Knowledge Landscape of Integrated Marketing Communication: Insights from a Bibliometric Network Analysis

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Abstract. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a strategic imperative in the digital economy, enabling organizations to deliver consistent messages across multiple communication channels while enhancing customer engagement and strengthening brand value. As digital technologies continue to transform marketing practices, understanding the development and intellectual structure of IMC research has become increasingly important for both academics and practitioners. This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to examine the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and global collaboration networks within IMC research published between 2000 and 2025. Utilizing the Scopus database and visualized through Biblioshiny, a total of 168 relevant documents were analyzed to identify the most prolific authors, institutions, countries, sources, and frequently co-occurring keywords. The findings reveal a substantial increase in IMC-related publications over the study period, with major research clusters centered on digital marketing, brand engagement, social media, and customer relationship management. Furthermore, co-authorship analysis demonstrates an increasing trend of international collaboration, particularly among institutions in the United States, Europe, and Southeast Asia. This study provides scholars and practitioners with a systematic understanding of the current IMC research landscape and its emerging trends, offering valuable strategic insights to guide future academic investigations and support evidence-based marketing practices in the rapidly evolving digital era.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Digital Marketing, Research Trends, Bibliometric Analysis

1 Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of modern marketing, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a strategic imperative, enabling brands to deliver consistent and compelling messages across multiple platforms and consumer touchpoints. IMC refers to the strategic coordination of various promotional tools including advertising, public relations, digital marketing, social media, direct marketing, and sales promotion to ensure clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact [1,2]. As the marketing

© The Author(s) 2026
R. Hurriyati et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 10th Global Conference on Business, Management, and Entrepreneurship (GCBME 2025)*, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research 407,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6239-819-1_43

ecosystem undergoes rapid digital transformation, IMC practices have evolved to incorporate advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), chatbots, user-generated content (UGC), and omnichannel platforms, thereby reshaping brand–consumer engagement paradigms [3, 4, 5].

Prior research has examined IMC from multiple perspectives. A stream of studies emphasizes its role in enhancing brand consistency and customer engagement across traditional and digital channels [1,2]. Another body of literature focuses on the integration of emerging technologies, highlighting how AI-driven personalization, social media platforms, and data analytics transform communication effectiveness and customer experience [3,4]. Furthermore, recent research underscores the importance of omnichannel strategies and real-time interaction in shaping seamless consumer journeys and strengthening relational outcomes [6,7]. Despite these advancements, existing studies remain fragmented, often addressing isolated aspects of IMC without offering a comprehensive understanding of its intellectual structure and thematic evolution.

The urgency to consolidate fragmented communication strategies has intensified as consumers increasingly demand personalized, seamless, and interactive brand experiences [8,9]. Consequently, the boundaries between paid, owned, and earned media have become increasingly blurred, positioning IMC not merely as a tactical approach but as a foundational framework for strategic brand management in the digital era [6,7]. In parallel, bibliometric analysis has gained prominence as a robust quantitative approach for mapping the intellectual structure, development trajectory, and emerging trends within a research domain [10,11].

Although bibliometric studies have been widely applied in digital marketing research, most existing works focus on specific sectors such as tourism [12,13], or on particular technological aspects of marketing. As a result, there is a lack of comprehensive bibliometric synthesis that captures the interdisciplinary convergence inherent in IMC, particularly in relation to its conceptual foundations, thematic clusters, and global collaboration patterns. This gap limits the ability of scholars to systematically understand the evolution and future direction of IMC research.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of IMC-related literature indexed in Scopus, covering the period from 2000 to 2024. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) map the intellectual structure of IMC research, (2) identify dominant and emerging thematic clusters, and (3) analyze patterns of global scholarly collaboration. By integrating descriptive and network-based bibliometric techniques, this study provides a holistic overview of the IMC knowledge landscape.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it offers a systematic mapping of the evolution of IMC research, identifying its core intellectual domains and interdisciplinary linkages. Second, it highlights emerging themes such as influencer marketing, personalization, ethical artificial intelligence, and sensory engagement, which are shaping the future of marketing communication. Third, it proposes a forward-looking research agenda to guide future academic inquiry and managerial practice in an increasingly complex and digitalized marketing environment.

In an era where consumer behavior is predominantly shaped by digital interactions, understanding the structure, dynamics, and trajectory of IMC research is essential for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to leverage its strategic potential.

2 Methods

This study adopts a quantitative bibliometric approach to systematically examine the intellectual structure, development trajectory, and thematic evolution of research on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). Bibliometric analysis is widely recognized as a robust methodological approach for mapping scientific knowledge domains, identifying research trends, and uncovering relationships among publications, authors, and keywords [10,11]. By combining performance analysis and science mapping techniques, this study provides both descriptive and relational insights into IMC scholarship.

2.1 Research Design

This research employs a descriptive and network-based bibliometric design. The study integrates:

Performance analysis (e.g., publication trends, prolific authors, leading journals), and Science mapping techniques (e.g., co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence analysis) This dual approach enables a comprehensive understanding of both the productivity and the intellectual structure of IMC research

2.2 Data Source and Search Strategy

The Scopus database was selected as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed journals and its widespread use in bibliometric studies. The search was conducted using the following query string: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("integrated marketing communication" OR "IMC" OR "marketing communication" OR "digital marketing communication" OR "integrated communication") To ensure data relevance and consistency, the search was refined using the following criteria:
Document type: journal articles
Language: English
Publication period: 2000–2025
The initial search yielded 3,764 documents

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To enhance the rigor and relevance of the dataset, a screening process was conducted based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria:
Inclusion criteria:
Articles explicitly addressing IMC or closely related communication strategies
Peer-reviewed journal publications

Studies within marketing, business, and communication domains
Exclusion criteria:
Conference papers, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed documents
Articles not directly related to IMC
Duplicate records
After applying these criteria, a final dataset of 168 articles was retained for analysis.

2.4 Data Extraction and Cleaning

Bibliographic data were exported in BibTeX and RIS formats and processed using Biblioshiny. Data preprocessing was conducted to improve analytical accuracy and consistency, including:
Standardization of author names to resolve inconsistencies
Harmonization of institutional affiliations
Normalization of keywords by merging synonyms and variations
These procedures are critical in bibliometric studies to minimize ambiguity and enhance the reliability of network structures.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted across four key dimensions:
Descriptive Analysis
This analysis evaluates:
Annual publication trends
Most productive authors, journals, and institutions
Co-authorship Analysis
This technique examines collaboration patterns among:
Authors
Institutions
Countries
Co-citation Analysis
This method identifies:
Influential publications
Intellectual foundations of the IMC field
Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis
This analysis uncovers:
Research hotspots
Thematic structures
Emerging research trends
Network visualization and clustering were performed using Biblioshiny's embedded algorithms, which group related items based on co-occurrence frequency and linkage strength. A minimum threshold of five occurrences was applied to ensure analytical robustness and reduce noise in the network.

2.6 Clustering and Visualization Procedure

The clustering algorithm implemented in Biblioshiny groups keywords into thematic clusters based on their co-occurrence relationships. The resulting visualizations include:
Network maps, illustrating relationships and node centrality
Density maps, highlighting areas of research concentration
Overlay maps, showing temporal evolution of themes
These visualization techniques facilitate the identification of dominant, emerging, and peripheral research themes within the IMC domain.

2.7 Reliability and Limitations

To enhance analytical reliability, data cleaning and validation were conducted iteratively to minimize inconsistencies in author names and keyword classification. However, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study relies solely on the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant publications indexed in other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar. Second, despite careful preprocessing, issues related to author disambiguation and keyword normalization may persist. Third, bibliometric analysis focuses on structural patterns and research productivity, rather than evaluating the theoretical depth or methodological rigor of individual studies.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Publication Trends and Growth Trajectory

The analysis shows a significant increase in IMC-related publications from 2020 to 2024, reflecting the growing importance of digital transformation, particularly the integration of social media, artificial intelligence, and data-driven marketing in communication strategies [3,4]. This trend indicates that IMC has evolved from a tactical approach into a central framework within digital marketing ecosystems

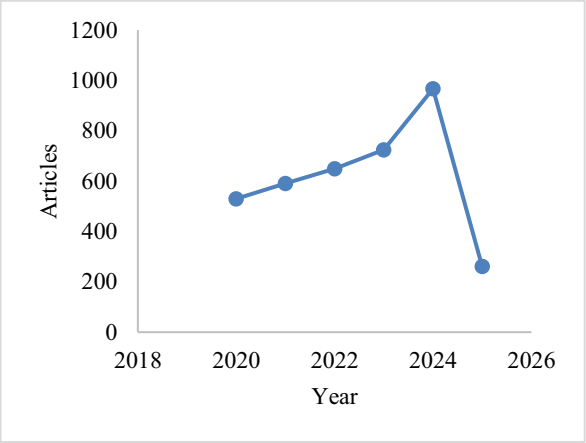

Fig. 1. Annual Publication Output on Integrated Marketing Communication (2020–2025).

These findings align with the rising importance of integrated and omnichannel communication in shaping consumer engagement [6,7], reinforcing IMC's role as a strategic integrator in modern marketing..

3.2 Most Prolific Journals and Citation Impact

IMC research is concentrated in high-impact journals such as Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Marketing Research, and Internet Research, accounting for about 18% of publications, with strong citation influence .[4 ,6] . This concentration reflects solid theoretical anchoring in mainstream marketing, particularly digital engagement and consumer behavior, but also indicates limited interdisciplinary diffusion, suggesting opportunities for broader theoretical integration.

3.3 Author Collaboration and Co-authorship Network

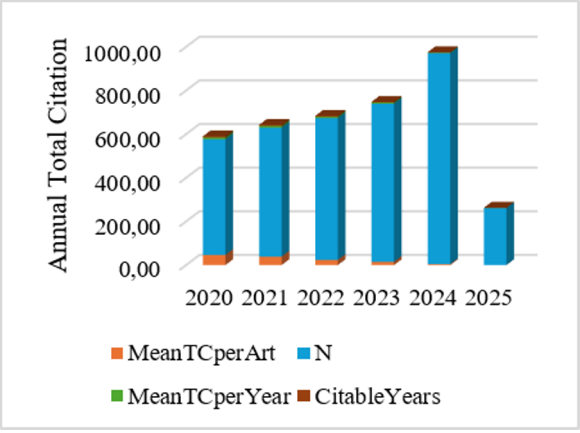

Fig. 2. Annual Total Cititation

3.4 Keyword Co-occurrence and Thematic Clusters

Keyword co-occurrence analysis provides insights into the conceptual structure and thematic evolution of IMC research. The strategic thematic map classifies research topics based on centrality and density, identifying dominant and emerging themes within the field.

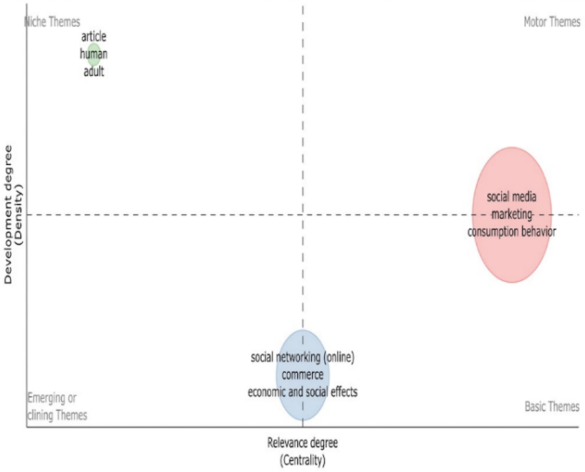

Fig. 3. Strategic Thematic Map of IMC Keywords

The results show that social media, marketing, and consumer behavior constitute the core "motor themes," indicating their central role in IMC research [14]. In contrast, themes such as economic and social effects appear as basic but underdeveloped areas, suggesting opportunities for further theoretical development.

The network visualization further reveals interconnected clusters representing key research domains, including digital marketing, technological integration, and consumer engagement.

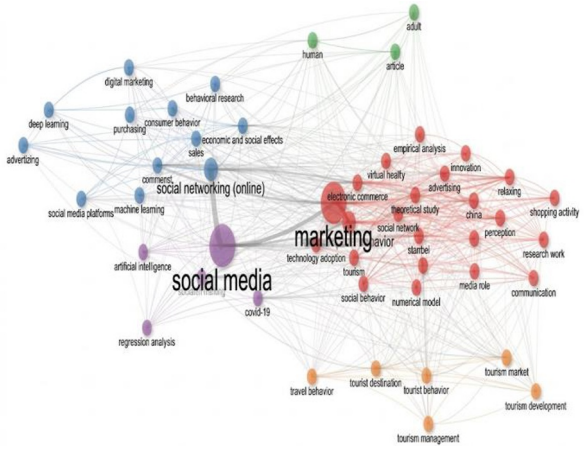

Fig. 4. Keyword Co-occurrence Network Visualization

In particular, the prominence of artificial intelligence and decision-making highlights the growing importance of technology-driven communication strategies [15,3]. Meanwhile, the presence of tourism-related clusters reflects the application of IMC in specific industry contexts [16].

The treemap analysis confirms the dominance of key terms such as “social media” and “marketing,” which together represent a substantial portion of the dataset, emphasizing the centrality of digital engagement in IMC research.



Fig. 5. Treemap of Keyword Frequency

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the shift toward customer-centric and technology-enabled marketing frameworks, where communication strategies are increasingly personalized, interactive, and data-driven.

3.5 Influential Documents and Citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis identifies influential works shaping IMC research, particularly in social media marketing and AI-driven consumer behaviour [1,3]. At the same time, reliance on classical frameworks such as Kotler and Keller indicates continued theoretical grounding. This hybrid structure reflects the shift from traditional communication models toward interactive, technology-enabled systems integrating consumer engagment and digital innovation [6,7].

3.6 Regional and Institutional Contribution

IMC research is dominated by institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, with increasing contributions from Southeast Asia. This distribution reflects

disparities in research capacity, funding, and academic networks [12]. Although emerging regions are more active, citation impact remains concentrated in Western institutions, indicating uneven recognition. These findings highlight the need to incorporate diverse regional perspectives to enhance the inclusivity and contextual relevance of IMC research globally.

4 Conclusion

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), demonstrating its evolution into a multidisciplinary domain shaped by digital transformation. The findings highlight a strong focus on digital engagement, social media, and technology-driven strategies, emphasizing the importance of personalized consumer experiences. IMC research remains anchored in mainstream marketing while incorporating emerging themes such as artificial intelligence and omnichannel communication. However, global contributions remain uneven, with Western dominance in citation impact. The study identifies opportunities for future research in ethical communication and interdisciplinary integration, while offering practical insights for developing more integrated, technology-enabled, and consumer-centric marketing strategies in the digital era.

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