Review

Business and Management Research on the Motion Picture Industry: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: The motion picture industry is subject to extensive business and management research conducted on a wide range of topics. Due to high research productivity, it is challenging to keep track of the abundance of publications. Against this background, we employ a bibliographic coupling analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of current research topics. The following themes were defined: Key factors for success, word of mouth and social media, organizational and pedagogical dimensions, advertising—product placement and online marketing, tourism, the influence of data, the influence of culture, revenue maximization and purchase decisions, and the perception and identification of audiences. Based on the cluster analysis, we suggest the following future research opportunities: Exploring technological innovations, especially the influence of social media and streaming platforms in the film industry; the in-depth analysis of the use of artificial intelligence in film production, both in terms of its creative potential and ethical and legal challenges; the exploration of the representation of wokeness and minorities in films and their cultural and economic significance; and, finally, a detailed examination of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises on the film industry, especially in terms of changed consumption habits and structural adjustments.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; business research; films; movies; literature review; motion pictures

1. Introduction

For over a century, the film industry has not only entertained the masses but also shaped economic, technological, and cultural shifts. As a component of a dynamic entertainment industry ecosystem, it is, in turn, also constantly reshaped and redefined by technological innovations and shifts in the marketplace (Vogel 2014). This broad relevance has naturally attracted significant research attention worldwide, leading to an ever-increasing number of scholarly publications on the motion picture industry exploring its diverse dimensions (De Vany 2003). This impressive growth has made it increasingly challenging to maintain an overview of the diverse research topics, methods, and findings. Given the overwhelming volume of information, researchers and industry professionals are challenged with pinpointing significant literature and extracting key trends and insights effectively (Ellegaard and Wallin 2015). In this context of expanding information, valuable insights might be missed or research voids could remain undetected. To systematically analyze and structure the existing literature and identify such gaps, bibliometric methods can be employed when the literature landscape is too large for a traditional literature review (Donthu et al. 2021; Zupic and Čater 2015). Utilizing the specific technique of bibliographic coupling (Kessler 1963; Weinberg 1974), this work clusters current salient research themes, offering a structured breakdown of the existing literature. This methodology not only ensures prompt access to key subjects but also reveals research gaps and highlights avenues for future studies in the realm of film business. Our bibliometric analysis complements a recent review by McKenzie (2023), which has a broader focus on micro- and macroeconomic implications for the movie industry.
The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In the Section 2, we explain the bibliometric procedure we employed to collect the literature sample and review the literature. In the Section 3, we present the findings and, in the Section 4, we discuss these outcomes, highlighting future research opportunities and addressing limitations of this bibliometric review. In the Section 5, we conclude our research by summarizing its main findings.

2. Methodology

2.1. Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliometric analyses have become an established methodology to map several subfields of business and management scholarship (Deyanova et al. 2022; Donthu et al. 2021; Filser et al. 2021; Hashemi et al. 2022; Korte et al. 2021; Kruggel et al. 2020; Naeini et al. 2022; Pacheco-Velázquez et al. 2023; Ribeiro-Navarrete et al. 2022; Tiberius et al. 2020; Tiberius et al. 2021; Zupic and Čater 2015). The fundamental notion of bibliometric methods is that citations indicate the influence and relevance of research articles (Noyons et al. 1999; Smith 1981; Zupic and Čater 2015). Its advantages are its unobtrusiveness and objectiveness (Donthu et al. 2021; Zupic and Čater 2015). The more references the citing documents share, the stronger their bibliometric connection (Egghe and Rousseau 2002; Zupic and Čater 2015). Documents that are strongly connected form clusters that are likely to deal with the same research themes (Zupic and Čater 2015). In contrast to co-citation analysis (Small 1973), which has a focus on older literature, bibliographic coupling stresses more recent research (Egghe and Rousseau 2002). As we were interested in a review of more recent literature, we opted for bibliographic coupling.

In order to identify the subject areas that have been extensively researched recently and those that have received limited attention, we conducted a bibliographic coupling analysis of a comprehensive dataset of publications centering around the motion picture industry from a business management perspective. This method reveals themes based on documents jointly citing another reference (Kessler 1963; Weinberg 1974). As one of the science mapping techniques, bibliographic coupling is employed to craft scientific maps, which visualize relationships and clusters among various publications, offering an insight into the structure and evolution of a research field (Donthu et al. 2021).

2.2. Data Collection and Dataset

For the collection of the data, we conducted a title search in the Web of Science (WoS) with the search terms “motion picture*” OR “film*” OR “movie*”. The choice of keywords was made in order to encompass a wide range of articles that were thematically linked to the film industry in the analysis.

We narrowed down the dataset by applying several filters. First, we delimited the search to the categories “Management,” “Business,” and “Business Finance” to ensure the topical relevance of the identified documents. Second, we further refined the dataset by filtering for the document types “article” and “early access” to ensure that only peer-reviewed and, therefore, highly qualitative publications were included. In order to focus on recent developments, we limited the publication timeframe to encompass the years 2013 through 2022. This step was essential to ensure that the collected documents were current and reflective of recent research in the field. The WoS search to collect data was carried out on 21 July 2023 and resulted in 354 documents.

2.3. Data Analysis

For the creation of the visual map of the dataset, we used VOSViewer version 1.6.19. The choice of VOS Viewer was influenced by its advanced capabilities in bibliographic visualization and its support for the fractional counting method (Van Eck and Waltman 2010, 2017). The fractional counting method was chosen to mitigate biases from multiple authors per article. This method guarantees that citations are fairly assigned among authors, capturing a balanced overview of the thematic links in the research articles reviewed. We
applied a citations threshold at a minimum of ten to reduce the dataset to a manageable size that also reflected the most relevant scholarly work. As a result, the 354 documents were narrowed down to 119. From these documents, 116 were connected with 2167 links, with a total link strength of 1174.67.

To identify the thematic clusters provided through the bibliographic coupling, the titles and abstracts of all articles were systematically reviewed and coded. This examination ensured that the pinpointed themes and connections genuinely reflected the core findings of the considered literature. When specific abstracts raised questions or lacked clarity, full articles were consulted to gain deeper insights and further validate the analysis results. This combined approach ensured that the outcomes provided both a comprehensive overview of the literature and in-depth insights into specific, relevant topics.

3. Results

In the course of the bibliometric coupling analysis, ten distinct clusters were identified (Figure 1). The article “Does Twitter matter? The impact of microblogging word of mouth on consumers’ adoption of new movies” authored by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2015) was distinguished by its superior citation count of 226. This paper also featured 63 links, resulting in a total link strength (TLS) of 27. On the other hand, the publication recording the pinnacle in TLS metrics was “Empirical generalizations on the impact of stars on the economic success of movies” by Hofmann et al. (2017), securing a TLS of 77, a citation count of 39, and 63 links. One cluster was notably small, encompassing merely two articles. There was a cluster (cluster 9) that could not be categorized into a specific thematic group. Absent this particular cluster, the subsequent clusters can be described follows.

Figure 1. Bibliographic coupling map. Source: Own elaboration.

3.1. Key Factors for Success

The first cluster (red) was the largest and contained 25 articles. This cluster analyzes various determinants that influence a film’s success and strategies to predict cinematic success based on these factors. The following indicators were investigated as influential factors: Production costs, releases by major studios, awards, and film sequels (Pangarker and Smit 2013); the quality, innovation, and reputation of films, especially in China (Elliott
et al. 2018); how the political orientations of consumers impact their movie selections (Roos and Shachar 2014); the impact of shared consumption on the success of joint experiences (Delre et al. 2016); and the influence of critic reviews considering timing. According to a data analysis, critic reviews have a stronger influence during economic downturns than during growth phases (Dhar and Weinberg 2016). Another article, however, examined to what extent film reviews influence cinema operators in their decisions about how long a movie stays on the program, which subsequently affects the movie’s overall performance (Legoux et al. 2016). According to a study, advertising after the launch of a movie serves as an indicator of product quality, in contrast to advertising prior to market launch (Song et al. 2016). Directorial performance and the rehiring of directors after a film project was also examined based on data evaluations (John et al. 2017). Studies indicated that ethnic diversity within the primary cast has been observed to positively influence consumer quality perceptions, serving as an additional determinant of success (Kuppuswamy and Younkin 2020). Several publications addressed the success indicator of a prominent cast (Hofmann et al. 2017). Star actors affect a movie’s success more than their artistic appreciation, especially at the initial box office launch (Carrillat et al. 2018). Besides the evident impact of stars on financial returns when contrasted with less-established actors (Liu et al. 2015), the selection of stars influences decisions made by previous stakeholders, such as financiers and cinema operators, and is utilized by production as a strategy to reduce risk (Liu et al. 2014).

3.2. Word of Mouth (WOM) and Social Media

Cluster 2 (green) was composed of 17 articles and dealt with the influence of movie ratings, especially those given by consumers. According to a study from 2013, while professional critics provide more reliable evaluations, it is the reviews from consumers themselves that have a more pronounced impact (Peng et al. 2013). In a study from 2017, the role of word of mouth in influencing volume and valence concerning a person’s drive to watch a film was explored, taking into account data from the US film industry and associated Twitter posts (Yoon et al. 2017). In a subsequent 2019 study, an alternative dataset was used to investigate how these aspects, paired with additional marketing communication methods, influence revenues before and after film premieres (Kim et al. 2019). Moreover, the effects of WOM on consumer behavior in both the USA and China were compared (Chiu et al. 2019) and further analyzed in conjunction with advertising, especially in Korea (Zhang et al. 2020). Further research has addressed the “Twitter Effect” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2015), the significance of distributing film trailers on social media platforms (C. Oh et al. 2017), and the integrated social media strategies employed by film studios, specifically in the context of Bollywood movies (Nanda et al. 2018).

3.3. Organizational and Pedagogical Dimensions

Cluster 3 (blue) consisted of 17 articles and explored a range of topics centered around the film industry and its connection to organization, spatial considerations, ethics, and education. There is an evident trend in the educational sector towards the integration of films as teaching tools. Beyond their traditional entertainment value, films serve as instructional resources, particularly within fields such as intercultural management (Desai et al. 2018) and ethics education (O’Boyle and Sandonà 2014; Werner 2014). Some publications directly associate the realm of cinema with organizational topics, either by analyzing workspaces and gender roles (Panayiotou 2015) or by examining the relationship between temporary and permanent organizations in film production (Stjerne and Svejnová 2016). Multiple papers addressed a range of organizational and pedagogical challenges, from gender disparity (Handy and Rowlands 2017) and digital interruptions (Franklin et al. 2013) to the informality present in the Nigerian film sector (Uzo and Mair 2014) and team dynamics in film creation (Narayan and Kadiyali 2016). Research on intuitive decision-making (Meziani and Cabantous 2020) emphasized the holistic approach of “sensemaking” and explored how intuition is utilized within organizational contexts.
3.4. Advertising—Product Placement and Online Marketing

Cluster 4 (yellow) comprised 15 articles and focused on product placement and online marketing, especially social media. They considered various aspects of product placement in films, notably, its effectiveness, including an examination of its efficacy in 3D films versus 2D films (Breves and Schramm 2019), brand placement strategies (Verhellen et al. 2016), and audience reactions (Meyer et al. 2016). Furthermore, certain publications focused explicitly on a younger target group (Naderer et al. 2019). These delved into how product placements manifest within children’s films and analyzed their influence on children’s behaviors, particularly with reference to food consumption (Matthes and Naderer 2015) as well as their overall brand perception (Naderer et al. 2018). Furthermore, different aspects related to online marketing in general were explored. A study emphasized the importance of online marketing, especially official microblogs, by examining the influence of various social media channels and events on box office success (Liao and Huang 2021). The efficacy of mini-movies as a novel online marketing strategy (Chen 2015) as well as brand mentions in mini-film advertising was also explored (Wu et al. 2020).

3.5. Tourism

Within cluster 5 (purple), there were 14 articles. The principal theme of this cluster was tourism. Topics covered included the phenomenon of film tourism (Araujo Vila et al. 2021), different categories of film tourists, their travel motivations (Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai 2015), and the relationship between authenticity and destination loyalty (Teng and Chen 2020). Another article addressed the impact of Hollywood movies on consumers’ expectations regarding the locations shown (Gkritzali et al. 2016). A majority of the publications centered on the Asian context: One article examined the use of microfilms on social media platforms as promotional tools for Chinese travel destinations (Shao et al. 2016). Additionally, interactions between locals and tourists at the movie-inspired location “Grand View Garden” in Beijing were studied (Zhang et al. 2016). In contrast, an article highlighted the role of movies and TV series in shaping Chinese tourists’ preferences for global destinations (Wen et al. 2018). Specifically, there was an in-depth look into how the Chinese film “Lost in Thailand” affected Chinese visitors’ patterns in Thailand (Du et al. 2020). Furthermore, an article examined the role of Bollywood films in affecting the travel and buying choices of Indian viewers (Josiam et al. 2015).

3.6. Influence of Data

Within cluster 6 (light blue), there were seven articles dealing with decision-making processes in the film industry utilizing data analytics. Thematically, this concerns the role and influence of actors and film characters (Kennedy et al. 2019), the impact of social media and online engagement on the film industry, and economic considerations. A system has been devised that employs data analysis and text-mining techniques to predict the profitability of a film and that can assist in selecting the most profitable cast (Lash and Zhao 2016). Referring to that, another publication examined the popularity of celebrities in the market (Mathys et al. 2016). Relying on data-mining approaches, viewer reactions to film premieres were assessed, forecasting the revenue a movie will generate during its opening weekend (Lipizzi et al. 2016). A study explored the correlation between social media activity and box office revenues, highlighting the significance of investments in communication across various social media channels, as evidenced by the results (S. Oh et al. 2017).

3.7. The Influence of Culture

Cluster 7 (orange) encompassed seven distinct articles focusing on the significance of cultural factors and their implications on the international success of films. Across these publications, it was consistently underscored that cultural variances across countries manifest significantly, influencing elements such as actor prominence, sequels, production budgets, critical reviews, and marketing strategies (Akdeniz and Talay 2013). Two articles conducted research to determine which market signals are of paramount importance for different target
groups. The significance of these signals fluctuates based on audience diversity and depends on the geographical distance between nations and the chosen marketing techniques (Kim and Jensen 2014) as well as cultural dynamics in combination with the branding attributes of films and the economic environment of the market, which further shape these preferences (Moon and Song 2015). Another article analyzed brand strategies, emphasizing the translation of film titles or brand names for global markets. A central aspect of the analysis was determining how the similarity and informativeness of translated titles or brand names influence the international success of cultural entities (Gao et al. 2020).

3.8. Revenue Maximization and Purchase Decisions

Cluster 8 (brown) consisted of seven articles and delved into the diverse factors that impact a potential customer’s decision to purchase. Among the range of topics explored, the publications analyzed the optimal timing for a movie release, addressing questions about the most suitable moments for cinematic debuts or DVD releases (Ahmed and Sinha 2016). Additionally, they probed into how current weather conditions during ticket presales can markedly influence the purchasing behaviors of potential viewers (Buchheim and Kolaska 2017). Film reviews and their implications were also critically examined, with a particular focus on discerning the differential impacts of online product reviews from unknown sources versus evaluations from familiar and trusted individuals (Lee et al. 2015). Notably, two articles within this cluster specifically centered on influential dynamics in the realm of product counterfeiting, bootleg copies, and piracy. These pieces of research analyzed the outcomes associated with films being illicitly procured and shared before their sanctioned release, coupled with the circulation of unauthorized copies in the aftermath of their official debut (Ma et al. 2014) and what effect piracy has on word of mouth and, therefore, also on revenues (Lu et al. 2020).

3.9. The Perception and Identification of Audiences

Cluster 10 (pink) was the smallest and contained two publications, both of which dealt with audience psychology. One article focused more on the psychological aspects influencing film selection. The consumption of films and the viewing experience from an audience’s perspective are contingent upon an individual’s decisions and experiences (Hart et al. 2016). The second article focused on the audience’s perception of film characters as they watch. In particular, the publication investigated the evolution of a character’s fashion and style throughout their development process within a film. This transformation, particularly when complemented by physical changes, is used to accentuate the character’s emotional state, facilitating a deeper connection and identification of the viewer with the respective character (Choi et al. 2014).

4. Discussion

4.1. The Current Research State and Future Research Opportunities

The clusters identified through bibliographic coupling provide a profound insight into the current state of research in the field of the motion picture industry from a business and management perspective. In the following section, we discuss the significance of these findings in the context of the film industry and in light of external influences on it.

The core of the publications critically analyzed what contributes to a film’s box office success, considering diverse factors ranging from the rationale behind viewers’ film choices and their psychological orientations to sociocultural influences and the implications of piracy, social media platforms, and word of mouth. Particularly with this overview of the clusters and research findings from various publications, it becomes evident that success is not contingent upon a single factor but encompasses a broad and intricate set of influential variables. For example, an article by Hofmann et al. (2017), which had the highest total link strength in the analysis, addresses the significance of actor selection as a factor for success.

With the advancement of time, a growing body of literature is surfacing that is dedicated to the exploration of current technological innovations, data evaluation, and the
realm of social media. In an era of digital transformation (Hanelt et al. 2021; Verhoef et al. 2021; Schulz et al. 2021) and rapidly evolving media consumption habits, these topics are gaining essential importance. Another point that proves this is that the most cited article by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2015) also deals with social media. The film industry is faced with new challenges and opportunities, as the data illustrate. Notably, the dominance of streaming platforms and the influence of social media have revolutionized the manner in which films are produced, marketed, and consumed. It has been observed that data are increasingly being employed to predict audience trends and personalize content. This transformation suggests a potential increase in the adoption of data analytics throughout the film production lifecycle.

However, it is not only technological factors that highlight the importance of these cluster topics. Sociocultural shifts also influence the way films are perceived and interpreted. Especially in a globalized world where cultures incessantly interact, subjects like “cultural influence” and “audience perception and identification” are becoming increasingly important. The results point to audiences gravitating towards content that mirrors cultural diversity and facilitates a deeper personal connection with characters and stories. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the film industry’s future orientation and development necessitates a consideration of both technological and sociocultural dimensions.

Against the background of these predominant research themes, we identified some exemplary topics with little or no research in the cluster analysis and, therefore, potential for future research in several areas, which we discuss in the following sections. Apart from these thematic aspects, we also encourage future research to address foresight methodologies for the future development of the motion picture industry (Fergnani 2022; Jashari et al. 2022; Marinković et al. 2022; Rohrbeck et al. 2015; Semke and Tiberius 2020; Tiberius and Hauptmeijer 2021).

4.1.1. Technological Dimension: AI in the Film Industry

The ongoing evolution of technological advancements and their effects on the film industry present numerous as yet unresolved questions. While the present review offers a comprehensive insight into the current state of research in regards to the technological dimension of the film industry, it still has some gaps. Notably, the potential and implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on film production in the coming years will be of paramount importance. Business management research already has a strong focus on the implications of artificial intelligence (Koechling et al. 2023; Lu 2019; Raisch and Krakowski 2021; Santana and Díaz-Fernández 2023; Tambe et al. 2019). Although the film industry already utilizes data analysis tools powered by AI, a fundamental question remains: Can artificial intelligence ever surpass the creativity of a human screenwriter? Can a machine achieve the emotional depth required to craft stories that genuinely resonate with an audience? And how else might AI be incorporated to potentially reduce costs or enhance efficiency? Additionally, there is an urgent need to examine and establish clear guidelines on the ethical and legal implications of employing AI in film production, with a particular focus on issues related to intellectual property and the representation of individuals.

4.1.2. Sociocultural Dimension: Wokeness and Minorities in the Motion Picture Industry

Another less-explored domain with cultural significance is the current trend of wokeness topics (Foss and Klein 2023; Melloni et al. 2023; Mirzaei et al. 2022) and the representation of minorities, such as the LGBTQ+ community, in the cinematic landscape, which have become highly relevant topics for film and series producers. Although more and more movie and series productions are addressing these issues, there is little research on this yet. As previously highlighted and as was evident in the cluster analysis, cultural representation in the media has garnered increasing attention in recent years. A commitment to diversity in media representations can not only promote the perception and acceptance of minorities but also enhance the economic success of media productions (Ellis 2023; Fils-Aimé 2023). For example, existing research provides quantitative analyses of the presence of LGBTQ+
characters but does not delve deeply into qualitative aspects (Ellis 2023). A review of various industries indicates that diversity, especially in leadership roles, can lead to more creative and innovative solutions (Nishii 2013), which might produce similar positive outcomes from movies. To summarize, it is essential to study the portrayal of diversity in the cinematic landscape in order to gain a more holistic view.

4.1.3. The Impact of Crises on the Film Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound global implications across multiple sectors, with the film industry being no exception (Kraus et al. 2020; Nicola et al. 2020). Productions had been stopped due to lockdown measures and social distancing rules applied to crews on set. The same was true for audiences, leading to a sharp decline in cinema attendance (McKibbin and Fernando 2020). As a consequence, several studios have shifted their distribution approach, either by postponing film debuts or by releasing films exclusively on streaming services. The long-term changes the pandemic brought to the film industry have not been studied much yet. This presents various potential topics for study: Firstly, historically, crises have instigated structural shifts across various industries (Bordo and Haubrich 2017). An examination of the persistent structural adaptations within the film sector, subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, might offer valuable insights for research. Secondly, consumer behavior has seen significant changes during the pandemic, notably with a strong tilt towards streaming services. It might be relevant now to concentrate on how consumer behavior shifts in the aftermath of such crises. Apart from the pandemic, which had a direct influence on the motion picture industry, other crises, such as the current Russia–Ukraine war or the Israel–Gaza conflict, with their various socio-economic consequences, may also indirectly impact the motion picture industry, which is a topic that is not completely understood yet.

4.2. Limitations

Although the methodology of this research offers robust insight into the research landscape, certain limitations exist. A significant challenge was handling the extensive dataset. Due to the chosen citation threshold, there is a chance that some thematic linkages went unrecognized. In addition, bibliographic coupling only covers articles with shared references. However, articles without similar reference lists can also be thematically similar, which indicates that certain relevant research domains might not have been identified. Although the formation of the clusters is an objective process, the identification of themes within these clusters is partly subjective. As a consequence, other researchers might have come up with slightly different topics.

4.3. Practical Implications

The bibliometric review of the literature provides stakeholders in the film industry with a consolidated overview of current trends and influences. By undertaking this work, it is evident which topics have been extensively researched and where research gaps remain. Therefore, the gained knowledge can provide practitioners with current topics to incorporate in their decision making. In particular, filmmakers, by understanding key success factors and the influences of culture and data, can derive new production and marketing approaches. Marketers, especially in the realms of WOM and online marketing—including E-WOM (Alnoor et al. 2022)—can derive valuable insights for more effective strategies through the integration of these studies.

5. Conclusions

In this research, we organized the voluminous and dispersed literature related to the motion picture industry within the fields of business and management using a bibliometric analysis. The bibliographic coupling revealed the subsequent research clusters: Key factors for success, WOM and social media, organizational and pedagogical dimensions, advertising—product placement and online marketing, tourism, the influence of data, the
influence of culture, revenue maximization and purchase decisions, and the perception and identification of audiences.

From the review of the contents of these clusters, we propose considering these potential avenues for future research: Exploring technological innovations, especially the influence of social media and streaming platforms on the film industry; the in-depth analysis of the use of artificial intelligence in film production, both in terms of its creative potential and ethical and legal challenges; investigations into the effects of recent strikes in Hollywood and their relationship to digital transformations; the exploration of the representation of wokeness and minorities in films and their cultural and economic significance; and, finally, a detailed examination of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises on the film industry, especially in terms of changed consumption habits and structural adjustments.

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