Original Paper

Analysis of Research Themes in Marketing Channels

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Abstract

Marketing Channels is an important area of research, especially in these days of supply chain issues. This study uses bibliometric techniques to identify the top authors and their clusters. These top countries contributed to the marketing channels area and maps the research themes prevalent over the years. We also map keyword networks for each decade to demonstrate the evolution of the research themes. Our analysis also shows the expansion of the area's global reach over the three decades regarding the contributors' country networks. Importantly, the study summarizes the impact of marketing channels research and provides directions for future research.

Keywords

Marketing Channels, bibliometric analysis, thematic evolution, performance analysis, citation analysis

1. Introduction

Marketing Channels is a very important area of research, especially in global supply chain issues. Academics and practitioners have been interested in the area, but to our knowledge, there has been no systematic analysis of research themes. In this review article focusing on Marketing Channels, as a first step and to keep the analysis manageable, we only review articles published in the Journal of Marketing Channels (JMC) in its 31 years of publication.

Since its founding, JMC has kept its number of publications relatively stable while substantially growing its influence, as measured by the number of citations. If we compare the first decade of the journal's existence (1991-2000) with the latest decade (2013-2022) we can see that the average number of publications was 13.9 for the first decade and 13.5 for the latest decade. Meanwhile, citations rose dramatically from an average of 18.7 for the first decade to 294.5 for the latest decade. *JMC* has published a total of 453 publications in its 31 years of existence, and the journal has been cited a total of 4034 times. Figure 1 shows an overview of the history of *JMC* in terms of the number of publications and citations.
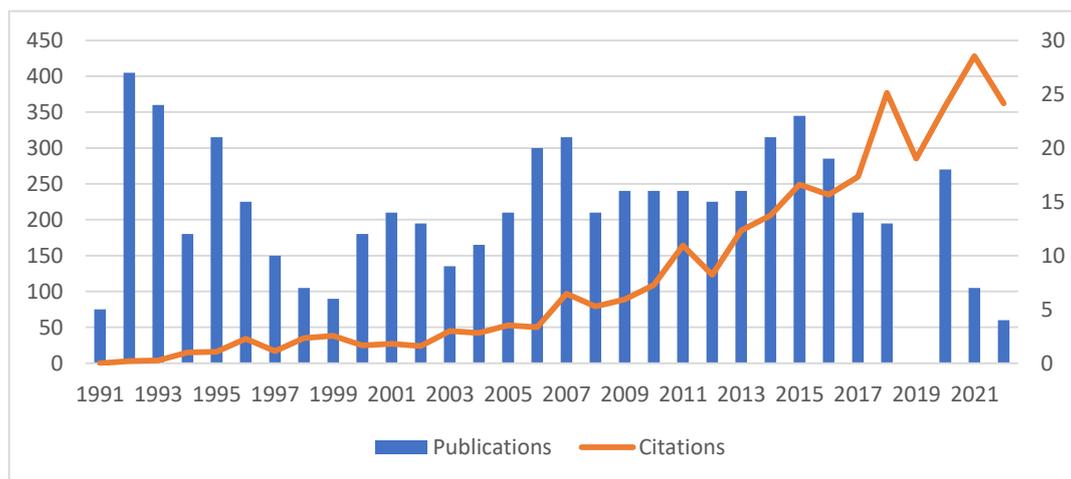
Figure 1. Publications and Citations, 1991-2022

As can be seen from Figure 1, although the number of publications per year fluctuated significantly over the years of its existence, the number of citations grew steadily, along with some fluctuations in the last decade. The recent peak in citations was 2021 with 428 citations. We could surmise that the COVID-19 pandemic-related supply chain disruptions focused the academic community on the topic of supply chain, and this topic has been a major focus of *JMC*'s mission and scope. The most cited *JMC* article in its entire history is an article addressing supply chain disruptions and mitigation strategies that was published in 2009. It has a total of 183 citations.

JMC is a well-known and reputable source of knowledge regarding distribution channels, supply chain management, and related business issues with a well-defined trend of expanding its academic influence, as measured by the number of citations per year. This study retrospectively examines 31 years of *JMC* publications in order to identify and analyze the key trends of the journal using bibliometric techniques. The purpose of the study is to address the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the underlying themes in *Marketing Channels* publications in the last 31 years?

RQ2. Who are the most influential contributors to the channels area in the history of *JMC* and in what countries do they reside?

RQ3. What is the geography of the collaborative networks among *JMC* contributors?

RQ4. What *marketing channels* articles were the most influential?

The main purpose of this review is to synthesize and summarize the most current state of knowledge of *marketing channels* and the evolution of JMC as a journal in the last three decades. The review does so using a quantitative method not used in prior research. The bibliographic methodology provides objective information to readers and aspiring marketing channel scholars. It should be useful to the editors and scholars in assessing the past impact of the journal and developing future directions for the journal.

2. Literature Review

Academic researchers use different types of literature reviews. The major categories include narrative review, systematic literature review, meta-analysis, and bibliometric review (Donthu et al., 2021). Narrative reviews are probably the most common and, if done well, provide a comprehensive review of previously published studies and may provide new perspectives on the literature. However, this type of review is not very systematic because the selection of the reviewed literature is often subjective, thus producing biased results (Green et al., 2006). Another major concern with narrative reviews is that incomplete coverage of the literature is often observed (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Systematic literature reviews overcome one downside of narrative reviews by using more systematic procedures to make literature selection procedures reproducible (Tranfield et al., 2003). However, since systematic literature review still uses qualitative techniques, different authors may interpret the results differently, resulting in biased and subjective results (MacCoun, 1998). Another downside of systematic literature review is that it is usually limited to a narrower subset of literature, focusing on certain streams of literature that typically include several dozens of articles (Snyder, 2019). The only types of reviews that have the potential to overcome the authors' bias are meta-analysis and bibliometric analysis since they both use quantitative tools to analyze the literature (Ramos-Rodriguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). Unlike narrative and systematic literature reviews, both meta-analysis and bibliometric reviews can and usually do handle large numbers (hundreds) of articles, thus providing a complete review of extant literature (Donthu et al., 2021). Researchers conducting meta-analysis collect empirical results from many articles and summarize findings of those results using quantitative methods, such as regression, ANOVA etc. They provide summaries of the direction and strength of the relationships among constructs studied in previous research as well as explore boundary conditions and attempt to shed light on mixed results from previous research (Donthu et al., 2021). The purpose of a bibliometric review is quite different from a meta-analysis. Bibliographic analysis originated in the field of information and library sciences (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015) and summarized the intellectual structure of an academic field by revealing social connections among authors in different countries and institutions, as well as structural relationships among topics and constructs (Donthu et al., 2021).

As the number of articles in an academic field or a journal grows, quantitative methods such as bibliographic review using big data and advanced software analysis is becoming more appropriate and popular than other types of reviews. Researchers find that bibliographic research has grown in stature in business and business-related disciplines (Mukherjee et al., 2022). For example, 76% of premier business journals have published bibliographic research, and the number of bibliographic articles in top journals in marketing and management has only grown in the last decade (Mukherjee et al., 2022). Journals have employed bibliometric review articles to mark significant milestones in their development by quantitatively reviewing the journal's history and planning for its future direction. For instance, *the Journal of Business Research celebrated its 45-year anniversary by bibliographically analyzing all of its published articles (Donthu et al.,* 2020). More closely related to *JMC, the Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing bibliometrically celebrated its 25 years in existence by publishing a study by Valenzuela-Fernandez et al. (2019) analyzing articles from* those first 25 years. Similarly, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* published a bibliographic study of 33 years of the journal's history by Donthu et al. (2020) that analyzed almost 1500 articles published in this journal since its inception. *Industrial Marketing Management* also analyzed its 46 years of publications in business-to-business marketing via bibliographic methods in Martinez-Lopez et al. (2020). Thus, given

the 30th anniversary of *JMC*, the large number of articles published in the journal, and the quantitative nature of our research questions, we decided to use bibliometric analysis to answer the research questions. Two typical bibliometric tools, science mapping and performance analysis, are used to analyze *JMC* articles published from 1991 through 2022. This analysis identifies publication trends, major themes, and JMC research constituents, i.e., authors, institutions, and countries.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data for bibliometric studies is extracted from scholarly databases. For this study, the data was collected by extracting all metadata for *JMC* publications from the Scopus database. The Scopus database is considered a comprehensive database of scholarly journals from many different disciplines (Bartol et al., 2014). The data for the Journal of Marketing Communication was downloaded using the sources "Journal of Marketing Communication" and "Journal of Inter-Organizational Relationships" and was used to fetch the data from Scopus data. The resulting 453 papers were then used for further analysis.

3.2 Methods

Using bibliometrics, this study thoroughly examines the distribution of authors who contributed to *JMC* and the countries of their residence at the time of publication. Bibliographic coupling analysis was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the journal. Bibliographic coupling between two articles occurs when they reference the same article in their reference lists (Kessler, 1963). Major bibliographic clusters were identified using VOSviewer software, while RStudio was used to map out the collaboration pattern among countries associated with *JMC* authors. This method has been frequently used in literature to analyze academic journals' evolutionary development and trends (Donthu et al., 2021).

4. Results of Bibliometric Analysis

4.1 Author Distribution

The staple of bibliometric analysis is investigating the distribution of authors. To identify the most prominent authors, we examined the distribution of authors who contributed to JMC from 1991 to 2022. Table 1 provides the results of the author distribution analysis.

Table 1. Top Contributing Authors, 1991-2022

Rank	Author	Total Publications (TP)	Total Citations (TC)	TC/TP
1	Rosenbloom B.	9	59	6.56
2	Dant R.P.	8	87	10.88
3	Grünhagen M.	8	76	9.50
4	Bellin H.	8	16	2.00
5	Frazer L.	7	114	16.29

6	Griffith D.A.	7	68	9.71
7	Herndon N.C.	7	45	6.43
8	Dimitrova B.V.	6	37	6.17
9	Larsen T.L.	6	36	6.00
10	Kaufmann P.J.	5	102	20.40
11	Zhuang G.	5	36	7.20
12	Dahlstrom R.	5	31	6.20
13	El-Ansary A.I.	5	29	5.80
14	Anderson R.E.	5	26	5.20
15	Windsperger J.	4	51	12.75
16	Bello D.C.	4	48	12.00
17	Stassen R.E.	4	45	11.25
18	Harvey M.	4	26	6.50
19	Pelton L.E.	4	25	6.25
20	Young J.A.	4	24	6.00

Bert Rosenbloom is the most prolific contributor to *JMC*, with 9 publications in the journal. Rajiv Dant, M. Grunhagen, and H. Bellin are closely behind, with eight publications each. If we look at the total citations column, L. Frazer has the most citations with 114 total citations, and Patrick Kaufman comes in second with 102 total citations. Finally, suppose we judge prominence by the ratio of total publications to total citations. In that case, the leader is Patrick Kaufman, with a ratio of 20.40, well ahead of L. Frazer, with a 16.29 ratio. The rankings in the table are based purely on the total number of publications that appeared in *JMC* from 1991 through 2022.

4.2 Geographic Distribution

The geographic distribution of contributing authors was examined using data extracted from the Scopus database. The results are shown in Table 2. Since the journal has been founded and hosted by US institutions throughout its history, it is not surprising that the majority of publications in *JMC* come from US-based authors. A total of 311 articles were contributed by US-based authors, comprising almost 63% of all publications. Australian authors come second with 33 articles and 6.7% of the total, rounding out the top 3 in the United Kingdom with 23 publications, representing 4.6% of the total number of publications in the journal. However, the rest of the contributing authors are relatively

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evenly spread throughout the world, suggesting that *JMC* has a truly global reach when it comes to marketing and marketing channels research.

Table 2. Distribution of Countries Contributing to Publications, 1991-2022

Rank	Country	Total Publications (TP)	Total Citations (TC)	TC/TP	% of Total
1	United States	311	2849	9.16	62.7%
2	Australia	33	313	9.48	6.7%
3	UK	23	291	12.65	4.6%
4	China	20	170	8.50	4.0%
5	Japan	17	51	3.00	3.4%
6	Spain	13	87	6.69	2.6%
7	Canada	12	73	6.08	2.4%
8	South Korea	10	141	14.10	2.0%
9	Netherlands	7	73	10.43	1.4%
10	Austria	6	54	9.00	1.2%
11	Taiwan	6	39	6.50	1.2%
12	Sweden	6	35	5.83	1.2%
13	Germany	6	18	3.00	1.2%
14	France	5	78	15.60	1.0%
15	India	4	69	17.25	0.8%
16	Norway	4	33	8.25	0.8%
17	Singapore	4	31	7.75	0.8%
18	Ghana	3	36	12.00	0.6%
19	Finland	3	18	6.00	0.6%
20	Turkey	3	5	1.67	0.6%

Table 3. Centrality of Countries Contributing to Publications, 1991-2022

Country	Degree	Country	Betweenness Centrality	Country	Closeness Centrality
United States	29	Germany	0.005	Germany	1
China	11	France	0.004	China	1
United Kingdom	6	China	0.003	Finland	1
Germany	5	Finland	0.001	UK	1
Finland	5	Netherlands	0.001	Turkey	1
Austria	5	UK	0.001	Singapore	1
France	5	Croatia	0.001	Poland	1
Australia	5	Turkey	0.001	South Korea	1
Croatia	5	Singapore	0.000	Serbia	1
Poland	4	United States	0.000	Taiwan	1
South Korea	4	Austria	0.000	UAE	1
Turkey	3	Australia	0.000	Argentina	1
Serbia	3	Poland	0.000	Indonesia	1
Taiwan	3	South Korea	0.000	Japan	1
UAE	3	Serbia	0.000	Saudi Arabia	1
Netherlands	3	Taiwan	0.000	Brazil	1
Bangladesh	3	UAE	0.000	Greece	1
Singapore	2	Bangladesh	0.000	India	1
Argentina	2	Argentina	0.000	Norway	1
Indonesia	2	Indonesia	0.000	Sweden	1

4.3 Collaboration Network of JMC

Since *JMC* authors represent so many different countries, we decided to map a global collaboration network of *JMC* and attempt to map an evolution of collaboration in the 3 decades of the journal's existence. Co-authorship on published articles is a formal way to create scientific collaborations (Donthu et al., 2021b). To document scientific collaboration researchers usually map and analyze the collaboration network of co-authors where the nodes are the authors or affiliated countries and the linkages are the co-authorships among the authors (Glanzel & Schubert, 2004). We used RStudio software to map and examine the collaborative network among *JMC* co-authors. To examine the evolution of the co-authorship patterns in *JMC* history, we divided the *JMC* history into three decades: from 1991 to 2000, from 2001 to 2010, and from 2011 to 2020. Figures 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate the three maps representing collaborative networks for *JMC* for each of the respective decades.
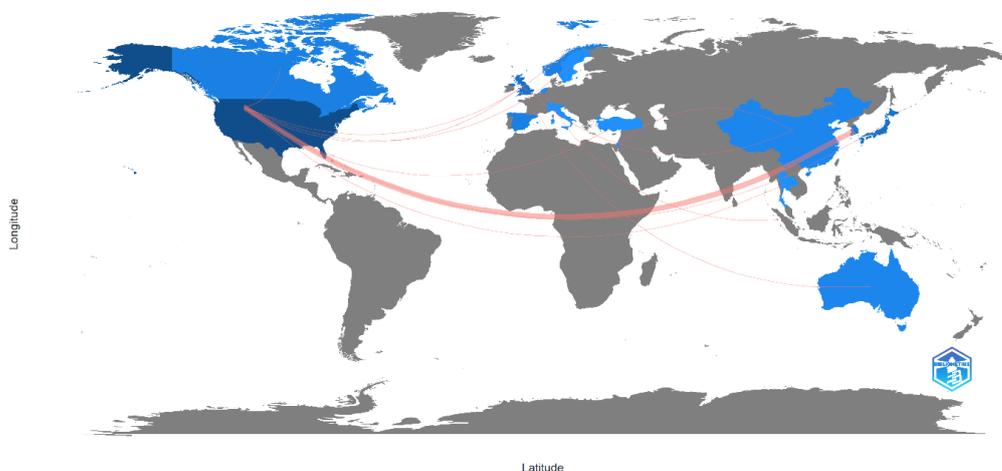

Figure 2. Collaborative Network Map for *JMC* from 1991 to 2000
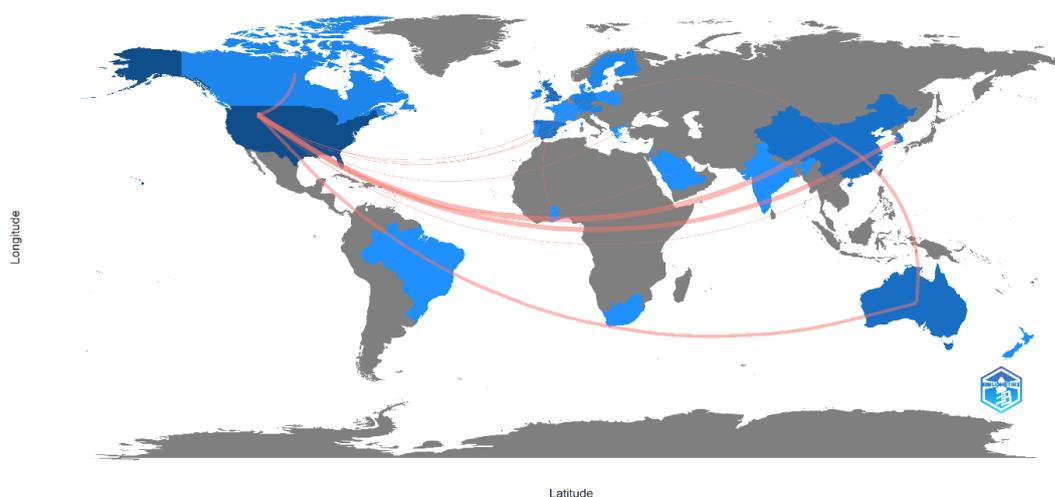

Figure 3. Collaborative Network Map for *JMC* from 2001 to 2010
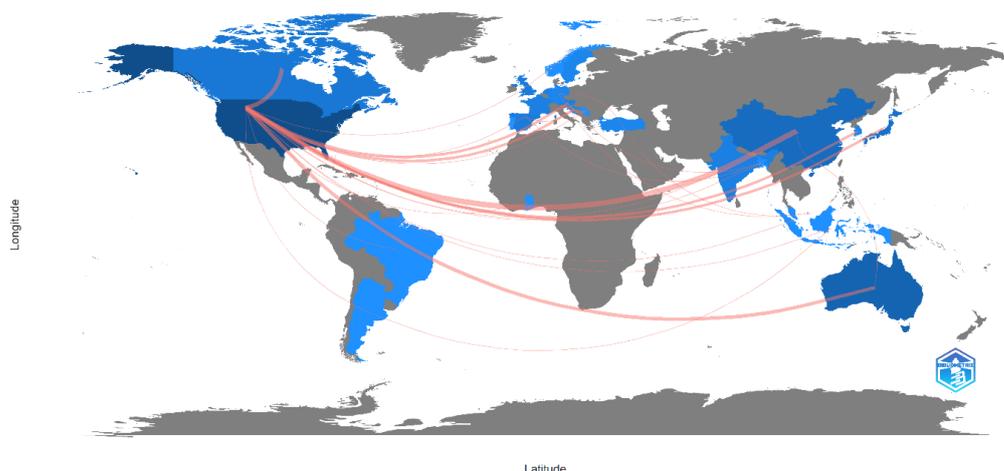
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Country Collaboration Map

Figure 4. Collaborative Network Map for *JMC* from 2011 to 2020

As can be seen in Figure 2, in the first decade of *JMC*, the collaboration network of the journal included countries in North America, such as the United States and Canada, as well as many countries in Western Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway. The collaborative network also included authors from Turkey, Israel and Australia. Japan, South Korea, China, and Thailand represented Asia. By far most co-authorships were with the US co-authors, as determined by the number of links to the country. The strongest link, judging by the width of the link, was between the US and South Korea. In the second decade of the journal's existence, the collaborative network of *JMC* expanded to include more countries and continents. As shown in Figure 3, the collaborative network now included additional Western European countries such as Portugal, Ireland, France, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Greece, and Eastern European countries such as Poland. The network also included Brazil from South America, India, Saudi Arabia, and countries of the African continent: South Africa and Ghana. The strong link between South Korean and US authors remained but now was not the only strong link. The linkages between the US and Australia, the US and China, the US and Canada, and China and Australia strengthened considerably relative to the previous decade. Figure 4 shows the collaborative network for *JMC* in the third decade from 2011 to 2020. The network expanded even more from the previous decade to include large countries such as Argentina, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. In Europe, the network made more inroads into Eastern Europe, including Serbia and Croatia. US remained a central node in all three decades, with practically all the countries connecting to US. In the third decade, the linkage between the US and China and the US and Japan strengthened, but the linkage between China and Australia weakened considerably. Figure 5 depicts the collaborative network of *JMC* authors for all publications examined.
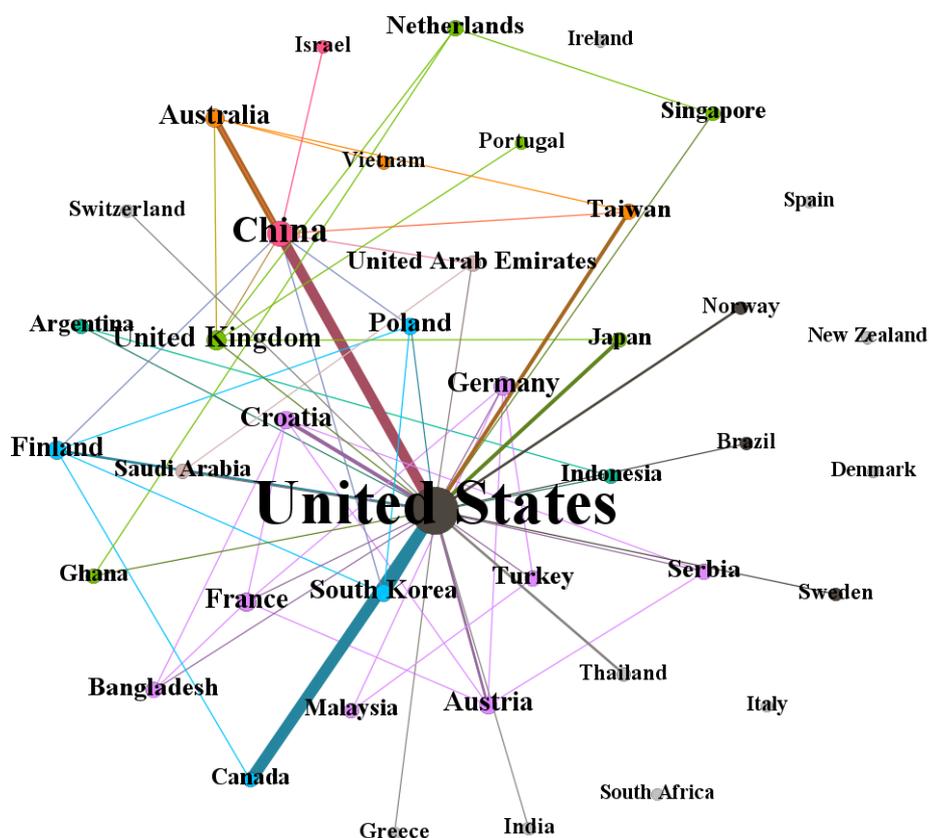
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Figure 5. Country Network Map, 1991-2022

The nodes in this total network represent the countries, the links represent the co-authorships, the color represents the co-authorship group, and the thickness of the links between the nodes represents the strength of the link as measured by the number of co-authorships in the dataset. Figure 5 confirms that the United States is clearly the central node of the collaborative network for *JMC,* with China as a distant second. US co-authorship connections to virtually all the countries in the network, with the strongest connections to China and Canada. Notably, a few countries are not connected to the overall network, which means the authors do not have co-authors in other countries. Contributors from Ireland, Spain, New Zealand, Denmark, Italy, and South Africa co-author within their own countries or contribute sole-authored articles.

4.4 Visualizing the Social Structure of JMC Authors

Figure 6 demonstrates the social group structure of contributors to JMC during the 1991-2022 period.
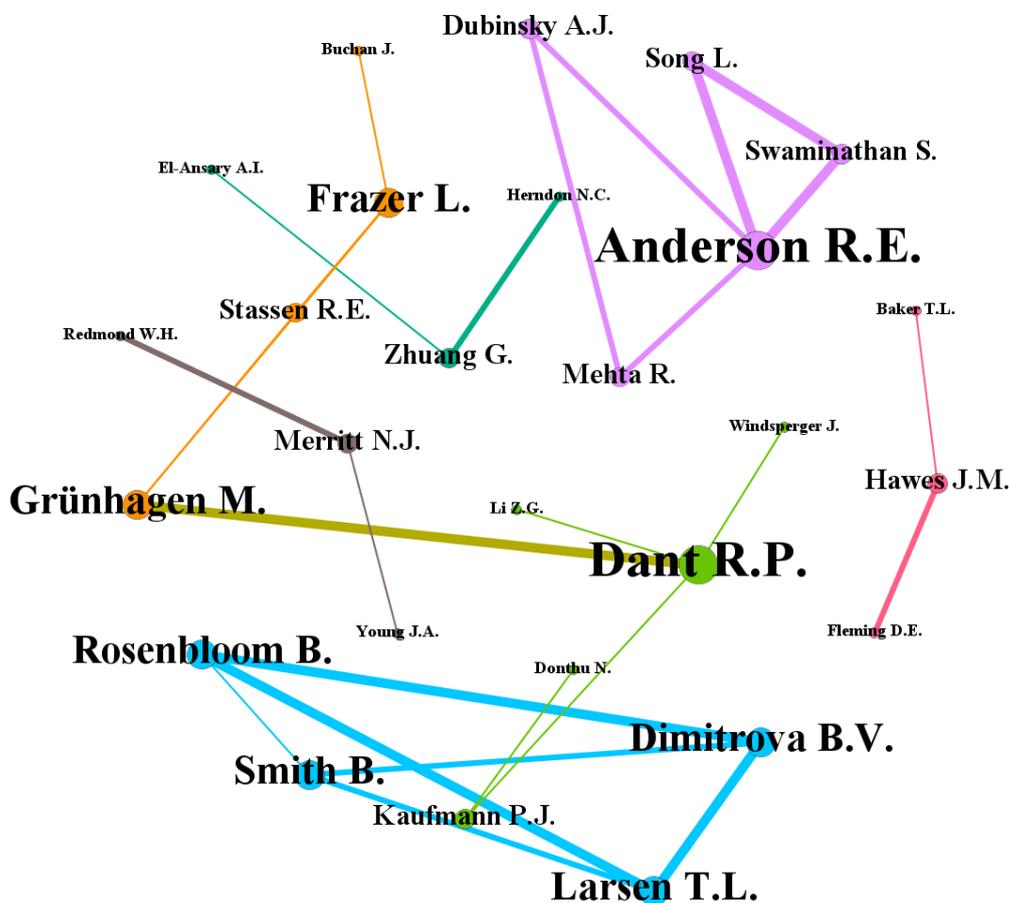

Figure 6. Social Structure of Publications, 1991-2022

We used VOSviewer and Gephi software to visualize the bibliographic coupling network of top *JMC* authors. To be considered a top author in our analysis a contributor must publish at least 3 articles in the journal. The nodes in this network are the authors, the lines represent co-authorship links, and the color represents the semantic cluster of the authors. As shown in Figure 6, the social structure of JMC's top authors comprises eight social groups. Most notable is the intellectual association between R. Dant and M. Grunhagen, who contributed 8 articles each, as shown in Table 1. Another notable intellectual association is among B. Rosenbloom, B. Dimitrova, and T. Larsen. B. Rosenbloom is ranked number one among the top contributing authors and B. Dimitrova and T. Larsen are also on that list with six articles each (see Table 1.)

4.5 Most Influential Articles in Marketing Channels

The extracted Scopus data was also analyzed to identify the most influential articles in JMC. The number of times an article was cited is commonly considered to be an appropriate measure of its influence (Donthu et al., 2020; Tsay, 2009). Based on that measure, Table 3 shows the most influential articles published in *JMC* for the last three decades.

Table 4. Centrality of Countries Contributing to *JMC* Publications, 1991-2022

Country	Degree	Country	Betweenness Centrality	Country	Closeness Centrality
United States	29	Germany	0.005	Germany	1
China	11	France	0.004	China	1
United Kingdom	6	China	0.003	Finland	1
Germany	5	Finland	0.001	UK	1
Finland	5	Netherlands	0.001	Turkey	1
Austria	5	UK	0.001	Singapore	1
France	5	Croatia	0.001	Poland	1
Australia	5	Turkey	0.001	South Korea	1
Croatia	5	Singapore	0.000	Serbia	1
Poland	4	United States	0.000	Taiwan	1
South Korea	4	Austria	0.000	UAE	1
Turkey	3	Australia	0.000	Argentina	1
Serbia	3	Poland	0.000	Indonesia	1
Taiwan	3	South Korea	0.000	Japan	1
UAE	3	Serbia	0.000	Saudi Arabia	1
Netherlands	3	Taiwan	0.000	Brazil	1
Bangladesh	3	UAE	0.000	Greece	1
Singapore	2	Bangladesh	0.000	India	1
Argentina	2	Argentina	0.000	Norway	1
Indonesia	2	Indonesia	0.000	Sweden	1

The most influential article of *JMC* is "Sources of Supply Chain Disruptions, factors that Breed Vulnerability, and Mitigating Strategies" by Stecke and Kumar (2009). It has received a total of 183 citations and more than 12 citations per year during our analysis. It has almost double the number of citations as the runner-up article entitled "The Role of Logistics Leverage in Marketing Strategy" by Mentzer and Williams (2001), which has 99 total citations and 4.30 citations per year at the time of our analysis.

5. Thematic Analysis of Marketing Channels Research

Bibliometrics enables a systematic examination of an extensive collection of scholarly publications, pinpointing the subjects investigated, detecting changes in a field, and presenting an overview of the current research landscape (Crane, 1972). One of the useful tools of bibliometric analysis is bibliographic coupling. Bibliographic coupling between two articles occurs when they reference the same article in their reference lists (Kessler, 1963). Therefore, the more references the two articles share, the stronger the thematic association between the two articles. We performed a bibliometric coupling analysis of the 453 articles published in *JMC* in its history up to 2022. Our analysis revealed six clusters of articles that are strongly associated with each other within the clusters based on the bibliographic coupling. We provide the description of each cluster and the most influential articles of each cluster in Table 4.

Table 5. Summary of the Thematic Clusters, 1991-2022

C	Theme	Authors	Title	TC	C/Y
1	**Supply chain and multichannel strategies**	Stecke and Kumar (2009)	Sources of supply chain disruptions, factors that breed vulnerability, and mitigating strategies	183	13.07
		Mentzer and Williams (2001)	The role of logistics leverage in marketing strategy	99	4.50
		Lee and Kim (2010)	Investigating dimensionality of multichannel retailer's cross-channel integration practices and effectiveness: Shopping orientation and loyalty intention	68	5.23
		Kwon and Jain (2009)	Multichannel shopping through nontraditional retail formats: Variety-seeking behavior with hedonic and utilitarian motivations	57	4.07
		Twede and	Supply chain issues in reusable packaging	53	2.94

		Clarke (2005)			
2	**Franchising**	Watson and Johnson (2010)	Managing the franchisor-franchisee relationship: A relationship marketing perspective	52	4.00
		Kaufmann and Kim (1995)	Master franchising and system growth rates	49	1.75
		Bradach (1995)	Chains within chains: The role of multi-unit franchisees	49	1.75
		Stanworth (1995)	The franchise relationship: Entrepreneurship or dependence?	49	1.75
		Dant and Grünhagen (2014)	International Franchising Research: Some Thoughts on the What, Where, When, and How	49	5.44
3	**International Channels**	Johnson and Raven (1996)	Relationship quality, satisfaction and performance in export marketing channels	21	0.78
		Bordonaba-Juste and Polo-Redondo (2008)	The effect of relationship marketing strategy on franchise channels: Evidence from Spanish franchisees	21	1.40
		Lim and Frazer (2002)	Introducing franchising regulation: An analysis of the australian franchising code of conduct	20	0.95
		Mallin et al. (2014)	The proactive behavior of younger salespeople: Antecedents and outcomes	18	2.00
		Magnusson and Boyle (2009)	A contingency perspective on psychic distance in international channel relationships	16	1.14
4	**Power and Dependence**	Duarte and Davies (2004)	Trust as a mediator of channel power	39	2.05
		Cronin and	The effects of a distributor's attribution of	19	0.63

	Baker (1993)	manufacturer influence on the distributor's perceptions of conflict, performance and satisfaction		
	Zhuang et al. (2008)	The impact of interpersonal guanxi on exercise of power in a Chinese marketing channel	17	1.13
	Rodríguez et al. (2006)	Dependence as a moderator in the relationship between franchisors and franchisees: The case of services franchises	16	0.94
	Li (1998)	Communication in marketing channels: Moderating effects of power structure and relationalism	15	0.60
5	**Coordination and Opportunism**	Pentina and Hasty (2009)	Effects of multichannel coordination and e-commerce outsourcing on online retail performance	37	2.64
		Zafeiropoulou and Koufopoulos (2013)	The Influence of Relational Embeddedness on the Formation and Performance of Social Franchising	24	2.40
		Haugland and Reve (1993)	Relational contracting and distribution channel cohesion	23	0.77
		Hawkins et al. (2009)	Opportunism in buyer-supplier relations: New insights from quantitative synthesis	23	1.64
		Bello et al. (2002)	E-business technological innovations: Impact on channel processes and structure	19	0.90
6	**Integration and Emerging Markets**	Huang et al. (2011)	A mixed-method study of the effects of guanxi between salespersons and buyers on retailer-supplier relationships in China	10	0.83
		Abrahamsson and Brege (2005)	Dynamic effectiveness: Improved industrial distribution from interaction between marketing and logistics strategies	9	0.50

Prater et al. (2009)	Emerging economies: Operational issues in China and India	7	0.50
Baker and Hawes (1993)	The relationship between strategy and structure within channel dyads	6	0.20
Prater and Jiang (2008)	The drivers of foreign rd investment in China	4	0.27

5.1 Cluster 1 Supply Chains and Multichannel Strategies

The first cluster, which we named supply chains and multichannel strategies, comprises 180 articles published in the journal. Cluster 1 is by far the largest cluster among the six clusters identified and includes the top five most cited articles of the journal. As mentioned in the analysis of the most influential articles, Stecke and Kumar (2009) and Mentzer and Williams (2001) are two of the most cited articles in the journal's history. The other 3 articles are by Lee and Kim (2010), Kwon and Jain (2009), and Twede and Clarke (2005). The first two articles deal with the issues of multichannel strategies, and the third investigates supply chain issues. Not surprisingly, this cluster is also the most influential cluster, with 1906 citations over the examined period. The average number of citations per article in this cluster is 11.91. The most commonly examined topics and concepts in this cluster include "supply chain", "supply chain management", "supply chain disruption", "supply chain risks," "logistics", "logistics management", "multichannel retailing," "multi-channel distribution", "multi-channel management", "e-tailing", "electronic commerce" and "online shopping".

5.2 Cluster 2 Franchising

The second cluster has 68 articles and was named franchising. This cluster has 954 total citations with a 15.14 average number of citations per article. The top five articles in this cluster were all cited roughly 50 times as they deal with major franchising issues. The most influential article in this cluster is a publication by Watson and Johnson (2010) on managing franchisor-franchisee relationships, with 53 citations at the time of our analysis. The four other articles, by Kaufmann and Kim (1995), Bradach (1995), Stanworth (1995), and Dant and Grünhagen (2014), are all tied for second place with 49 citations each. Notably, the first three of the four articles were published in 1995 in the special issue of *JMC* on Franchising. The most commonly explored concepts in this cluster are "franchising", "multi-unit franchising", "retail franchising", "social franchising", "franchisee failure", "franchise systems", "international franchising" ,and "agency theory".

5.3 Cluster 3 International Channels

Cluster 3 comprises 57 published articles; we named it the international channels cluster. This cluster of articles was cited 403 times, with an average of 7.75 citations per article at the time of our analysis. The most common concepts explored by the research of this cluster were "buyer-seller relationships", "customer relationship management", and "performance". A variety of different concepts were explored in the articles of this cluster in contrast to the previous cluster on franchising. The common thread of this cluster was that many articles used an international setting to explore topics familiar to the mainstream of research for marketing channels. A good example of such an article is one by

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Johnson and Raven (1996) that examines relationship quality, satisfaction, and performance in export marketing channels setting.

5.4 Cluster 4 Power and Dependence

The fourth cluster is called power and dependence and it has 47 articles within the cluster. This cluster was less influential than the previous three clusters, with 290 total citations and 6.9 citations per article in the examined period. The most common concepts explored by the research articles in this cluster were "channel power", "power asymmetry", "dependence", "interdependence", "channel conflict", "trust", and "inter-organizational relationships". These are the core constructs in marketing channels research, and a good example of an article from this cluster is by Duarte and Davies (2004) exploring trust as a mediator of channel power. This article is also the most influential in this cluster, with 39 citations during our analysis.

5.5 Cluster 5 Coordination and Opportunism

Cluster five has 45 articles, and this cluster's theme is coordination and opportunism in inter-organizational relationships. This cluster has 348 total citations, an average of 8.7 per published article. The most commonly investigated topics by the articles in this cluster are "multichannel coordination", "opportunism", "transaction cost theory", "governance", and "relationalism". The most cited article in this cluster is by Pentina and Hasty (2009), which investigates the impact of e-commerce outsourcing and multichannel coordination on online retail performance. It received a total of 37 citations at the time of our analysis.

5.6 Cluster 6 Integration and Emerging Markets

The last cluster, cluster 6, has a theme of integration in the distribution channels and emerging markets and only consists of 10 articles. This cluster has been cited a total of 46 times with an average citation per cited article of 5.11. As Table 4 shows, the articles in this smallest cluster deal with issues of integration of channel operations in emerging markets of China, India, and Kazakhstan. Huang et al. (2011) article on the effects of guanxi on retailer-supplier relationships in China is the most cited article in this cluster, with 10 total citations at the time of our analysis.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study used bibliometric methods to conduct a retroactive analysis of 453 articles of *Journal of Marketing Channels*. We examined 31 years from the inception of the journal in 1991 to 2022. While the goal was to review the entire area of marketing channels, as a first step and to keep the analysis manageable, we started with an analysis of only articles published in JMC, which represents the gold standard of research in the area. Future research may want to expand the analysis to include marketing channels research in other marketing journals.

Our analysis revealed that the journal has made tremendous progress over its 31-history. Although the average number of articles per year stayed relatively steady, the number of citations of the journal increased more than fifteenfold over the period examined in this study. This speaks to the growing influence of the journal in the last three decades and the emphasis of the journal on the quality of the publications versus sheer quantity.

The most prolific contributors to the journal in its history were B. Rosenbloom, R. Dant, M. Grunhagen, and H. Bellin based on the number of articles published. Based on the number of total citations and citations per year, the leaders were P. Kaufman and L. Frazer. In terms of the social structure of contributing authors, the most notable intellectual association was between R. Dant and M. Grunhagen

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who were also top contributors to the journal. Another top contributor social group included B. Rosenbloom, B. Dimitrova, and T. Larsen. It is notable that the most influential articles in the history of the journal were co-authored by contributors outside of the strong social networks identified. As mentioned above, these were by Stecke and Kumar (2009) and Mentzer and Williams (2001) and were published in the second decade of the journal's existence and both focused on supply chain and logistics issues.

Although the majority of the journal's articles came from US-based authors, more than a third of publications were published by authors residing outside of the United States. Over the last three decades, the journal has considerably expanded its global reach. While in the first decade of its existence, the journal authors were primarily from North America and Western Europe, by the third decade of the journal's history, the contributing authors came from all around the world, including Eastern Europe, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Brazil, and Argentina. United States remained the central node in the collaborative network of the journal throughout the history with strong collaborative linkages with authors in Canada and China. Despite this exemplary global expansion of author contributions from different countries, the journal may continue on the same path of expanding its global reach in the coming decades. The journal's leadership may consider implementing special issues focused on the study of distribution channels in various parts of the world that are not currently well represented in the geographic distribution of the authors shown in Table 2. Another tool that could be used is the outreach to or sponsorship of business and marketing conferences with a certain geographic focus to attract contributors from those geographic areas.

Along with the geographic expansion of contributing researchers, the journal experienced an explosion of research themes and topics in its 31 years of history. We visualized this explosion in three figures (Figures 7-10), and the overall thematic structure covers a wide variety of marketing themes that have become germane to the study of marketing channels. These themes span core channel themes such as retailer-manufacturer relationships to marketing strategy, supply chain management and even consumer behavior. We could well expect this expansion of thematic structure to continue with the renaming of the journal, as the scope of the journal now includes not only inter-organizational relationships within a marketing channel but well beyond that purely marketing setting.

The thematic analysis revealed six major clusters around which the research published in *the area* coalesced. All major themes one expects in this type of journal were represented well in these clusters. In order of prominence and influence, these were supply chains and multichannel strategies, franchising, international channels, power and dependence, coordination and opportunism, and integration and emerging markets. Although this clustering was not surprising and some of these clusters were identified in previous research (Zemanek & Tran, 2021), what we find surprising was the lack of some themes that we were expecting at the outset of our analysis. For example, the marketing channel is often defined as a set of independent organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption (Kotler et al., 2022). Given a wide variety of organizations that participate in the channel, different types of wholesalers/distributors, different types of retailers, and other intermediaries, we were surprised not to see any articles, let alone cluster of articles on social network analysis among these various actors. Another surprising finding was that given the tremendous evolution of technology and its impact on distribution channels in the last three decades, much of it was not adequately covered in the *JMC* articles. The impact of technology is limited to "e-tailing" and "multi-channel" issues, however other technological advances such as

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artificial intelligence, cloud, social media, big data analytics, and mobile technologies did not find much space on the pages of the journal. Future contributors to the journal may address these research gaps as they aspire to publish research in *JMC*. At the same time, the journal leadership may implement special issues addressing these topics, as they may be germane to the journal's scope and may be interesting to the journal's audience. Notably, in our cluster analysis, we found that the second most influential cluster was focused on franchising, and the most cited articles in this cluster were the articles published in the special issue on franchising.

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