EKLEKTİK

The Evolving Landscape of Email Marketing

E-posta Pazarlamasının Değişen Görünümü

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The Evolving Landscape of Email Marketing[1]

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Abstract

Email marketing remains an incredibly relevant and useful type of digital marketing channel that is directly measurable, targeted, and cost-effective when engaging with customers in a direct manner and at any scale. This paper showcases a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of academic research output published in WOS that focuses on email marketing to identify trends, influential players, and emerging themes. The authors extracted data from the WOS database and analyzed it with Biblioshiny. The study indicates that interest in email and email marketing research has grown steadily, with considerable inquiry coming from the USA, UK, and Australia. The authors identified four common themes across the studies: personalization, automation, mobile optimization, and audience segmentation. The study also identified a trend towards the convergence of email with other forms of digital marketing, most notably social media and customer relationship management (CRM). In terms of overall implications, the authors suggest that while the email marketing literature predominantly draws on inquiry into campaign performance and user engagement, there are emerging areas for inquiry, such as AI, privacy regulation, and synergy with other platforms. This research extends the digital marketing literature by tracing an evolution of email marketing research and providing actionable pathways to better understand, navigate, and develop best practices within this established field.

Keywords: E-mail marketing, Digital marketing, Bibliometric analysis

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1   This study is derived from the thesis titled "The Evolving Landscape of Email Marketing: Strategies for Success in the Digital Age," which is being written by Firdawss Iguedem under the supervision of Muhammet Ali Aytaç at the Institute of Graduate Studies at İstanbul Gedik University.

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EKLEKTİK

E-posta Pazarlamasının Değişen Görünümü

Öz

E-posta pazarlaması, müşterilerle doğrudan ve her ölçekte etkileşime geçerken doğrudan ölçülebilir, hedeflenebilir ve maliyet etkin olması bakımından son derece güncel ve faydalı bir dijital pazarlama türü olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu makale, eğilimleri, etkili aktörleri ve ortaya çıkan temaları belirleme girişimiyle, WOS'ta yayımlanan ve e-posta pazarlamasına odaklanan akademik araştırma çıktılarının kapsamlı bir bibliyometrik analizini sunmaktadır. Yazarlar, WOS veri tabanından verileri çıkarmış ve Biblioshiny ile analiz etmiştir. Çalışma, e-posta ve e-posta pazarlaması araştırmalarına olan ilginin istikrarlı bir biçimde arttığını ve özellikle ABD, Birleşik Krallık ve Avustralya'dan kayda değer düzeyde araştırma çıktısı geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Yazarlar, çalışmalar genelinde dört ortak tema belirlemiştir: kişiselleştirme, otomasyon, mobil uyum ve hedef kitle segmentasyonu. Çalışma ayrıca, e-postanın özellikle sosyal medya ve müşteri ilişkileri yönetimi (CRM) gibi diğer dijital pazarlama türleriyle yakınsamasına yönelik bir eğilim tespit etmiştir. Genel çıkarımlar açısından, yazar, e-posta pazarlaması literatürünün ağırlıklı olarak kampanya performansı ve kullanıcı etkileşimi incelemelerine dayansa da e-posta pazarlaması içerisinde yapay zekâ, gizlilik düzenlemeleri ve diğer platformlarla sinerji gibi ortaya çıkan yeni araştırma alanları bulunduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bu araştırma, e-posta pazarlaması çalışmalarının evrimini izleyerek ve bu yerleşik alan içinde daha iyi uygulamaları anlamak, yönlendirmek ve geliştirmek için uygulanabilir yollar sunarak dijital pazarlama literatürünü genişletmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: E-posta pazarlaması, Dijital pazarlama, Bibliyometrik analiz

Introduction

Email marketing has come a long way since the internet began. Email was invented in 1971, but it wasn't until the late 1990s that businesses began to realize its potential for marketing purposes[4]. Early academic research focused heavily on technical aspects of email, such as deliverability and infrastructure. When email marketing matured, academics began studying consumer habits, response rates, and the effective-

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4   Dave Chaffey and Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, *Digital Marketing* (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2019).

ness of email marketing campaigns.[5] In practice, businesses first used email as a mass communication tool to deliver the same messages to the largest number of people. Then, they slowly changed the course and worked towards great specificity in their tactics using segmentation, personalization, and automation. Research studies began to explore the way consumers process email marketing communications, and this era began to feel the shift to consumer-based studies.[6] With that beginning, ideas of customer-based relationship management, email design, and mobile optimization were on the rise, and they tried to find a new way to attract customers, although previously e-mail marketing shot itself in the foot because of spam.[7]

Especially after checking the evolution of omnichannel marketing and customer experience implications, it is easy to observe that a mounting scholarly focus on cross-platform consumer behavior.[8] New technologies, and in particular artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, have evolved the industry again. Increasingly academic research has explored predictive analytics, real-time personalization, and customer journey mapping and their relevance to email marketing.[9] Email marketing is now perceived not only as a communication tool but also as a fluid, data-informed discipline supporting digital engagement strategies. Research has assured that despite the growing number of social media platforms, email marketing is still a unique activity that allows for direct, personal, and measurable engagement with consumers.[10] The evolution of email marketing reflects wider trends in digital marketing, revealing a continuous need to adapt and innovate. In this study, a bibliometric analysis is conducted to reveal the overall landscape of email marketing and to gain a better

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5   Mengjie Liao, Lin Qi, and Jian Zhang, "The Dynamic Evolution Mechanism of Heterogeneous OWOM—An Improved Viral Marketing Model," *Information* 11, no. 3 (2020): 140.

6   Arnaud De Bruyn and Gary L. Lilien, "A Multi-Stage Model of Word-of-Mouth Influence through Viral Marketing," *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 25, no. 3 (2008): 151–163.

7   Oleg V. Pavlov, Nigel Melville, and Robert K. Plice, "Toward a Sustainable Email Marketing Infrastructure," *Journal of Business Research* 61, no. 11 (2008): 1191–1199.

8   Peter C. Verhoef, Pallassana K. Kannan, and J. Jeffrey Inman, "From Multi-Channel Retailing to Omni-Channel Retailing: Introduction to the Special Issue on Multi-Channel Retailing," *Journal of Retailing* 91, no. 2 (2015): 174–181.

9   Sepideh Bashang and K. Puttanna, "The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Digital Marketing: A Review," *International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies (IRJEMS)* 2, no. 3 (2023): 125–133.

10   Dimple Patil, "Email Marketing with Artificial Intelligence: Enhancing Personalization, Engagement, and Customer Retention," 2024.

understanding of the relevant trends.

In the last ten years, bibliometric studies have emerged as a highly sought-after approach to analyzing vast collections of scholarly work in digital marketing. These analyses utilize quantitative measures to assess publication patterns, author productivity, citation patterns, and thematic change, providing broad insights into how disciplines evolve over time.[11] Nonetheless, though general digital marketing reviews are typical, focused bibliometric reviews on email marketing are rare. The majority of current reviews aggregate email marketing within general categories, frequently being overtaken by more contemporary technologies like social networks, influencer marketing, or mobile applications. Tiago and Veríssimo[12], for example, gave a general breakdown of digital marketing aids but gave little emphasis to the distinctive features and changing function of email. Literature reviews that have addressed email marketing have usually done so through its use in CRM[13] or to compare it with other digital technologies under the digital marketing, and not as a standalone examination of the development of academic and professional knowledge concerning email marketing over time. A dearth of focused bibliometric analyses on email marketing indicates an evident gap in research, thereby rendering it an underexplored yet worthy area in need of separate investigation.

Key Insights about Email Marketing

Email marketing is widely recognized as one of the most effective and enduring tools within the broader domain of digital marketing. As part of the wider ecosystem of web, mobile, and social media channels.[14] Email marketing consistently delivers one of the highest returns on investment (ROI) among digital marketing channels, ave-

11   Juran Kim, Seungmook Kang, and Ki Hoon Lee, "Evolution of Digital Marketing Communication: Bibliometric Analysis and Network Visualization from Key Articles," *Journal of Business Research* 130 (2021): 552–563.

12   Maria Teresa Pinheiro Melo Borges Tiago and José Manuel Cristóvão Veríssimo, "Digital Marketing and Social Media: Why Bother?," *Business Horizons* 57, no. 6 (2014): 703–708.

13   Edward C. Malthouse et al., "Managing Customer Relationships in the Social Media Era: Introducing the Social CRM House," *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 27, no. 4 (2013): 270–280.

14   Dave Chaffey and Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, *Digital Marketing* (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2019).

raging up to \$36 for every dollar spent.[15] This makes it a cost-effective strategy for businesses of all sizes, shows its high ROI potential, and lets us position it as a core component of any digital marketing mix. This positions email as a core tactical and strategic component of digital marketing programs, particularly in ecommerce settings where conversion and customer lifetime value are central performance metrics.[16]

Additionally, early work primarily focuses on how email continues to be used as an alternative marketing channel. The researchers agreed that commercial communication must be designed with user experience, technical capacity, and antispam regulation in mind. They also emphasize that if email communication cannot align with those three, customer trust decreases, complaints increase, and pressure mounts on network infrastructure, suggesting that sustainable email marketing requires both technological safeguards and responsible managerial practices.[17] Furthermore, in another study, researchers claim that email also plays a crucial role in the digital marketing mix, while retailing central paradigm shifts towards multichannel to omnichannel. Because it plays a central hub role between web visits, mobile app usage, and in-store interaction.[18] Lastly, companies should include social media in their strategic digital communication mix, and email must be a bridge between those social channels and relationshiporiented communications.[19]

The integration of email into customer relationship management (CRM) further reinforces its strategic role. In digital marketing, the "social CRM house" refers to how firms combine social media data, CRM systems, and analytical capabilities to manage customer relationships.[20] In this framework, email is a key outbound channel for activating insights generated from social and behavioral data, enabling firms to deliver tailored offers, recommendations, and content at different stages of the customer journey.

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15   Litmus, "The ROI of Email Marketing," infographic, accessed September 20, 2025, https://www.litmus.com/blog/infographic-the-roi-of-email-marketing.

16   Yudiyanto Joko Purnomo, "Digital Marketing Strategy to Increase Sales Conversion on E-Commerce Platforms," *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)* 1, no. 2 (2023): 54–62.

17   Pavlov, Melville, and Plice, "Sustainable Email Marketing Infrastructure," 1193.

18   Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman, "From Multi-Channel to Omni-Channel Retailing," 176.

19   Tiago and Veríssimo, "Digital Marketing and Social Media," 705.

20   Malthouse et al., "Managing Customer Relationships in the Social Media Era," 274.

For an effective e-mail marketing campaign, personalization is a key metric. Personalized emails result in higher engagement rates. Research shows that personalized emails can lead to a 26% increase in open rates and a 760% boost in revenue. The role of personalization in email marketing shows that even when an email's informational content is limited or noninformative, personalized elements can significantly influence engagement metrics, such as open and clickthrough rates. This means that perceived relevance and individual targeting can shape consumer responses beyond the purely informational value of the message[21]. Tailoring content to personal preferences can significantly enhance customer experience. Especially, AI-driven email marketing advances the personalization derived from behavioral, transactional, and contextual data. This enhances engagement and customer retention, particularly in competitive digital environments where consumer attention is scarce.[22]

On the other hand, customer segmentation can be helpful for those who use personalization in their digital strategy. Segmentation structures the email audience into meaningful subgroups based on demographic, behavioral, or value-based criteria. Dividing your customers into specific segments allows for more targeted messaging. Businesses that utilize segmentation see a 14.31% higher open rate compared to those that do not. Segmentation in email marketing leads to more relevant messaging and improved campaign performance, as firms can tailor content, timing, and frequency to the needs of specific customer segments.[23] This helps ensure that the right messages reach the right people. Together, personalization and segmentation represent two foundational pillars of effective email strategy.

Another key insight about e-mail marketing is mobile optimization, because with more consumers accessing emails on mobile devices, having mobile-friendly designs is becoming essential. Emails that aren't optimized for mobile can lead to lost opportunities and decreased engagement.[24]

21 Navdeep S. Sahni, S. Christian Wheeler, and Pradeep Chintagunta, "Personalization in Email Marketing: The Role of Noninformative Advertising Content," *Marketing Science* 37, no. 2 (2018): 236–258.

22 Patil, *Email Marketing with Artificial Intelligence*, 2024.

23 Filip Šinko Morandini and Damir Dobrinić, "The Role of Segmentation in E-Mail Marketing," *CroDiM: International Journal of Marketing Science* 1, no. 1 (2018): 145–156.

24 Yudiyanto Joko Purnomo, "Digital Marketing Strategy to Increase Sales Conversion on E-Commerce Platforms," *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)* 1, no. 2 (2023): 54–62.

Finally, automation plays a crucial role in maximizing the impact of email marketing. Automation tools enable businesses to deliver timely messages based on customer behavior, such as welcome emails for new subscribers and reminders for abandoned carts.[25] Not only does this save time, but it also increases the likelihood of conversion.

While the reality of the effectiveness of email marketing is established through reports in the industry and companies, we found scant identifiable academic work related to its evolution and its thematic shifts. Most digital-marketing literature has focused on emergent topics such as social media and mobile marketing while overlooking the possibilities for continued growth in email marketing. Therefore, it is time to map out such scholarly work toward contextualizing prior contributions, emergent research topics, and gaps.

The primary goal of this study is to provide a bibliometric analysis of email marketing literature to explore its evolution, identify the key authors and institutions, and discover the main themes of research. More specifically, the study answers the following research questions:

1. How has the academic output on email marketing developed over time?

2. Who are the major contributors, in terms of both output and influence?

3. What are the major themes of research, and how have the themes shifted?

Bibliometric Approach

A bibliometric analysis represents a quantitative and systematic approach to evaluating the progress of academic knowledge. It sheds light on publication patterns, citation networks, frequency of keyword co-occurrences, and thematic clustering, which can provide insights at the macro-level involving progress and prioritization of discipline, and micro-level specific contributions in the area under study.[26] In addition

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25   Alderd J. Froolik, *Effect AI-Powered Email Automation: An Analysis of Email Marketing Automation*, no. uzsaf_v1 (Center for Open Science, 2024).

26   Luc Van Doorslaer, "Bibliometric Studies," in *Researching Translation and Interpreting*, ed. Luc Van Doorslaer and Yves Gambier (London: Routledge, 2015), 168–176.

to Biblioshiny, available from the Bibliometrix R package, tools provide the potential for insightful visualization of networks and nascent clusters of knowledge.[27]

As the digital marketing ecosystem continues to grow in sophistication, the research is timely and meaningful. Mapping the discipline of email marketing and the developments of academic discourse should provide fertile ground for future research and practice. Furthermore, representing the convergence of email marketing with other digital efforts, such as content marketing, automation, and personalization, should reveal interesting and purposeful future courses.

Findings

This research uses the bibliometric analysis approach to examine the intellectual structure, productivity, and thematic progression of email marketing studies. Owing to the increasing importance of email marketing in digital communication and the limited availability of in-depth bibliometric syntheses in this research area, the approach offers breadth and analytical depth. Bibliometric approaches enable the systematization of the literature using quantitative methods in a large academic publication dataset.[28] Web of Science (WoS) databases were utilized to search for relevant literature. This database was chosen for its extensive peer-reviewed article indexing across various disciplines, its amenability to use with Bibliometrix tools, and its richness in metadata (author, institution, citations, keywords, etc.). E-mail marketing, OR email marketing, OR Permission marketing is used as a query on WOS. As we aim to clarify the entire development in this area, we use only the main headline of the topic and do not choose a time period based on Oliveira et al.'s[29] recommendations in their article to avoid eliminating any needed documents. After the search, we eliminated articles written in languages other than English or published in categories other than Business, Communication, or Social Science interdisciplinary Web of Science categories. Then the document type was set to article, and 2025 was excluded. Because

27   L. Radha and J. Arumugam, "The Research Output of Bibliometrics Using Bibliometrix R Package and VOSviewer," *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2021): 44–49.
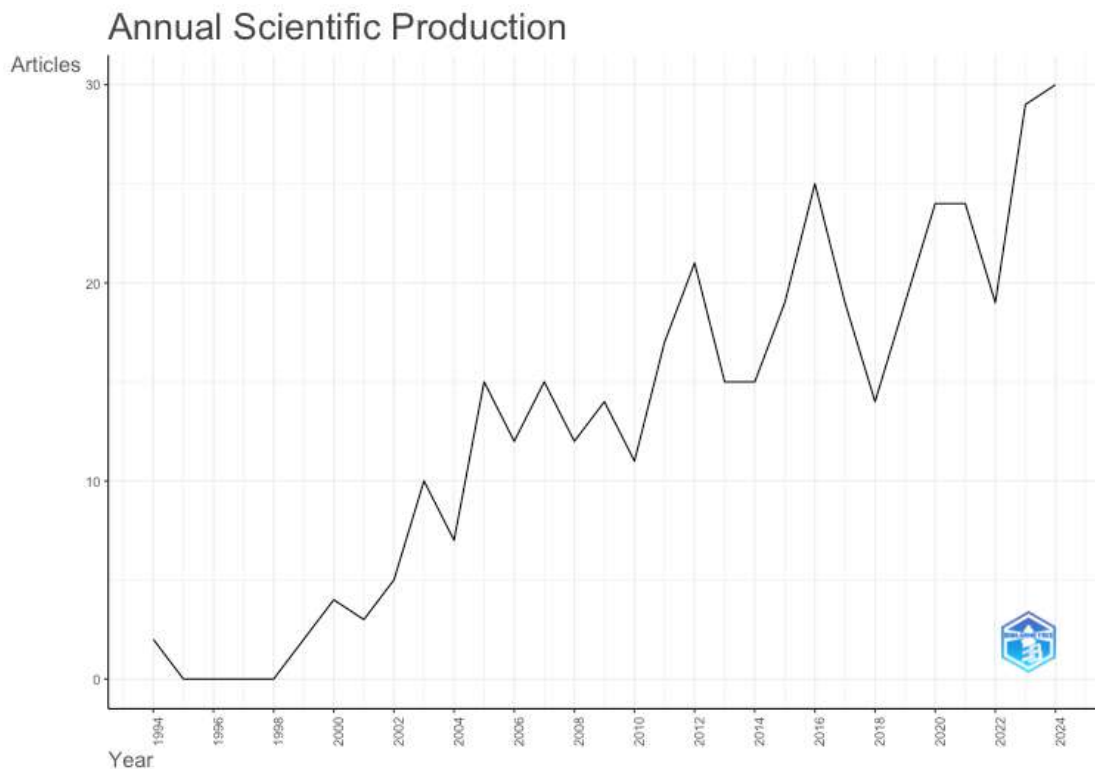
28   Asim F. Choudhri et al., "Understanding Bibliometric Parameters and Analysis," *Radiographics* 35, no. 3 (2015): 736–746.

29   Otávio José de Oliveira et al., "Bibliometric Method for Mapping the State-of-the-Art and Identifying Research Gaps and Trends in Literature: An Essential Instrument to Support the Development of Scientific Projects," in *Scientometrics: Recent Advances* (London: IntechOpen, 2019).

the research was conducted on 29 January. And there was not enough data for 2025 at that time. After data cleaning and filtering, 402 unique documents were included in the final dataset.

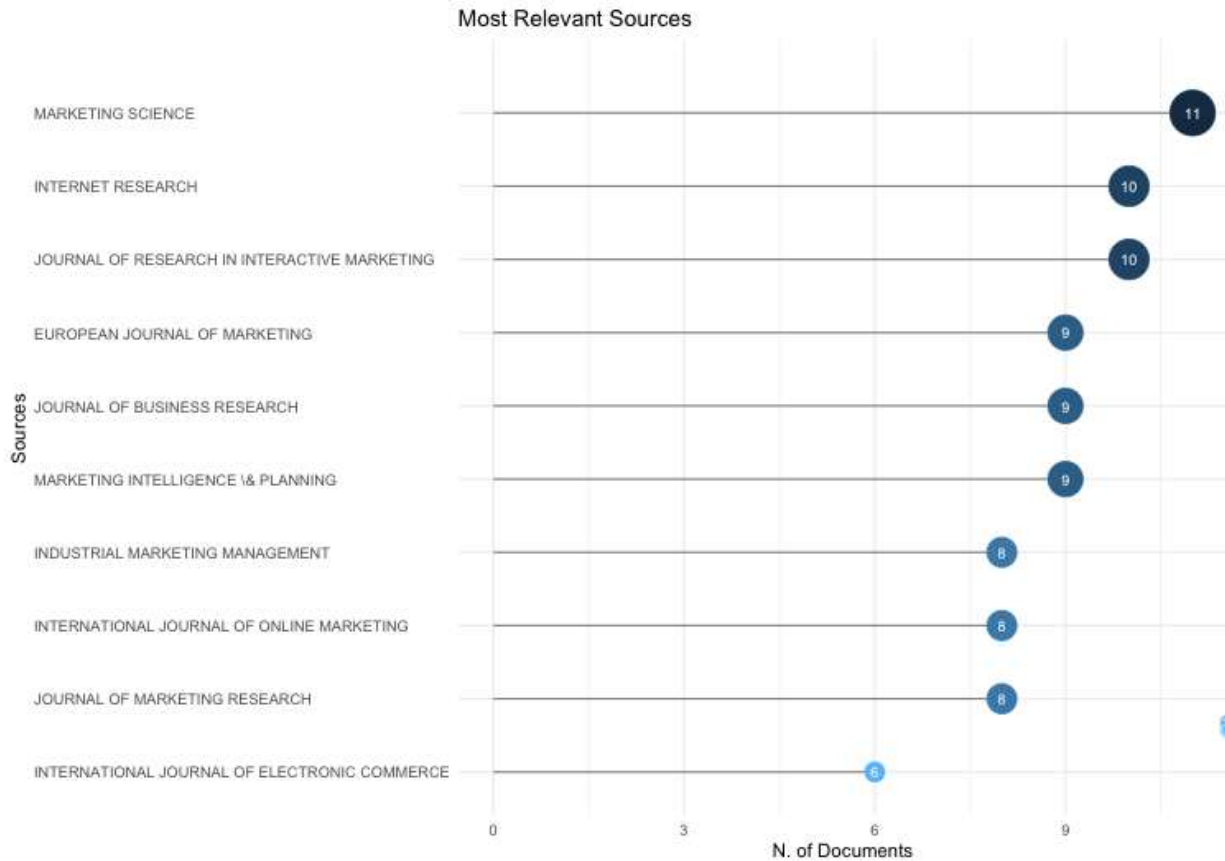**Scientific Production Over Time and Source Analysis**

The dataset from 1994 to 2025 shows an upward trend across the board for publications and keyword usage related to the email marketing concept. Even though a direct count of keywords per year is not provided, the frequency of key thematic keywords used through time will reflect the scholarly interest and depth of the topic since the early days of email marketing. Between 2018 and 2025, peak frequencies of keywords can be observed; thus, the wave of academic interest is likely the result of artificial intelligence, data privacy laws (e.g., GDPR), and data segmentation through increased use of CRM systems.

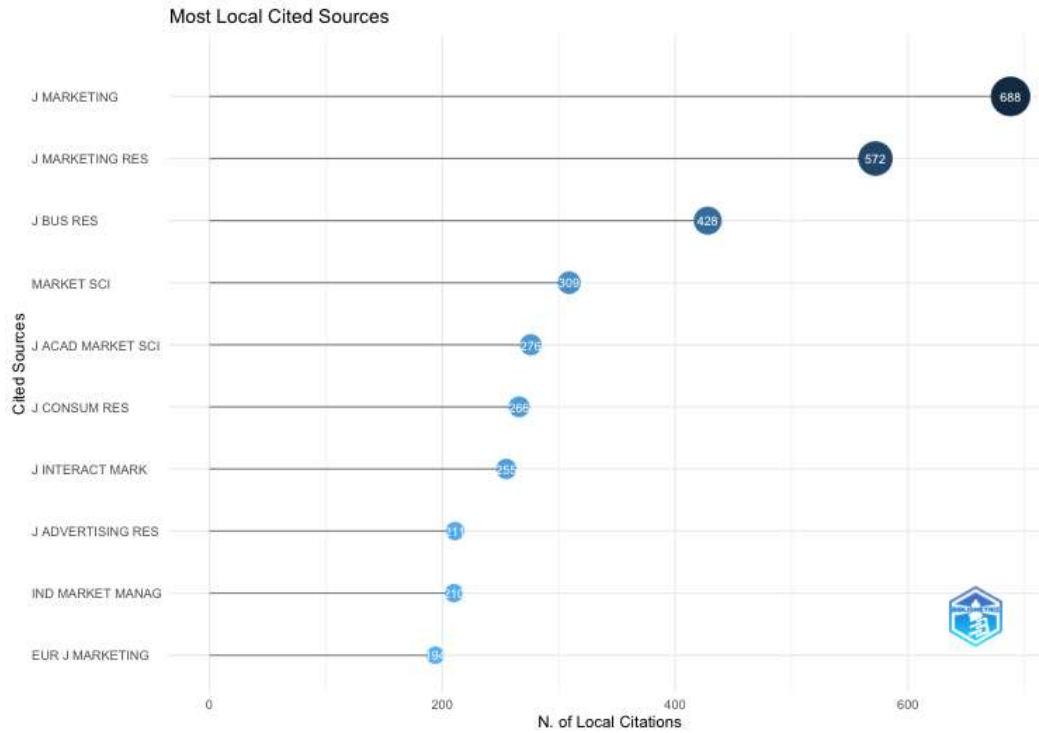**Figure 1.** Scientific Production per Year

The field of email marketing research has shown gradual yet consistent growth across the last 30 years, as illustrated in Figure 1. The graph clearly shows a flat line from 1995 to 2000, a small lift from 2001 to 2006, a steeper incline post-2010, and a surge

from 2021 to 2024. 2023 and 2024 are the most prolific years on record, with 29 and 30 publications, respectively. This reflects a peak in academic interest, likely driven by advances in automation and AI-driven personalization, greater integration of CRM and predictive analytics, and heightened attention to data privacy regulations and consumer trust. The 9.45% year-on-year growth rate reinforces this trend of steady growth and marks the academic importance and vibrancy of this area.
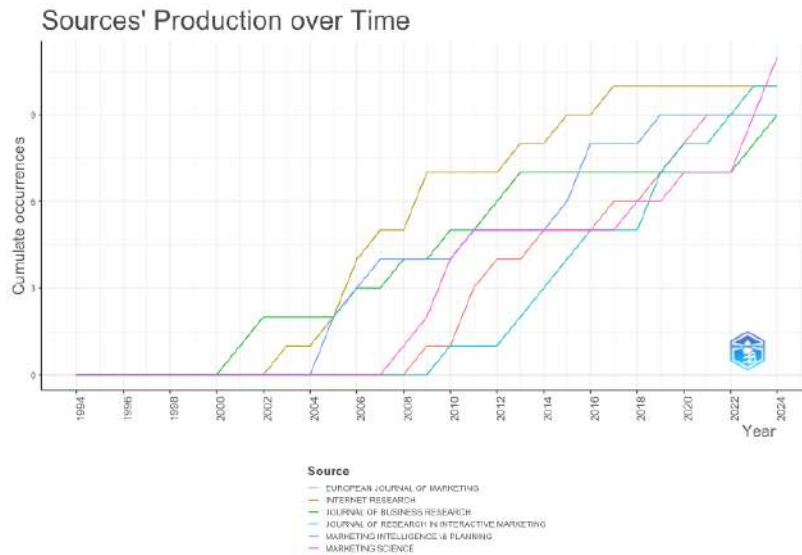

Figure 2. Most Relevant Sources

When we checked out most locally cited journals, there are many specialized or new journals, for example: Social Media and Society, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, and Cogent Business and Management. It is evident that the field of email marketing is trending in a way that reflects. New and emerging technological trends, social consequences of technology, and personalization using AI.

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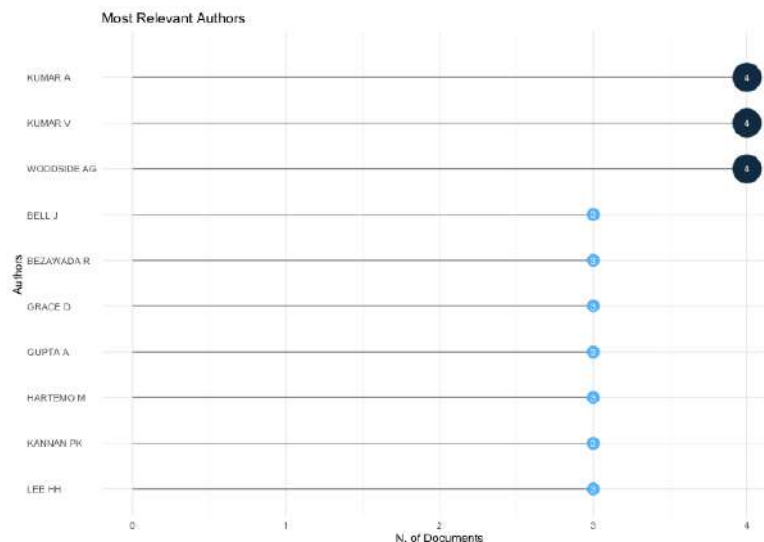**Figure 3.** Most Local Cited Journals

A longitudinal dataset enables the assessment of the contribution of the six top journals to email marketing research over the last thirty years. All six journals produced substantial output in email marketing research. Assessing volume output and when the journals became contributors to email marketing provides additional insights related to the adoption and maturity of the discipline. When we analyze journal-wise trends, the first publication in marketing science was in 2008 and added 11 more till today, reflecting increasing theoretical interest in analytics, segmentation, and optimization models within email strategy. In the Journal of Internet Research, there are 10 articles between 2003 and 2017, mainly focusing on tech-driven and behavioral aspects: spam filtering, click-through behaviors, and CRM interfaces. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing published its first article comparably late in 2010 but reached 10 articles in 2023. Topics specialize in engagement, interactivity, and cross-channel analysis, which align well with evolving email use cases (personalized, lifecycle, multi-touchpoint). On the other hand, the European Journal of Marketing has had steady growth since 2009, reaching 9 articles by 2024 and highlighting interest in relationship marketing, consumer trust, and cross-cultural perspectives on email engagement. Journal of Business Research is one of the earliest major contributors among them, which started to publish in 2001. It's well known for B2B studies, performance measurement, and email's role in strategic decision-making. The last one is Marketing Intelligence & Planning, which, importantly, contributes to li-

terature and mainly focuses on sustained output in market segmentation, planning algorithms, and campaign strategy. Internet Research and Marketing Science are dominated by volume and consistency post-2010. Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing is rising sharply post in 2014, suggesting a scholarly pivot to interactive, data-driven types of email.
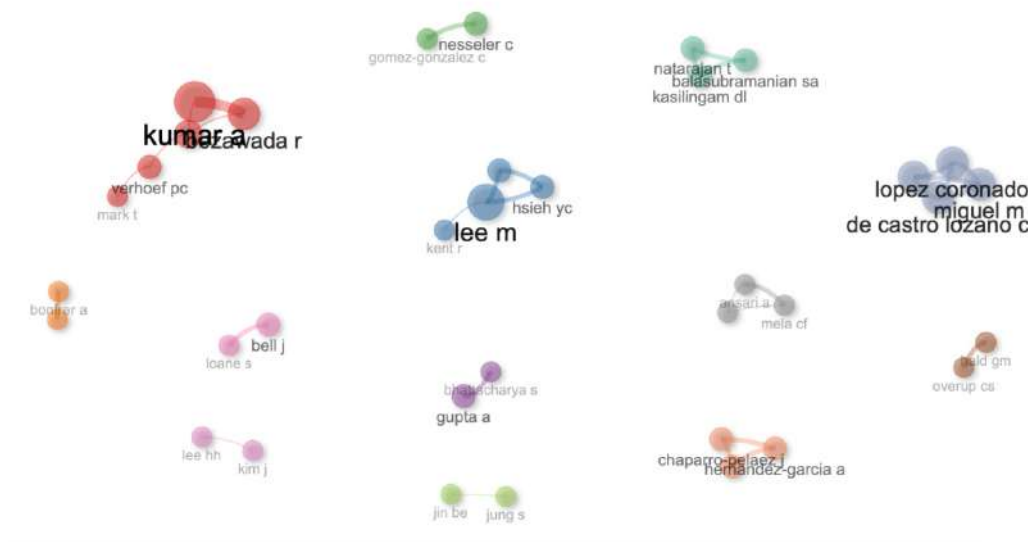

Figure 4. Source Production Over Time

Authorship and Collaboration

Figure 5. Most Relevant Authors

Figure 5 shows the leading contributors in the field of email marketing research ba-

sed on the number of articles. The top scholars usually have a constant citation yield through time, or their research is continually relevant. Researchers like Woodside AG and Hartemo M are high-value contributors who have made fewer but highly cited contributions that have shaped important debates. The network graph visualizes the field exhibits properties. The average of 2.66 co-authors per document in this field shows small-team collaborations. On the other hand, 26.6% of papers have international co-authorship, suggesting a moderate level of globalization of email marketing research. Much of the international collaboration is among upper-level authors like Kumar V and Kannan PK, who tend to co-publish in global marketing contexts.
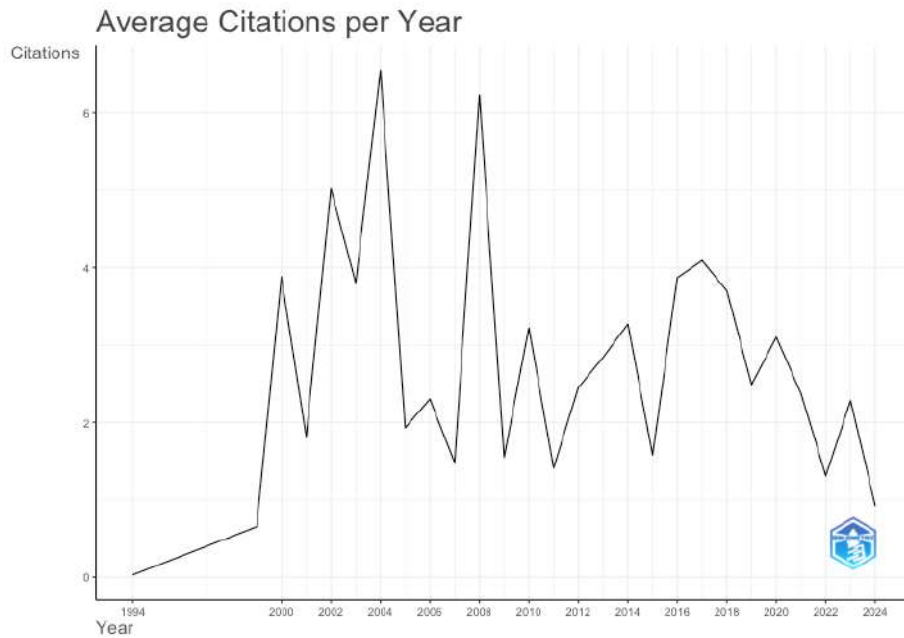

Figure 6. Collaboration Network

Top authors maintain consistent influence, and core studies by these researchers likely serve as foundational works in the field. A few authors dominate article production, which indicates a specialized but expanding research community. High citation rates per year show that email marketing remains an active and evolving research domain with enduring academic and industry relevance. Collaboration is moderate but increasing, suggesting that globalization and crossinstitutional projects are becoming essential for producing highimpact research. Kumar A and V are both ranked number one on academic influence, both in terms of numbers and in defining the field. Hartemo M and Gupta A. are emerging leaders, given their citation rate compared to their number of papers. Lee, HH, and Grace, D make substantial contributions to consumer experience personalization and brand management. Besides that, if we check the affiliations, Georgia State University is the highest producing institution with 12 publications. Griffith University and the University of Ulster intersect closely, de-

monstrating a productive academic climate with 11 and 10 publications, respectively. Research concentrated from elite U.S., European, and Australian institutions. Emerging from Norway, Spain, South Africa, and Taiwanese universities demonstrates emerging globality and diversity.

Citation Analysis examines how influential research in email marketing has been over time, using metrics like mean total citations per article (MeanTCperArt), mean citations per year per article (MeanTCperYear), and citable age (CitableYears), which is defined as how long the articles have been available for citation.

Figure 7. Avarage Citation per Year

The Golden Era of Citation Power is between 2000 and 2008. Articles written during this period exhibit high longevity and scholarly impact. Examples probably include seminal research on email ROI, CRM integration, and regulatory frameworks.

After that, till the end of 2020, we can talk about the maturing phase. Research branched into segmentation, behavior analytics, and multichannel marketing. More recent lower mean total citations but relatively consistent year-to-year citation rates (approx. 2–4) reflecting sustained over-time relevance. These numbers should not be interpreted as low impact but rather citation lag (i.e., citation typically takes 2–5 years to meaningfully accumulate). The increasing number of publications in those years also suggests high engagement and scholarly momentum, even if citation maturity has not yet occurred.
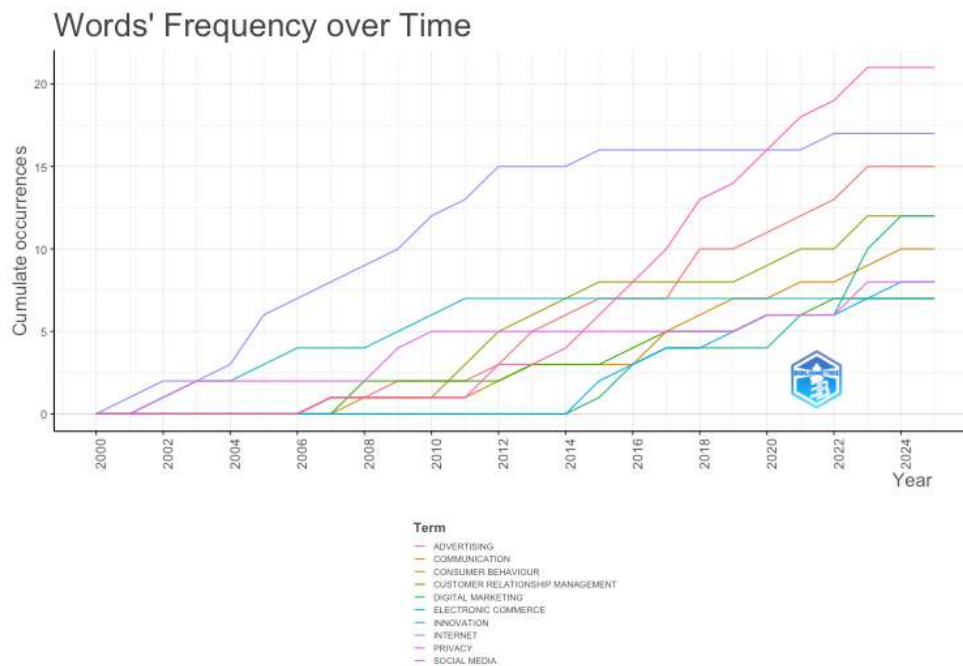
The most impactful papers, by citation impact, mostly came from the early to mid-2000s, which most likely established theoretical or practical benchmarks. Since 2010, citation consistency has improved, as has our attention to language, but with improved areas of specialization and topicality.

Recent publications between 2021 and 2024 are still developing, and citation impact will develop into future core papers in areas such as personalization of email, AI implementations for email, and privacy compliance.
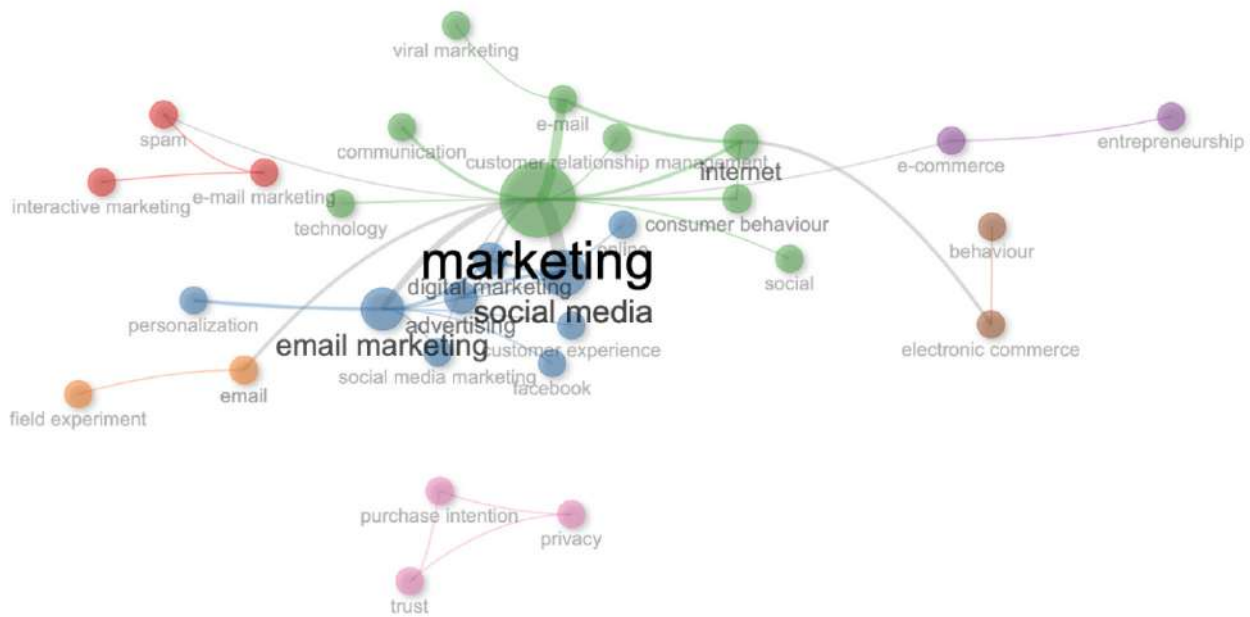
Thematic Evaluation

The annual keyword frequencies for core research terms enable us to trace the evolution of dominant themes in email marketing scholarship. The provided line graph showed a cumulative count of topics along the x-axis. We can summarize what we can learn from Figure 8 as follows. Media and Interaction dominate this theme, which is expected to link in part to the integrated multichannel/email strategy some of the email-related project work has. Privacy has picked up speed post-2018, which is aligned with some of the data regulation storylines (GDPR, CCPA). Digital Marketing, Advertising, and Consumer Behaviour have a steady growth, establishing a threshold of growth beyond the ease of useful operational work to a more strategic approach regarding email.

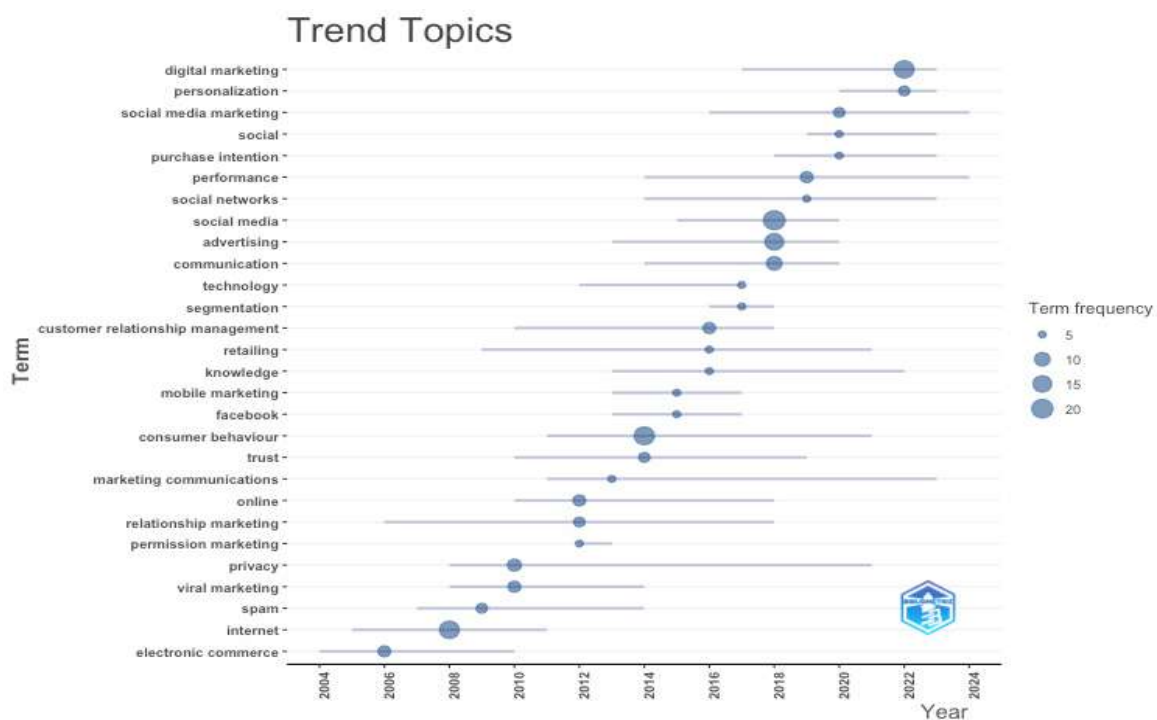**Figure 8.** Words' Frequency over Time

206

Potential themes likely to find places in future research in email marketing, such as AI-powered automation, seem underscored for now. However, it would play a crucial role in email marketing, with key aspects including campaign scheduling, content quality, and targeting precision. On the other hand, this also has a chance to be found under innovative keywords because of its nature, and privacy concerns because of the use of personal data. And develop seamless experiences across multiple integrated touchpoints.

Figure 9. Co-occurance Map

The co-occurrence map shows us several thematic clusters in the literature. At the center, large nodes such as marketing and social media indicate that most studies on email marketing are part of the broader digital marketing and social media ecosystem, rather than being an isolated tool. The blue cluster linking email marketing, digital marketing, advertising, and customer experience suggests a strong focus on how marketers reach the end customer. The green cluster, which connects internet, customer relationship management, consumer behavior, and communication, highlights a second central theme: email as a relational channel that supports CRM strategies and shapes consumer responses in online environments.

Figure 10 highlights the trend topics in literature. It focused on how the email marketing research has shifted and diversified over time. Early in the period, attention centers on foundational issues such as the internet, electronic commerce, spam, privacy, and viral marketing, reflecting concerns with the basic infrastructure of online communication. As the timeline progresses into the late 2000s and early 2010s, topics such as permission marketing, relationship marketing, online marketing communications, consumer behavior, and trust gain prominence, indicating a move from purely technical or regulatory debates toward relationship-building, consent, and psychological responses to email.

Figure 10. Trend Topics

Discussion

The bibliometric analysis provides an overall impression of the ongoing academic transition of email marketing over the last three decades. Although it began as a marginal topic, email marketing has evolved into a more major and frequently addressed topic area in the literature on digital marketing, particularly evident in its rising patterns of growth and relative scholarly attention since 2015. The steady upward line of email marketing scholarships since 2015 is reflective of the ongoing digital transformation of marketing strategies across the globe, fueled by automation, personalization, and AI-based data analytics.

The bibliometric analysis showed that an increase in publication output from 2020 regularly coincided with the digital adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Georgia State University and Northwestern University have had a particularly large effect on supporting scholarly output, with the US, UK, and Australia leading the way; however, emerging countries and institutions are increasingly being most effective and have been influential with the increased publication rates in international collaborations, such as India and Finland.

Thematic analysis indicates that fundamental recurrent terms such as "social media", "consumer behavior", "digital marketing", and "privacy" indicate that email is merging with wider digital systems. Also, from thematic mapping, there is a transition from practice-based issues, such as issues relating to spam filtering, toward more strategic issues, including customer relationship management, lifecycle marketing, and AI-based personalization. Email marketing research has developed, with better attention given to ethical use of data, optimization for mobile, and measurement of ROI.

Co-authorship is on the rise with the globalization of research, showing evidence through increased Multiple Country Publications (MCP). There are seminal works that have continued to be relevant, reflecting both foundational theory and regard for contemporary practice.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Bibliometric measures can be combined with content and sentiment analysis to provide further insight into consumer reactions. There is very little longitudinal research that observes consumers from different channels and over time. There also seems to be limited studies on the cultural and regional differences seen in response to email.

The themes and citation analyses give practitioners evidence-based practices, such as mobile is critical, AI personalization is a key focus, and re-engagement is essential. Marketers can use the academic field and highlights from this study to benchmark their business practices based on powerful performance metrics across key practices, segmentation quality, automation, and privacy compliance. As personalization becomes more advanced, the opportunity for ethical design is essential. Brands must strive to build and maintain the trust of consumers while responsibly using their data. Trends in geography reveal where and who to collaborate with in academia and industry, particularly in the Asia-Pacific and Europe. Multinational marketers will have opportunities to discover global innovation partners.

Future Research

The scope of email marketing has moved from merely a communications tactic to a strategic, technology-driven, and ethical practice, according to the bibliometric patterns and engagement with emerging trends in marketing theory and marketing practice that the bibliometric patterns reveal (with themes such as AI personalization, omnichannel, etc.). Email marketing may not represent a bygone era of marketing, but rather an adaptable and resilient arm of the digital strategy. According to trend topics, the last articles mainly focused on digital and social media marketing and personalization. Those areas still need to be investigated in the near future. But terms like AI, automation, and mobilization seem to be subtopics that could become main topics of future research. In further studies, researchers should focus more deeply on those areas.

Limitations

While this bibliometric study provides useful measurements of the history and contemporary progress of email marketing research, there are limitations that should be put in context to understand the findings and help direct improvements in future research.

One of the main limitations is associated with the coverage or completeness of the databases used. The present study followed the data extracted from the Web of Science databases and filtered through Biblioshiny (R Bibliometrix package). Although the database is among the most respected and used academic databases, it does not represent all scholarly publications. Many current articles that could be relevant were not collected if they are in Scopus, Google Scholar, industry white papers, or conference proceedings. This is more so for articles from non-English journals or emerging areas that might lack adequate indexing. Thus, the evidence presented in this study may exhibit some Western bias, which may not adequately represent countries where email marketing activity is also developing rapidly.

In constructing the search strings, such as "email marketing" AND " e-mail marketing", selection bias was introduced. When the filtering process was keyword-based, it is likely that studies that addressed the same themes in differing nomenclature (eg, "permission marketing", "email interaction", "email campaign/newsletter management") were missing. It is likewise likely that studies that address digital marketing in broader ways but address email marketing in more superficial ways were remo-

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ved from consideration. Additionally, the process of keyword normalisation (e.g., by combining "e-mail marketing" with "email marketing") may have impacted on the clustering and co-occurring mapping. Despite Biblioshiny being a strong tool, it must be fed as accurately as possible, including standards for keywords and all other aspects that may impact the analysis.

The dataset is restricted to publications produced from 1994 to 2024, which includes 30 years of scholarly work. However, most of the impactful works emerged after 2010. The timeframe may influence the clues towards recent and novel approaches that are undercutting the developments set in previous times, this clustering of time-phased publications could neglect the underpinning theoretical discoveries located at the top of the newer approaches. Additionally, by the publication date of late 2023 and 2024, reports may not have attained enough citations to truly ascertain their influence or relevance within the network over a longer timeframe.

Ethical Approval

This research article does not require ethical approval as it is a bibliographic study.

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