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INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS VALUATION APPROACHES: BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF RECENT YEARS

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a core element of strategic marketing, particularly in the context of digital transformation and increasing demands for accountability. Despite its centrality in practice, scholarly evaluation of IMC effectiveness remains methodologically diverse and theoretically fragmented. This study aims to systematically analyze how IMC effectiveness has been assessed in peer-reviewed academic literature over the past 34 years (1991–2024). The research seeks to identify dominant theoretical perspectives, categorize key measurement tools, and expose gaps in standardization. To achieve these objectives, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix R package. The dataset comprised 410 peer-reviewed articles retrieved from the Scopus database through a structured query focused on IMC effectiveness. The methodology included keyword co-occurrence analysis, co-citation mapping, and trend analysis to reveal thematic clusters, leading contributors, and the intellectual structure of the field. The results identified five major thematic clusters: (1) conceptual foundations, (2) brand equity and consumer behavior, (3) measurement models and return on investment, (4) digital and social media integration, and (5) global and emerging market applications. The findings reveal a progression from conceptual discourse in the 1990s to the emergence of quantitative models and digital engagement frameworks in recent years. Despite this development, a unified evaluation framework remains absent. This study contributes to the advancement of IMC scholarship by synthesizing key trends and offering a foundation for future interdisciplinary research. Practically, the findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, integrative metrics to guide both academic inquiry and managerial decision-making.

Keywords: marketing, communications, effectiveness, engagement, digitalization.

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Интеграцияланған маркетингтік коммуникациялардың тиімділігін бағалау тәсілдері: соңғы жылдардағы библиометриялық талдау

Интеграцияланған маркетингтік коммуникациялар (ИМК) – қазіргі заманғы стратегиялық маркетингтің маңызды бөлігіне айналды. Әсіресе цифрлық өзгерістер үдерісінде және нәтижеге қойылатын талаптар күшейген тұста. Тәжірибеде кеңінен қолданылып жүргенімен, ИМК тиімділігін ғылыми тұрғыда бағалау әдістері қалыптаспаған, теориялық негіздері шашыраңқы күйде қалып отыр. Осы зерттеудің мақсаты – 1991 жылдан 2024 жылға дейінгі аралықта жарық көрген ғылыми еңбектерде ИМК тиімділігі қалай бағаланғанын жүйелі түрде сараптау. Зерттеу барысында негізгі теориялық бағыттарды анықтау, бағалау құралдарын жіктеу және стандарттың жетіспеушіліктерін көрсету көзделді. Аталған мақсаттарға жету үшін R бағдарламасындағы Bibliometrix топтамасы қолданылып, библиометриялық талдау жүргізілді. Эмпириялық дереккөз ретінде Scopus базасынан алынған, ИМК тиімділігіне арналған жүйелі іздеу нәтижесінде іріктелген 410 ғылыми мақала пайдаланылды. Әдістемелік тәсілдерге басты ұғымдардың жиілігін талдау, бірге дәйектеу (ко-цитация) желілерін бейнелеу және тақырыптық бағыттардың даму үдерісін саралау кірді. Бұл тәсіл ИМК зерттеулеріндегі зияткерлік құрылымды, жетекші бағыттар мен негізгі авторларды анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Талдау нәтижесінде бес негізгі тақырыптық жиын топтастырылды: тұжырымдамалық негіздер; бренд пен тұтынушының мінез-құлқы; тиімділікті өлшеу үлгілері мен инвестиция қайтарымы (ROI); цифрлық және әлеуметтік желілерді біріктіру; жаһандық және дамушы нарықтардағы қолдану ерекшеліктері. Зерттеу барысында ИМК тиімділігін бағалау тәсілдерінің уақыт ағымымен қалай өзгергені анықталды. Дегенмен, әлі күнге дейін бірыңғай, жалпыға ортақ бағалау жүйесі қалыптаспағаны байқалды. Бұл зерттеу

ғы ғылыми білімді толықтырып, бағыттарды жүйелеу арқылы теориялық үлес қосады. Сонымен қатар, қаржылық, тұтынушылық және цифрлық көрсеткіштерді біріктіретін, нақты жағдайға бейімделген кешенді бағалау үлгілерін әзірлеудің маңыздылығын көрсетіп, басқарушылық шешім қабылдауда да пайдалы ұсыныстар береді.

Түйін сөздер: маркетинг, коммуникациялар, тиімділік, қатысу, цифрландыру.

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Подходы к оценке эффективности интегрированных маркетинговых коммуникаций: библиометрический анализ последних лет

Интегрированные маркетинговые коммуникации (ИМК) стали неотъемлемым элементом стратегического маркетинга, особенно в условиях цифровой трансформации и растущих требований к измеримости эффективности. Несмотря на широкое применение в практике, академическая оценка эффективности ИМК остаётся методологически разнородной и теоретически фрагментированной. Целью настоящего исследования является систематический анализ для последующего определения подходов к оцениванию эффективности ИМК в рецензируемой научной литературе за последние 34 года (1991–2024). Исследование направлено на выявление ведущих теоретических подходов, классификацию ключевых инструментов оценки и определение пробелов в стандартизации. Для достижения поставленных целей был проведён библиометрический анализ с использованием пакета Bibliometrix для языка R. В качестве эмпирической базы использовались 410 рецензируемых научных статей, отобранных из базы данных Scopus по целевому поисковому запросу, ориентированному на эффективность ИМК. Методология включала анализ со-встречаемости ключевых слов, анализ цитирования и анализ динамики тематических направлений, что позволило выявить ведущие исследовательские кластеры, ключевых авторов и интеллектуальную структуру области. Результаты анализа выявили пять основных тематических кластеров: (1) концептуальные основы, (2) брендинг и поведение потребителей, (3) модели измерения и оценка рентабельности (ROI), (4) интеграция цифровых и социальных медиа, (5) применение ИМК в глобальном и развивающемся контексте. Несмотря на значительный прогресс, было выявлено, что универсальная модель оценки ИМК пока не сформирована. Исследование вносит вклад в развитие научной базы по ИМК, предлагая систематизированное понимание ключевых тенденций и формируя основу для будущих междисциплинарных исследований. Практическая значимость заключается в необходимости применения контекстуально адаптированных и интегративных метрик для академических и управленческих целей.

Ключевые слова: маркетинг, коммуникации, эффективность, вовлеченность, цифровизация.

Introduction

Integrated Marketing Communication (hereinafter – IMC) emerged in the beginning of 1990s due to the increasingly shattered media landscape and the need for coherent brand messaging across multiple platforms (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999: 21–38). Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) involves the purposeful coordination of a company's distinct promotional activities such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, and digital communication in order to create a consistent and reinforcing brand message across all channels (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998: 1–13). Researchers have suggested that integration enhances consumer recognition, improves message clarity, and contributes to the development of stronger relationships with stakeholders (Kitchen, 2017: 11–30; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000: 17–21).

As IMC gained academic and practical popu-

larity, a growing body of research explored how to measure and evaluate its effectiveness in recent years. Initial theoretical frameworks primarily aimed to demonstrate the conceptual value of IMC (Caywood & Ewing, 1991: 295–299). In recent decades, scholars have developed a variety of metrics and analytical frameworks, spanning from econometric modeling of media synergy (Naik & Raman, 2003: 375–388) to measurement scales for IMC implementation at the firm level (Porcu et al., 2017: 692–718). Although substantial efforts have been made, developing standardized and universally accepted IMC effectiveness valuation tools remains an ongoing challenge (Kliatchko, 2008: 133–160; Šerić, 2016: 577–597).

Although several narrative reviews and meta-analyses of IMC have been conducted (e.g., Luxton et al., 2015: 37–46; Madhavaram, 2005: 69–80; Schultz & Patti, 2009: 75–84), the field still lacks

a comprehensive bibliometric analysis that specifically addresses the evaluation of effectiveness. Specifically, this research systematically delineates the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of IMC effectiveness literature through advanced bibliometric techniques, including keyword co-occurrence analysis, citation and co-citation analysis, and temporal trend mapping. While previous reviews predominantly concentrate on publication growth trajectories, prominent authors, and topic overviews within the IMC domain, they frequently restrict their analysis to select specific journals or geographic regions. Therefore, to address this gap, the present study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of IMC research published over the past 34 years, using the Scopus database and the Bibliometrix R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017: 959–975).

The primary objectives are to identify key publication trends, leading authors, influential institutions, and core journals within the IMC domain. The study also examines citation dynamics and co-citation networks to uncover the intellectual structure underpinning IMC effectiveness research. In addition, it highlights dominant themes related to effectiveness measurement tools such as return on investment (ROI), brand equity, synergy modeling, and consumer engagement. Finally, it explores emerging areas of interest, including digital IMC, consumer empowerment, and applications in emerging markets, which represent promising avenues for future investigation.

By offering a systematic, quantitative overview of the IMC literature, this study contributes valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners aiming to enhance evaluation methodologies and advance theoretical understanding of how integrated communication strategies influence market outcomes. The subsequent sections outline the research methodology, present key findings, and propose future research directions.

Literature review

The concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is grounded in the understanding that various promotional tools such as advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, and personal selling should be strategically aligned to ensure a consistent and cohesive brand message. Early scholarly work emphasized the transition from product-focused, one-way advertising to a holistic framework centered on consumer engagement

(Duncan & Moriarty, 1998: 1–13). This evolution was spurred by the fragmentation of media channels and the realization that an undifferentiated, mass communication approach often falls short of delivering sustained brand equity or consumer loyalty (Keller, 2009: 139–155).

Subsequent studies refined this premise by highlighting IMC's strategic function. Rather than viewing IMC merely as a tactical toolset, scholars argued for its integration at the highest organizational levels, linking marketing objectives to corporate goals and embedding IMC principles into cross-functional processes (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999: 21–38; Porcu et al., 2017: 692–718). Adopting this strategic stance positions IMC as a dynamic, iterative process wherein marketing communications do not operate in silos but are continually informed by consumer feedback, competitive analysis, and brand positioning (Kliatchko, 2008: 133–160). Such an approach has proven particularly relevant in contemporary markets, characterized by the rapid proliferation of digital media and the emergence of consumer-centric platforms.

Yet, the diversity of channels and touchpoints complicates IMC implementation, making it essential to develop frameworks that account for stakeholder collaboration, message consistency, and adaptive brand storytelling. As a result, modern IMC discourse increasingly intersects with broader organizational strategies, such as brand orientation, market orientation, and the evolving notion of omnichannel management. This interdisciplinary perspective underscores the multifaceted nature of IMC, positioning it not merely as a communication tactic but as a central tenet in shaping consumer perceptions, driving engagement, and building brand value over time (Luxton et al., 2015: 37–46).

Despite the widespread endorsement of IMC as a best practice, measuring its effectiveness has been fraught with complexity. Traditional performance metrics, such as reach and frequency, struggle to capture the nuanced interactions consumers have with brands across online and offline platforms (Kitchen et al., 2008: 531–546). Researchers have turned to diverse qualitative and quantitative indicators ranging from brand recall and purchase intention to engagement metrics on social media to encapsulate how IMC efforts influence consumer behaviors (Eagle et al., 2007: 956–970).

A prominent debate revolves around the use of financial vs. non-financial metrics for gauging IMC success. While financial metrics like return on investment (ROI) offer straightforward comparisons

for budget allocation, they can oversimplify complex consumer journeys (Naik & Raman, 2003: 375–388). Conversely, non-financial or consumer-centric metrics (e.g., brand equity, customer satisfaction, advocacy) shed light on deeper attitudinal or relational outcomes, yet may lack immediate managerial salience if they do not translate readily into short-term financial returns (Keller, 2009: 139–155). Consequently, IMC researchers advocate a hybrid measurement strategy, one that balances ROI-based models with robust consumer insight data to form a comprehensive evaluation of campaign performance and future brand potential (Smith, 2006: 564–579).

Moreover, recent scholarship emphasizes the role of digital analytics in refining IMC effectiveness measurement (Leeftang, 2014: 1–12). Tools such as multi-touch attribution models, social listening, and sentiment analysis enrich marketing dashboards by unveiling real-time shifts in consumer engagement. However, these approaches also introduce analytical challenges related to data integration, modeling sophistication, and privacy considerations. Consequently, researchers have increasingly highlighted the necessity of systematic frameworks that harmonize traditional performance indicators with newly available digital metrics, ensuring a more accurate portrayal of IMC's overall impact.

Valuation in marketing communications broadly encompasses the frameworks and models that aim to quantify the returns and strategic benefits derived from integrated campaigns. Traditional valuation tools rely heavily on measuring immediate outcomes such as sales lift or market share changes, often through econometric models or controlled experiments. However, such short-term metrics may overlook the long-term effects of IMC on brand equity, consumer loyalty, and other enduring intangible assets, which are becoming increasingly relevant in saturated and highly competitive market environments (Keller, 2009: 139–155).

In response, scholars have advanced a variety of holistic valuation strategies that incorporate brand-building, consumer engagement, and market orientation factors (Porcu et al., 2017: 692–718; Luxton et al., 2015: 37–46). For instance, brand equity models integrate consumer perceptions (awareness, associations, loyalty) with financial indicators (price premiums, revenue growth) to offer a balanced view of communication effectiveness (Keller, 2009: 139–155). Other scholars advocate for the use of integrated dashboards or scorecards, highlighting the importance of cross-functional collaboration and

alignment with overarching organizational goals (Smith et al., 2006: 564–579). This aligns with the notion of “IMC capability,” which posits that organizations adept at orchestrating integrated campaigns and leveraging internal synergies see higher brand performance and market impact (Luxton et al., 2015: 37–46).

Yet, despite these advancements, a universal consensus on the most robust valuation paradigm remains elusive (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015: 34–39). Distinct industry contexts, regional market norms, and technological infrastructures often necessitate bespoke measurement approaches. For example, direct-to-consumer brands may prioritize lifetime customer value metrics, while B2B firms might lean on lead generation and conversion rates. Similarly, consumer-packaged goods companies may emphasize media mix modeling, whereas technology start-ups rely on agile analytics or real-time attribution. This methodological heterogeneity underscores the growing importance of knowledge synthesis and interdisciplinary collaboration in refining valuation tools for IMC.

Considering the breadth and complexity of IMC research, a systematic approach to aggregating and evaluating this body of literature becomes paramount. Traditional narrative reviews, although insightful, may be susceptible to subjective biases and may inadvertently exclude pivotal studies due to the sheer volume of publications (Zupic & Čater, 2015: 429–472). Bibliometric methods, by contrast, employ quantitative techniques to uncover patterns in scholarly output, mapping citation networks, co-authorship structures, and thematic clusters within large datasets (Donthu et al., 2021: 739–759).

For the IMC effectiveness domain, a bibliometric analysis offers a means to chart the intellectual evolution of key topics, pinpoint the most influential works and authors, and identify any emergent areas that may signal future research directions (Kitchen et al., 2008: 531–546). By transforming extensive publication data into visual and statistical representations, this approach can uncover underlying connections between studies, providing insights into how various subthemes such as measurement techniques, the impact on brand equity, and digital IMC are interrelated. Moreover, bibliometric findings can guide practical recommendations by showing whether certain valuation methods have been rigorously tested across diverse contexts or if research efforts remain concentrated in limited sectors (Zupic & Čater, 2015: 429–472).

Thus, the gap in current IMC scholarship lies not merely in advancing new theories or measurement models but in comprehensively mapping and critically assessing the existing literature. A bibliometric review can address this shortfall, providing an evidence-based foundation on which both academics and practitioners can build. In doing so, it responds directly to calls for greater methodological rigor and interdisciplinary integration in IMC research, while also offering strategic direction for future empirical and conceptual studies.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate how the effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has been examined within the academic literature over the past three decades. The research design was structured into three principal phases: data collection, data refinement, and bibliometric analysis. In the initial phase, relevant scholarly publications were extracted from the Scopus database using a carefully formulated search query aimed at capturing literature focused on IMC and its evaluation. The second phase involved the systematic cleaning and preparation of the dataset, which included the elimination of duplicates, standardization of author names, harmonization of keywords, and validation of thematic relevance. The final phase consisted of an in-depth bibliometric analysis incorporating descriptive statistical summaries, co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence mapping, and collaboration network evaluation. Each phase is discussed in detail in the subsections that follow.

The bibliographic dataset was obtained from the Scopus database and encompasses scholarly publications spanning the period from 1991 to 2024. The year 1991 was selected as the starting point because it marks the formal emergence of IMC as a distinct topic in scholarly discourse. Notably, 1991 saw the first comprehensive study and academic discussions of IMC. For example, Caywood and Ewing's (1991) work introduced IMC as a new marketing communications paradigm. Subsequent literature reviews and bibliometric analyses explicitly identify 1991 as the inception of IMC research, underscoring that meaningful academic inquiry into IMC begins in the early 1990s. By using 1991 as the baseline, the analysis captures the full evolution of IMC scholarship from its very inception. Meanwhile, the cut-off at 2024 was chosen to include the most recent publications and thus

encompass roughly three decades of development. This end-point aligns with the approach of prior comprehensive IMC reviews that span multiple decades up to the present era. In sum, the 1991–2024 timeframe enables a longitudinal overview from IMC's introduction in academia through to its contemporary advancements, ensuring the analysis reflects both the foundational work and the latest trends in the field.

Consistent with prior reviews (e.g., Al Mamun, 2022: 4–27), the utilized search queries incorporate terms such as “Integrated Marketing Communication”, “integrated marketing communications”, “IMC effectiveness”, and “IMC measurement”. Therefore, to identify the most relevant literature, the research applied a search string KEY (“Integrated Marketing Communication” OR “integrated marketing communications” OR “IMC effectiveness” OR “IMC measurement”). The inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly book chapters. The initial search resulted in the retrieval of 449 bibliographic records.

During the research, the Bibliometrix R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017: 959–975) was used to remove duplicates and standardize author names and keywords. In total, 39 records were excluded due to duplication or irrelevance, resulting in a final dataset of 410 documents. Bibliometrix functions were used to unify variations in author names (e.g., “Kitchen, P.J.” and “Phillip J. Kitchen”), to merge synonymous keywords (“Integrated Marketing Communication” vs. “IMC”), and to extract citation and reference metadata.

In accordance with established guidelines in bibliometric scholarship, a series of complementary analyses was conducted to systematically address the research objectives:

Descriptive Analysis: The analysis began by investigating longitudinal publication trends to assess the temporal growth trajectory of IMC scholarship. Annual publication frequencies were calculated to reveal patterns in research output over time, while aggregated yearly citation counts were used to evaluate the evolving scholarly influence of the field. This examination offers insight into whether IMC research has reached a saturation point or continues to expand. In addition, the study identified the most prolific contributors at the author, institutional, and national levels. Measures such as total citation counts and h-index values were employed to evaluate both productivity and scholarly impact within the IMC literature.

Co-citation Analysis: To examine the intellectual structure of IMC effectiveness research, a co-citation analysis was conducted using the reference lists of 410 publications. A co-citation matrix was developed, where each cell reflected how frequently two documents were cited together. Based on this matrix, a network analysis was performed, and the Louvain community detection algorithm was applied to identify cohesive thematic clusters. A hierarchical clustering dendrogram based on co-citation distances further supported the interpretation of cluster boundaries. Key publications within each cluster were reviewed to determine thematic focus. For example, a cluster including Schultz (1997) and Duncan and Moriarty (1998) was interpreted as representing the conceptual foundations of IMC. The resulting clusters reveal intellectual sub-structures in the field, illustrating how scholars tend to co-cite foundational works around shared topics or theoretical perspectives. Clusters of highly co-cited papers indicated thematic lines of inquiry, particularly those on IMC effectiveness.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis: To identify prevailing research themes and emerging areas of inquiry within the IMC literature, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed. A co-occurrence network was constructed in which nodes represented standardized keywords and edges denoted their joint appearance within individual publications. To enhance interpretability and reduce noise, the network was pruned by excluding keywords below a predefined frequency threshold. The association strength normalization technique was applied, followed by the implementation of the Louvain algorithm to detect clusters of frequently co-occurring terms. Each resulting cluster delineates a thematic domain within the broader IMC research landscape. For instance, a grouping of terms such as “brand equity,” “consumer engagement,” and “psychology” points toward a research stream focused on consumer behavior and brand-related outcomes in integrated marketing contexts. Furthermore, a two-dimensional thematic map was produced via correspondence analysis using the Bibliometrix package, enabling the classification of clusters based on their centrality (indicating importance within the field) and density (reflecting internal cohesion and development). This mapping facilitated the categorization of themes as motor themes (central and mature), niche themes (specialized but peripheral), and emerging or declining themes (low centrality and density, suggesting early-stage or diminishing interest). Owing to spatial constraints, the findings from

the cluster analysis are primarily conveyed through narrative interpretation and tabular summaries.

Collaboration Analysis: The study also explored patterns of scholarly collaboration by analyzing co-authorship networks and geographic distribution. Mapping co-authorship relationships enabled the identification of interconnected research communities and the degree of collaboration among individual scholars. In parallel, a geographical analysis was conducted to assess regional contributions to IMC effectiveness research and to determine whether scholarly activity is concentrated within specific national contexts or dispersed across international partnerships. Although not the primary focus of the study, examining the structure and density of collaborative networks offers valuable contextual insight. For example, the presence of a tightly connected cluster of researchers within a single country may suggest the existence of a coordinated national agenda or institutional emphasis on IMC effectiveness.

All analyses were conducted using R (version 4.0), with the majority of computations performed through the Bibliometrix package. Core functions included biblioAnalysis, networkPlot, and conceptualStructure for thematic mapping. VOSviewer (version 1.6) was also utilized to validate network visualizations and assess the consistency of clustering results. Clustering parameters, including the resolution value in the Louvain algorithm and the number of clusters, were selected based on established methodological conventions and refined through iterative testing to enhance interpretability. For example, several resolution levels were evaluated to prevent excessive fragmentation, which ultimately yielded five meaningful keyword clusters. Quality control procedures were applied, such as verifying that key outcomes, including the identification of the most frequently cited publications, were not disproportionately affected by outliers or anomalies. Additionally, checks ensured that the keyword normalization process preserved conceptual distinctions between terms. The results of these procedures are presented in the next section, accompanied by visual outputs such as network diagrams and dendrograms, along with summary tables. Together, these methods provide a transparent and replicable overview of the IMC effectiveness literature.

Results and discussion

Between 1991 and 2024, the corpus of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) literature has exhibited a sustained upward trajectory, marked

by pronounced accelerations in the early 2000s and again in the late 2010s. Quantitative analysis reveals that the mean annual output during 2001–2005 increased by approximately 60 percent relative to the preceding quinquennial interval, reflecting the formalization and institutional consolidation of IMC as a distinct research domain (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000: 17–21). The most dramatic expansion occurred after

2010, driven in part by the proliferation of digital marketing channels and a burgeoning scholarly focus on multi-channel integration frameworks (Batra & Keller, 2016: 122–145; Mangold & Faulds, 2009: 357–365). According, to Figure 1, the annual volume of IMC-related publications from 1991 to 2024 demonstrates a generally upward trend, marked by two distinct periods of accelerated growth.

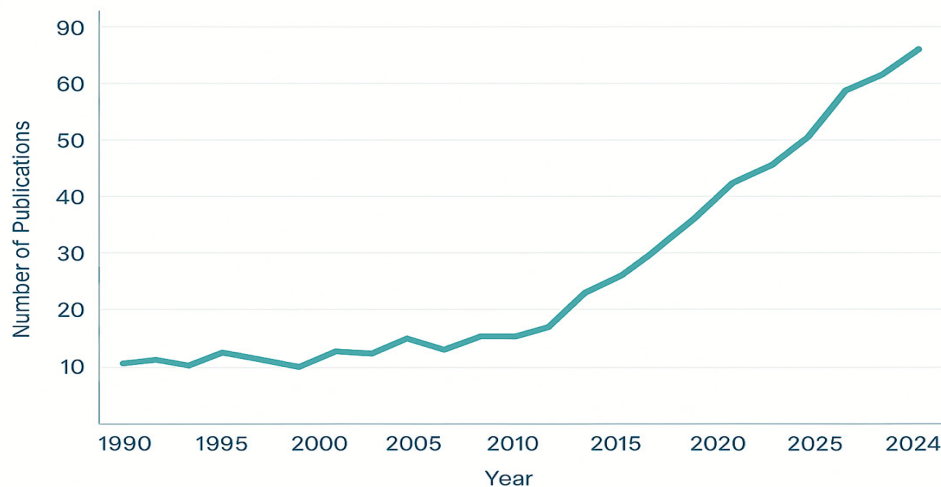


Figure 1 – Annual publication output on IMC from 1991 to 2024

Note – compiled by authors based on Scopus database

The most substantial increase in IMC-related publications occurred during the 2010s, with a marked acceleration beginning after 2010. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of publications approximately doubled relative to the 2006–2010 period, followed by a continued upward trajectory from 2016 onward. By 2021, the annual output had expanded by an order of magnitude compared to the early 1990s. This surge corresponds with the broader digital transformation, during which the integration of social and mobile media into marketing communication strategies became a critical area of inquiry. In total, 410 publications were included in the analysis, with more than half appearing within the last decade, underscoring a sustained and growing scholarly focus on IMC effectiveness.

In parallel with the rise in publication volume, citation counts have also increased, although they exhibit a strong concentration around a limited number of seminal contributions. The mean citation

count per document within the dataset is approximately 20; however, this figure is substantially influenced by a small subset of highly cited publications (see Table 1).

Table 1 presents the five most frequently cited publications within the analyzed corpus of IMC research. Leading the list is the influential article by Mangold and Faulds (2009), which has amassed over 4,700 citations and is widely recognized for its pivotal role in incorporating social media into the IMC conceptual framework. Other highly cited works include Batra and Keller (2016), which offers a reconceptualization of IMC in the context of digital marketing, and Naik and Raman (2003), whose econometric model of media synergy serves as a foundational reference in empirical assessments of IMC effectiveness. Seminal studies connecting IMC to brand-related outcomes, such as Madhavaram et al. (2005) on brand equity and Luxton et al. (2015) on IMC capabilities and organizational perfor-

mance, complete the top five. The visibility and impact of these publications reflect the field's emphasis on digital integration and methodological rigor in measuring communication outcomes. To further contextualize the evolution of IMC scholarship, it is

important to identify the most prolific contributors to the literature. Examining these key authors provides insight into dominant research agendas, theoretical orientations, and methodological trends that have shaped the discourse over time (see Table 2).

Table 1 – Top five cited IMC publications from 1991 to 2024

Study	Topic	Total Citations
Mangold & Faulds (2009, Business Horizons)	Social media's role in IMC	4736
Batra & Keller (2016, Journal of Marketing)	Reframing IMC in a digital era	1242
Naik & Raman (2003, Journal of Marketing Research)	Synergy in multimedia communications	842
Madhavaram et al. (2005, Journal of Advertising)	IMC & brand identity; brand equity link	726
Luxton et al. (2015, Journal of Advertising)	IMC capability & brand performance	433
Note – compiled by authors based on Scopus database		

Table 2 – Top Five Most Prolific Authors in IMC Research

Author	Publications	Citations	Key Contributions
Philip J. Kitchen	15	430	IMC theory & definitions; global IMC adoption
Don E. Schultz	10	520	Early IMC pioneer; measurement & accountability
Marija Šerić	9	125	Empirical IMC trends; tourism/hospitality IMC
Lluís Porcu	8	105	IMC measurement scales; organizational IMC
Michael Reid	7	295	IMC & brand orientation; market orientation
Note – compiled by authors based on Scopus database			

Table 2 presents the five most prolific authors in the field of IMC, based on publication volume, total citations, and thematic focus. Philip J. Kitchen and Don E. Schultz occupy the top positions, which aligns with their widely recognized status as foundational figures in the development of IMC theory and practice. Kitchen, with 15 publications, and Schultz, with 10, contributed extensively to the early conceptualization of IMC and its diffusion across international contexts. Schultz, often in collaboration with Kitchen, also played a pivotal role in advocating for the standardization of IMC evaluation, emphasizing the importance of return on investment (ROI) metrics and performance-based accountability. Their scholarly impact is further reflected in their citation metrics, with Kitchen's contributions accumulating approximately 430 ci-

tations and Schultz's works nearing 520 within the dataset. These figures underscore their enduring influence on the intellectual and methodological evolution of IMC research.

The bibliometric investigation identified a set of distinct thematic clusters that delineate the intellectual contours of the IMC effectiveness literature. Two complementary analytical techniques were employed to uncover these patterns: a keyword co-occurrence analysis, which highlights the principal research themes based on term frequency and association, and a co-citation analysis, which reveals the foundational works and intellectual linkages underlying those themes. The findings from both methods are examined in parallel to provide an integrated overview of the field's conceptual and theoretical development (see Figure 2).

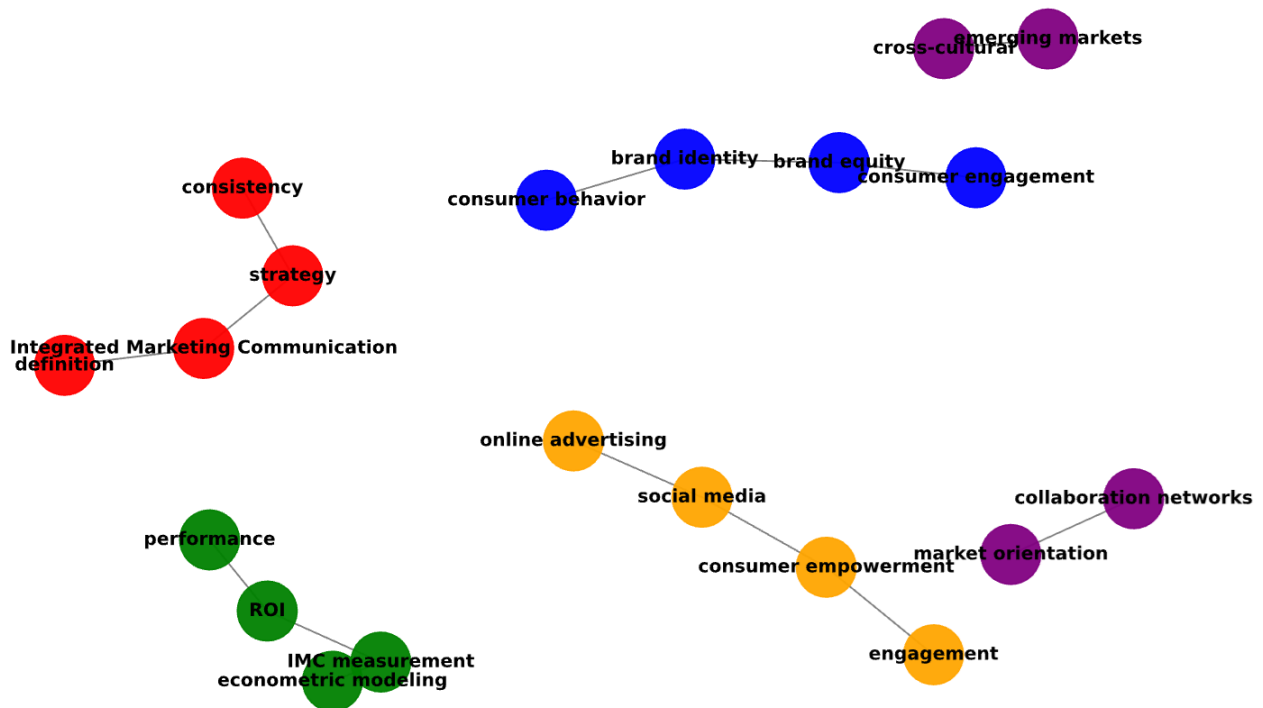


Figure 2 – Keyword co-occurrence network of IMC research
Note – compiled by authors

Figure 2 displays the keyword co-occurrence network, in which nodes represent frequently occurring terms, and the colors indicate clusters of keywords that commonly appear in conjunction across the literature. The analysis revealed five primary thematic clusters, each reflecting a distinct area of focus within IMC research. Specifically, the red cluster pertains to “Conceptual Foundations and the Definition of IMC”, the blue cluster captures themes related to “Branding and Consumer Psychology”, the green cluster is associated with “Measurement and Evaluation”, the orange cluster highlights topics within “Digital IMC and Interactive Media”, and the purple cluster reflects scholarship on “Global and Emerging Markets”. These thematic groupings emerged from both the co-occurrence network structure and the supporting bibliometric evidence.

Cluster 1: Conceptual Foundations and the Definition of IMC (Red nodes).

This cluster is centered around broad strategic terminology, including “Integrated Marketing Communication”, “strategy”, “definition”, and “consistency”. It reflects a foundational body of scholarship aimed at conceptualizing IMC, articulating its theoretical underpinnings, and establishing the rationale for integration across communication chan-

nels. These contributions have played a critical role in shaping the discourse and providing a basis for subsequent empirical investigations into IMC effectiveness.

Cluster 2: Branding and Consumer Psychology (Blue nodes).

This thematic group is characterized by recurring terms such as “brand equity,” “brand identity,” “consumer engagement,” and “consumer behavior.” It represents a body of literature that links IMC to consumer psychology and brand management. Studies within this cluster frequently explore how integrated communication strategies influence brand perception and consumer relationships. Research designs often include experimental methods, survey-based analyses, and brand equity modelling, with a focus on assessing IMC success through consumer attitudes, behavioral responses, and branding outcomes.

Cluster 3: Measurement and Evaluation (Green nodes).

This cluster encompasses terms such as “performance”, “return on investment (ROI)”, “IMC measurement”, “econometric modeling”, and “social media metrics”. It reflects a thematic concentration on the formulation and use of quantitative methods

for evaluating the effectiveness of IMC. Research in this area frequently introduces structured evaluation frameworks, including financial indicators, scoring systems, and customer equity metrics. These studies commonly draw on empirical data to demonstrate how communication integration contributes to measurable outcomes. Overall, this cluster represents the methodological foundation of IMC effectiveness research.

Cluster 4: Digital IMC and Interactive Media (Orange nodes).

Key terms in this cluster include “social media”, “online advertising”, “digital”, “consumer empowerment”, and “engagement”. While the term “engagement” overlaps with Cluster 2, its application here pertains specifically to digital environments. This cluster encapsulates the literature focused on integrating IMC across digital platforms, emphasizing two-way communication and the participatory role of consumers. Topics include harmonizing traditional and digital messaging, leveraging user-generated content, and addressing challenges of consistency across digital touch-

points. The presence of “consumer empowerment” suggests a growing recognition of consumers as active contributors to brand narratives in digitally mediated environments.

Cluster 5: IMC in Global and Emerging Markets (Purple nodes).

This cluster comprises terms such as “cross-cultural”, “emerging markets”, “market orientation”, and “collaboration networks”. Although heterogeneous, the unifying thread is the contextualization of IMC practices within diverse cultural and economic environments. Studies in this area investigate how integration strategies vary across geographic regions and organizational settings, with particular attention to contrasts between developed and developing markets. This cluster highlights the field’s increasing interest in understanding how IMC effectiveness is shaped by institutional, cultural, and structural variables on a global scale.

The co-citation network, represented through a hierarchical dendrogram, confirmed the presence of three overarching clusters within the IMC literature (see Figure 3).

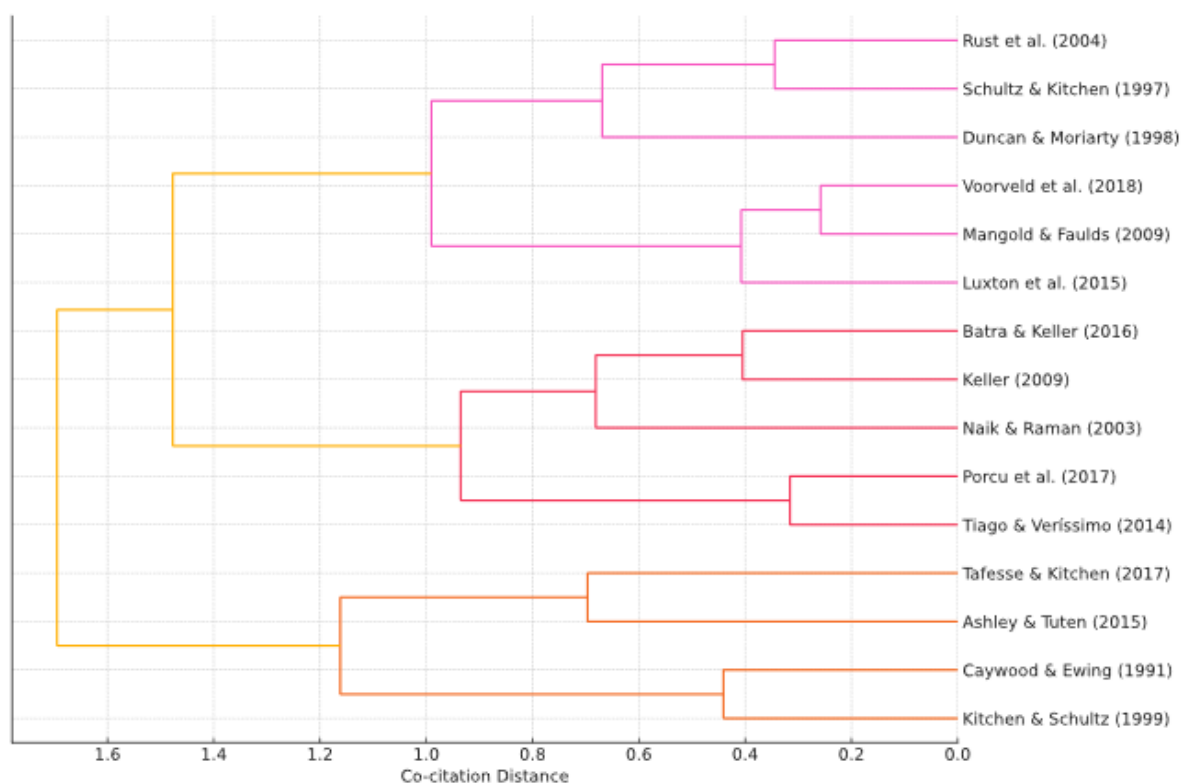


Figure 3 – Dendrogram of co-cited references in IMC research

Note – compiled by authors

Interpretation of the dendrogram and associated co-citation clusters:

Cluster A: Conceptual Foundations This cluster encompasses foundational literature predominantly published in the 1990s. Frequently co-cited works include Schultz and Kitchen (1997), Kitchen and Schultz (1999), Duncan and Moriarty (1998), and Caywood and Ewing (1991), among others. These sources are often referenced together in subsequent publications addressing the theoretical underpinnings of IMC, particularly its definition, scope, and strategic rationale. This grouping reflects the early scholarly efforts to establish IMC as a distinct field within marketing communications.

Cluster B: Quantitative Models and Measurement A second cluster aggregates literature from the early 2000s that introduced formalized, data-driven approaches to assessing IMC effectiveness. Central co-cited references in this grouping include Naik and Raman (2003), Rust et al. (2004), Schultz and Patti (2009), and Luxton et al. (2015). These studies are frequently cited in research focused on evaluating IMC performance through metrics such as return on investment, brand impact, and econometric modeling. The prominence of this cluster underscores

the methodological advancement of the field toward measurable and accountable communication strategies.

Cluster C: Digital Media and Consumer Engagement The third cluster comprises literature emerging primarily in the late 2000s and 2010s that addresses the integration of digital technologies and evolving consumer roles within IMC. Notable co-cited works in this category include Mangold and Faulds (2009), Batra and Keller (2016), Ashley and Tuten (2015), Tiago and Verissimo (2014), and Tafesse and Kitchen (2017). These references are commonly cited in contemporary studies examining topics such as social media strategy, content-driven engagement, and the participatory dynamics of consumers in shaping brand communications. This cluster reflects the field's increasing orientation toward interactive media and digital transformation.

Table 3 provides a synthesis of the principal thematic clusters within IMC effectiveness research, tracing the evolution of focal areas over time and linking each to representative scholarly contributions and associated outcome measures.

Table 3 – Major research themes in IMC effectiveness literature for 1991–2024

Theme & Period	Focus Areas (Keywords)	Representative Works (Examples)	Insights on IMC Effectiveness
Conceptual Foundations (1990s)	IMC definitions; strategy; message consistency; organizational adoption	Schultz & Kitchen (1997); Duncan & Moriarty (1998); Kitchen & Schultz (1999)	Articulated <i>why</i> integration matters; proposed that consistency leads to better brand understanding (mostly conceptual arguments, little quantitative evaluation)
Branding & Consumer Psychology (ongoing)	Brand equity; brand identity; consumer behavior; engagement (general)	Keller (2009); Madhavaram et al. (2005); Batra & Keller (2016)	Demonstrated IMC's role in building brand value and relationships; measured outcomes like brand equity, customer satisfaction as proxies for IMC effectiveness
Measurement & ROI (2000s)	Performance metrics; ROI; synergy models; IMC implementation scales	Naik & Raman (2003); Rust et al. (2004); Porcu et al. (2017)	Developed models and metrics to quantify IMC impact (e.g., sales lift from synergy, ROI%); introduced firm-level IMC capability measures predicting performance
Digital Integration (2010s)	Social media; online advertising; content marketing; consumer empowerment	Mangold & Faulds (2009); Ashley & Tuten (2015); Voorveld et al. (2018)	Expanded IMC to interactive channels; identified new effectiveness criteria (social engagement, viral reach); highlighted need for real-time and platform-specific measurement in IMC
Global & Cross-cultural (2010s)	Cross-cultural campaigns; emerging markets; global IMC strategies; collaboration	Kliatchko & Schultz (2014); Okazaki & Taylor (2013); Tafesse & Kitchen (2017)	Examined IMC in diverse contexts; suggested that cultural differences moderate IMC effectiveness; stressed internal collaboration and market orientation as factors in successful IMC execution
Note – compiled by authors			

Table 3 consolidates the principal thematic clusters in IMC effectiveness research spanning the period from 1991 to 2024, offering a reflective overview of the field's development. One notable trend is the centrality of digital integration, with social media and engagement metrics now playing a critical role in the evaluation of IMC outcomes. Although measurement approaches have become more diverse, the absence of a universally accepted evaluative framework persists. The literature increasingly draws on interdisciplinary methodologies, including econometric modeling and marketing analytics, and emphasizes the necessity of context-specific strategies, particularly within global and business-to-business environments. These findings suggest that while IMC has matured as a field, it remains theoretically and methodologically fragmented, highlighting the need for continued synthesis and practical alignment.

The following section synthesizes these insights to draw key conclusions and propose directions for future research. It demonstrates how the findings support broader trends, such as the field's shift toward data-intensive and analytically grounded approaches. The discussion also considers implications for practice, including the growing importance of integrated analytics capabilities for organizations seeking to evaluate and optimize IMC strategies. Furthermore, the paper reflects on current limitations, such as the predominance of English-language and United States-based scholarship, which, although still influential, is beginning to shift. By explicitly linking the empirical results, particularly the thematic clusters and observed patterns, to the study's conclusions and recommendations, this section aims to enhance the interpretive clarity of the analysis and respond to previously identified gaps in connecting findings to broader implications.

Conclusion

After three decades of scholarly development, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has evolved from an emerging concept into a foundational element of strategic marketing thought. However, evaluating the effectiveness of IMC remains a complex and multifaceted challenge. This bibliometric analysis traces the intellectual progression of IMC effectiveness research, revealing a transition from conceptual advocacy to empirically grounded, data-informed investigation. While integration continues to be a core component of marketing strategy, the indicators used to assess its effectiveness vary considerably across the literature.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the findings:

IMC effectiveness research has become increasingly mature and diverse. The steady rise in publication output and citation volume indicates that IMC has been firmly established as a legitimate domain of academic inquiry. Earlier studies were predominantly conceptual, focusing on the rationale for communication integration. More recent contributions have emphasized empirical approaches, introducing measurement scales, econometric models, and real-world case studies to evaluate communication outcomes. There is growing evidence that effective IMC implementation contributes to outcomes such as stronger brand equity, improved customer relationships, and enhanced marketing return on investment. At the same time, the field has become segmented into subfields, as reflected in the cluster analysis, which identified distinct thematic areas including digital environments, global applications, and managerial perspectives. While this diversity demonstrates intellectual vitality, it also suggests that insights are often isolated within thematic silos. Advancing a more unified theory of IMC effectiveness will require greater integration of perspectives across these subdomains.

Digital transformation has redefined how IMC success is assessed. A consistent pattern across the findings is the growing prominence of digital and social media in shaping IMC strategies and evaluation criteria. Traditional measures, such as reach and frequency, are no longer sufficient in isolation. They are increasingly being complemented by metrics that capture engagement, sharing behavior, and continuity across platforms. Influential studies by Mangold and Faulds (2009) and Batra and Keller (2016) underscore how consumer interaction and cross-platform consistency have emerged as critical indicators of success. In practical terms, this means that modern IMC campaigns are often judged by social media sharing rates, multichannel conversion paths, and the overall fluidity of the customer journey rather than by single-channel performance metrics.

Measurement and accountability remain unresolved concerns. Despite methodological progress, the field has yet to coalesce around a universally accepted approach to evaluating IMC performance. This persistent gap is evident in the existence of a distinct thematic cluster devoted to measurement-related research. Although scholars have developed numerous tools, including return on investment models, synergy assessments, and IMC audit instruments, the diversity of approaches has led to incon-

sistencies in the literature. These variations make it difficult to compare findings across studies or to build a cumulative body of knowledge. Addressing this issue will require efforts toward standardizing key metrics and developing robust evaluation frameworks that can be adapted across contexts.

Contextual variability significantly influences IMC effectiveness. IMC strategies and their outcomes are shaped by the specific cultural, industrial, and organizational settings in which they are implemented. What constitutes effective communication in one context may be ineffective or even counterproductive in another. For instance, consumer-facing industries may rely heavily on coordinated media and retail campaigns, while business-to-business environments may prioritize content marketing and relationship-building initiatives. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies reveal that local communication norms, media preferences, and consumer expectations must be accounted for when designing and assessing IMC efforts. Both researchers and practitioners are advised to adopt context-sensitive approaches, including more comparative and cross-national research designs. The growing internationalization of IMC scholarship supports this direction and will help identify which principles are universally applicable and which are context-specific.

The future of IMC research lies in methodological and disciplinary integration. To remain relevant, IMC research must reflect the integrative principles it promotes. The increasing relevance of digi-

tal technologies, the rise of data-driven strategies, and the expansion into global markets all demand interdisciplinary collaboration. The study of marketing communication can no longer be divorced from technological innovation, cultural analysis, or financial performance evaluation. Future advances in IMC assessment are likely to emerge from the convergence of multiple fields. For example, artificial intelligence can be used to optimize media allocation, and social network analysis can provide new insights into message diffusion. The bibliometric analysis indicates that such convergence is already underway, as evidenced by the expanding diversity of keywords and referenced disciplines. Scholars are encouraged to engage in cross-disciplinary research and to adopt mixed-method approaches. Practitioners are similarly advised to assemble teams that combine marketing expertise with data science, cultural intelligence, and strategic communication planning.

Future research should prioritize the creation of a comprehensive IMC effectiveness framework that integrates financial, behavioral, and operational metrics validated across industries, markets, and campaign types. Additional focus should be placed on longitudinal analysis, the application of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and immersive media, and the strengthening of academic-industry partnerships. Such efforts will ensure that IMC research continues to offer theoretically sound and practically relevant insights.

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