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Inbound Marketing for Sustainable Growth: Bibliometric Review (1992-2022)

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Abstract

In response to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, businesses are now focusing on sustainability and innovation. Amidst emerging entrepreneurial challenges in the form of clutter, inbound marketing has gathered huge attention for businesses to forge long-term, loyal, and profitable customer relationships. Increased usage of tools such as Google Analytics and Demographic Insight has transformed inbound marketing into an effective strategy to gain an edge over competitors. A three-step methodology has been applied in this paper. Firstly, 507 documents on inbound marketing were selected and then assessed by deploying a bibliometric review based on the country of origin of authors, bibliographic coupling, keywords, citation, co-citation, and co-authorship. Next, content analysis is also done. Third, research directions for future studies are suggested based on content analysis. The dataset on inbound marketing has been extracted from the Web of Science, which has 507 documents on inbound marketing from 1992 to 2022. This dataset is used as a basis for bibliometric analysis and content evaluation. Additionally, several categories of selected documents have been highlighted, including business, environment, and management. This paper presents further research, like the application of sentimental analysis, and also guides policy formulators and marketers regarding how businesses can remain sustainable and relevant in hyper-competition.

Keywords: Sustainability, Bibliometric Analysis, Inbound Marketing, Innovation

Introduction

Growing the focus on efficiency and sustainability has forced companies to adopt cost-effective methods to acquire and retain customers. Inbound marketing is one such approach to maintaining profitable customer relationships by creating content tailored to each customer based on her tastes, preferences, and other relevant details. Recently, inbound marketing has garnered attention among

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marketers with a focus on social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing. Inbound marketing includes methods of attracting customers that do not directly cost money by focusing on creating quality messages. (Assiriyage, et al., 2018)

Companies must remain relevant and sustainable today as the danger of becoming obsolete and irrelevant is looming very close, especially now due to the huge outburst of social media, deep internet penetration, and expansion enabling marketers and budding entrepreneurs to woo consumers and convince them to become their loyal customers by employing multiple tools, both digital and non-digital. Internet penetration makes people more financially inclusive and boosts trade and economic growth of countries (Wasim et al., 2022).

The first paper on inbound marketing was published in 1992, and a huge amount of data has been gathered on this topic for the past 20 years (See Figure 1). The highest number of documents on this topic was in 2018. The number of citations of these documents is demonstrated in Figure 2

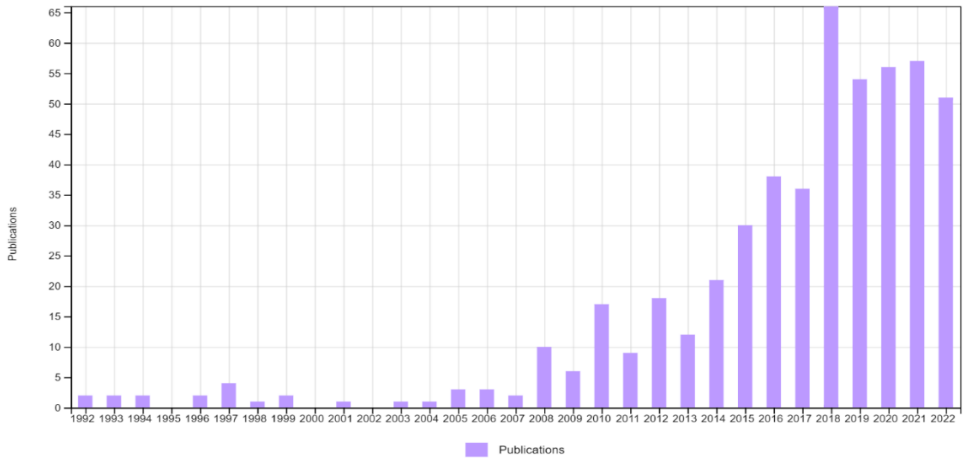


Figure 1:Longitudinal evolution of inbound marketing literature,1992-2022 (n=507)

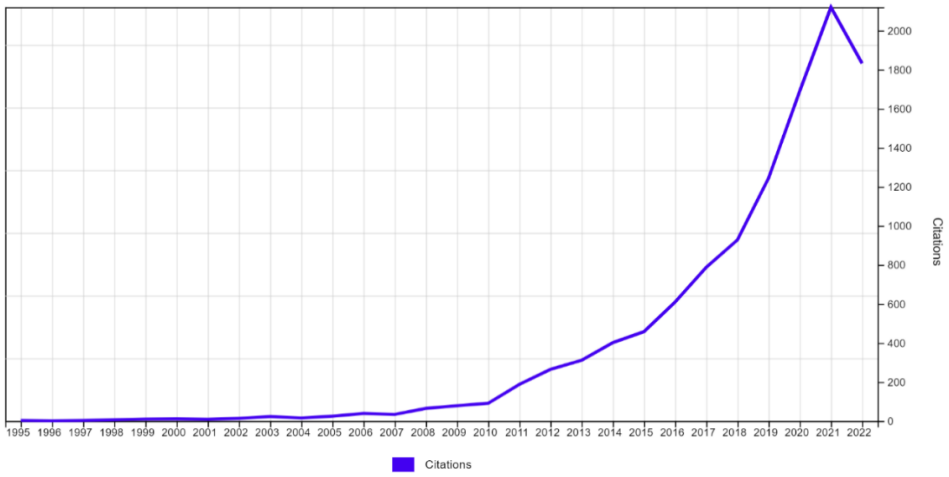


Figure 2: Longitudinal evolution of inbound marketing citations,1992-2022 (n=507)

The highest number of citations was received in 2021. Interestingly, as depicted in Figure 3, the number of documents and the number of citations follow a similar growth trajectory.

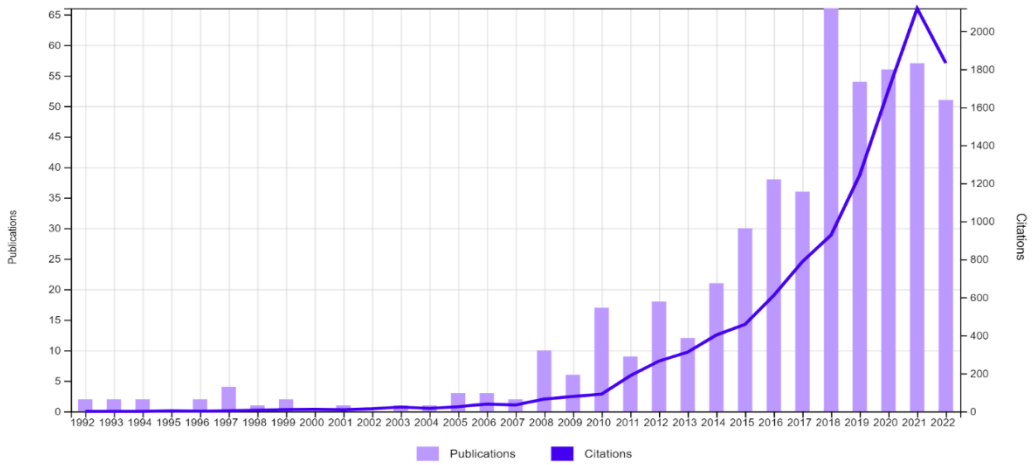


Figure 3: Comparative evolution of publications and citations on inbound marketing, 1992-2022(n=507)

Much of the literature on inbound marketing has been in diverse fields and directions. Therefore, a systematic, thorough bibliometric analysis is pertinent for summarizing this knowledge. To encapsulate the richness of research on inbound marketing, a systematized, holistic literature review has been conducted for the last twenty years, from 1992 to 2022, using bibliometric analysis (White et al., 2016) and content analysis. (Paul & Benito, A review of research on outward foreign direct investment from emerging countries, including China: what do we know, how do we know and where should we be heading?, 2018)This literature review is

unique as, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first-ever bibliometric analysis conducted on inbound marketing. Moreover, the literature review is novel in terms of methods and discovers the following research areas: (1) sentiment analysis and (2) holistic model for new ventures.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: first, the scope of research is covered, then the rationale behind writing this research paper. The research problem, research objectives, and theoretical/conceptual framework follow these. Next, the significance and limitations of this research are written. Furthermore, an extensive literature review is done, and tools, indicators, and metrics of inbound marketing are discussed. In addition to these, analysis, interpretation, and discussion are included. Lastly, the conclusion is written and followed by recommendations for policy formulators, academicians, and business owners.

Scope of research

Several journals and books were selected to collect documents on inbound marketing. This research covers the analysis of 507 documents from 1992 to 2022. Rather than only selecting highly ranked or international journals and books, all journals and books were selected to remove selection bias. The names of some selected journals are Annual Review of Sociology, Journal of Business Research, Marketing and Management of Innovations, Sustainability, Doxa Comunicación – DOAJ, Spanish Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, Revista Icono, Social Sciences (Basel), Technological Forecasting and Social Change.

Rationale of Research

With ever-growing competition, companies are facing huge challenges in understanding customers' tastes, preferences, and problems. Inbound marketing is an important tool for maintaining profitable customer relationships. It creates content tailored to each customer based on their preferences and likes. Various inbound marketing tools help comprehend the customer's behaviors, sentiments, emotions, and location. Some inbound marketing tools are Sociograph, Twitter Analytics, Brandwatch Analytics, Demographic Insights, Agora Pulse, SWB Social, and Google Analytics. It is highly pertinent to develop a deep understanding of customers as they are the backbone behind a company's survival and sustainable growth.

Research Problem

The boom of social media has spurred a gigantic influx of competition, making it increasingly difficult for companies to snatch each other's market share. Fierce competition has provided tremendous opportunities to customers, allowing

them to very easily switch their brands and spread negative word of mouth about them.

Therefore, companies need to be a step ahead. They must be where their customers are present and should be well aware of their conversations and behaviors. This is where inbound marketing comes into play, as inbound marketing tools provide comprehensive insights about their customers' sentiments, location, demographic data, and audience rating behaviors such as website visits, likes, dislikes, engagement, interaction, conversion, and traffic distribution.

Objectives of research

1. To conduct bibliometric analysis of documents written on inbound marketing from 1992 to 2022 by employing citation, co-citation, authors' country of origin, bibliographic coupling, co-authorship, and keywords.

2. To do a content analysis of documents on inbound marketing from 1992 to 2022.

Theoretical Framework

Inbound Marketing in the context of sustainability

Inbound marketing is also called '*pull marketing.'* It aims to solve customers' problems, from need recognition to final purchase, by addressing their difficulties all along the customer journey map. For this to occur, content must reflect expertise, authority, and trustworthiness. One of the greatest advantages of inbound marketing is its exceedingly high return on investment (ROI) because it can be used to employ inbound marketing for free or charge nominal subscription charges. Hence, it is a preferable choice for marketers. (Assiriyage, et al., 2018)

This is aligned with the '*triple bottom line'* approach adopted by companies to achieve sustainable growth. Triple bottom line concepts underpin the idea that businesses should create value for stakeholders that include customers, employees, and society. (Miller, 2020) Supporting this, companies have forged partnerships with non-profit organizations with whom they share a common purpose. For example, Pepsi introduced 100% single-use Pepsi Max plastic bottles. It partnered with charitable organizations like Recycle Now and Keep Britain Tidy in 2021 (Glenday, 2021) Another example is Nestle, which aims to curtail its packaging material by 33.33% by 2025. To achieve this target, Nestle has removed plastic straws from all its products by the end of 2021 and has launched reusable containers for its brand named *Nesquik* cocoa powder and *Haagan-Dazs* in Canada (Nestle, 2022)These examples are a testament to the fact that consumers are ready to spend more on sustainable products. Their willingness to buy sustainable products is 42%

higher than that of traditional products. (Petro, 2022)This is where inbound marketing comes in. It targets consumers' demand for sustainable products and generates a higher customer acquisition ratio, thus promising sustainable growth for companies.

Significance of Research

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first bibliometric analysis conducted on inbound marketing. Moreover, this paper is novel in terms of methods and recommends the following future research areas: (1) sentiment analysis and (2) holistic model for new ventures.

Limitations of Research

This study is limited to 30 years, from 1992 to 2022. Moreover, new inbound marketing tools that emerged after 2022 can also be included.

Literature Review

Müller-Pérez et al. (2022) analyzed drivers behind the intention to adopt inbound marketing tools by taking 310 Tamaulipas companies. This study adopted Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to achieve the results. Independent variables taken were perceived usefulness, trust, attitude, word of mouth, perceived ease, and perceived risk. The research concluded that perceived usefulness, trust, attitude, and word of mouth significantly influence the intention to adopt inbound marketing tools. Thomas A. et al. (2018) and White, Guldiken, Hemphill, He, and Khoobdeh, (2016) studied the impact of visual merchandising on impulse purchasing. Another strand of literature (Sahin, 2021) explored awareness and propensity of digital marketing approaches in technology-oriented entrepreneurship by taking two Turkish startups. (Shelton M. et al. 2021) and (Sánchez, García, & Rodríguez, 2020) studied the impact of retail markets and bond marketing in Indonesia. The study carried out qualitative analysis and concluded that digital marketing implemented by startups is quite low. In addition to this, another piece of literature written by Garcia (2018) identified new indicators and audience metrics used by companies to determine data related to inbound marketing practices. To gauge this, various audience measurement tools (Google Analytics, Agora Pulse, Twitter Analytics, Brandwatch Analytics) were exhaustively analyzed. The dependent variables of this study were page visits, clicks, responses, and retweets, while independent variables were comprised of Electrodermal level, tonic activity, and electrodermal response. The findings of this research were that behavioral metrics enable prediction for planning content.

Davidavičius & Limba (2016) scrutinized users' behavior regarding inbound marketing while consuming content by doing qualitative analysis of 336

respondents. Roberts, J. A., et al. (2015) researched the hierarchical model of personality. The dependent variable taken was purchase decision, while the independent construct was content. Bleoju, Capatina, Rancati, & Lesca, (2016) found that there exists a relationship between consumer presence in stages of the buying decision model and content purpose. Royo-Vela & Hünermund, (2016) Moreover, Alon, Anderson, Munim, and Ho, (2018) investigated whether inbound marketing strategies influence the decision-making process of students regarding specific HEI brands. Appio, Cesaroni, & Di Minin (2014) his study also scrutinized whether inbound marketing approaches positively influence brand equity (specifically awareness and image) of higher education institutions. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was done by taking brand knowledge, decision-making, and interactive marketing as dependent constructs and habits, as well as social networking sites and mobile internet connection as independent variables. It concluded that interactive marketing communication tools have a tremendous impact on the decision-making process of postgraduate students.

Methodology

Methods of inbound marketing, a multitude of channels have sprung up over the years, that have given impetus to inbound marketing, which can be categorized as digital and non-digital (Kim & McMillan, 2008). Examples of such channels are chatbots, LinkedIn, SEO(Search Engine Optimization), e-books, e-newsletters, podcasts, blogs, videos, and feedback forms to interact with customers. Table 2 reports methods, metrics, and indicators of inbound marketing. In the first step, journals and books were selected to collect documents on inbound marketing. Rather than only selecting highly ranked or international journals and books (Mainela et al., 2014), all journals and books were selected to remove selection bias. In the second step, the sample period and the search technique were selected. The third step included analyzing results and identifying research streams and research questions of 507 documents on inbound marketing.

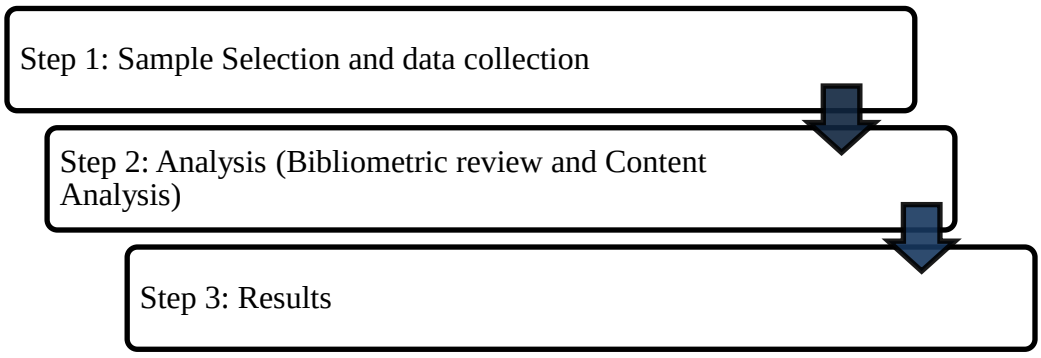


Figure 4: Methodology adopted in this research

Table 1: Process of choosing a sample from Web of Science in this study

Some filters that have been applied to search in Web of Science

1)Filters for searches	Topic (Search keywords in "Title, Abstract and keywords")
2) Type of paper	Articles, Book Chapters
3) Language	English and Spanish
4) Web of Science Categories	▪ Social Sciences interdisciplinary, ▪ Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism; ▪ Business, Finance ▪ Management ▪ Education & Educational Research, ▪ Green & Sustainable Science & Technology; Environmental Sciences; Environmental Studies, ▪ Business; ▪ Regional & Urban Planning
5) Journal Abbreviations	
5) Times cited in all databases Times cited in Web of Sciences	
6)Funding organizations	
7) Publisher	
8) Publication date and year	
8) DOI	
9) Cited References	

Analysis and Interpretation

The following complementary tests were applied in this study to do a bibliometric review: (1) co-citation analysis (Paltrinieri et al., 2019), (2) citation analysis, (3) bibliographic coupling, (4) co-authorship analysis, and (5) content analysis. For this, Vosviewer software was used, which offers text mining to create and visualize bibliometric networks.

Discussion

This section discusses findings drawn by employing co-citation, authors' country of origin, bibliographic coupling, citation analysis, co-authorship analysis, keyword analysis, and content analysis.

Co-citation

Co-citation mapping is defined as the mapping of highly cited papers about the papers that cite them (Alon et al.,2018). A two-level procedure was adopted using Vosviewer software to conduct co-citation mapping. First, to be included in the mapping, an author of an article should have at least 10 citations, out of which 270 met the threshold. Figure 5 demonstrates co-citation mapping.

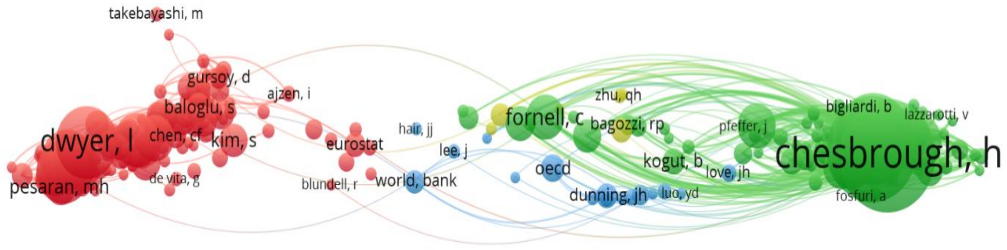


Figure 5:Co-citation mapping

Authors' country of origin

It is worth noticing where inbound marketing has gained attention. Figure 6 depicts the authors of origin, indicating that recent progress in inbound marketing has mainly come from the People's Republic of China, followed by the US, Australia, Spain, Taiwan, and Italy.

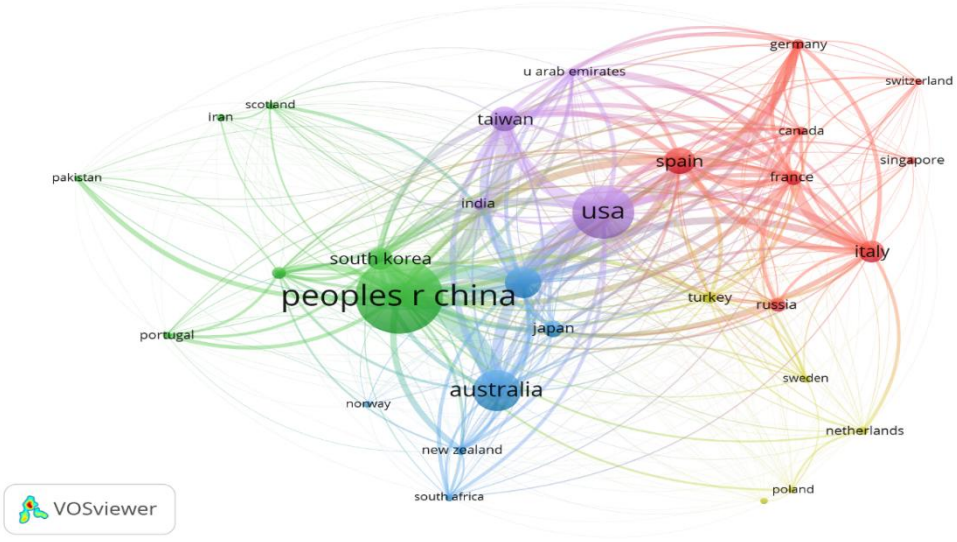


Figure 6: Authors' country of origin mapping

Bibliographic coupling

Bibliographic coupling between documents was explored, and links can be observed in Figure 7. Each link's strength is dependent on the number of cited references that the two publications have in common. Dahlander(2010) is represented by the biggest circle, indicating its highest number of citations (1408) in all databases.

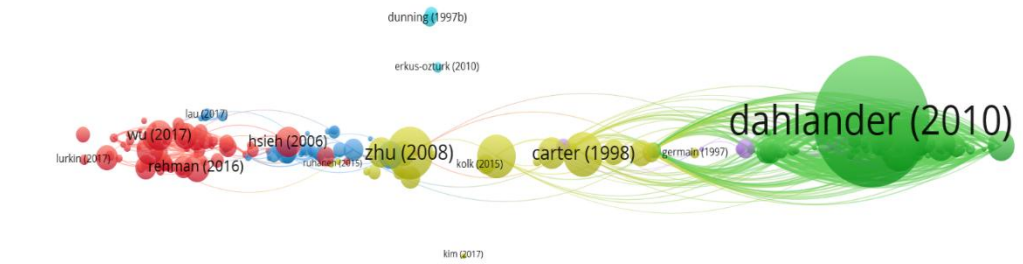
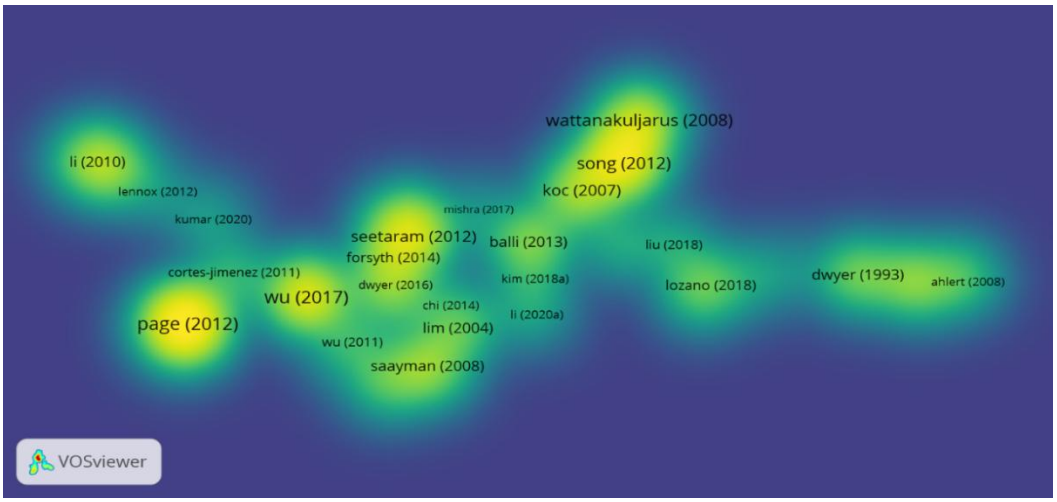


Figure 7:Bibliographic coupling between publications

Citation analysis

Citation analysis indicates linkages between publications, i.e., when one publication cites the other (Appio et al.,2014). The number of citations gauges the



magnitude of impact. The criterion selected was that each document should have at least 5 citations. Therefore, 279 documents fulfill this threshold, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Density visualization of citation analysis

Co-authorship analysis

This assesses the association among authors and their affiliations. The selection was done based on 5 as the least number of documents of organizations and 5 as the least number of citations of an organization, out of 687 organizations, 16 meet this criterion as illustrated in Figure 7, that Griffith University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the University of Surrey emerged as dominant organizations.

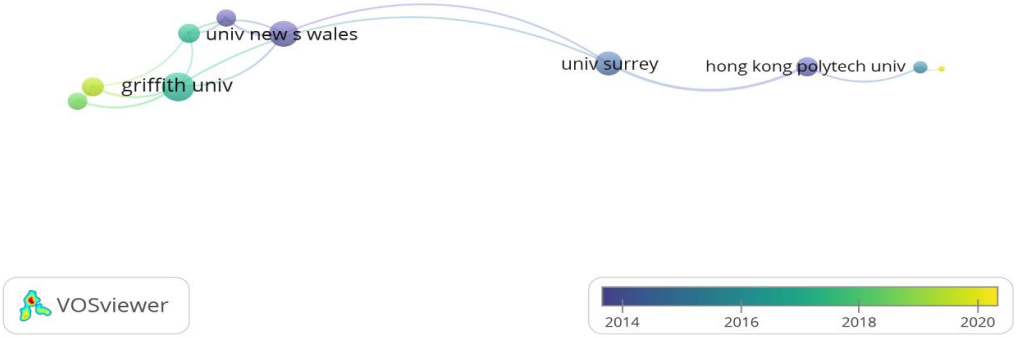


Figure 7: Overlay visualization indicating co-authorship analysis of authors' organizations

Keywords analysis

The co-occurrence of an author-specified keyword is analyzed by setting 3 as the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword. Out of 1804 keywords, 102 meet this threshold, as shown in Figure 8 below.

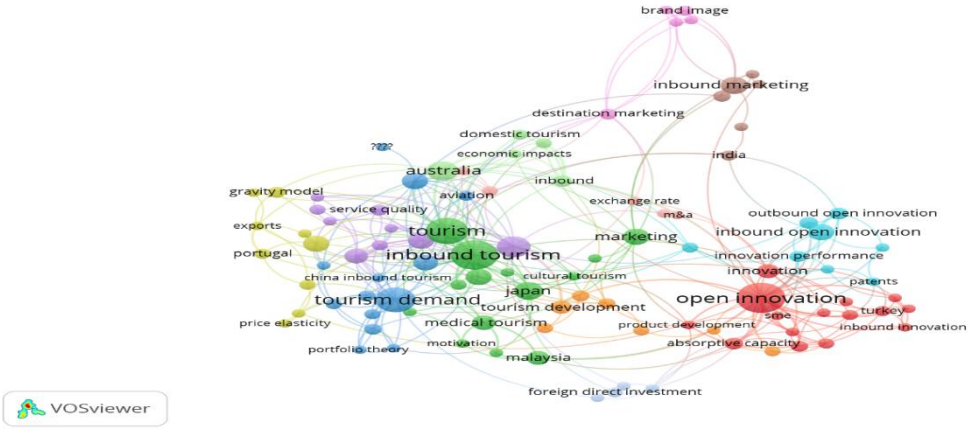


Figure 8: Co-occurrence of authors specified keywords

Content analysis

Table 2: Key journals on inbound marketing (1992-2022)

S.No	Journals	Web of Science Category	References
1	Annual Review of Sociology	Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary	(Garcia Mendoza et al., 2021)
2	Journal of Business Research	Business	(Bleoju et al.,2016)
3	Marketing and Management of Innovations	Management	(Baranchenko et al., 2019)
4	Sustainability	Green & Sustainable Science & Technology; Environmental Sciences; Environmental Studies	(Sánchez-Teba et al., 2020)
5	Doxa Comunicación - DOAJ	Communication	(Aguado & Grcia, 2018)
6	Spanish Journal of Marketing	Business	(Rodríguez & García, 2022)
7	Journal of Marketing for Higher Education	Business; Education & Educational Research	(Royo-Vela & Hünermund, 2016)
8	Revista Icono	Communication	(Guadalupe, 2015)
9	Social Sciences (Basel)	Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary	(Davidavičius & Limba, 2016)
10	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	Business; Regional & Urban Planning	(Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2021)

Table 3 gives an overview of research questions, methodologies, and theories that papers have used on the topic of inbound marketing from 1992-2022

Author	Research Question/Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Findings
(Müller-Pérez, et al., 2022)	To determine of intention of Tamaulipas MSMEs to adopt inbound marketing tools	310 companies from Tamaulipas	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)	Intention to adopt inbound marketing tools	Perceived usefulness, trust, attitude, word of mouth, perceived ease, and perceived risk	Perceived usefulness, trust, attitude, and word of mouth significantly influence the intention to adopt inbound marketing tools.
(Sahin, 2021)	To explore awareness and propensity of digital marketing approach in technology-oriented entrepreneurship	Two Turkish startups	Qualitative analysis,	Inbound-outbound marketing techniques	Technology-oriented entrepreneurship	Digital marketing implemented by startups is quite low
(Aguado & Grcia, 2018)	To identify what new indicators the audience metrics are using, determine the data they provide for inbound marketing practices		Analysis of the audience measurement tools (Google Analytics, Agora Pulse, Twitter Analytics, Brandwatch Analytics	Page visits, clicks, responses, retweets	Electrodermal tonic level, activity, electrodermal response	Behavioral metrics enable prediction for planning contents

Table 3: Literature Review of documents on inbound marketing (1992-2022)

Author	Research Question/Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Dependent variable	Independent variable	Findings
(Davidavičius & Limba, 2016)	To investigate users' behavior regarding inbound marketing while consuming content	336 respondents	Qualitative analysis	Purchase decision	Content	There exists a relationship between the consumer' s presence in the stages of the buying decision model and the content purpose
(Royo-Vela & Hünermund, 2016)	-Do inbound marketing strategies influence students' decision-making process regarding a specific HEI brand? -Can inbound marketing approaches positively influence brand equity (awareness and image) of higher education institutions	121 respondents	Qualitative and quantitative analysis	Brand knowledge, decision-making, interactive marketing	Habits, social networking sites, mobile, internet connection, influence factors	Interactive marketing communication tools have a great impact on postgraduate students' decision-making process

Conclusion

Literature on inbound marketing is found to be interdisciplinary, as shown in this study above. By using diverse categories of Web of Science, these articles fall into business, education, management, environment, and urban planning. Research on inbound marketing is growing rapidly due to increased usage of Sociograph, Demographic Insight, Google Analytics, Twitter Analytics, Agora Pulse, and other tools. There remain several unexplored research areas on inbound marketing. A step method was utilized to suggest future research streams. First, bibliometric analysis was done on 507 documents by employing keywords analysis, country of origin of authors, citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, citation and co-citation analysis, and co-authorship analysis. Moreover, the content of these documents has also been assessed. Lastly, research is suggested for the future by using content analysis as its premise.

Recommendations

1. Companies should set personalized criteria to tailor their content to each individual as sentiment analysis helps organizations to cater to individuals' feelings and emotions, as these will be more effective

2. An integrative and holistic model, which is a combination of traditional and digital marketing approaches, is required for startups to compete in this era of digitalization.

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