2</sup> Each of the 392 paper has a unique ID. This number is the ID number and refers to the number provided in Figure 3

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) [#30 in Figure 3] examine two aspects of brand loyalty, purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, as linking variables in the chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance. Related to brand trust, Elliott and Yannopoulou (2007) [#190 in Figure 3] developed a psychosocial model of trust in brands by drawing on both social theory and on the psychology of human relationships. Brand commitment research is dominated by Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant (2001) [#17 in Figure 3] and shows how consumers process negative information about the brands they like. Brand commitment of the consumer toward the brand is identified as a moderator of negative information effects. Later Ahluwalia et al. (2001) [#40 in Figure 3] find when consumers are not familiar with a brand, negative information spills over to attributes that are associated with the target attribute but not mentioned in the message. However, positive information does not differ, which means when consumers like the brand, a spillover occurs for the positive information as well. Since those similar work emerged, multiple studies dealt with brand commitment such as Zhou, Zhang, Su, and Zhou (2011) who identifies brand attachment as a antecedent of brand commitment or Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) exploring the brand commitment on the strength of consumer brand relationships as well as longtime reputation of the brand. Finally, another key article is the one from Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido (2001) [#35 in Figure 3] which examines mass-market brands to determine to what extent, in a consumer setting, human personality and brand personality are related.

This research stream emphasizes these concepts are related or interrelated to each other. It further shows that consumer brand relationships research is complex, multi-dimensional and therefore researchers and practitioners need to look at brand relationships as a holistic construct rather than atomistic one. This suggests that when designing future studies, one needs to study not just the relationship between one and another construct but consider multiple constructs and asses how they all relate and interact. In line of this argument, and a continuation of this research stream shows the most recent work by Belaid and Temessek Behi (2011) who examined the role of and its links with

constructs such as brand satisfaction, brand commitment, brand trust and brand loyalty. Similarly, Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapçı (2011) show that brand experiences, brand satisfaction, brand trust positively effects brand loyalty or Keller (2012, p. 186) argues that “any concept as complex as brand relationships lends itself to multiple concepts, perspectives, and analysis.” Moreover, Schmitt (2012) presents a consumer-psychology model which distinguishes three levels of consumer engagement (object-centered, self-centered and social) and five processes (identifying, experiencing, integrating, signifying and connecting) and illustrates how brand relationship research is connected with other constructs. Notably, a recent work of Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013) scrutinized antecedents and consequences of the brand personality construct (e.f. Aaker, 1997) by the help of a meta-analytic review

## *5.2. Consumer behavior and attitude*

This research stream assesses the effects of consumer brand relationships onto consumer attitude or consumer behavior. It is dominated by the works by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) [#86 in Figure 3] where they determine why and under what conditions consumers enter into strong, committed, and meaningful relationships with certain companies, becoming champions of these companies and their products. Based on theories of social identity and organizational identification, they propose that strong consumer-company relationships result from consumers' identification with those companies. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) [#119 in Figure 3] report results from a longitudinal field experiment examining the evolution of consumer brand relationships. Development patterns differed, whereby relationships with sincere brands deepened over time in line with friendship templates, and relationships with exciting brands evinced a trajectory characteristic of short-lived flings. Finally, Aggarwal (2004) [#120 in Figure 3] finds that when consumers form relationships with brands, they use norms of interpersonal relationships as a guide in their brand assessments. Two relationship types are examined: exchange relationships in which benefits are

given to others to get something back and communal relationships in which benefits are given to show concern for other's needs.

This research stream assesses more the contextual questions related to consumer brand relationships such *who*, *when*, *why* and *how* consumers enter relationship with brands. One recent article which is an extension of this research stream is by Alba and Lutz (2013) who present their Attachment-Aversion (AA) Relationship Model and discuss the scope of brand relationships research by presenting their typology of AA relationships.

### 5.3. *Brand love*

Another research stream which emerged is brand love. It is dominated by the works from Ahuvia (2005) [#147 in Figure 3] who investigates the possessions and activities that consumers love and their role in the construction of a coherent identity narrative. Ahuvia demonstrate the role and importance of loved objects and activities in structuring social relationships with brands. Later, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) [#169 in Figure 3] test hypotheses involving brand love that assesses satisfied consumers' passionate emotional attachment to particular brands. Brand love is greater for brands in product categories perceived as more hedonic versus utilitarian product and for brands that offer more in terms of symbolic benefits.

This research stream focuses on extreme emotions consumers have for brands. Since Ahuvia's (2005) paper, multiple studies dealt with the brand love construct (e.g., Ahuvia et al., 2008; Albert et al., 2008; Heinrich, Albrecht, & Bauer, 2012; Batra et al., 2012) or similar constructs such as brand passion (Bauer, Heinrich, & Martin, 2007; Swimberghe, Astakhova & Wooldridge, 2014) as well as extreme negative emotions such as anti-branding (Krishnamurth & Kucuk, 2009) or brand divorce (Sussan, Hall, & Meamber, 2012). Specifically extreme negative emotions or the 'dark-side' of



consumer brand relationships need further investigations and should be research priorities for the next years in the area of consumer brand relationships.

#### *5.4. Brand community*

This research stream emerged as one of the largest so far. It is dominated by a couple of articles. For the beginning, Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) [#28 in Figure 3] introduce the concept and framework of brand communities. Grounded in both classic and contemporary sociology and consumer behavior, this article uses ethnographic and computer mediated environment data to explore the characteristics, processes, and particularities of different brand communities. Later, McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) [#58 in Figure 3] analyze brand communities from a customer-experiential perspective. Crucial relationships include those between the customer-brand, customer-company, customer-product in use, and customer-customer. The authors expand the definition of a brand community to entities and relationships neglected by previous research and argue the importance of the social context and that brand communities are dynamic, rather than static phenomena. Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz (2002) [#62 in Figure 3] look at intergenerational influence on brand relationships. They assessed mother-daughter dyads to isolate and quantify intergenerational impacts with different ranges of effects at both the product category and the product or brand level. Another seminal piece is the one by Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) [#148 in Figure 3] who develop and assess a conceptual model of how different aspects of customers' relationships with the brand community influence customers intentions and factual behaviors. The authors describe how identification with the brand community leads to positive consequences, such as greater community engagement amongst others, and negative consequences, such as normative community pressure and (ultimately) reactance.

This research stream also focuses on the connection between the consumer's identities and other consumers in relationships to brands. Brand communities strengthen consumer brand relationships (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). A brand community is a self-selected group of consumers with a shared emotional attachment to a brand, shared values, social identity, where consumers engage jointly to accomplish a common goal. A continuation of this research stream are papers focusing consumer brand identification (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2013), on online brand communities (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Zhou et al., 2012), social networks brand communities (Zaglia, 2013), as well as customer engagement and brand communities (Brodie et. al. 2013). More recently the brand community concept was adopted in research on accessed based consumption, like in the car sharing context (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) or in the online consumption context (Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Therefore we propose that the concept of brand communities will continue to be in focus of research interest.

### *5.5. Brand cult and culture*

Related to both research streams 5.4. and 5.6., brand cult and research associated to consumer brand relationships and culture emerged. Also culture related to consumption has been studied for decades (McCracken, 1986), only recently studies assess the influence of culture on consumer brand relationships or cross-cultural studies and consumer brand relationships (Chang & Chieng, 2006). Some studies focus on the relationship between consumer culture theory and consumer brand relationships (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Nairn, Griffin & Wicks, 2008) or cult (retro) brands (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). For example Chang and Chieng (2006) [#187 in Figure 3] develop a framework of consumer brand relationships and conduct a cross-cultural comparative study of consumers at coffee chain stores in Shanghai (China) and Taipei (Taiwan). Their findings reveal that individual as well as shared experiences work through brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image to shape a consumer brand

relationships. Thompson and Arsel (2004) [#130 in Figure 3] study the intersection of global brands and local cultures and the ways in which global brands structure the expressions of cultural heterogeneity and consumers' corresponding experiences of globalization. They develop the construct of the hegemonic brandscape. Later Arnould and Thompson (2005) [#139 in Figure 3] synthesize research conducted in the last two decades of consumer research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. They assess the cultural dimensions of the consumption cycle with their brands and their brand relationships. Brown et al. (2003) [#92 in Figure 3] study cult (retro) brands. The authors conduct a "netnographic" analysis of two prominent retro brands and show the importance of Allegory (brand story), Aura (brand essence), Arcadia (idealized community), and Antinomy (brand paradox). They also demonstrate that cult or retro brand management involves an uneasy, co-creative, and occasionally clamorous relationship between producers and consumers.

This research stream focuses on cultural aspects of brand relationships as related to brands (cult brand) or related to social groups (culture). A continuation of this research stream are recent studies on the role of culture on consumer brand relationships (Sen, et. al. 2013) or cross cultural studies (Kim, Park & Kim, 2014). We believe there is much more research needed to fully understand brand cult and specifically investigating the types, meaning and drivers of consumers' relationships to brands across various culture and sub-cultures.

#### *5.6. Self connection (self-congruence, self-presentation, reference group)*

Also there are some studies which assess self-connection concepts and branding (Belk, 1988), only recently the concept of self-connection and consumer brand relationships have been studied. There are multiple studies assessing the relationship between self-connection or related terms such as self-congruence, self-presentation, reference group and their effect on consumer brand relationships.

For example, Escalas and Bettman (2003) [#80 in Figure 3] focus on reference groups as a source of brand associations, which can be linked to one's mental representation of self to meet self-verification or self-enhancement goals. They conceptualize this in terms of self-brand connections, that is, the extent to which individuals have incorporated a brand into their self-concept. Later, Escalas and Bettman (2005) [#154 in Figure 3] show that consumers purchase brands in part to construct their self-concepts and form self-brand connections. Their results show that brands with images consistent with an in-group enhance self-brand connections for all consumers, whereas brands with images that are consistent with an out-group have a stronger negative effect on independent versus interdependent consumers. Another key article in that research stream is the one from Chaplin and John (2005) [#146 in Figure 3] who assess self-brand connection for children and how these self-brand connections change as children move into adolescence. Moreover it was Ji (2002), who analyzed the relationships between children and brands. Nairn et al. (2008) introduce a framework outlining the relationships children have with brands and “to understand the effects of brand symbols on the lives of today's children, including a more informed approach to socially responsible marketing”. Some other studies dealt with consumer brand relationships and self-connection concepts (Stokburger-Sauer, et. al. 2013).

As previously mentioned, consumer brand relationship is interdisciplinary, complex and multi-dimension. In that respect, as with the previous research streams they are all connected to each other. This stream of research on consumer's self-connections and brand relationships relates strongly to brand community (5.4.) in respect to brand identity as well as brand cult (5.5.) as also Figure 3 illustrates. Most recent work related to this are among others by Kressmann et al. (2006), Johnson, Matear and Thomson (2011), Cheng, White and Chaplin (2012), or Tuškej, Golob, and Podnar (2013). Research on the extended self (Belk, 1988) recently experienced a revival by Belk himself (2013) who adopted the concept to a digital world.

### *5.7. Storytelling*

Interestingly, as Figure 3 illustrates, this research stream about consumer brand relationships and storytelling theory is currently not related to any other research stream. This is also obvious when looking at the publications which are all published in the journal of Psychology and Marketing. The work from Woodside and Chebat (2001) [#32 in Figure 3] updates Heider's (1958) balance theory in consumer behavior by developing the theories linked to theories of perceptual, attitudinal, and behavior automaticity and controlled thinking between consumers and brands. They assess automatic-controlled memory retrievals and storytelling on thinking and action towards brands. Later, Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) [#243 in Figure 3] show that people relate to each other more in terms of stories-and products and brands which often play both central and peripheral roles in their stories.

Albeit somehow a separate research stream as Figure 3 illustrates, storytelling is a powerful way companies can use to communicate and strengthen the relationship consumers have with brands. It allows connecting consumers with brands and consumers like to buy lifestyles, emotions, legends, or myths. More recently, it looks that some researchers have begun to borrow the concept of storytelling to other research streams identified in our bibliometric analysis such as storytelling and brand communities (Megehee & Spake, 2012; Kuo & Feng, 2013) but we believe there are many opportunities to further explore, how, where, when and why storytelling works or not for consumer brand relationships and subsequent research streams. For example, is storytelling for consumer brand relationships culturally grounded? Can storytelling be used to create brand heritage?

## **6. Discussion and Limitations**

The overall goal of this study was not only to shed light on the field of consumer brand relationships research but also to assess where the root lie in academic literature and how this

research field has evolved over the last decades. More in detail we pursued three main research questions (RQ) which we want to recall hereinafter. Our work is based on a retrospective study. We collected data from the *ISI Web of Science* database and conducted a bibliometric citation meta-analysis as this method has the power to uncover how consumer brand relationship research has evolved in the past (RQ1). Moreover this technique allows uncovering which journals are the ones that spread CBR research in the literature and which articles and corresponding authors are the most cited ones (RQ2) and thus brought forward the research on consumer and their brands. Finally our approach also reveals which universities respectively business schools have contributed most and thus are the centers of excellent research on consumer brand relationships (RQ3).

Our analysis identified 392 relevant articles, mostly from journals of business and management field followed by applied psychology, communications, hospitality, and leisure, sports and tourism research. The results of the bibliometric analysis help when answering the first research question. Research on consumer brand relationships has many different roots in the literature which meant that it has developed not from a single but from diverse sources. , not only consumer behavior or branding literature

Different disciplines conduct research about consumer brand relationships, which confirms its interdisciplinary nature, but still the discipline of management and business journals dominate. Specifically, the marketing literature with a focus on consumer research, like the *Journal of Consumer Research* or the peer-reviewed conference proceedings of the Association for Consumer Research (a.k.a. *Advances in Consumer Research*) as well as journals in the domain of marketing and psychology (e.g., *P&M*, *JCP*) make a significant contribution. However, we have to note that also journal with a broader focus, like the *Journal of Marketing* or the *Journal of Business Research* influenced the development of consumer brand relationships demonstrably. However, the absence of publications regarding consumer brand relationships research in other highly regarded journals, like the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, or *Journal of Personality & Social*

*Psychology* is surprising. This leads us to the conclusion, that consumer brand relationships research has its roots primarily in the marketing literature. As far as our analysis uncovers research on consumers and their brands evolved out of the need, that literature before the turn of the millennium neglected relationships between brands and consumers and thus was simply unable to explain specific phenomena of consumer behavior, like consumers' emotional attachment to brands (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) or brand love (Ahuvia, 2005). Thus, driven from and based on existing literature on brand satisfaction and loyalty, brand personality, or brand meaning, just to name a few, academics started to investigate relationships from different perspective. Without any doubt Fourniers (1998) publication can be seen as milestone, however not necessarily because of its groundbreaking framework but in particular because of the tremendous popularity her seminal work gained.

No less important and also with regard to our second research question we identify those authors and articles who are highly cited and thus are of relevance for consumer brand relationship research. With this regard not only articles are highlighted which are well-known in the literature and thus are moderately useful for directing future reading, but also a list of trending papers which are up and coming is the outcome of our bibliometric analysis. We have provided detailed references on those ascending papers so that people can quickly assess if the topic might be relevant to their own research and consequently get inspiring ideas. With this regard we visualized our findings using citation mapping technique of *HistCite<sup>TM</sup>* computer software. This approach not only puts results into graphs (c.f. Figure 3) but also identified seven sub-research streams related to consumer brand relationships: (1) The study of the relationships between various branding concepts such as brand loyalty, brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand commitment and brand personality; (2) effects of consumer brand relationships on consumer behavior and attitude or purchase intention; (3) brand love; (4) brand community; (5) brand cult and culture; (6) self-connection (e.g., self-congruence, self-presentation, reference group); and (7) storytelling theory.

In addition the dataset reveals new insights on the global distribution of the most prolific authors and journals in this research field in terms of academic output and relevance and importance. The most influential institutions respectively universities are based in the US and UK. This is not surprising as the majority of overall submission to international marketing journals is also dominated by Anglo-American contributions. However, our bibliometric analysis reveals those universities that conducted research in consumer brand relationships from the very start as visualized in Table 1. We believe that this bibliometric analyses makes an important contribution to the literature, as it outlines, structures, and identifies the key institutions, journals, articles and authors as well as research streams in linkage to the research about consumer brand relationships.

However, some limitations are noteworthy in this study. While our dataset from *ISI Web of Science* is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. Even though the top tier marketing journals are included in our study our analysis did not include all journals available worldwide as well as all conference proceedings like the ones from the *American Marketing Association* (AMA), the *Academy of Marketing Science* (AMS) or the *European Marketing Academy Conference* (EMAC). Also they have been taken into account in our global citations as cited articles, they have not been included as possible key articles. Therefore, our results are valid within that scope. We have to note, that we did not exclude self-citations in our analysis. Although this is common practice, future research may find a way to operate and exclude self-citations to yield a more accurate assessment of an article's importance. Despite its high degree of objectivity, bibliometric citation meta-analysis has also a subjective dimension (Van Raan, 2003) since we had to make choices on the search terms used and the time period, as well as identify and label the core research streams with the help of *HistCite<sup>TM</sup>* software. The articles reviewed here were all written in English. Future research may investigate non-English research to highlight its contribution to the academic literature as well. Another limitation is that our bibliometric analysis is based on papers which have been published and cited by other articles. As this might take some time, we are aware that current hot topics''



related to consumer brand relationships such as anthropomorphism and brand relationships (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012), brand divorce (Fiona, Meamber & Hall, 2012), brand authenticity (Bruhn et al. 2012), and others were not identified as key research streams. We believe these are important and emerging research topics to consider and are an integrated part of the consumer brand relationships research field. Nevertheless the results of our analysis shed light on a relatively new and fascinating research area of the relationships between consumers and brands. Whilst academia and practitioners have paid huge attention to customer relationship management (CRM) in the past, consumer brand relationships management (CBRM) is still in its infancy. Hence, it is not surprising that the number of high quality publications and thus journals dealing with this topic is still small but constantly growing. We like to encourage academics worldwide to devote themselves the nascent research area of consumer brand relationships.

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**Table 1:** Most Influential Institution [sorted by  $P_{CBR}$  (left) and TGC (right)]

Rank	Institution	$P_{CBR}$	TLC	TGC	Institution	TGC	$P_{CBR}$	TLC
1	University of Wisconsin	12	53	467	Vanderbilt University	486	3	51
2	Columbia University	10	46	275	University of Wisconsin	467	12	53
3	Boston College	10	12	48	Boston University	439	5	34
4	University Connecticut	9	22	203	University Illinois	401	8	90
5	Ohio State University	9	17	125	Northwestern University	336	4	20
6	University Minnesota	9	14	71	Depaul University	327	5	81
7	University Illinois	8	90	401	Stanford University	318	7	52
8	University Arizona	8	34	118	Baruch College	301	2	28
9	Stanford University	7	52	318	Harvard University	279	6	20
10	University of Florida	7	19	75	Columbia University	275	10	46

Note:

$P_{CBR}$     number of articles published related to consumer brand relationships  
 TLC        total local citations received  
 TGC        total global citations received

**Table 2:** Ranking of Top 20 Journals (sorted by  $P_{CBR}$ )

Rank*	Journal	Label	$P_{CBR}$	TLC/t	TGC/t
1	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	JCR	46	41.71	219.25
2	<i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>	ACR	39	15.64	74.60
3	<i>Psychology &amp; Marketing</i>	P&M	34	8.53	29.69
4	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	JBR	28	3.29	20.03
5	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	JM	25	22.14	161.71
6	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	JCP	13	4.03	32.91
7	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	JMR	11	5.90	45.05
8	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	EJM	11	0.60	4.10
9	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	JAMS	10	2.38	17.17
10	<i>Marketing Theory</i>	MT	8	0.83	1.83
11	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	JA	8	0.73	5.17
12	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	IMM	8	0.29	9.24
13	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	JBE	6	1.38	4.92
14	<i>Journal of International Marketing</i>	JIM	6	1.00	6.00
15	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	JR	6	0.76	16.01
16	<i>Journal of Advertising Research</i>	JAR	6	0.51	8.24
17	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	IJRM	5	2.38	12.04
18	<i>International Marketing Review</i>	IMR	5	-	3.10
19	<i>International Journal of Market Research</i>	IJMR	4	0.13	2.79
20	<i>Journal of Sports Management</i>	JSM	3	0.11	2.29

\*ordered by numbers of published articles related to CBR [ $P_{CBR}$ ]

Note:

$P_{CBR}$	number of articles published related to consumer brand relationships
TLC/t	average local citations received per year
TGC/t	average global citations received per year



**Table 3: Ranking of Top 10 Articles (sorted by TGC/t)**

<b>Rank*</b>	<b>Author(s) (year)</b>	<b>TLC</b>	<b>TLC/t</b>	<b>TGC</b>	<b>TGC/t</b>
	Fournier (1998)	100	7.69	1,213	93.34
<b>1</b>	Oliver (1999)	33	2.75	432	36.00
<b>2</b>	Arnould & Thompson (2005)	19	3.17	171	28.50
<b>3</b>	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)	27	2.70	171	17.10
<b>4</b>	Bhattacharya & Sen (2003)	18	2.25	117	14.63
<b>5</b>	Brown, Barry, Dacin & Gunst (2005)	6	1.00	59	9.83
<b>6</b>	Ahuvia (2005)	11	1.83	38	6.33
<b>7</b>	Escalas (2004)	8	1.14	30	4.29
<b>8</b>	Chaplin & John (2005)	9	1.50	23	3.83
<b>9</b>	Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido (2001)	11	1.10	30	3.00
<b>10</b>	Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker (2005)	7	1.17	16	2.67

\* ordered by TGC/t

Note:

TLC      total local citations received  
TLC/t    average local citations received per year  
TGC      total global citations received  
TGC/t    average global citations received per year

**Table 4:** Ranking of Top 20 Articles (sorted by LCSe)

No.	Author(s) / Title	Journal	LCSe	TGC/t	TLC/t
1	Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), Brand Community	JCR	41	30.7	7.8
2	Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004), When good brands do bad	JCR	27	12.43	5.57
3	McAlexander, Shouten and Koenig, Building Brand Community	JCR	22	19.89	5.56
4	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty	JMR	18	17.1	2.7
5	Arnould and Thompson (2005), Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research	JCR	16	28.5	3.17
6	Escalas and Bettman (2005), Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning	JCR	14	9	3
7	Aggarwal (2004), The Effects of Brand Relationship Norms on Consumer Attitudes and Behavior	JCR	14	6.43	3
8	Oliver (1999), Whence consumer loyalty?	JMR	13	36	2.75
9	Escalas and Bettman (2005), You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands	JCP	12	6.38	2.38
10	Bhattacharya (2003), Consumer-company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies	JMR	11	14.63	2.25
11	Ahuja (2005), Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives	JCR	10	6.33	1.83
12	Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003), Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the revival of brand meaning	JMR	9	7.75	2
13	Chaplin and John (2005), The development of self-brand connections in children and adolescents	JCR	8	3.83	1.5
14	Algesheimer, Dholakia, Herrmann (2005), The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs	JM	8	11	1.67
15	Caprara, Barbaranelli, Guido (2001), Brand personality: How to make the metaphor fit?	JEP	7	3	1.1
16	Johar, Sengupta, Aaker (2005), Two roads to updating brand personality impressions: Trait versus evaluative inferencing	JMR	7	2.67	1.17
17	Escalas (2004), Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands	JCP	6	4.29	1.14
18	Brown, Barry, Dacin, Gunst (2005), Spreading the word: Investigating antecedents of consumers' positive word-of-mouth intentions and behaviors in a retailing context	JAMS	6	9.83	1
19	Keller (2003), Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge	JCR	6	9.5	1.63
20	Schau and Gilly (2003), We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal Web space	JCR	6	7.75	1.13

Note:

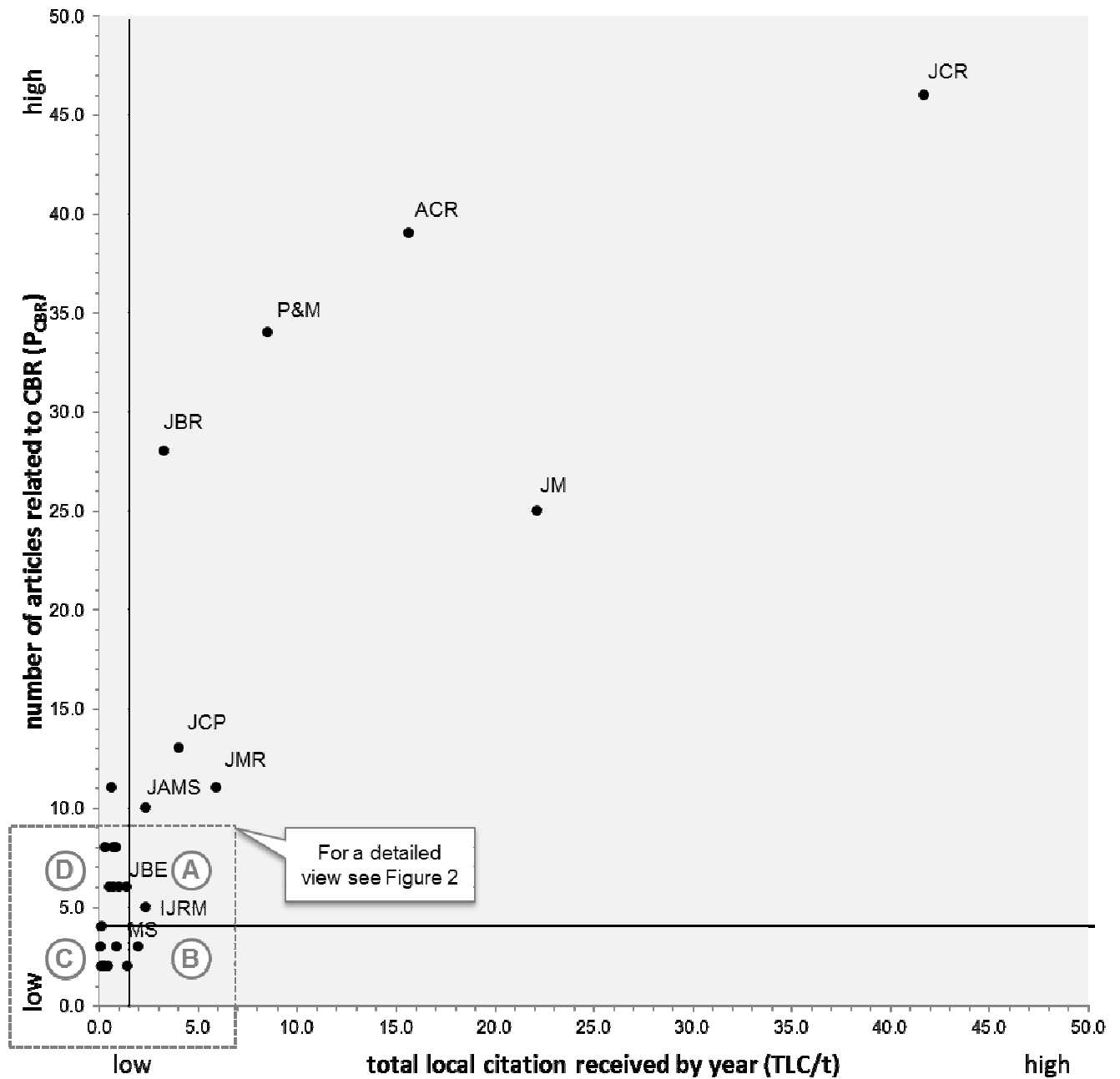
TLC/t: average local citations received per year

TGC/t: average global citations received per year

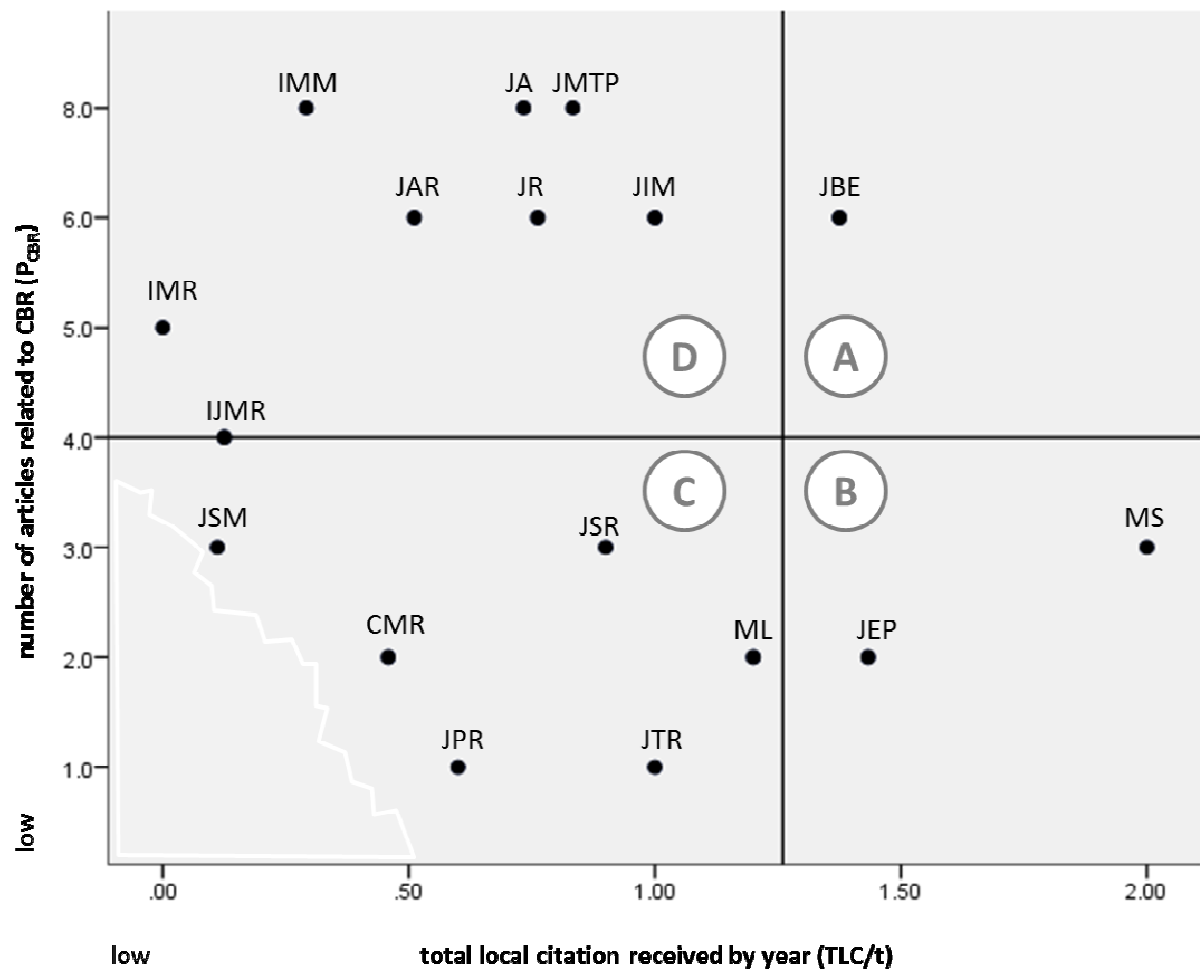
LCSe: ratio of local citations in the ending

For abbreviations of journal names see Appendix.

**Figure 1: Journal Focus and Impact on CBR Research (big picture)**

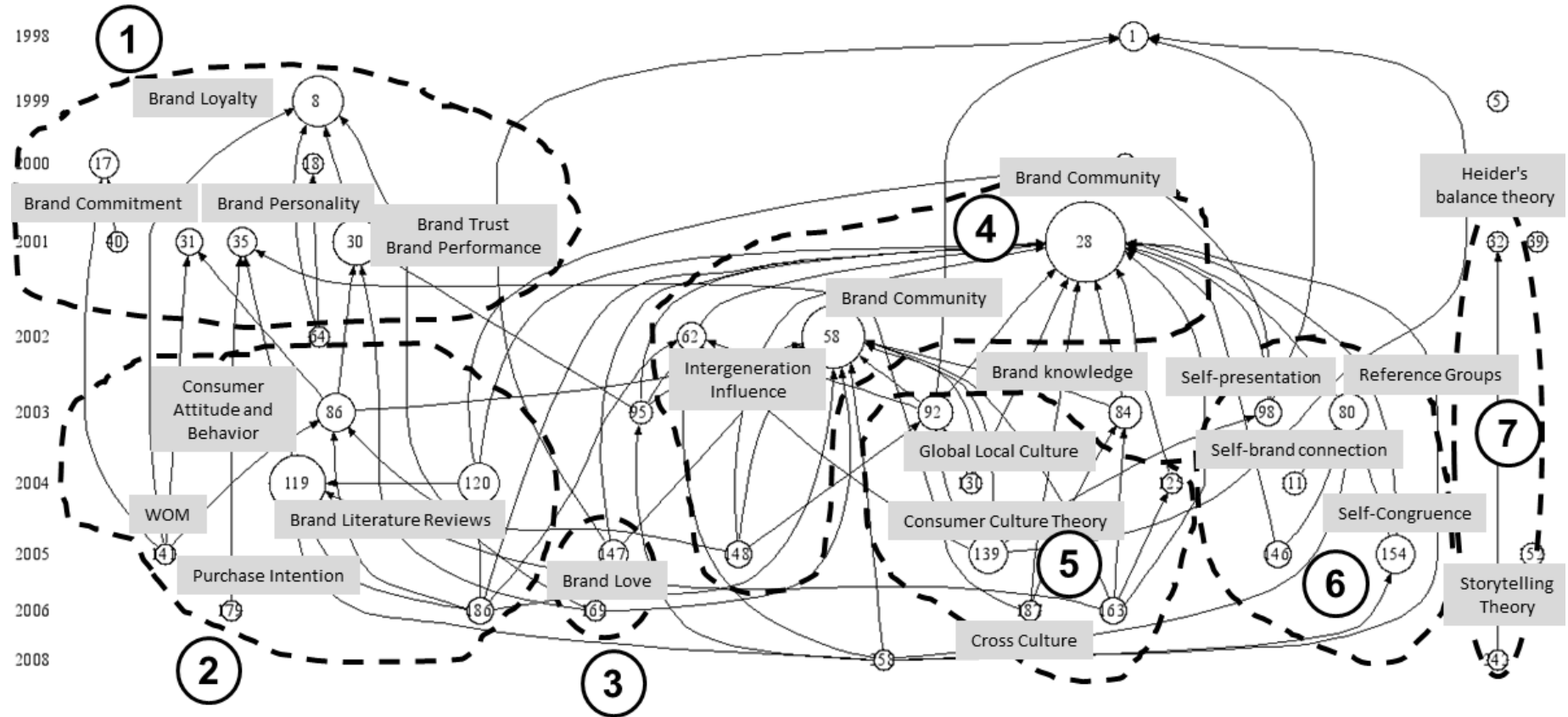


**Figure 2: Journal Focus and Impact on CBR Research (detailed view)**



*Note:* As there are 87 journals in quadrant B, C, and D, for illustrative and readability purposes we only show those journals which have at least either 2 articles published between 1998 and 2010 or at least an average citation per year of 0.25.

**Figure 3: Consumer Brand Relationships Citation Mapping**



## Appendix

### Journal Related Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
ACR	<i>Advances in Consumer Research</i>
CMR	<i>California Management Review</i>
EJM	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>
IJMR	<i>International Journal of Marketing Research</i>
IMM	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>
IMR	<i>International Marketing Review</i>
JA	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>
JAMS	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>
JAR	<i>Journal of Advertising Research</i>
JBE	<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>
JBR	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>
JCP	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>
JCR	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>
JEP	<i>Journal of Economic Psychology</i>
JIM	<i>Journal of International Marketing</i>
JM	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>
JMR	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>
JMTP	<i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>
JPR	<i>Japanese Psychology Research</i>
JSM	<i>Journal of Sports Management</i>
JSR	<i>Journal of Service Research</i>
JTR	<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>
ML	<i>Marketing Letters</i>
MS	<i>Marketing Science</i>
P&M	<i>Psychology &amp; Marketing</i>

### Methodology related abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
TLC	total local citations received
TLC/t	average local citations received per year
TGC	total global citations received
TGC/t	average global citations received per year
LCS/e	ratio of local citations in the ending
P <sub>CBR</sub>	number of articles published related to consumer brand relationships