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Bibliometric analysis of Integrated Marketing Communications (2015–2024): knowledge structures, emerging themes, and future perspectives

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Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) research has expanded rapidly, but its intellectual structure remains fragmented, limiting theoretical consolidation and practical advancements, especially in this digital era. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of IMC literature from 2015 to 2024 using Scopus data, employing co-occurrence analysis, citation mapping, and network visualization. The findings reveal dominant research themes, including digital transformation, consumer engagement, and brand equity, alongside emerging topics such as AI-driven personalization and cross-platform integration. Key scholars, influential journals, and collaborative networks are identified, highlighting the field's evolution and interdisciplinary connections. This study provides a thorough overview of the intellectual landscape of IMC over the past decade, offering strategic directions for future research and practical insights for marketing professionals navigating an increasingly digital environment.

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Introduction

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) emerged as a response to the rapidly changing media and marketing landscape of the early 1990s. It is marked by increasing media fragmentation, technological advances, and economic pressures on organizations. Schultz (1993), a pivotal figure in the field, introduced IMC as a strategic approach designed to unify diverse communication methods into a cohesive message across various channels. Since its inception, IMC has gained traction as a core strategy for building long-term relationships with stakeholders and enhancing corporate outcomes (Pisicchio & Toaldo, 2021). Over the years, IMC has evolved from a tactical communication tool to a sophisticated strategic framework capable of realigning organizational structures, driving value creation, and shaping overall marketing processes (Yousaf & Fan, 2020). Researchers such as Kliatchko and Schultz (2014), Avraham (2020), and others have emphasized the need for IMC to be viewed as a functional tactic and an integrated business process contributing to a company's competitive advantage.

In the digital era, IMC has been heavily influenced by the growth of digital marketing tools, the ubiquity of social media, and the expansion of big data analytics, all of which have transformed how organizations engage with consumers (Vollero et al., 2019). This evolution has spurred a dynamic scholarly discourse around IMC (e.g., Kushwaha et al., 2020; Juska, 2021; Qi et al., 2024), driving a need to better understand the developmental trends, significant contributions, and future directions within this field. A comprehensive bibliometric analysis of IMC literature is essential to provide insights into the academic community's engagement with the subject, highlighting key themes and identifying influential authors, journals, and institutions in recent decades (Donthu et al., 2021).

In the academic discourse on IMC, there has been a persistent call to deepen its conceptual foundations and enhance its practical applicability framework (Porcu et al., 2019). Systematic evaluations of the field's intellectual progress are essential for identifying key research trajectories and guiding its development (Khan et al., 2020). Over the past decade, the rapid proliferation of AI-driven technologies has fundamentally reshaped IMC by enabling hyper-personalized, data-driven marketing strategies (Davenport et al., 2020; Rust, 2020). This period has witnessed an exponential growth in scholarly literature examining how AI technologies are reshaping marketing strategies (Stone et al., 2020), consumer engagement (Gupta & Khan, 2024), and decision-making processes (Mariani, Perez-Vega & Wirtz, 2022). However, existing reviews have primarily focused on qualitative syntheses or limited bibliometric analyses, often constrained by narrow temporal scopes or insufficient attention to the dynamic interplay between technological advancements and IMC's theoretical evolution. This gap hinders a holistic understanding of how the field has adapted to disruptive innovations, particularly in the AI era, and how these transformations have influenced its intellectual structure and collaborative networks. Therefore, a thorough bibliometric review is needed to provide a systematic, data-driven exploration of IMC's intellectual evolution, methodological advancements, and emerging research frontiers.

This study attempts to conduct a bibliometric review of IMC literature, focusing on articles published from 2015 to 2024 in the Scopus database. This review will provide a detailed map of the intellectual landscape of IMC, identifying significant new research trends, key themes, and emerging topics. The study aims to offer insights that can guide future research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of IMC's role in contemporary marketing practice by uncovering the structure and impact of scholarly work on IMC.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the leading publications, journals, authors, and countries in the field of IMC, and what is the network structure of authorship and keywords?
2. What are the primary topics covered in IMC research? Specifically, what are the motor, basic, transversal, emerging, specialized, and peripheral themes?
3. What future perspectives and relevant research directions can be identified within the field of IMC?

This study holds significant value for multiple reasons. First, it advances the academic understanding of IMC by providing a comprehensive bibliometric analysis that traces the evolution of research in this field over the past decade. By identifying key research trends, influential publications, and emerging themes, this study offers a critical resource for scholars aiming to build upon existing knowledge or explore new, underexplored areas within IMC. Second, the findings have profound practical implications for marketing practitioners. By uncovering the trajectory of IMC research and its current focus areas, such as AI-driven technologies, data-centric strategies, and consumer empowerment, this study equips practitioners with evidence-based insights to design more effective, innovative, and adaptive marketing communication strategies in an increasingly digital and dynamic marketplace. Finally, this study advances IMC research by filling a key methodological gap through the first bibliometric analysis covering 2015–2024, a decade shaped by the rapid advancements in AI-driven technologies and transformative shifts in IMC practices, which prior bibliometric studies have not captured. This study reveals emerging research themes and sets a robust precedent for future bibliometric investigations in marketing and communication. By capturing contemporary technological and theoretical advancements, this approach provides rich insights into the evolving IMC landscape, offering valuable insights for academia and industry.

Literature review

A substantial portion of IMC review literature has traditionally concentrated on theoretical development through conventional review methodologies. Kliatchko (2008) revisited the IMC construct and identified four pillars: stakeholders, contents, channels, and results. The interplay of these four pillars at different levels of IMC provides the basis for a new definition as "IMC is an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs." Zvobgo and Melewar (2011) expanded upon this by examining global IMC drivers, differentiating between market situational and organizational factors, thus providing a comprehensive view of the external and internal influences on IMC practices. Subsequent reviews have taken more focused approaches. Šerić and Saura (2012) critically assessed IMC's conceptual and methodological challenges, identifying research gaps in varied industries and regional contexts. Tafesse and Kitchen (2017) contributed an integrative framework linking constructs like organizational support processes, integration strategies, and IMC outcomes, which enriches the understanding of IMC's multi-dimensional integration requirements. Furthering this examination, Šerić (2018) conducted an exhaustive review of empirical IMC studies, revealing trends in research topics, methods, and geographical focus over 15 years. Ahmad and Mokhtar's (2019) work on the evolution of IMC's theoretical and conceptual underpinnings highlights its broadening scope, while recent reviews by Swani et al. (2019) and Vashisht et al. (2019) delve into advertising tools within IMC, identifying future research avenues

in this rapidly evolving field. This literature indicates a progression from general theoretical development to nuanced analyses of IMC constructs and industry applications. These studies underscore the need for a comprehensive, integrative understanding of IMC while highlighting significant areas for future research, such as cross-industry and cross-national IMC applications, emerging tools, and evolving methodologies.

The literature employing bibliometric methods in IMC research remains notably limited, with only three reviews identified. Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2015) conducted a bibliometric analysis of IMC literature from 1991 to 2012, utilizing co-word analysis and science mapping to explore the relationships between keywords and concepts, thereby identifying key thematic trends and the evolution of IMC research. Building on this, Tackie and Anning-Dorson (2021) expanded the scope by evaluating author productivity, citation impact, and the influence of peer-reviewed sources, offering a deeper understanding of the field's intellectual structure and scholarly contributions. Most recently, Wu et al. (2022) analyzed IMC research from 1991 to 2020, highlighting its steady growth and identifying emerging areas of high potential, such as brand equity and consumer empowerment. Despite these contributions, the literature lacks a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the most recent decade, marked by rapid technological advancements and transformative shifts in IMC practices.

Thus, while existing scholarship on IMC has laid a foundational understanding of its thematic evolution, several critical limitations remain. First, the literature lacks a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the most recent decade (2015–2024). This period witnessed the rapid proliferation of AI-driven technologies, including programmatic advertising, predictive analytics, and chatbots, that have redefined personalized, data-centric marketing strategies (Davenport et al., 2020; Rust, 2020). Given the increasing influence of AI-driven marketing tools, big data analytics, and personalized consumer engagement strategies, an updated bibliometric review is essential to capture the evolving research landscape and provide insights into emerging theoretical and methodological advancements. Second, although previous studies have mapped the evolution of keywords and themes, they provide limited guidance on future research directions and practical implications for practitioners, especially in AI, leaving a gap in actionable agendas for academia and industry. Third, while these studies have identified influential literature and authors, they lack an in-depth analysis of the social structure of knowledge, such as collaboration networks among researchers, institutions, and countries, which is essential for understanding the collaborative dynamics driving IMC research. Addressing these limitations is crucial for advancing the field and ensuring academic discourse remains aligned with contemporary advancements.

Method

An intensive bibliometric analysis was conducted via the Scopus database from Elsevier to advance the understanding, measurement, and analysis of published scientific literature on IMC. The bibliometric method applies quantitative tools to bibliographic data (Broadus, 1987). It enables researchers to handle large quantities of bibliographic data while minimizing potential biases (Donthu et al., 2021). This study employed a rigorous three-phase strategy: execution plan, data collection, and detailed bibliometric analysis.

Data collection and strategy. This study retrieved publications from the Scopus database, one of the largest and most comprehensive repositories of scholarly articles, known for its extensive

coverage and reliable bibliographic data (Donthu et al., 2021). Furthermore, with more accuracy owing to the availability of a reference list and the h-index, the Scopus database is convenient for conducting the co-citation analysis (Hasana et al., 2022).

The data collection process was executed in Feb 2025, targeting the term *integrated marketing communications* with the string [TITLE-ABS-KEY (“integrated marketing communications” OR “integrated marketing communication”)] across all indices of the Scopus database. The result obtains a total of 886 publications. To enhance the relevance of the dataset and maintain a focused scope, we applied subject area restrictions, limiting the selection to publications classified under *Business, Management and Accounting*. Additionally, to ensure a focus on high-impact, peer-reviewed sources, the document type was restricted to *journal articles*, excluding conference proceedings, book chapters, and other non-peer-reviewed publications. Articles are widely recognized as the most significant scientific contributions, making them the preferred unit of analysis for bibliometric studies over conference proceedings, book reviews, and editorials (Vlase & Lähdesmäki, 2023). Furthermore, only English-language publications were included to maintain consistency in analysis and minimize potential biases introduced by translation. Even Morrison et al. (2012) noted that language restrictions are common in review articles to ensure consistency and reliability in data extraction and analysis. After applying the initial filtering criteria, 305 articles were retained for further evaluation. A manual screening of title and abstract was conducted to assess eligibility, during which one article was excluded to ensure methodological rigor and thematic relevance. This step adhered to established bibliometric practices, as recommended by widely cited methodological guidelines in previous research (e.g., Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The identification process is shown in Fig. 1. Finally, 304 articles were exported to comma-separated values (CSV) Excel format, consisting of the content of title, authors, abstract, keywords, and references.

Data analysis and visualization. The analysis was executed in two stages: the first focused on the IMC domain, employing a multi-level evaluation across sources, authors, and documents. The second stage centered on uncovering the intricate knowledge structures within the literature, examining social, intellectual, and conceptual structures using advanced bibliometric techniques (Palácios et al., 2021). These techniques included collaboration, co-citation, and co-occurrence analysis, providing a robust and comprehensive understanding of the field's development and core scholarly networks.

This study applies multiple bibliometric analyses to examine and visualize knowledge structure and gain a deeper understanding of its development. It uses three complementary software tools: the VOSviewer, Bibliometrix R, and CiteSpace. The Bibliometrix R package 4.4.1 was employed for a range of descriptive statistics and advanced bibliometric indicators, including annual publication growth and collaboration index (CI), to deliver a comprehensive data overview, as well as to map the intellectual structure of a field (Derviş, 2019). VOSviewer was used to provide a variety of visualizations in the areas of co-citations, co-authors, and co-words in a given corpus of literature with the probabilistic approach, including Network Visualization, Overlay Visualization, and Density Visualization (Ding & Yang, 2022). CiteSpace can provide a clear picture of the evolution of knowledge in the temporal dimension and the historical span of a particular field, as it measures the similarity of knowledge units using a set-theoretical data standardization approach, which is used to provide time zone and timeline views within a specific period (Xu et al., 2023).

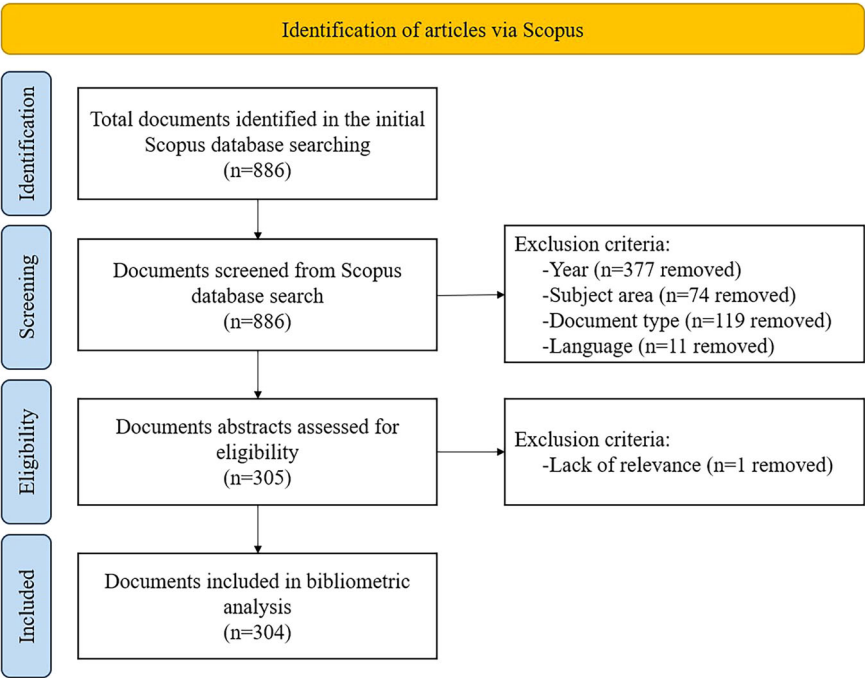


Fig. 1 PRISMA flow chart. The flow of the search for identifying and screening sources for the bibliometric analysis.

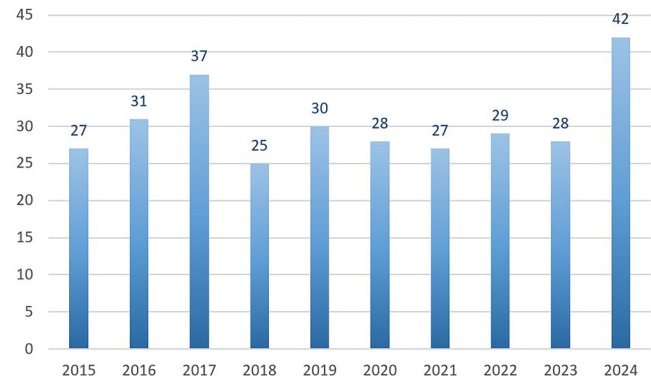


Fig. 2 Annual and cumulative productions. The blue bars indicate the number of articles published each year.

Results and Analysis

Descriptive statistics

Annual Publications. The growth of a discipline or research area is closely tied to the quantity and content of its academic literature. The trend in publication volume over time can partially reflect the level, pace, and scale of IMC research over the past decade. The result in Fig. 2 reveals a relatively steady growing trajectory, with some fluctuations but no drastic changes in overall research activity. Annual publication volume has consistently hovered around 30, indicating a steady output within the field. However, the observed stagnation in annual publication output between 2020 and 2023 suggests minor variations in research enthusiasm, possibly driven by external factors like the global pandemic (Aviv-Reuven & Rosenfeld, 2021). Afterward, the volume of publications peaked in the past decades in 2024, signaling that the field continues to maintain a stable increase in scholarly focus. This sustained growth can be attributed to the widespread recognition of IMC as the most effective approach in today’s complex multi-channel environment (Laurie & Mortimer, 2019). Moreover, as Porcu et al. (2019) and Šerić et al. (2015)

highlighted, applying IMC to different contexts presents an exciting avenue for future research, further driving scholarly engagement in the field.

Leading Journals. The analysis demonstrates that research on IMC is concentrated in a limited number of sources, with 171 journals publishing relevant studies in total. Eight sources have contributed five or more publications, while the remaining 163 journals have published four or fewer papers. Only three journals have published over ten articles, collectively accounting for 47 or 15.46% of the dataset. This reveals a significant concentration of scholarship within a narrow selection of outlets. These journals fall into four broad categories: (a) general marketing, (b) advertising, (c) communication, and (d) multidisciplinary journals, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of research in this domain. Figure 3 shows the top five journals with the highest cumulative publications in the IMC field over the past decade. Figure 3 illustrates the most prolific journals in the last decades. *Journal of Marketing Communications* (total 21 IMC publications) exhibits a steadily increasing trend in overall publication volume in this field year by year. In contrast, the publication volume of the *European Journal of Marketing* (16 IMC articles), *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies* (10 IMC articles), and the *International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research* (8 IMC publications) was concentrated primarily in 2018 and earlier, with a sharp decline after 2019. *Sustainability* (Switzerland) (8 IMC articles) published the first article in this field in 2020, followed by steady growth in subsequent years. This concentration of IMC scholarship within a few key journals indicates a firm reliance on specialized sources in advertising, communication, and marketing, suggesting that while IMC is interdisciplinary, it remains deeply rooted in these core areas.

The most prolific journals in terms of publication volume are not necessarily those contributing the most impactful papers in the field. For several decades, scholars have employed bibliometric citation analysis to evaluate the influence and performance of academic journals (e.g., Tomaszewski, 2023). Baumgartner and Pieters (2003) emphasized that “different journals exert the most influence in specific subfields.” This study also pinpointed the

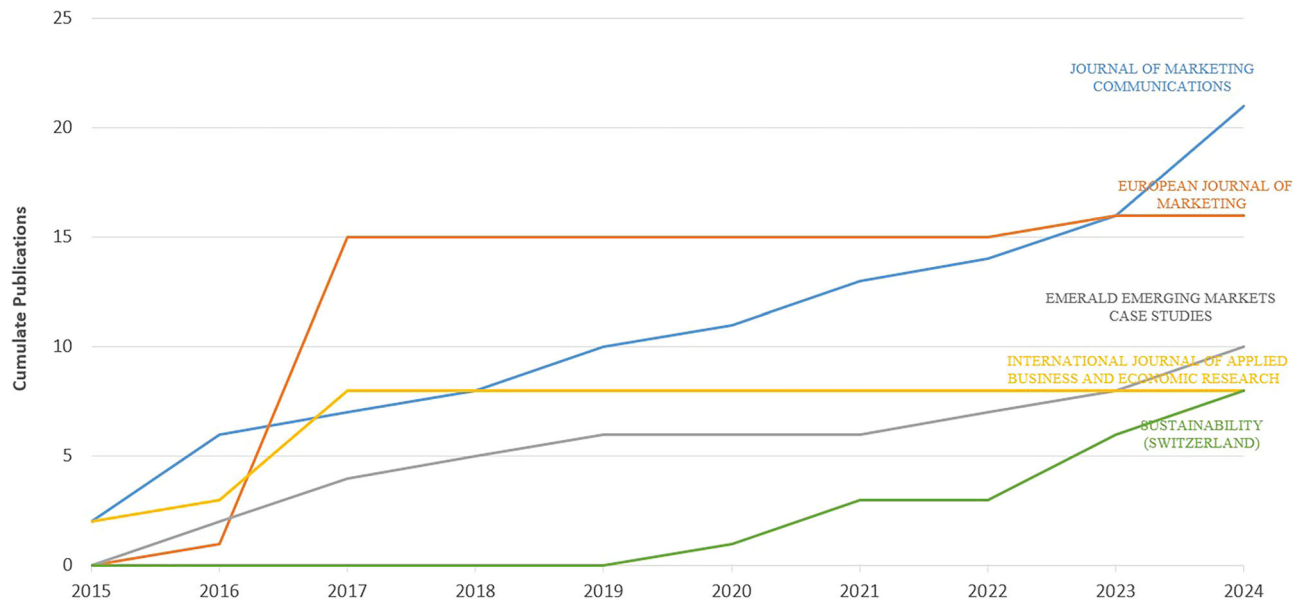


Fig. 3 Journal's production over time. Evolution in the number of relevant articles published by the top 5 journals.

Table 1 The most influential journals in IMC research.

Journal Title	TC	P-IMC	CiteScore	h-index
European Journal of Marketing	686	16	6.9	13
Journal of Marketing	344	1	24.1	1
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	332	5	17.8	5
Journal of Retailing	248	1	15.9	1
Journal of Advertising	220	3	11.2	3
Journal of Marketing Communications	211	21	7.7	9
Business Horizons	162	2	17.7	2
International Journal of Advertising	139	7	13.9	6
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	137	1	30.0	1
Journal of Marketing Management	98	4	8.0	3

TC total citation, P-IMC the number of publications related to IMC, h-index the number of publications for which a journal has been cited by other articles at least that same number of times in the local database.

journals that “shape” and “lead” the evolving domain of IMC. Table 1 demonstrates the top ten most influential journals in recent decades, ranked by the journal's total citations, CiteScore (2023), and h-index (2023). The *European Journal of Marketing* stands as the most influential, with 686 citations, followed by the *Journal of Marketing* at 344 and the *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* with 332. Notably, the *Journal of Marketing Communications* has produced the highest volume of IMC articles (21) and 211 citations, solidifying its role as the leading publication within this specialized field. The *Journal of Marketing* ranked fifth with 477 citations, and the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, with 137 citations, holds the highest CiteScore score in these cited journals.

This analysis highlights that while specific journals lead in publication volume, others with fewer IMC articles exert a more significant influence on the field by attracting higher citation counts, underscoring the importance of both publication quantity and scholarly impact in shaping IMC research. Since the database used in this study primarily includes publications from 2015 onward but references foundational works from earlier periods, these high-impact journals reflect the long-standing academic foundations and ongoing scholarly influence within the IMC field. This dual approach emphasizes how the field has been shaped over time by influential journals that not only contribute to IMC's theoretical development but also serve as critical

platforms for its interdisciplinary applications, as evidenced by the substantial citation counts and citation metrics, such as CiteScore and h-index, associated with these key publications.

Leading papers. The past decade has witnessed a surge of pivotal studies in IMC, with significant publications emerging as the driving forces behind the field's academic evolution and setting the intellectual agenda for future research. Table 2 presents a ranking of the ten most cited studies in the recent decade in the field of IMC, led by the landmark contribution from Batra and Keller (2016), which dominates with 344 citations and is published in the *Journal of Marketing*. This conceptual paper presents two models, the “bottom-up” Communications Matching Model and the “top-down” Communications Optimization Model, aimed at improving marketing efficiency. Followed by the research from Baxendale et al. (2015), a novel approach to understanding the relative impact of multiple marketing touchpoints, including advertising, word-of-mouth (WoM), retailer communications, peer observation, and traditional earned touchpoints on brand consideration across various consumer categories, reveals that touchpoint positivity often outweighs frequency in influencing consumer decisions. Manser et al. (2017) proposed an IMC framework to analyze the impact of various customer touchpoints on consumer engagement and profitability in an omnichannel environment, identifying five key research

Table 2 The most cited papers in the last decade.

Title	Authors	Journal	TC	Key Words
Integrating marketing communications: new findings, new lessons, and new ideas	Batra R.; Keller K.L. (2016)	J. Mark.	344	Digital media; integrated marketing communications; marketing communications; marketing integration; traditional media
The impact of different touchpoints on brand consideration	Baxendale S.; Macdonald E.K.; Wilson H.N. (2015)	J. Retail.	248	Advertising; In-store communications; Integrated marketing communications; Retailing; Word-of-mouth
Omni-channel marketing, integrated marketing communications and consumer engagement: A research agenda	Manser Payne E.; Peltier J.W.; Barger V.A. (2017)	J. Res. Interact. Mark.	206	Brand management; Integrated marketing communications; multi-channel measurement; Online consumer behavior; Social media marketing; Web 2.0
Synergistic effects of social media and traditional marketing on brand sales: capturing the time-varying effects	Kumar V.; Choi J.W.B.; Greene M. (2017)	J. Acad. Mark. Sci.	137	Consumer packaged goods; Integrated marketing communications; Marketing effectiveness; social media; Time-varying effect model
Integrating identity, strategy and communications for trust, loyalty and commitment	Melewar T.C.; Foroudi P.; Gupta S.; Kitchen P.J.; Foroudi M.M. (2017)	Eur. J. Mark.	127	Commitment; communications; identity; loyalty; strategy; trust
Integrated marketing communication capability and brand performance	Luxton S.; Reid M.; Mavondo F. (2015)	J. Advert.	125	N/A
A marketing communications approach for the digital era: Managerial guidelines for social media integration	Killian G.; McManus K. (2015)	Bus. Horiz.	117	Corporate communications; Customer relationship management; Integrated marketing communications; Social media strategy
Communication-in-use: customer-integrated marketing communication	Finne Å.; Grönroos C. (2017)	Eur. J. Mark.	91	CIMC; Communication-in-use; Customer-dominant logic; Customer-integrated marketing communication; Relationship communication; Value-in-use
Exploring the integration of social media within integrated marketing communication frameworks: Perspectives of services marketers	Valos M.J.; Haji Habibi F.; Casidy R.; Driesener C.B.; Maplestone V.L. (2016)	Mark. Intell. Plan.	88	Brands; Integrated marketing communication; Interaction; Internet; Services marketing; Social media
Unlocking the Power of Integrated Marketing Communications: How Integrated Is Your IMC Program?	Keller K.L. (2016)	J. Advert.	87	N/A

TC total citations.

areas and emphasizing the need for further studies to enhance understanding and operationalization of consumer-brand engagement.

These studies are critically important as they collectively advance the field of IMC by providing foundational frameworks, empirical insights, and practical tools for optimizing marketing strategies across diverse channels and touchpoints. They emphasize the dynamic interplay between traditional and digital marketing, the impact of consumer touchpoints on engagement and decision-making, and the need for cohesive strategies to enhance brand consistency and trust. These works offer actionable guidance for improving marketing efficiency, resource allocation, and campaign effectiveness by integrating conceptual models, customer-centric approaches, and data-driven methodologies. Their contributions enable marketers to understand consumer behavior better, strengthen brand-consumer relationships, and achieve competitive advantages in an increasingly complex and omnichannel environment. Leveraging these insights can lead to more impactful and aligned marketing efforts, ultimately driving superior organizational outcomes.

Leading authors. The findings reveal a substantial scholarly contribution to IMC, with 704 authors collaborating on 304 articles published over the past decade, underscoring significant engagement and collective effort within the field. However, the data also indicate a limited concentration of prolific researchers: only five authors (1.64%) have produced five or more publications, and 13 authors (4.28%) have contributed more than four. This highlights a relative scarcity of experts actively

advancing research in IMC. Table 3 analyzes the most influential scholars, evaluated based on their publication output and citation impact. Topping the list is Maja Šerić from Universitat de València, with nine IMC works among the 59 articles, closely followed by Lucia Porcu from Universidad de Granada. Among these prolific authors, Philip James Kitchen from ICN Business School and Pantea Foroudi from Brunel Business School stand out with the highest citation counts, reaching 381 and 281, respectively. These scholars play a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual landscape of IMC, driving its growth, and setting future research agendas.

Most leading authors originate from European countries, underscoring the region's strong academic presence and influence in IMC research. This concentration of authorship may be attributed to robust academic collaborations among institutions, facilitating co-authorship and fostering a well-connected research community that drives innovation and thought leadership. According to the funding conditions analysis in this study, out of the 304 articles, 49 (16.1%) received funding support. However, the 13 most prolific authors contributed 45 articles, of which 16 (35.6%) were funded, revealing a significantly higher proportion than the overall funding rate in the database. This aligns with Gunn and Mintrom's (2016) assertion that funding is pivotal in enhancing research productivity and impact, as evidenced by European countries' considerable emphasis on university-based research, providing scholars with greater funding opportunities. It can be seen that IMC scholarship is highly collaborative, with a notable concentration of influence among a small group of prolific

Table 3 The most productive author in IMC research.

Author	Organization	Country	NP	NT	TC	h-index
Šerić, Maja	Universitat de València	Spain	9	59	140	18
Porcu, Lucia	Universidad de Granada	Spain	8	38	251	14
Kitchen, Philip James	ICN Business School	France	7	199	381	36
Del Barrio-García, Salvador	Universidad de Granada	Spain	5	70	169	25
Vernuccio, Maria	Sapienza Università di Roma	Italy	5	28	70	9
Laurie, Sally	University of Northampton	UK	4	7	59	5
Mortimer, Kathleen	University of Northampton	UK	4	28	59	13
Foroudi, Pantea	Brunel Business School	UK	4	193	238	37
Alarcón-Del-amo, María Del Carmen	Universidad de Murcia	Spain	4	49	54	17
Butkouskaya, Vera	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	Spain	4	13	54	6
Llonch, Joan	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	Spain	4	25	54	11
Kerr, Gayle	Queensland University of Technology	Australia	4	41	58	17
Gil-Saura, Irene	Universitat de València	Spain	4	203	93	33

NP number of publications in IMC field, NT number of total publications, TC total citations.

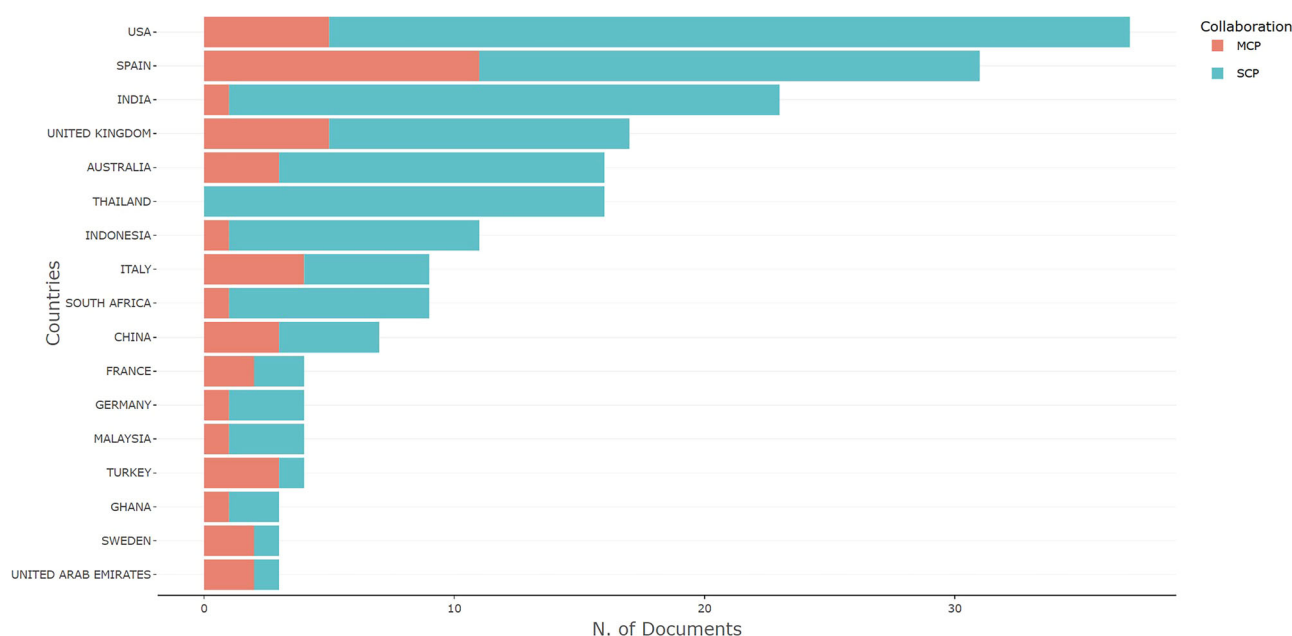


Fig. 4 Corresponding author's country. The blue color represents the number of single-country articles and the red color reflects the number of international collaborative articles.

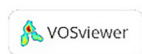
authors. These authors, primarily affiliated with European institutions, are crucial in driving the field's development.

Countries. Based on the affiliations of all contributing researchers in recent decades, the 304 publications in the dataset represent a wide array of countries, establishing IMC as a genuinely international research field. A total of 47 countries or territories have contributed to IMC literature. As Fig. 4 illustrates, the United States leads with 37 publications, followed by Spain (31) and India (23). Spain has the most international collaborative articles (11), accounting for 35.5%. The United Kingdom published 17 IMC articles, while Australia and Thailand, which have 16 publications, contributed significantly. Meanwhile, countries like Indonesia, Italy, South Africa, and China published more than seven publications. This distribution reflects the global reach of IMC research while highlighting the disproportionate contribution from a handful of nations.

It can be seen that IMC research output is highly concentrated in a small group of nations. The top 10 countries account for 57.9% of global publications, underscoring their central role in

shaping the scholarly discourse. This disparity can be attributed to varying government expenditure on academic research. Leydesdorff and Wagner (2009) established a correlation between a nation's share of global publications and its investment in research and development (R&D). Indeed, research productivity is closely tied to governmental investment in science and technology, with high-output countries typically allocating substantial resources to R&D. According to the OECD (2023), nations such as the United States, Germany, and China rank among the top global spenders on R&D, accounting for a significant proportion of worldwide research expenditure. Such financial commitments enable these countries to develop cutting-edge research infrastructure, attract leading academic talent, and support large-scale research initiatives, thereby sustaining their dominance in research output.

Structure of knowledge. This study employs three core knowledge structures (conceptual, social, and intellectual) to establish a comprehensive statistical framework for visualizing the global



landscape of scientific knowledge. These structures collectively delineate both the structural and dynamic aspects of scientific research, offering a robust approach to examining the complexities of academic contributions and their interconnections across disciplines (Palácios et al., 2021) and mapping the contours of academic inquiry while pinpointing the synergies and influences driving progress across disciplines.

and consumer engagement (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020). A key contribution of this cluster is the role of brand authenticity and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in strengthening consumer trust and emotional connections (Vashist, 2018; Zimand-Sheiner & Lahav, 2020). Topics like social marketing, sustainability, and consumer behavior reflect the increasing consumer preference for brands aligned with their values. Additionally, cultural and technological influences shape consumer responses to IMC strategies. Studies show that engagement varies based on cultural background and digital literacy (Sinclair, 2015), prompting brands to adopt localized and hyper-personalized marketing approaches. This adaptation ensures that brands tailor messaging to specific markets and maintain overall brand coherence, reinforcing a balance between global consistency and regional relevance in IMC strategies.

Keywords clustering analysis: The keyword clustering analysis reveals the thematic structure of IMC research, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature. Among 1,125 identified keywords, 55 met the threshold of four occurrences and were categorized into five clusters. Figure 5, generated using *VOSviewer 1.6.20*, visualizes the keyword co-occurrence network, illustrating conceptual intersections. This distribution reflects established and emerging IMC research priorities, emphasizing areas where traditional marketing principles integrate with evolving digital and strategic communication frameworks. These clusters provide insights into current scholarly focus while underscoring the field's ongoing development and the convergence of diverse theoretical and practical perspectives.

This cluster examines the intersection of consumer psychology, marketing communication, and purchasing behavior, emphasizing IMC's role in shaping consumer attitudes and decision-making. The integration of digital platforms has transformed IMC from traditional advertising into interactive, personalized engagement (Whitburn et al., 2020). Research highlights the impact of digital IMC strategies, such as targeted advertising, influencer partnerships, and omnichannel marketing, in fostering consumer trust and brand loyalty (Kumar, 2021). Unlike conventional approaches, digital IMC enables immersive experiences, enhancing consumer participation and advocacy (Payne et al., 2017). Additionally, studies have advanced the understanding of cognitive and emotional processing in consumer responses to explain how consumers engage with IMC based on involvement and brand familiarity (Bhuian et al., 2018). Findings indicate that personalized, consistent, and emotionally resonant

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IMC strategies strengthen brand attachment and facilitate consumer co-creation of brand narratives (Englund, 2020; Parameswaran, 2023). This body of work underscores the evolving role of IMC in fostering deeper consumer-brand relationships through digital engagement and psychological insights.

Cluster 3 (Blue): Digital commerce, social media, and Marketing 4.0

This cluster examines the integration of digital platforms in IMC, emphasizing social media marketing, online networking, and Marketing 4.0. Research highlights the transformative role of social media as an interactive, bidirectional IMC channel, shifting from traditional message consistency to real-time, user-generated content that enhances consumer engagement (Caratù et al., 2023; Mandagie & Rana, 2023). This evolution necessitates agile brand management across digital platforms (Kumar et al., 2017). Additionally, AI-driven analytics play a critical role in digital IMC, enabling personalized advertising, predictive consumer insights, and optimized brand interactions (Kumar & Kirti, 2021). The shift toward data-driven IMC facilitates hyper-targeted campaigns, enhancing consumer experiences and influencing purchase behavior.

Cluster 4 (Yellow): Corporate communications and CRM integration

This cluster explores the integration of corporate communications and digital tools in customer relationship management (CRM), particularly within e-commerce, organizational culture, and social media strategy. The convergence of IMC and CRM is increasingly vital for enhancing customer experiences through data-driven personalization. Research highlights AI-driven CRM systems as instrumental in predicting customer needs, automating engagement, and enabling personalized marketing, fostering long-term relationships (Opresnik, 2022). This shift aligns with customer-centric IMC strategies, where real-time engagement and predictive analytics inform decision-making (Chen & Huang, 2017). Additionally, IMC-CRM integration enhances internal collaboration across marketing, sales, and customer service, strengthening omnichannel consistency and reinforcing brand trust and loyalty (Chaturvedi & Babu, 2020).

Cluster 5 (Purple): Business performance and market orientation

This cluster examines the relationship between IMC strategies and business performance, emphasizing brand coherence, organizational efficiency, and financial outcomes. Empirical research confirms that well-integrated IMC strategies enhance brand equity, consumer engagement, and customer retention (Anabila, 2020; Udayana et al., 2021). Firms with strong IMC capabilities achieve better internal alignment, ensuring cohesive brand messaging across all communication channels (Porcu et al., 2020). Moreover, IMC is increasingly recognized as a strategic driver of innovation and market adaptability, reinforcing organizational resilience in dynamic environments (Butkouskaya et al., 2020). IMC supports sustainable growth and differentiation by aligning marketing communications with consumer expectations and competitive forces.

Thematic evolution: Keyword bursts indicate emerging research hotspots, marking shifts in academic discourse and highlighting novel trends that shape future research. Figure 6, generated by CiteSpace 6.3.R3, presents the strongest citation bursts, revealing distinct research focal points over time.

Before 2020, the prominence of keywords such as social marketing (2015–2017), brand image (2016–2018), and consumer behavior (2017–2018) underscores an early focus on brand perception and consumer engagement. During this period, corporate-related themes like brand identity (2017–2019) and

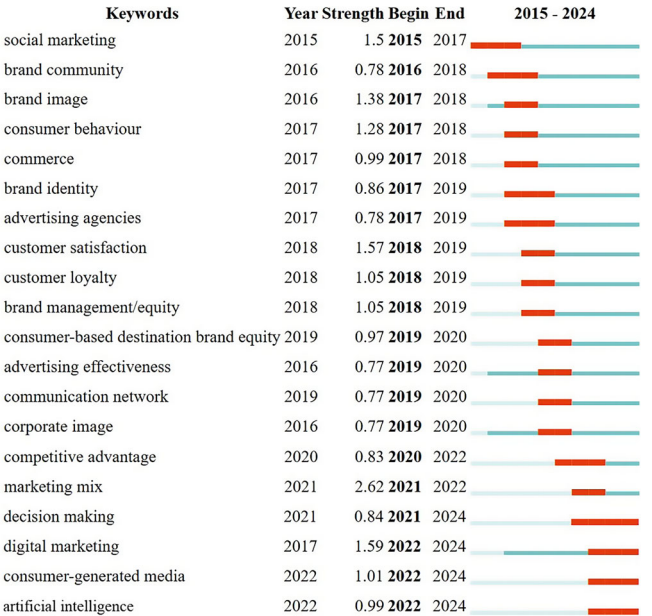


Fig. 6 Top 13 keywords with the strongest citation bursts. The red line represents the burst period of the keyword.

corporate image (2016–2020) also gained traction, reflecting scholarly attention to brand positioning and corporate communications. In recent years, the focus has expanded toward data-driven and digital marketing approaches, with keywords like competitive advantage (2020–2022), consumer-generated media (2022–2024), and artificial intelligence (2022–2024) experiencing significant citation bursts. Digital marketing (2017–2024) has demonstrated sustained academic interest, reinforcing its pivotal role in IMC’s ongoing transformation. This thematic progression highlights a shift from foundational brand management concepts to technology-driven marketing strategies.

Intellectual structure of knowledge. Co-citation network analysis, a widely recognized technique in bibliometric research (Tang et al., 2023), identifies relationships between academic works by examining shared references. This approach reveals key contributions, tracking knowledge evolution, and guiding future research.

Co-citation network of the author: Figure 7 presents a comprehensive portrayal of the most influential author networks and the strength of their interconnections derived from bibliographic data. A total of 20138 cited authors, among whom only 80 achieved a threshold of 25 or more co-citations. Don E. Schultz from Northwestern University stands out as the preeminent figure in this analysis, boasting an impressive co-citation link strength of 8781 and 273 citations. He is closely followed by Philip James Kitchen from ICN Business School, who demonstrates significant influence with a co-citation link strength of 8214 and 245 citations, significantly outpacing other counterparts.

As Fig. 7 illustrated, D.E. Schultz and P.J. Kitchen dominate the foremost cluster, which is highlighted in green. Schultz’s prolific output totals 173 publications, comprising 94 individual works and 79 co-authored studies, while Kitchen had 199 articles, including 53 individual publications. This group includes 25 authors: T.R. Duncan, J.G. Kliatchko, S.E. Moriarty, I. Kim and G. Kerr centered on shared research themes of IMC definition, dimensions, evolution, and social media as a crucial IMC tool. The second cluster represented in red features 29 researchers

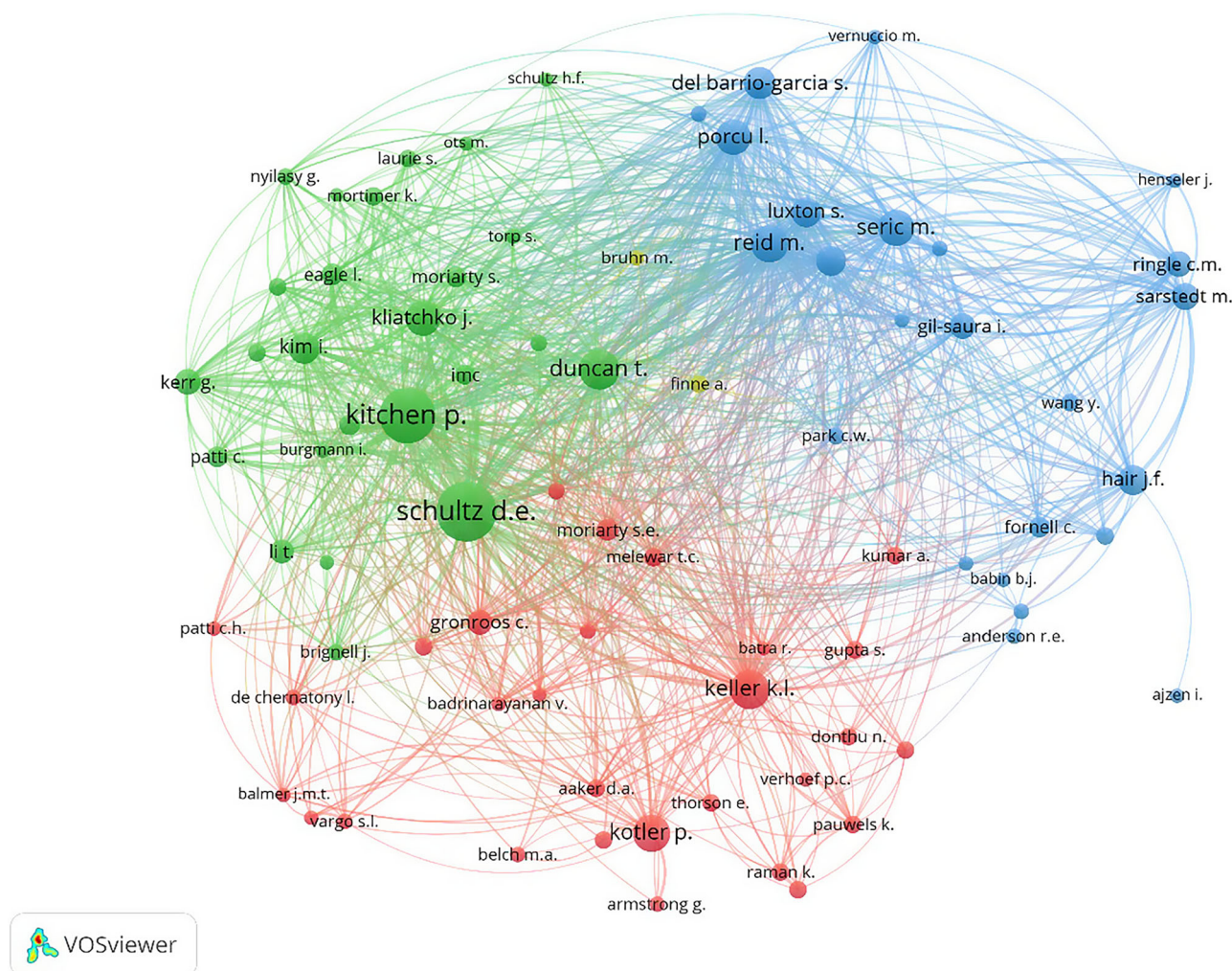


Fig. 7 Co-citation network map of key authors. The different colored clusters represent different authors' interest, with larger names indicating greater influence and more co-citations.

dominated by K.L. Keller and P. Kotler, including C. Gronroos, S.E. Morarity, T.C. Melewar, F. Mulhern, and S. Madhavaram. This group converges around interests in the challenges, synergies, and integration issues of IMC programs and focuses on consumer behavior and customer-centric strategy. The third cluster, depicted in blue, anchored by 24 authors, including M. Reid, M. Seric, L. Porcu, S. Del Barrio-Garcia, and S. Luxton, focused on the IMC practice, measurement, and the critical link between IMC and brand equity. This network underscores the intricate web of collaboration and shared research interests that define the current landscape of IMC scholarship.

The network reveals a threefold structure: (1) theoretical development, (2) strategic application, and (3) empirical validation, demonstrating IMC's evolution from a conceptual framework to a managerial tool. The dense interconnections among clusters suggest cross-fertilization of ideas, indicating that modern IMC research is increasingly multidisciplinary, integrating insights from branding, consumer psychology, and data analytics. The cohesion of these scholarly networks underscores the necessity for future research to bridge conceptual IMC models with empirical testing, particularly in AI-driven and digital IMC landscapes. It reinforces IMC's dynamic progression and highlights key research priorities, including standardized IMC measurement frameworks and adaptive consumer engagement strategies in an evolving digital marketplace.

Co-citation analysis of reference.: There are 15252 references cited by 304 articles. Figure 8 clearly visualizes the central relationships among authors in bibliographic references, highlighting three distinct clusters that encapsulate interconnected research themes in marketing communications. Cluster 1 (red) focuses on definition, measurement, and brand performance, represented by Kliatchko (2008), Duncan et al. (1993, 1998), and Luxton et al. (2015, 2017). It forms the foundation of IMC research, guiding empirical studies on its effectiveness. Cluster 2 (green) highlights the evolution of IMC in the digital environment, particularly its intersection with social media, including the works of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Kietzmann et al. (2011), and Mangold and Faulds (2009). Cluster 3 (blue) addresses the progression of IMC, theoretical debates from Kitchen et al. (2008), and practical challenges proposed by Mulhern (2009) and Kliatchko (2009).

The clustering of references indicates an evolutionary trajectory in IMC research: (1) foundational theories and measurement, (2) adaptation to digital and social media, and (3) ongoing theoretical refinements and practical challenges. The interconnectivity between clusters suggests modern IMC research necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from branding, consumer psychology, and data analytics. This network illustrates the field's intellectual foundations while providing a clear roadmap for understanding its development and future directions.

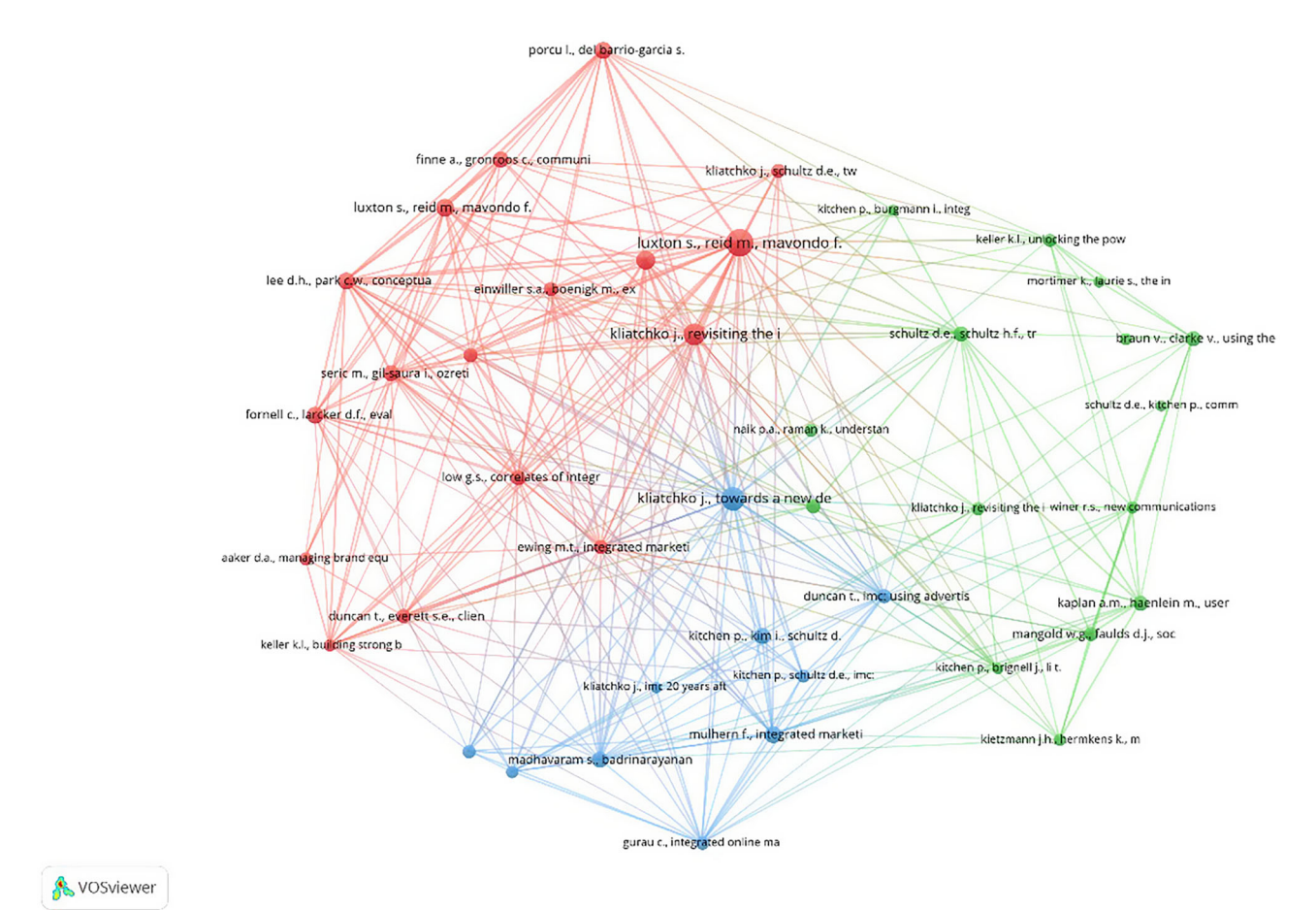


Fig. 8 References co-citation network of the author for documents. It highlights key reference connections in this field, which are demonstrated by the author.

Table 4 The most influential articles in IMC.				
Authors	Years	Titles	Source	co-citations
Luxton S., Reid M., Mavondo F.	2015	Integrated marketing communication capability and brand performance	J. Advert.	34
Kliatchko J.	2005	Towards a new definition of integrated marketing communications (IMC)	Int. J. Advert.	27
Kliatchko J.	2008	Revisiting the IMC construct: a revised definition and four pillars	Int. J. Advert.	25
Reid M.	2005	Performance auditing of integrated marketing communication (IMC) actions and outcomes,	J. Advert.	20
Luxton S., Reid M., Mavondo F.	2017	IMC capability: antecedents and implications for brand performance	Eur. J. Mark.	19
Mulhern F.,	2009	Integrated marketing communications: from media channels to digital connectivity	J. Mark. Commun.	18
Fornell C., Larcker D.F.,	1981	Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error	J. Mark. Res.	17
Lee D.H., Park C.W.,	2007	Conceptualization and measurement of multidimensionality of integrated marketing communications	J. Advert. Res.	17
Porcu L., Del Barrio-Garcia S., Kitchen P.,	2017	Measuring integrated marketing communication by taking a broad organizational approach: the firm-wide IMC scale	Eur. J. Mark.	17
Finne A., Gronroos C.,	2017	Communication-in-use: customer-integrated marketing communication	Eur. J. Mark.	16

Table 4 illustrates the top ten co-citation works representing the most influential works in the IMC field. The study by Luxton, Reid, and Mavondo (2015) in the *Journal of Advertising* stands out as the most influential reference, with 34 co-citations, making a significant contribution by conceptualizing IMC capability and empirically linking it to brand performance, reinforcing the strategic importance of IMC in driving business outcomes. The seminal works by Kliatchko (2005, 2008) collectively receive 52 co-citations and play a foundational role in shaping the conceptualization of IMC by proposing revised definitions and

core pillars that guide academic inquiry and practical implementation. Reid’s (2005) and Luxton et al.’s (2017) research on IMC capability and brand performance demonstrates the growing empirical focus on measuring IMC effectiveness. The high-impact studies reviewed serve as a critical foundation for future research in IMC by establishing a robust theoretical and empirical framework. These works refine foundational definitions, clarify performance metrics, and demonstrate IMC’s measurable impact on marketing effectiveness and brand performance, providing a clear basis for further exploration. By

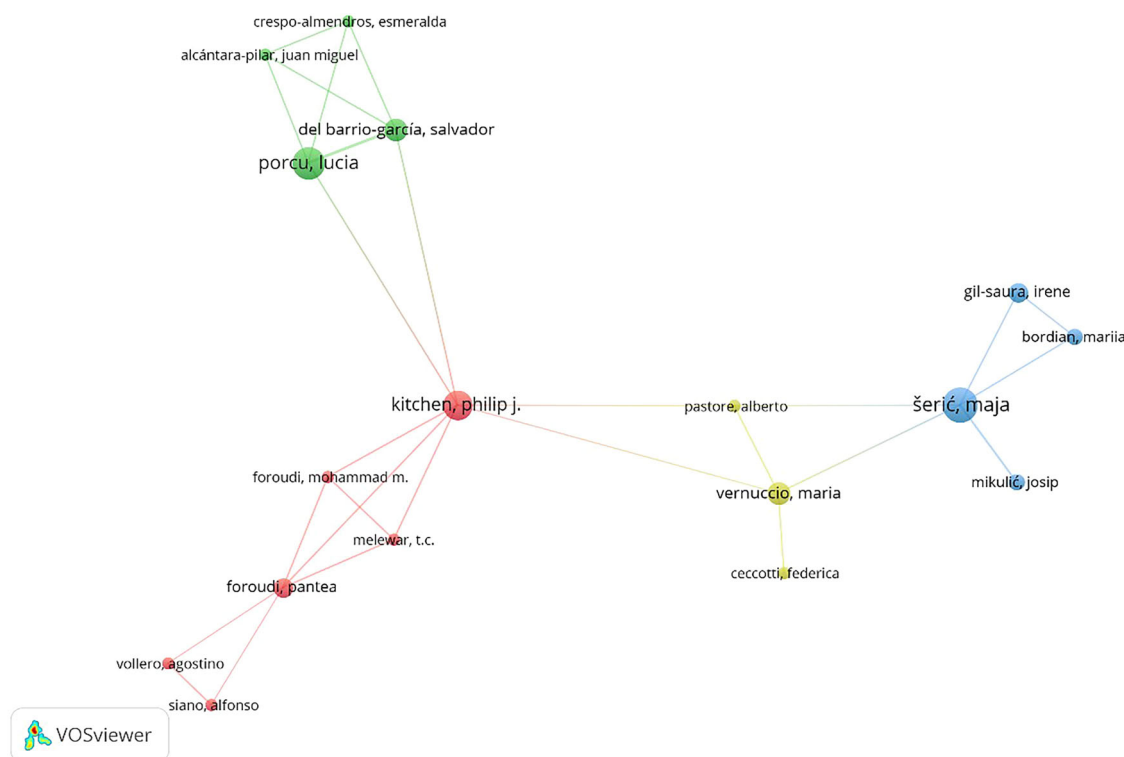


Fig. 9 Network of collaboration between authors. It illustrates the author collaboration network. The bigger the author names the more times they collaborate with others.

bridging the gap between theory and practice, they offer a structured approach for future studies to build upon, particularly in understanding how IMC adapts to evolving market dynamics, digital transformation, and consumer behavior. The insights derived from these studies, such as integrating diverse communication channels and aligning IMC strategies with organizational goals, create a roadmap for advancing the field. Future research can leverage these contributions to explore emerging trends, test new frameworks, and develop innovative methodologies, ensuring IMC's continued relevance and growth as a strategic discipline.

Social structure of knowledge. The analysis of collaboration networks reveals the intricate social structures that define relationships among authors, institutions, and nations, shedding light on the most influential contributors and key research hubs (Cowan & Jonard, 2004).

International collaboration between authors: A total of 704 authors were identified, with an average of 2.66 co-authors per article. Single-author papers accounted for 13.82% (42 articles), while 86.18% (262 publications) had multiple authors. International co-authorship reached 20.39%. Figure 9 visualizes the author collaboration network, highlighting 17 key contributors grouped by collaborative clusters. Lawani's (1986) Collaboration Index (CI) measures co-authorship intensity, offering insights into scholarly collaboration trends. The CI for multi-author articles remained steady at 2.26 from 2015 to 2024, indicating a consistent pattern of joint authorship. This analysis underscores the stable and collaborative nature of IMC research over the past decade.

International collaboration enhances research quality by integrating complementary skills and knowledge from diverse teams (Bozeman & Corley, 2004). Integrating varied perspectives often leads to novel problem-solving approaches and the development of groundbreaking ideas. Figure 10 illustrates the co-authorship networks between countries, which are organized

into seven distinct clusters. By applying a minimum of five papers and two citation filters, 17 countries and territories were highlighted. Leading the global partnerships are the United Kingdom, the USA, and France, with a total link strength (TLS) of 16, 15, and 15, respectively, followed by Spain (12) and Australia (12). Each cluster contains three or more items, with the first cluster (blue) dominated by the United Kingdom, which is characterized by the highest levels of collaboration, with 83 publications and a TLS of 40. This group primarily consists of regions in Europe and India. The second cluster (green) is led by the USA, with 72 papers and a TLS of 25. This cluster includes China, Germany, and South Korea. The third cluster (red) is Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, with 54 publications and a TLS 8. The fourth set of items (purple) includes all European countries and is dominated by Spain, with 45 publications and a TLS of 18. The last cluster (orange) contributed fewer documents and had low link strength.

International research teams are more likely to produce highly cited publications, underscoring the substantial impact of cross-border collaboration on scientific advancement (Wagner et al., 2015). International collaboration in IMC research fosters the integration of diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources, contributing to innovation and knowledge advancement in the field. The analysis highlights global research cooperation patterns, demonstrating that such collaborations extend beyond geographic boundaries, often linking developed and developing nations. These cross-continental partnerships strategically enhance research output, particularly in marketing communications, by facilitating knowledge exchange and strengthening the field's theoretical and practical contributions.

Discussions

This study systematically identified the leading publications, journals, authors, and countries (RQ1) shaping IMC research

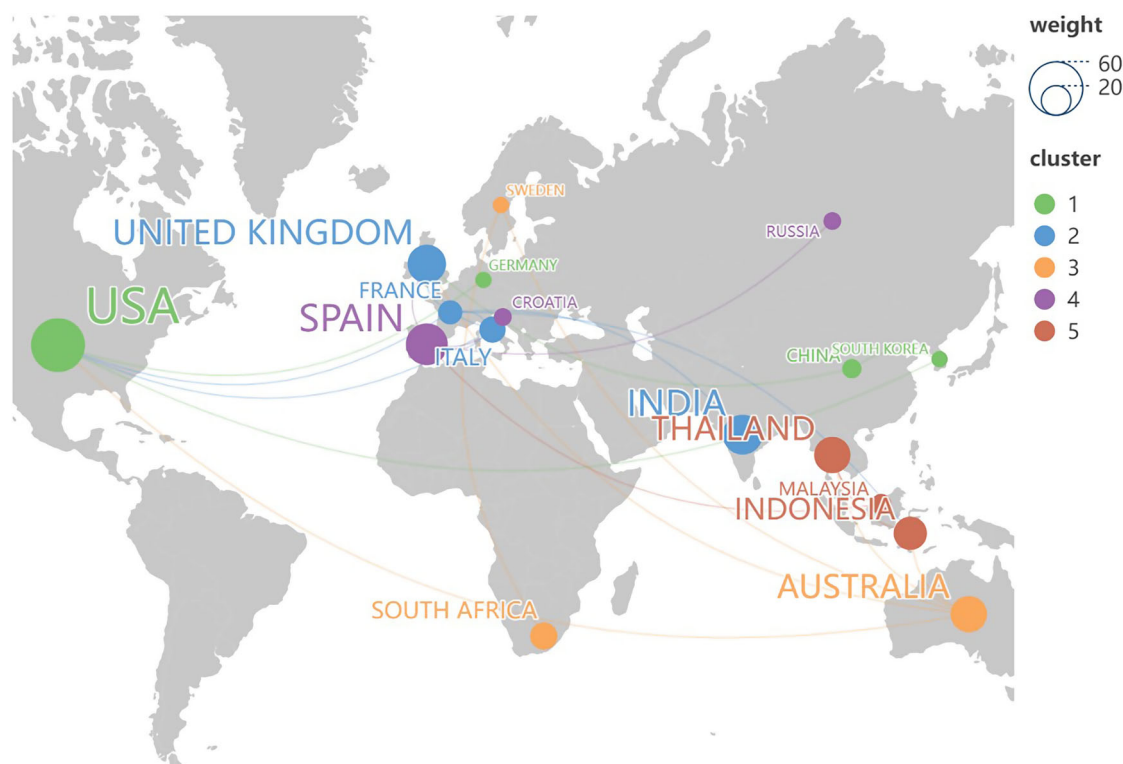


Fig. 10 International connectivity patterns. It shows the co-authorship networks between countries.

from 2015 to 2024. The findings highlight that Kitchen, P.J., Porcu, L., Foroudi, P., Del Barrio-García, S., and Šerić, M are both most influential and productive scholars in the field, contributing significantly to the development of IMC scholarship through highly cited works. Geographically, the United States emerged as the dominant contributor, followed by Spain, India, the United Kingdom, and Australia, with Spain, the U.S., and the U.K. demonstrating strong international research collaborations. The most influential publications include seminal works such as “Integrating Marketing Communications: New Findings, New Lessons, and New Ideas”, “The Impact of Different Touchpoints on Brand Consideration” and “Omni-Channel Marketing, Integrated Marketing Communications, and Consumer Engagement: A Research Agenda” have provided critical insights into the evolving role of IMC across digital and traditional marketing landscapes. Furthermore, the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* stand out as the primary platforms for IMC research, underscoring its interdisciplinary reach across marketing, advertising, and business.

Primary topics covered in IMC research. The thematic evolution of IMC research (RQ2) reflects a dynamic interplay between foundational marketing principles and emerging digital innovations. The analysis of thematic clusters and keyword bursts reveals distinct topic classifications. Motor themes are well-developed and highly influential topics driving IMC scholarship. *Branding* and *advertising* remain central, with sustained attention to *brand equity*, including brand image and management, reinforcing IMC’s role in shaping consumer perceptions and fostering brand trust. The prominence of *consumer behavior* and *customer loyalty* further underscores the strategic focus on audience engagement and long-term relationship-building. Basic and transversal themes serve as the bedrock of IMC research, transcending multiple domains while maintaining strong conceptual

linkages. *Advertising effectiveness* and *corporate image* highlight IMC’s role in reinforcing brand credibility and trust, while *customer satisfaction* signals a growing emphasis on consumer-centric marketing. Corporate communications and CRM integration have also gained relevance, with studies focusing on how firms leverage digital tools to enhance customer engagement, streamline interactions, and drive competitive advantage. Emerging themes reflect the frontiers in IMC research. The rapid advancement of technology has spurred new directions in IMC, particularly in AI-driven marketing and consumer-generated content. *Artificial intelligence* and *consumer-generated media* highlight the increasing reliance on machine learning, automation, and user-driven content in shaping brand narratives. Additionally, *decision-making* has emerged as a focal point, reflecting research on how IMC strategies influence consumer choices in digital environments. The persistent growth of *competitive advantage* as a high-impact keyword suggests that IMC is increasingly considered a strategic lever for business performance. The specialized and peripheral topics explore their application in specific industries or contexts. *Commerce* and *advertising agencies* highlight the role of IMC within business operations and agency strategies, while *social marketing* reflects early research on IMC’s role in promoting social change. The emphasis on *brand community* signals an enduring interest in consumer-brand relationships, particularly within digital and social media ecosystems. IMC research continues to evolve, integrating established branding and consumer behavior concepts with digital, AI-driven, and data-centric strategies. The field is witnessing a convergence between traditional IMC frameworks and technological advancements, ensuring its relevance in contemporary marketing.

Directions for future research. Future research should adopt cross-disciplinary, culturally nuanced, and methodologically diverse approaches to advance IMC scholarship and practice. This section outlines key areas for future research (RQ3) that aim

Table 5 Future research priorities in IMC.			
Research Area	Key Themes	Sample Research Questions (RQs)	Relevant Citations
Cross-Disciplinary Methods	Mixed-method integration, neuro-IMC	RQ1: How can neuroimaging techniques complement social media analytics to measure emotional engagement? RQ2: What frameworks integrate ethnographic insights into AI-driven content optimization?	Lim et al. (2022); De Keyser et al. (2020)
AI & Automation	Ethical AI, synthetic influencers	RQ1: How does algorithmic bias in personalized ads affect trust in diverse demographic groups? RQ2: How does AI-generated content influence consumer trust?	Davenport et al. (2020); Ki et al. (2023)
Global Cultural Dynamics	Cross-cultural UGC, platform localization	RQ1: What strategies balance brand consistency with cultural adaptation in global campaigns? RQ2: How do cultural dimensions (e.g., uncertainty avoidance) influence consumers' brand trust across diverse markets?	Okazaki et al. (2020); Hofstede et al. (2010)
Sustainability Communication	Greenwashing, brand activism	RQ1: What linguistic markers distinguish authentic sustainability narratives from greenwashing? RQ2: How do consumers reconcile brand purpose statements with inconsistent corporate practices?	Coombs (2023); Nielsen (2023)

to bridge current knowledge gaps and provide actionable insights for researchers in the field. Table 5 suggests the further research agenda.

Cross-disciplinary methodological innovation. IMC research remains siloed across marketing, communications, and information technology domains, limiting holistic insights into consumer behavior in interconnected digital ecosystems (Voorveld et al., 2018). Future studies should integrate behavioral science, neuroscience, and computational social sciences methods to develop more holistic frameworks for understanding consumer behavior in increasingly complex digital ecosystems.

Mixed-method approaches: Future research should integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the complexity of consumer engagement. Embedding ethnographic insights into AI-driven IMC enhances interpretability, while combining big data analytics with surveys provides a comprehensive view of consumer behavior and IMC strategy effectiveness. This approach deepens understanding of the impact of technological advancements on IMC and consumer interactions.

Neuro-IMC and emotional engagement: Integrating neuroscience techniques, such as fMRI and EEG, into IMC research presents valuable opportunities for examining subconscious emotional drivers of consumer behavior. Advancing this field requires exploring how neuroimaging can complement social media analytics for real-time emotional engagement measurement and developing frameworks to incorporate neuroscientific insights into emotionally resonant IMC strategies.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration: Interdisciplinary collaboration with scholars in data science, psychology, and cultural studies is crucial for addressing methodological limitations in IMC research. Integrating computational social science methods, such as network analysis and sentiment mining, can enhance insights into cross-cultural consumer interactions. Additionally, behavioral science can inform IMC strategies by designing nudges encouraging sustainable consumer behaviors.

AI-driven IMC strategies and ethical governance. The rapid adoption of AI tools (e.g., generative AI, predictive analytics) demands rigorous investigation into their impact on IMC effectiveness and ethical risks. While studies highlight AI's role in personalization (Davenport et al., 2020), gaps persist in

understanding how algorithmic bias in targeting affects marginalized groups (Martin & Murphy, 2017) or how synthetic influencers reshape brand authenticity (Ki et al., 2023).

AI-powered personalization and automation: Future research should examine AI's role in optimizing cross-channel campaigns while preserving creative authenticity. Investigating how generative AI balances efficiency with originality in content creation is essential. Additionally, exploring AI-driven consumer behavior prediction across cultural contexts can help brands develop hyper-personalized IMC strategies at scale.

Ethical governance and algorithmic bias: The ethical challenges of AI-driven IMC, including data privacy risks, algorithmic bias, and manipulative dark patterns, demand urgent scholarly focus. Research should develop governance frameworks ensuring transparency, fairness, and accountability. Collaboration with data ethics scholars is crucial to mitigate biases in AI-driven targeting and promote responsible AI use in IMC.

Synthetic influencers and brand authenticity: The emergence of synthetic influencers challenges traditional concepts of brand authenticity and trust. Future research should explore consumer perceptions of AI-generated versus human influencers and identify strategies for brands to maintain authenticity in an era of synthetic content.

Digital engagement dynamics in global contexts. Existing research on digital brand-consumer interactions is largely Western-focused. Future studies should examine how cultural values, such as individualism and collectivism, shape engagement behaviors (Okazaki et al., 2020).

Cross-cultural UGC: Future research should examine how cultural dimensions (including individualism, collectivism, and power distance) shape UGC engagement. Comparative studies can also assess how platform-specific affordances influence co-creation behaviors across cultural contexts, providing deeper insights into regional variations in digital interaction.

Global campaign standardization vs. localization: Future research should explore the balance between global campaign standardization and cultural adaptation. Investigating how brands maintain message consistency while adapting to local cultural norms can provide valuable insights into effective cross-cultural IMC strategies.

Sustainability and purpose-driven IMC. Growing consumer demand for sustainability (Nielsen, 2023) and CSR has reshaped consumer expectations, compelling brands to align their IMC strategies with societal and environmental values. This shift necessitates a deeper exploration of how purpose-driven communication can enhance brand trust, loyalty, and long-term consumer relationships.

Authentic sustainability narratives: Future research should examine how brands can authentically communicate sustainability initiatives to mitigate perceptions of greenwashing. Investigating linguistic and visual strategies that distinguish genuine efforts from superficial claims will provide critical insights into effective sustainability communication.

Purpose-driven campaigns and consumer behavior: Future research should examine the effectiveness of purpose-driven IMC campaigns in shaping consumer behavior. Analyzing how sustainability-focused initiatives influence purchase decisions, brand advocacy, and loyalty across diverse demographics and cultures, along with the impact of storytelling and emotional appeals, will provide deeper insights into optimizing purpose-driven marketing strategies.

Theoretical implications. This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by systematically mapping the knowledge structure of IMC research in recent decades (2015–2024), offering valuable insights for scholars, educators, and marketing practitioners. This period is marked by rapid AI-driven innovation and significant shifts in IMC practices previously unexamined. IMC has been a subject of ongoing academic debate, particularly concerning its conceptual foundations, theoretical advancements, and methodological frameworks. Based on the bibliometric analysis of IMC literature published in recent decades, this study comprehensively assesses emerging research directions, shifts in scholarly discourse, and evolving knowledge structure.

The conceptual structure analysis indicates IMC research focuses more on integrated, technology-driven ecosystems. Previous IMC bibliometric analysis emphasized marketing mix, social marketing, and brand equity, reflecting a theoretical orientation toward unified messaging and managing consumer perceptions. However, through the bibliometric analysis of recent ten-year articles, this research reveals a structural reconfiguration, catalyzed by the rapid advancement of digital technologies. Emerging keywords, such as artificial intelligence, consumer-generated media, and competitive advantage, signal an expansion of IMC's theoretical scope. This evolution repositions IMC from a primarily message-oriented discipline to a dynamic organizational capability that operates at the intersection of technological innovation, consumer behavior, and strategic decision-making. The growing emphasis on consumer-generated content and performance-based outcomes highlights the increasing relevance of real-time feedback loops and data-driven optimization, thereby prompting the development of new evaluative metrics and conceptual frameworks within the IMC domain.

The study maps the intellectual structure of IMC through co-citation analysis, reflecting a paradigm shift from viewing IMC as merely a communication approach to recognizing it as a core organizational capability. Earlier co-citation networks centered on seminal papers by Schultz (1993) and Duncan (1998), which framed IMC as a unified messaging discipline. In contrast, current networks highlight management tools, digital transformation, and consumer behavior, particularly aligning IMC strategies with organizational goals. A central theoretical advancement lies in the growing alignment of IMC frameworks with broader

organizational objectives, reflecting a shift from siloed communication tactics to integrated, performance-oriented systems. This evolution demonstrates how modern IMC theory harmonizes operational efficiency with consumer-centric flexibility, driven by technological and behavioral insights.

The bibliometric review identifies disparities in international collaboration patterns. Past research was primarily dominated by North American and European institutions, focusing on Western consumer contexts. Today, the landscape is more decentralized, with rising contributions from Asia-Pacific regions, particularly in studies addressing cultural adaptation, localized AI ethics, and cross-border data governance. This link between developed and developing countries exemplifies how regional nuances reshape IMC's theoretical boundaries.

Practical implications. The insights from this bibliometric analysis of IMC research hold substantial practical relevance for marketers, brand managers, policymakers, and industry leaders, particularly as they navigate an increasingly digital and fragmented media environment. By understanding key research trends and emerging themes, practitioners can refine their IMC strategies to ensure brand messaging remains cohesive, consistent, and interactive across multiple platforms. This alignment is crucial for fostering consumer trust, enhancing engagement, and strengthening brand loyalty in an era where digital interactions significantly influence consumer decision-making.

Leveraging data-driven insights from IMC research enables businesses to achieve precise audience segmentation, personalized communication, and optimized resource allocation, enhancing marketing efficiency and ROI. Marketers can integrate AI tools for content creation, sentiment analysis, and behavior prediction, ensuring adaptive IMC strategies. However, marketers face significant challenges in integrating AI-driven tools, including the need for technological investments and addressing data privacy concerns and algorithmic biases. Additionally, ensuring transparency in AI decision-making, balancing automation with human creativity, and preventing consumer data misuse in hyper-personalized campaigns further complicate AI adoption. To address these issues and enhance IMC effectiveness, marketers and policymakers must prioritize ethical frameworks, transparent practices, and a balanced approach that leverages AI's efficiency while preserving human ingenuity. Insights from this study can guide regulations that foster responsible digital marketing. Identifying key authors, institutions, and research hubs promotes high-impact collaborations, enabling specialized training, cross-sector partnerships, and best practices. Strengthening academia-industry ties ensures IMC strategies remain theoretically sound and practically viable, driving innovation while maintaining compliance.

Conclusion, limitations, and further research

This review advances IMC scholarship by systematically mapping its intellectual structure and identifying key contributors, including influential journals, authors, and countries. Outlining the nomological network of research clusters captures the thematic evolution of IMC over the past decade, spanning digital transformation, business performance, and consumer engagement. These insights serve as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners, enhancing theoretical and applied understanding of IMC.

The consistent growth in IMC research underscores its critical role in shaping technology-driven marketing strategies, fostering customer engagement, and enabling data-driven decision-making. This study highlights three strategic pathways for future research: (1) extending current research clusters by integrating

emerging digital tools and AI applications, (2) addressing gaps identified in recent scholarly contributions, and (3) overcoming methodological and conceptual limitations to enhance IMC's theoretical rigor.

However, this study has limitations that present opportunities for further inquiry. First, the reliance on Scopus may exclude relevant studies indexed in other databases such as Web of Science; future research should adopt a multi-database approach for a more comprehensive analysis. Second, while this study employs quantitative bibliometric methods, integrating advanced qualitative tools such as NVivo and SciMAT, or qualitative analysis methods including content analysis and theoretical framework development, could provide richer insights into content and thematic development. Lastly, future studies could incorporate multilingual research teams or leverage translation tools to include non-English publications, thereby providing a more comprehensive and globally inclusive perspective on the evolution of IMC research. Addressing these gaps will further refine the field's intellectual foundations and enhance its contributions to contemporary marketing discourse.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this research as no data were generated or analysed.

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