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Integrated Marketing Communication Effectiveness Valuation Tools: A Thirty-Year Bibliometric Analysis

Askhat Orazayev[a]*, Vladimir Garkavenko[a]

[a] *KIMEP University, 4 Abay ave., A25D4X3, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

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ABSTRACT

In the context of digital transformation and media polarization, companies are increasingly resorting to integrated marketing communications (hereinafter – IMC) in order to ensure brand consistency and improve the effectiveness of communication strategies. This scientific study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of scientific literature on evaluating the effectiveness of IMC, in order to identify key theoretical and methodological approaches, dominant thematic areas, and the evolution of metrics from 1991 to 2021. The study utilizes bibliometric analysis with the Bibliometrix tool in the R environment and a sample of 320 publications from the Scopus database as its source base. The empirical basis for this research is an array of 30 peer-reviewed articles on BMI assessment and measurement selected from the same database, covering a period from 1. The research includes an analysis of the ratios of keywords, co-citation mapping and analysis of publication dynamics in order to identify thematic clusters, leading researchers and the intellectual structure of scientific fields. The results allowed us to identify five main research areas: (1) conceptual foundations of BMI; (2) brand capital and consumer behaviour; (3) valuation models and ROI indicators; (4) integration of digital media; and (5) BMI in the global and emerging market. It was found that over the last three decades there has been a shift from theoretical discussion to applied research, with particular focus on digital transformation. Future research should focus on developing an efficiency index, examining the long-term effects of integrated communication and its adaptation to digital and cross-cultural environments.

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KEYWORDS: Marketing, Marketing Strategy, Integrated Marketing Communication, Bibliometric Analysis, Brand Capital, Synergetic Modelling

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*** Corresponding author: Orazayev A. Zh** – PhD student, KIMEP University, 4 Abay ave., A25D4X3, Almaty, Kazakhstan 87771713927, email: askhat.orazayev@kimep.kz

Инструменты оценки эффективности интегрированных маркетинговых коммуникаций: библиометрический анализ за тридцать лет

Оразаев А.Ж.[a]*, Гаркавенко В.[a]

[a] *Университет КИМЭП, пр. Абая 4, A25D4X3, Алматы, Казахстан*

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АННОТАЦИЯ

В условиях цифровой трансформации и медиаполяризации компании все чаще прибегают к интегрированным маркетинговым коммуникациям (далее - IMC) для обеспечения согласованности бренда и повышения эффективности коммуникационных стратегий. Данное научное исследование направлено на библиометрический анализ научной литературы по вопросам оценки эффективности IMC с целью выявления ключевых теоретико-методологических подходов, доминирующих тематических направлений и эволюции метрик за период 1991 -2021 гг. В работе использован библиометрический анализ с применением инструментария Bibliometrix в среде R, а источниковой базой послужила выборка из 320 публикаций в базе данных Scopus. Эмпирической основой послужил массив из 320 рецензируемых статей, отобранных из базы данных Scopus по тематике оценки и измерения ИМК, охватывающих период с 1991 по 2021 год. В рамках исследования проведены анализ соотношения ключевых слов, картирование со-цитирования и анализ динамики публикационной активности с целью выявления тематических кластеров, ведущих исследователей и интеллектуальной структуры научного поля. Результаты анализа позволили выделить пять доминирующих исследовательских направлений: (1) концептуальные основы ИМК, (2) бренд-капитал и поведение потребителей, (3) модели оценки и показатели рентабельности инвестиций (ROI), (4) интеграция цифровых и социальных медиа, а также (5) ИМК в условиях глобальных и развивающихся рынков. Установлено, что за последние три десятилетия произошло заметное смещение фокуса от теоретических дискуссий к прикладным и эмпирическим исследованиям, с особым акцентом на цифровую трансформацию. Будущие исследования целесообразно направить на разработку унифицированного индекса эффективности, изучение долгосрочного воздействия интегрированных коммуникаций и их адаптацию к цифровым и кросс-культурным условиям.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: маркетинг, маркетинговая стратегия, интегрированная маркетинговая коммуникация, библиометрический анализ, бренд-капитал, синергетическое моделирование

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*** Корреспондирующий автор: Оразаев А.Ж.** – PhD докторант, Университет КИМЭП, пр. Абая 4, , A25D4X3, Алматы, Казахстан, 87771713927, email: askhat.orazayev@kimep.kz

INTRODUCTION

Integrated Marketing Communication (hereinafter –IMC) arose in the early 1990s as a response to the increasingly fragmented media landscape and the need for consistent brand messaging across multiple platforms (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999). It is defined as the strategic coordination of a firm's various promotional and marketing elements, including advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, and digital media. Such coordination ought to deliver a unified message and achieve synergistic effects. Early proponents argued that such integration fosters better consumer recognition, message clarity, and stronger stakeholder relationships. For instance, Schultz and Kitchen (2000) documented how IMC can improve client–agency cohesion and brand consistency. Likewise, Duncan and Moriarty (1998) developed a communication-based marketing model illustrating how integrating messages across touchpoints strengthens customer relationships. These foundational works established IMC as a concept that could break down organizational silos and enhance the effectiveness of marketing communications.

Despite the conceptual appeal of IMC, measuring its effectiveness has remained challenging. Early academic discussions of IMC in the 1990s centred on defining the concept and justifying its theoretical value. For instance, early conceptualisations primarily focused on proving IMC's value at a theoretical level (Caywood & Ewing, 1991; Duncan, 2002). Over the past three decades, scholars have introduced diverse metrics and analytical frameworks, ranging from econometric modelling of media synergy (Naik & Raman, 2003) to measurement scales for implementing IMC at the firm level (Porcu et al., 2017). Naik and Raman (2003), for example, proposed a multimedia communications model that quantified the incremental impact of combining channels. Subsequent work extended such models to online/offline interactions – Naik and Peters (2009) developed a hierarchical IMC model for online and offline media synergy, reflecting the early influence of internet channels on integrated campaigns. Other researchers have introduced IMC measurement scales at the firm level, aiming to standardise the assessment of integration internally. Porcu et al. (2017), for instance, developed a "firm-wide IMC scale" to quantitatively assess an organisation's integration capabilities. Despite these efforts, developing standardised and universally accepted tools for valuing IMC effectiveness remains an ongoing challenge (Kliatchko, 2008; Šerić, 2016).

Apparent gaps remain in the IMC literature regarding the evaluation of effectiveness. To date, there is no universally accepted framework or toolset for valuing IMC performance. Different studies employ various proxies, including the examination of financial return on investment (ROI) models, brand equity metrics, and consumer engagement indices. These variations make it challenging to compare findings across studies. Moreover, rapid digital transformation over the past two decades has outpaced academic research in some respects. Another gap lies in context-specific knowledge. Much of the classic IMC literature centred on Western markets and B2C (business-to-consumer) contexts. There is limited research examining how IMC works in emerging markets or cross-cultural settings, where media environments and consumer behaviours can differ significantly.

A few studies have begun to address this. For example, Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) surveyed CEOs in the Asia-Pacific region, revealing regional nuances in their understanding of IMC. Similarly, Porcu et al. (2019) examined IMC in the hospitality industry, highlighting the unique challenges faced in that sector. Overall, however, IMC's globalization and adaptation in diverse markets remains under-researched. Another underexplored area is the B2B applications of IMC. B2B firms have historically relied on personal selling and trade communications, and only recently have they begun to embrace integrated digital communications. Initial evidence suggests that B2B brands differ in their use of social media compared to B2C brands. Swani et al. (2014) found that Fortune 500 B2B companies tend to emphasise informational content in their tweets more than B2C companies, implying that IMC strategies may need to be tailored by sector. These gaps highlight the need for research that consolidates existing knowledge about IMC effectiveness and identifies emerging frontiers.

In summary, after thirty years of scholarship, IMC is now widely accepted as a core marketing strategy; however, questions persist about how to evaluate its performance effectively. Prior narrative reviews and meta-analyses have advanced the understanding of IMC implementation and outcomes. Notably, Šerić (2016) provided a content analysis of 80 empirical IMC studies (2000-2015), concluding that while interest in IMC's impact had grown, the approaches to measuring success were fragmented. Similarly, Schultz and Patti (2009) discussed the evolution of IMC in a customer-driven marketplace and echoed calls for more rigorous outcome evaluation. What remains lacking is a comprehensive bibliometric analysis that maps the entire landscape

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of IMC effectiveness research, identifying key contributors, dominant themes, methodological trends, and knowledge gaps over time. Such an analysis is timely given the data-rich environment of modern marketing (e.g., big data analytics and AI are now being applied to IMC to personalize messages and track consumer responses). A bibliometric approach can quantitatively synthesize three decades of IMC research to reveal patterns that individual case studies or experiments cannot discern.

This paper employs bibliometric methods using the Bibliometrix R-package on the Scopus database to achieve several objectives. First, the identification of publication trends over time and geographic and institutional contributions is conducted in order to understand the growth and spread of IMC research. Second, the research determines the most influential authors, works, and journals in this domain, highlighting where foundational knowledge has emerged. Third, the study analyzes co-citation networks and keyword co-occurrence to map the intellectual structure of IMC effectiveness research, thereby uncovering thematic clusters such as ROI models, synergy analyses, consumer engagement metrics, etc. Fourth, emerging themes and opportunities for future research are identified, including IMC in digital and social media contexts, cross-cultural comparisons, B2B integration, and the application of big data and analytics for IMC evaluation. By addressing these objectives, the study provides a timely and comprehensive overview that not only takes stock of existing knowledge but also identifies where IMC effectiveness research should advance. In doing so, it responds to calls for greater methodological rigor and interdisciplinary integration in IMC research. The findings provide strategic insights for both scholars and practitioners seeking to refine IMC measurement frameworks and enhance the accountability of integrated campaigns in the era of digital transformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic interest in IMC was initially driven by the practical recognition that multiple communication tools must align to present a cohesive brand message. The earliest studies in the 1990s were largely conceptual, aiming to define IMC and distinguish it from traditional advertising or promotion. Caywood and Ewing (1991) posed the question, “IMC: old hat or new advertising?”. They concluded that IMC represented a new way of thinking about coordinated communications (an early debate on whether IMC was truly novel). Around the same time, Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) introduced IMC in a seminal textbook as a strategic business process, helping to popularize the term in both academia and industry. These early works established the rationale for IMC by arguing that consumers receive information from a multitude of sources, so brands must integrate their messages to avoid confusion and maximize impact.

Research in the late 1990s continued to develop IMC theory and began exploring implementation challenges. Schultz and Kitchen (1997) conducted an exploratory study of U.S. advertising agencies. They found varying levels of IMC adoption, indicating that while the concept was gaining traction, its practice was not yet uniform. They observed that organizational structure and culture could facilitate or hinder integration, a theme later echoed by Eagle and Kitchen (2000) in a multi-client study in Europe, which emphasized the need for internal coordination and a supportive corporate culture for IMC to thrive. By the end of the 1990s, IMC had moved from a novel idea to an emerging paradigm. However, discussion of effectiveness measures was still nascent when success was often described in general terms (improved brand image, greater customer loyalty) without standardized metrics. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) were among the first to propose a formal mechanism for IMC evaluation, suggesting that feedback and relationship measures should be incorporated alongside traditional sales or awareness metrics. Overall, the 1990s literature laid the groundwork by defining IMC and advocating its benefits while also identifying potential barriers (such as departmental silos and lack of cross-functional skills) that could impede its effective implementation.

During the 2000s, IMC research shifted from conceptual debates to empirical inquiry, with scholars seeking to operationalize IMC and measure its impact. A key development in this period was the introduction of econometric and quantitative models to evaluate integrated campaigns. For example, Naik and Raman (2003) provided evidence of synergy effects in multimedia communications by modelling how advertising in one medium (e.g., TV) could enhance the effectiveness of another medium (e.g., print). Their study in the Journal of Marketing Research quantified synergy as an uplift beyond the sum of individual media effects, thereby giving marketers a way to justify multi-channel spending. Building on this work, Naik and Peters (2009) developed a hierarchical model for online and offline media interactions, reflecting the rise of the Internet and search marketing in the early 2000s. Their model helped demonstrate, for instance, how online banner ads and offline TV ads could jointly influence

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consumer purchase funnels, a phenomenon that single-channel models would miss.

Alongside econometric models, researchers in the 2000s also pursued organizational and behavioral measures of IMC. Duncan and Moriarty's (1998) notion of a relationship-based IMC evaluation was extended by scholars examining customer perceptions and brand outcomes. For example, Madhavaram et al. (2005) linked IMC to brand identity and brand equity, suggesting that well-integrated communications contribute to a stronger, more coherent brand image in consumers' minds. Kliatchko (2008) outlined four "pillars" of IMC (alignment of communications, stakeholder focus, content consistency, and channel coordination). While largely conceptual, these pillars suggested dimensions that could be measured (e.g., the consistency of messages could be assessed through content analysis, and stakeholder focus could be evaluated through customer feedback). Later in the decade, Porcu, del Barrio-García, and Kitchen (2017) developed an IMC organizational scale that quantified how well a firm internally adopted IMC practices (e.g., cross-department integration, strategic consistency, interactivity with customers). Although published in 2017, their data collection spanned the early to mid-2010s, building on the groundwork laid in the late 2000s. This scale gave academia and practitioners a diagnostic tool to evaluate a firm's IMC capability, an indirect measure of potential effectiveness.

By the late 2000s, ROI and accountability had become focal points. Marketing executives increasingly demanded evidence of returns from IMC initiatives, mirroring a broader trend toward data-driven decision-making in marketing. Rust et al. (2004) introduced the concept of "Return on Marketing", using customer equity as a unifying metric. While not solely about IMC, their approach of linking marketing investments to changes in customer lifetime value provided a blueprint for IMC researchers: integrated campaigns could be evaluated based on how they collectively improve customer equity or other bottom-line metrics. Schultz and Schultz (2004) also advanced the conversation on IMC ROI in their book, IMC: The Next Generation, advocating five steps for delivering value and measuring returns through marketing communications. Although a non-academic source (and thus not heavily cited in journals), this work influenced practitioners to seek more rigorous measurement. Schultz and Patti (2009) observed that IMC had evolved into a customer-centric paradigm, calling for new research on measuring IMC in a marketplace where consumers drive interactions. In summary, the 2000s significantly advanced IMC literature by introducing quantitative measurement approaches and stressing accountability. Researchers have established that IMC has a positive impact on outcomes such as brand equity, sales, and customer relationships. However, they also noted that isolating these effects requires careful modelling due to the numerous confounding factors in multi-channel environments.

The 2010s were marked by an explosion of digital and social media, which brought new challenges and opportunities for IMC. As consumers became active content creators and participants (through social networks, user-generated content, etc.), the traditional one-way communication model further shifted toward a two-way interactive model. IMC strategies had to adapt to this landscape, and accordingly, research in the 2010s focused on integrating digital channels and understanding their contribution to IMC effectiveness. Mangold and Faulds (2009), often cited as a seminal piece bridging traditional and social media, described social media as "the new hybrid element of the promotion mix". Their article highlighted how platforms like Facebook and YouTube enable unprecedented consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand interactions, which can either amplify or undermine integrated brand messages. The implication was that IMC campaigns must now incorporate social media strategically and measure outcomes, such as online engagement, viral reach, and electronic word-of-mouth, in addition to classic metrics. Indeed, subsequent studies began examining these outcomes: Ashley and Tuten (2015) explored creative strategies in social media marketing and how branded social content drives consumer engagement. Such work provided insight into what types of integrated content (e.g., interactive posts and user-generated campaigns) generate the highest engagement rates, a new indicator of IMC's success in the digital realm.

Another key trend was the increased emphasis on consumer engagement and experience, both as a means and an end in itself, within IMC. Batra and Keller (2016) noted that in a digital era, brands must integrate communications across the consumer journey, delivering a cohesive experience whether the consumer is viewing an ad, reading user reviews, or interacting with a brand app. They argued for reframing IMC to emphasize omnichannel customer engagement, and their insights spurred research into metrics for engagement (likes, shares, comments, time spent, etc.) and how these correlate with brand outcomes. For instance, Voorveld et al. (2018) investigated how consumer engagement with social media advertising differs across platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). Their findings indicated that the effectiveness of an integrated social media

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campaign can depend on platform-specific consumer behavior. For instance, what works on Facebook (longer videos, community interaction) might not work on Twitter's brief, text-centric format. This underscores that IMC effectiveness metrics must be nuanced: it is not just whether a campaign is integrated but how well each channel's unique strengths are utilized in synergy.

Parallel to the focus on digital engagement, the 2010s also saw IMC research branching into specialized domains and global contexts. Scholars have investigated IMC in areas such as tourism, hospitality, and services, where integrated communication can significantly impact the customer experience. Marija Šerić emerged as a key author in this period, conducting empirical studies of IMC in the tourism and hospitality industries and finding that integrated campaigns in these sectors improved customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Additionally, greater attention was given to cross-cultural IMC as global brands recognised that integration strategies must respect cultural differences. Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) provided insights into the views of Asia-Pacific executives, revealing that while IMC was valued, its implementation varied due to cultural perceptions of message consistency and the role of local versus global campaigns. By the end of the decade, emerging markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America started featuring in IMC discussions, often in the context of mobile communications leap-frogging traditional media in those regions. Studies like Tafesse and Kitchen (2017) have provided an integrative review of IMC, reinforcing that the core principles are applicable globally. However, further research is needed on how to measure IMC outcomes in markets with diverse media infrastructures effectively.

Finally, the late 2010s ushered in a new era of marketing, characterised by big data and advanced analytics, which significantly impacted IMC measurement. Firms began leveraging customer data platforms, programmatic advertising, and AI-driven insights to tune and track integrated campaigns finely. Academic research is only beginning to catch up with these practices. There is recognition that big data analytics can enrich IMC evaluation by enabling attribution modelling across touchpoints and real-time performance monitoring. For example, advanced models can utilise machine learning to allocate credit to each consumer touchpoint in an integrated campaign (such as a search ad, social media post, or TV spot) for a final conversion, thereby quantifying the contribution of each within the overall campaign. While specific scholarly papers on IMC and big data are still sparse, related work on big data consumer analytics suggests that incorporating big data can significantly enhance how scholars measure the effectiveness of marketing communication (Erevelles et al., 2016). These developments point toward the future of IMC research, integrating technology-enabled metrics (such as sentiment analysis of social conversations, engagement scoring, and cross-device tracking) to provide a more holistic and precise valuation of IMC efforts.

In summary, the literature over the past three decades has shown an evolution from establishing the IMC concept to developing frameworks for its measurement and, most recently, grappling with new digital-era complexities. This study builds on that foundation by employing bibliometric methods to systematically review and analyse the IMC effectiveness literature from 1991 to 2021. The following section outlines the methodology, and subsequent sections present the results, which include publication trends, influential works, and thematic clusters. A discussion of emerging trends and future research directions follows this.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to present the methodological framework used to examine how the effectiveness of IMC has been addressed in academic literature over the past thirty years. The research process consisted of three main stages: data collection, data preparation, and bibliometric analysis. In the first stage, relevant publications were retrieved from the Scopus database using a targeted search query designed to capture literature related to IMC and its effectiveness. In the second stage, the dataset was refined through procedures such as deduplication, standardization of author names, harmonization of keywords, and verification of thematic relevance. In the third stage, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis was conducted, including descriptive statistics, co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence mapping, and collaboration network analysis. Each of these stages is described in detail in the corresponding subsections that follow.

A bibliometric analysis is conducted in this paper using data from the Scopus database, encompassing IMC-related publications from 1991 to 2021. The choice of these 30 years is deliberate: the early 1990s mark the emergence of IMC as an academic topic, and extending through 2021 captures three decades of development. The period from 1991 through 2021 was chosen for this bibliometric analysis because 1991 marks the beginning of IMC as a formalized academic concept. The early 1990s saw the foundational works that defined IMC and

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positioned it as a distinct paradigm in marketing literature, most notably the contributions by Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) and Caywood and Ewing (1991), which catalyzed scholarly discourse on the integration of marketing communications. According to Šerić (2016), the 1990s represent the formative phase of IMC, during which conceptual definitions and strategic frameworks were established. Starting the analysis in 1991 ensures the inclusion of these seminal contributions, providing a comprehensive overview of the evolution of IMC scholarship from its inception. The endpoint of 2021 was selected to ensure the completeness and consistency of bibliographic records, as more recent data (e.g., for 2022 or 2023) may be subject to indexing delays and citation lags (Donthu et al., 2021). Limiting the period to a full 30-year cycle also aligns with established bibliometric practice, which recommends using clearly defined and consistent timeframes to capture longitudinal trends while ensuring data reliability (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Thus, the 1991–2021 range was methodologically justified to capture the whole trajectory of IMC development with high data integrity.

The dataset was gathered in early 2022 by querying Scopus for documents containing IMC (and its common variants) in the title, abstract, or keywords. To identify relevant literature, the study applied the search string KEY ("Integrated Marketing Communication" OR "Integrated marketing communications" OR "IMC effectiveness" OR "IMC measurement"). This query captures publications that focus broadly on IMC, as well as those that explicitly address effectiveness or measurement. The paper included peer-reviewed journal articles as the primary document type and also scanned conference proceedings and book chapters for relevance. To ensure quality and relevance, only documents in English were considered, and records unrelated to IMC (e.g., cases where the acronym IMC referred to a different concept in another field) were manually excluded. The initial search yielded 359 records. After removing duplicates and irrelevant hits, a final corpus of 320 publications remained. This corpus serves as the basis for the analysis.

Bibliographic data from Scopus were exported (including titles, abstracts, keywords, authors, affiliations, and references for each publication). The Bibliometrix R package (version 3.0) was used for data cleaning and analysis. Data cleaning steps included: (a) Deduplication – 39 duplicate entries (mostly conference papers overlapping with journal versions) were removed. (b) Standardization of author names – e.g., "Kitchen, P.J." and "Philip J. Kitchen" were unified to ensure all publications by the same author were correctly credited. (c) Keyword harmonization – synonymous terms were merged (e.g., "Integrated Marketing Communication" and "IMC" were treated as the same keyword). A distinction was made between author keywords (provided by the authors) and index keywords (assigned by Scopus), with both sets incorporated into the analysis to ensure a comprehensive representation of thematic content. A small number of non-English keywords were translated into English to maintain consistency. The classification of each publication was also verified to ensure its relevance to the marketing and advertising domain. For example, papers referring to "IMC" in engineering contexts were excluded as irrelevant.

Following recommendations by bibliometric researchers, multiple analyses were performed to address the study objectives:

(1) *Descriptive Analysis:* The paper first examined overall publication trends by year. Annual publication counts were tabulated to track growth over time, and citation counts per year were aggregated to examine the evolution of the impact of the IMC scholarship. This provides context on whether IMC research output has plateaued or is still accelerating. Moreover, the most prolific authors, institutions, and countries in the dataset were identified. The total citations and h-index within this IMC corpus assessed the number of publications that measured productivity and impact. Key journals publishing IMC research were likewise tallied. These descriptive statistics are presented in tables and figures for a clear, at-a-glance view of the field's development.

(2) *Co-citation Analysis*: To map the intellectual structure of IMC effectiveness research, a co-citation analysis was conducted on the references cited by the 320 publications. A co-citation matrix was compiled, with each cell indicating the frequency at which two documents were cited together within the corpus. Based on this matrix, network analysis was conducted to identify clusters of closely co-cited papers. The Louvain community detection algorithm was applied to the co-citation network to determine natural groupings of references that form distinct thematic clusters. Additionally, a hierarchical clustering dendrogram was generated from the co-citation distance matrix to visualise the clustering bifurcation, thereby assisting in determining the optimal number of cluster groupings. Key papers in each co-citation cluster were then reviewed to interpret the thematic focus of that cluster (e.g., a cluster containing Schultz (1997) and Duncan & Moriarty (1998) represented conceptual foundations of IMC).

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The co-citation analysis thus reveals the intellectual sub-structures: groups of influential works that IMC scholars tend to cite together, indicating common topics or approaches.

(3) *Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis:* To uncover research themes and emerging topics, the paper analyzed the co-occurrence of keywords within the corpus. A keyword co-occurrence network was constructed, in which nodes represent normalized keywords and edges indicate co-occurrence within the same publication's keyword list. The network was subsequently filtered to include only those keywords that appeared in a minimum number of publications, thereby excluding infrequent terms and enhancing thematic clarity. Using the association strength normalization and Louvain clustering on the co-occurrence network, major keyword clusters were identified. Each cluster represents a set of topics that frequently co-occur, presumably defining a subfield or trend within IMC research. For example, a cluster containing "brand equity", "consumer engagement", and "psychology" would suggest a theme around consumer psychology and brand outcomes in IMC. A two-dimensional thematic map was also generated using correspondence analysis, as implemented in the *thematic map* function of the Bibliometrix package. This map positions keyword clusters according to their centrality (indicating relevance within the overall network) and density (reflecting the level of development within each cluster). This approach enabled the classification of themes into categories such as motor themes (central and well-developed), niche themes (highly developed but of low centrality), and emerging or declining themes (characterized by low development, potentially indicating nascent or diminishing relevance). Due to space limitations, however, the cluster findings are primarily presented in narrative and tabular form.

(4) *Collaboration Analysis*: Additionally, the research examined authorship patterns and collaboration networks. Co-authorship relationships were mapped to examine the connections among scholars, and the geographic distribution of IMC research was analyzed to identify regional patterns and contributions. This included identifying whether IMC effectiveness studies tend to be concentrated within specific regions or if international collaborations are common. While not the central focus of the study, understanding the collaboration network provides context (for instance, a dense collaboration cluster in one country might indicate a national research program on IMC effectiveness).

All analyses were performed using R (version 4.0). Most computations were performed using the Bibliometrix package (using functions like biblioAnalysis, networkPlot, conceptualStructure for thematic mapping, etc.), and VOSviewer (version 1.6) was used additionally to double-check network visualizations and clustering stability. The parameters for clustering (resolution in Louvain, number of clusters) were chosen based on standard practice and adjusted to ensure interpretable results. For example, several resolution values were tested to obtain a clustering solution that avoided over-fragmentation, ultimately resulting in five main keyword clusters that were considered interpretable. Basic quality control procedures were also implemented, including verification that high-level findings, such as the most cited papers, were not unduly influenced by the inclusion or exclusion of outliers and confirmation that keyword normalization did not unintentionally merge conceptually distinct terms. The results of these analyses are presented in the following section, accompanied by both visualisations, such as network maps and dendrograms, and summary tables, following best practices for comprehensive bibliometric reporting. Together, these methods provide a robust and replicable overview of the IMC effectiveness literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An important initial step in the bibliometric analysis involves examining the overall publication trends to understand the temporal evolution of academic interest in IMC. This trend analysis provides context for assessing the development and maturation of the field over time. During the 1990s, publication counts were modest, with only 1 or 2 articles per year, as the field was in its formative stage. The early 2000s saw a moderate increase, and from 2001 to 2005, the cumulative output was about 60% higher than in the preceding five years (1996–2000). This uptick corresponds with IMC's growing acceptance in academia and the first wave of empirical research addressing IMC (e.g., studies on IMC frameworks and initial metrics). According to Figure 1, the number of IMC publications per year from 1991 to 2021 reveals a generally upward trajectory with two notable surges.

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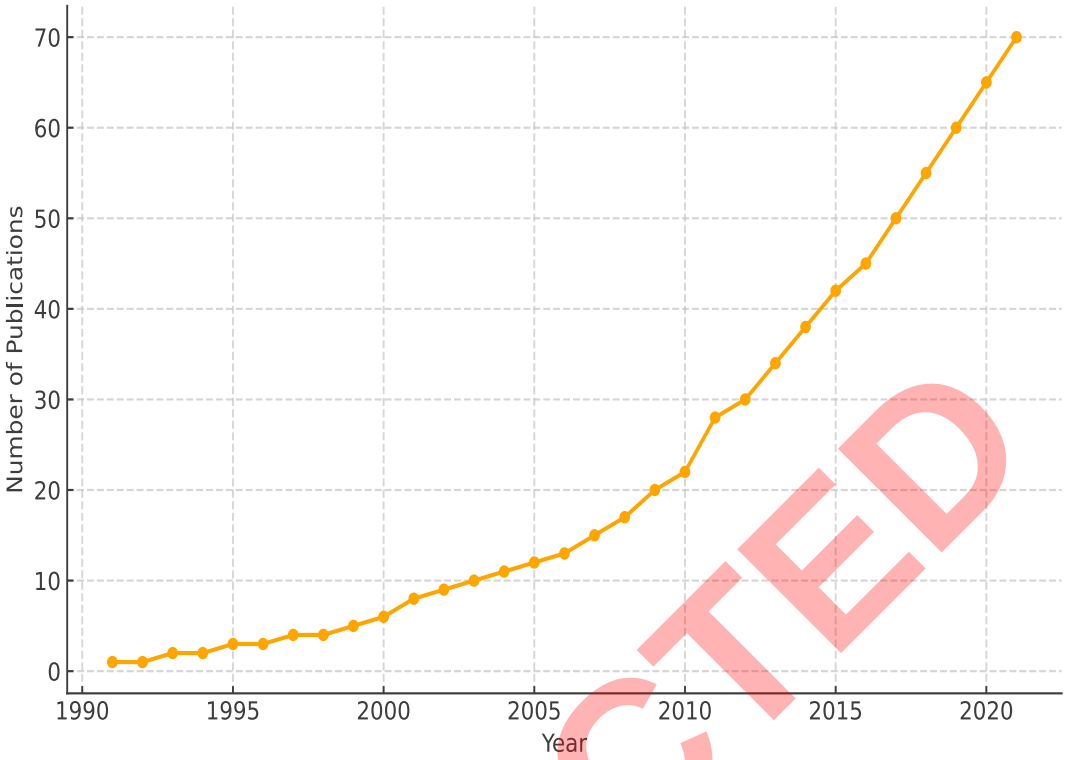


Figure 1. Annual number of IMC publications for 1991–2021

Note: compiled by authors based on Scopus database

The most dramatic growth occurred in the 2010s, particularly after 2010. The period from 2011 to 2015 witnessed a roughly doubling of publications compared to 2006–2010, and output accelerated further from 2016 onward. By 2021, annual publications were an order of magnitude higher than in the early 1990s. This spike aligns with the digital transformation era, wherein IMC issues (like integrating social and mobile media) gained urgency. In total, 320 publications were analysed, with over half published in the last decade alone, reflecting sustained and increasing scholarly interest in the effectiveness of IMC.

Corresponding to the growth in publications, citation counts have also accumulated, though they are skewed toward a few seminal works. The average number of citations per document in the dataset is about 20, but this average is influenced by highly cited papers (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Top five cited IMC publications for 1991–2021

Study (first author, year)	Topic	Total citations (Scopus)
Mangold & Faulds (2009) – Business Horizons	Social media's role in IMC	2739
Batra & Keller (2016) – Journal of Marketing	Reframing IMC in a digital era	983
Naik & Raman (2003) – Journal of Marketing Research	Synergy in multimedia communications	608
Madhavaram et al. (2005) – Journal of Advertising	IMC & brand identity; brand equity link	386
Luxton et al. (2015) – Journal of Advertising	IMC capability & brand performance	288

Note: compiled by authors based on Scopus database

Table 1 illustrates the top five most-cited IMC publications in the sample. Notably, the single most-cited work is Mangold and Faulds (2009), with over 2,700 citations, which underscores the impact of research integrating social media into IMC frameworks. Other top-cited works include Batra and Keller (2016), a high-impact Journal of Marketing article that reframes IMC for the digital age, and Naik and Raman (2003), whose quantitative synergy model has become a foundational reference for modelling IMC effectiveness. Classic contributions linking IMC to brand outcomes, such as Madhavaram et al. (2005) on brand equity and Luxton et al. (2015) on IMC capability and performance, round out the top five. The prominence of these works confirms that digital IMC and measurement models are focal points attracting significant scholarly attention and citations.

To gain a deeper insight into the intellectual foundations and development of IMC research, it is essential to examine the scholars who have made the most significant contributions to the field over time. Identifying prolific authors not only highlights individual academic influence but also helps trace thematic priorities and methodological approaches that have shaped the literature (see Table 2).

Table 2. Top five most prolific authors in IMC research for 1991–2021

Author	IMC publications	Total citations (Scopus)	Key contributions
Philip J. Kitchen	15	430	IMC theory & definitions; global IMC adoption
Don E. Schultz	10	520	Early IMC pioneer; advocated measurement & accountability
Marija Šerić	9	125	Empirical IMC trends; applications in tourism/hospitality
Lluís Porcu	8	105	IMC measurement scales; organizational integration
Michael K. Reid	7	295	IMC & brand orientation; market orientation linkages

Note: compiled by authors based on Scopus database

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Table 2 illustrates the top five authors in terms of the number of IMC publications, along with their citation counts and key areas of contribution. Not surprisingly, Philip J. Kitchen and Don E. Schultz top the list. Kitchen (15 publications) and Schultz (10 publications) are often regarded as pioneers of IMC; together, they authored numerous early works that defined IMC and explored its global adoption. Schultz's work (much of it in collaboration with Kitchen) also laid the groundwork for IMC measurement and accountability, as he frequently called for the development of ROI measures and more rigorous evaluation techniques. The influence of these two scholars is further evident in their citation counts (Kitchen's works in the dataset have 430 citations; Schultz's have ~520), reflecting their foundational impact.

The bibliometric analyses revealed several thematic clusters that characterise the literature on IMC effectiveness. The paper presents the findings from two analyses: keyword co-occurrence analysis, which identifies the major research themes, and co-citation analysis, which sheds light on the underlying intellectual structure and seminal works that define those themes. These results are discussed in tandem to paint a comprehensive picture of the research landscape (see Figure 2). Figure 2 below provides a visualization of the keyword co-occurrence network, where nodes represent frequent keywords and node colors denote clusters of terms that often appear together. The research identified five major keyword clusters, described in detail after the figure: red indicates "Conceptual Foundations and IMC Definition," blue denotes "Branding and Consumer Psychology," green shows "Measurement and Evaluation," orange signifies "Digital IMC and Interactive Media," and purple corresponds to "Global and Emerging Markets," as revealed by the network and supporting analysis.

Cluster 1: "Conceptual Foundations and IMC Definition" (Red nodes). This cluster is dominated by general and strategic terms such as "Integrated Marketing Communication" (the term itself), "strategy," "definition," and "consistency." This cluster highlights that a substantial portion of IMC literature has been devoted to establishing the concept and arguing why integration matters, thereby laying the groundwork for subsequent effectiveness studies.

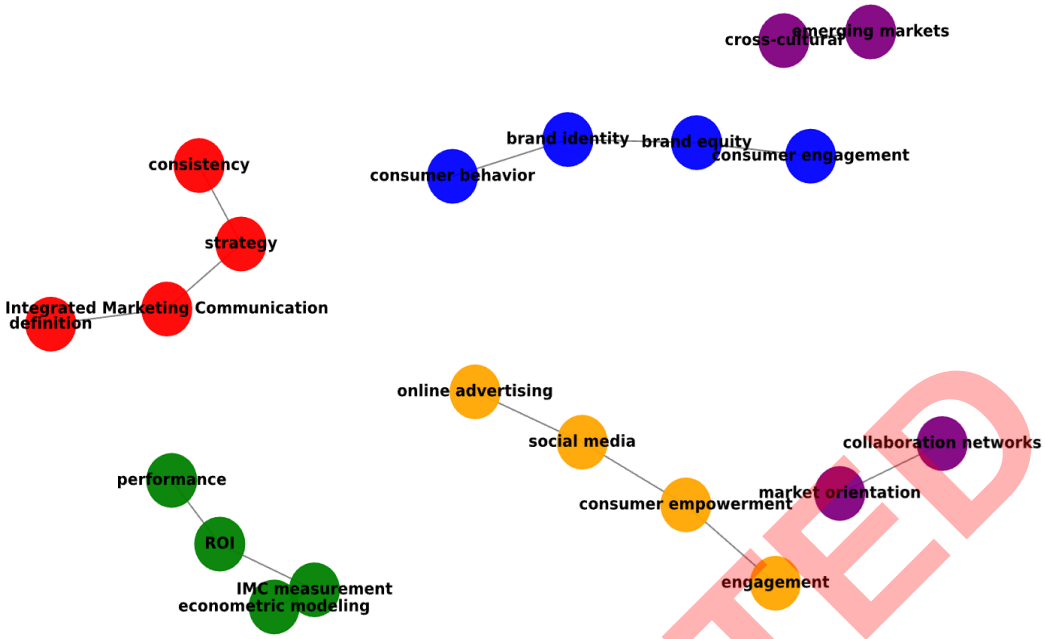


Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence network of IMC research

Cluster 2: "Branding and Consumer Psychology" (Blue nodes). Keywords such as "brand equity," "brand identity," "consumer engagement," and "consumer behavior" are frequently used here. This theme bridges IMC with brand management and consumer psychology. Many studies in this cluster examine how integrated communications affect consumer perceptions of the brand and customer relationships. Overall, Cluster 2 highlights that one significant stream of IMC effectiveness research evaluates success in terms of brand-related outcomes and consumer responses, utilising methods such as surveys, experiments (to test message integration effects on attitude), and brand equity modelling.

Cluster 3: "Measurement and Evaluation" (Green nodes). This cluster centers on terms like "performance," "ROI," "IMC measurement," "econometric modeling," and even some digital metrics like "social media metrics". It corresponds to research focused on quantifying IMC results and developing tools or models for evaluation. This cluster essentially captures the technical core of IMC effectiveness research: how to measure it. Studies in this group often propose frameworks (e.g., financial metrics, customer equity, scoring models) or analyze campaign data to demonstrate methods for evaluating integration outcomes.

Cluster 4: "Digital IMC and Interactive Media" (Orange nodes). Keywords here include "social media," "online advertising," "digital," "consumer empowerment," and "engagement" (the last overlapping with Cluster 2 but here in a digital context). This cluster represents research dealing with integrated marketing in digital channels and two-way communication with empowered consumers. Key themes include integrating traditional and digital media, maintaining consistency online, and leveraging user-generated content. The term "consumer empowerment" suggests that studies recognise consumers' participation in brand communications (e.g., via reviews and social sharing), which affects IMC outcomes.

Cluster 5: "Global and Emerging Markets IMC" (Purple nodes). Terms such as "cross-cultural," "emerging markets," "market orientation," and "collaboration networks" fall into this cluster. This is a somewhat diverse cluster, but its unifying theme is contextual and organizational factors in IMC. "Cross-cultural" and "emerging markets" refer to research examining IMC in diverse cultural or economic contexts, such as how IMC strategies or their effectiveness may differ in developing countries or between Western and Asian markets. In short, Cluster 5 demonstrates that IMC research is expanding to examine how integration operates across various environments, including cultural, geographical, and organisational contexts.

The co-citation network (visualized as a dendrogram) corroborated a division into three broad clusters of literature (see Figure 3).

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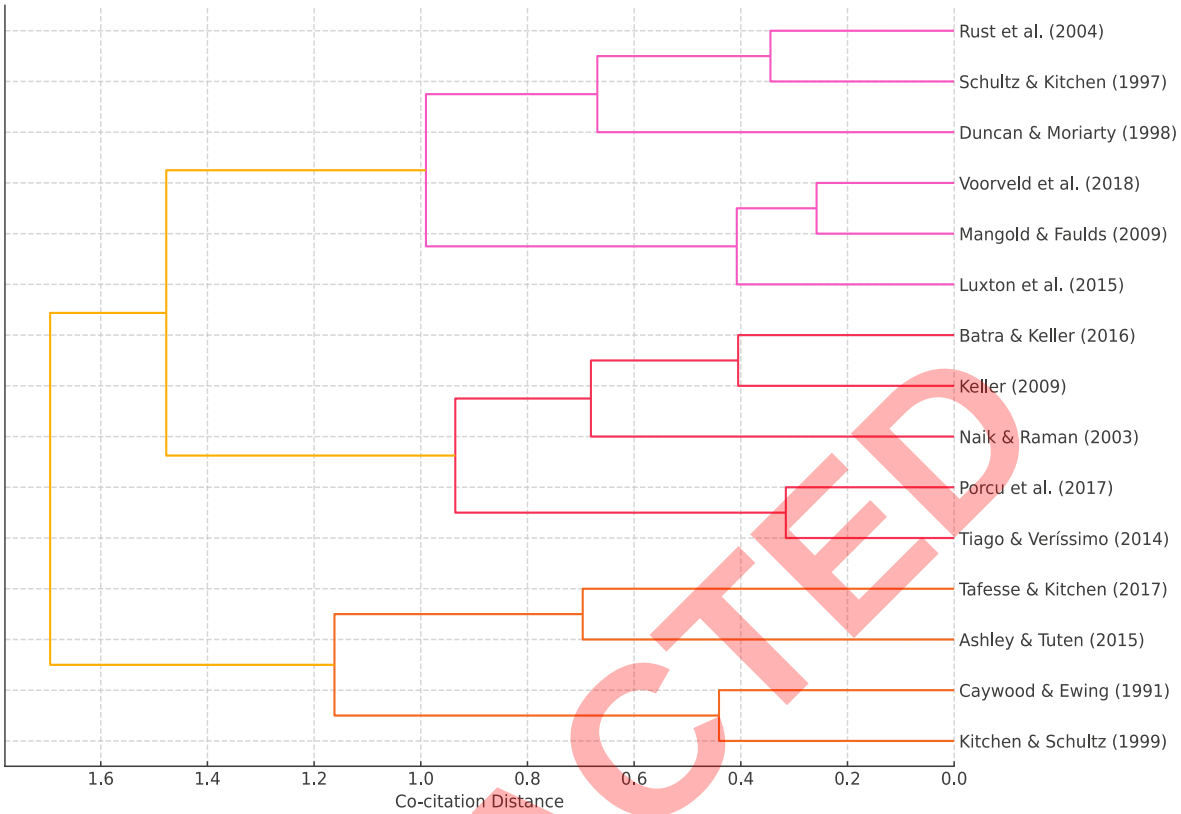


Figure 3. Dendrogram of co-cited references in IMC research

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Interpreting the dendrogram and underlying co-citation groupings:

Cluster A (Conceptual Foundations): This includes seminal works mainly from the 1990s. Co-cited references here include those by Schultz and Kitchen (1997), Kitchen and Schultz (1999), Duncan and Moriarty (1998), and other early IMC thought pieces (Caywood & Ewing, 1991) may also be cited). These are frequently cited together in later papers when authors discuss the definition and scope of IMC.

Cluster B (Quantitative Models and Measurement): In the co-citation dendrogram, another cluster group together references from the early 2000s that introduced quantitative measurement approaches. Key co-cited works here include Naik and Raman (2003), Rust et al. (2004), Schultz & Patti (2009), and Luxton et al. (2015), among others. These tend to be cited together in papers that discuss evaluation techniques, ROI, and performance outcomes.

Cluster C (Digital and Consumer Engagement): The third co-citation cluster emerging comprises references from the late 2000s to 2010s that deal with digital media and consumer engagement in IMC. Mangold and Faulds (2009), Batra and Keller (2016), Ashley and Tuten (2015), Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) on digital marketing, and Tafesse & Kitchen (2017) would be examples here. These are cited together in many recent papers addressing social media integration, content marketing, and the changing consumer role in IMC.

Table 3 synthesizes the key thematic clusters of IMC effectiveness research over time, linking focus areas with representative studies and outcome metrics.

Table 3. Major research themes in IMC effectiveness literature for 1991–2021

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 why 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

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Table 3 consolidates the core thematic clusters in IMC effectiveness research from 1991 to 2021, reflecting the field's evolution. Digital integration has become central, with social media and engagement metrics now core to evaluating IMC outcomes. Measurement approaches have diversified, yet a unified framework remains elusive. The literature is increasingly incorporating interdisciplinary tools (e.g., econometrics, analytics) and recognising the need for context-sensitive strategies, particularly in global and B2B settings. These patterns suggest a mature, yet still fragmented field, where further synthesis and adaptation are needed to align theoretical development with practical demands.

In the next section, the paper will synthesise these insights into a set of conclusions and outline future research directions. The research will highlight how the findings support certain conclusions. For example, that IMC effectiveness research is trending toward data-rich, analytical approaches, moreover, the paper will discuss implications for practitioners (such as the importance of investing in integrated analytics capabilities). Moreover, the paper will acknowledge limitations (for instance, the field's heavy reliance on English-language and U.S.-centric research, which is slowly changing). This approach ensures that the results, specifically the identified patterns and clusters, are directly connected to the conclusions and recommendations. It also addresses the previously noted gap in earlier drafts concerning the insufficient linkage between findings and interpretations.

CONCLUSION

After thirty years of development, IMC has evolved from a novel idea into a central tenet of strategic marketing. Nevertheless, evaluating IMC effectiveness remains a complex endeavor. This bibliometric analysis reveals the evolution of IMC effectiveness research over the past three decades. The field has shifted from conceptual advocacy toward empirically grounded, data-driven inquiries. While integration remains a cornerstone of marketing strategy, the metrics used to assess IMC success continue to vary widely across studies.

Several clear conclusions emerge:

1. *Research on IMC effectiveness has matured and diversified.* The steady growth in publications and citations reflects the establishment of IMC as a legitimate academic domain. Early IMC studies were largely conceptual, arguing in favour of integration; in contrast, recent studies are far more empirical and specialised. Researchers have progres-

sively developed quantitative models, measurement scales, and case studies to assess IMC outcomes. There is no evidence that effective implementation of IMC can generate significant benefits, ranging from enhanced brand equity and strengthened customer relationships to improved marketing return on investment. At the same time, the literature has fragmented into subthemes (as the cluster analysis showed), indicating a healthy diversification. This means IMC is being explored in multiple contexts (digital, global, B2B, etc.) and through multiple lenses (consumer psychology, econometric, managerial). Such diversity is a sign of a maturing field, though it also implies that findings are sometimes siloed. Continued efforts to synthesise insights across these subdomains will be crucial for advancing a unified theory of IMC effectiveness.

2. *The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the criteria for IMC effectiveness.* A consistent thread in the findings is the rise of digital and social media as both a context for IMC and a focus on effectiveness metrics. Traditional measures, such as reach, frequency, and classic persuasion metrics, are no longer sufficient alone; they must be supplemented (or replaced) by measures of engagement, virality, and customer involvement. The most influential recent works (e.g., Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Batra & Keller, 2016) underscore how consumer engagement and experience consistency across channels have become key performance indicators for IMC. In practice, this means that an IMC campaign today might be evaluated by its social media sharing rates, cross-channel conversions, or customer journey smoothness, rather than just awareness lift or sales uptick in a single channel.

3. *Measurement and accountability remain the foremost challenges.* Despite many advances, the field has not yet converged on a single approach to valuing IMC performance. Therefore, a gap is repeatedly noted in the literature. The analysis found an entire cluster of research devoted to IMC measurement techniques (Cluster 3). While this signifies progress (e.g., ROI models, synergy tests, and IMC audit tools), it also highlights ongoing fragmentation. Different studies use different metrics, making it difficult to compare results or build cumulatively on each other.

4. *Context matters: IMC effectiveness is not one-size-fits-all.* The impact of IMC differs across industries, cultures, and organizational settings. What defines "effective IMC" must be adapted to context. For instance, in consumer goods, success may depend on mass media and retail synergy, while in B2B settings it may hinge on content marketing and trade events. Cross-cultural research shows that campaigns must respect local communication norms what works in one country may fail in another. Therefore, IMC strategies and evaluation metrics should be tailored to specific environments. Practitioners must consider local data availability and consumer behavior; researchers should conduct more comparative studies. The growing internationalization of IMC research supports this direction and will help distinguish universal versus context-specific effectiveness indicators.

5. *The future of IMC research lies in integration.* Finally, the study's meta-perspective leads us to observe that IMC research, to remain relevant, must embody the spirit of integration in its own scholarly approach. The emerging trends such as digital convergence, data-driven methods, cross-cultural expansion all require interdisciplinary thinking. Marketing communication can no longer be studied in isolation from technology (IT and data analytics), cultural studies, or even finance. The next generation of IMC valuation tools will likely come from cross-pollinating ideas: e.g., using AI (from computer science) to model IMC mix optimization, or using social network analysis (from sociology) to measure how integrated messages spread in networks. The bibliometric findings show some movement in this direction, with diverse keywords and reference disciplines entering the IMC sphere. The research strongly encourages this trajectory: integrating knowledge from different fields will enhance IMC measurement and practice. For academics, this might mean collaborating across departments or employing mixed-methods research (quant + qual, or experimental + computational). For practitioners, it means building teams that include not just marketers, but data scientists and cultural experts when planning and evaluating campaigns.

Future research should prioritize the development of a unified IMC effectiveness framework that integrates financial, customer, and process metrics, validated across diverse contexts and campaign types. Additional attention is needed for longitudinal studies, the role of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, AR/VR), cross-cultural comparisons, and stronger collaboration between academia and industry to ground findings in real-world practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization and theory: AO; research design: AO and VG; data collection: AO and VG; analysis and interpretation: AO and VG; writing draft preparation: AO and VG; supervision: AO; correction of article: AO; proofread and final approval of article: AO and VG. All

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authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Information about the authors

***Askhat Zh. Orazayev** – PhD student, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, email: askhat.orazayev@kimep.kz,ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5746-7795
Vladimir Garkavenko – PhD Associate professor, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, email: gvlad@kimep.kz, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/ 0009-0005-7774-781X

Авторлар туралы мәліметтер

***Оразаев А.Ж.** – PhD докторант, КИМЭП Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, email: askhat.orazayev@kimep.kz ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5746-7795
Гаркавенко В. – PhD, қауымдастырылған профессор, КИМЭП Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, email: gvlad@kimep.kz, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/ 0009-0005-7774-781X

Сведения об авторах

***Оразаев А.Ж.** – PhD докторант, Университет КИМЭП, Алматы, Казахстан, email: askhat.orazayev@kimep.kz ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5746-7795
Гаркавенко В. – PhD, ассоциированный профессор, Университет КИМЭП, Алматы, Казахстан, email: gvlad@kimep.kz, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/ 0009-0005-7774-781X