



The Dynamics of Ambush Marketing Research: A Bibliometric Analysis and Visualisation of Research Trends and Collaborations

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of ambush marketing research, utilizing data indexed in the Scopus database. Ambush marketing, a tactic employed by brands to gain visibility without official event sponsorship, has emerged as a significant area of inquiry in marketing and sports management. Using Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace, the analysis maps the intellectual, conceptual, and social structures of the field. The results reveal a consistent growth in scientific output over the years, with notable contributions from researchers such as Burton and Séguin. Prominent journals like the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship serve as key dissemination platforms. Country-wise analysis highlights the dominance of research output from the United States, Canada, and Australia. Network visualizations of co-citation and bibliographic coupling indicate strong theoretical foundations and interdisciplinary intersections. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies major themes such as guerrilla marketing, sponsorship effectiveness, and consumer response. The thematic map highlights emerging and niche areas requiring further exploration, including legal frameworks and ethical considerations. The study concludes by identifying research gaps and suggesting practical implications for policymakers, sponsors, and marketers to navigate ambush marketing's evolving landscape.

Keywords: Ambush Marketing, Bibliometric Analysis, Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, Citespace

JEL Classifications: M310, M370

1. INTRODUCTION

Ambush Marketing has emerged as a contentious yet creative marketing strategy where brands attempt to associate themselves with high-profile events without paying sponsorship fees (Kelly et al., 2012; Leone, 2008). This strategy allows non-sponsoring companies to capitalize on the visibility and popularity of events such as the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, or major music festivals, to boost brand recognition and consumer engagement (Anastasios et al., 2023; Michaelis et al., 2008). While ambush marketing challenges the exclusivity of official sponsors, it simultaneously

raises important questions regarding ethics, legal frameworks, and brand positioning in competitive markets (Suri, 2025; Wolfsteiner et al., 2019).

Being an unconventional strategy, ambush marketing obfuscates the distinction between proper advertising and parasitic behavior in marketing (Hamedani and Ghiasi, 2022; Milojević and Pavicevic, 2020). It could be anything from blatant advertising around the venues of events to latent connections drawn with symbolic imagery or clever timing (Nufer, 2025; Vigar-Ellis and Hall, 2015). Owing to its unclear nature, the practice has drawn the

attention of event managers, regulators, and organizers, and this has drawn forth debates surrounding the safeguarding of rights in sponsorship (Johnson, 2011). While its creativity has drawn interest among researchers working in the field of marketing, branding, law, as well as business strategy, this has drawn forth an increasing number of articles written in the scholarly tradition that seek to deconstruct its mechanisms, implications, and success (Nufer, 2025; Pelanda, 2011).

The new-age expansion of digital media has bestowed ambush marketing with new frontiers. The era of social media and influencer marketing presents fertile ground upon which subtle but viral campaigns could rival authorized sponsorships in outreach as well as interaction (Scott et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020). The digital upgrade has evoked interest among the researchers to juxtapose conventional and digital ambush marketing strategies with reference to recall among brands, consumption attitude, as well as market performance (Lin et al., 2020). The researches nowadays explore not only ambushing companies' strategic motivation but also consumers' reaction, ethics evaluation, legal exceptions that make such practice successful (Yun et al., 2020; Burton and Chadwick, 2019).

Despite its controversial reputation, ambush marketing represents a rich and dynamic research domain. It encapsulates broader marketing debates around branding, strategic communication, event sponsorship, and intellectual property (Pelanda, 2011). As this topic has gained global relevance, especially in light of high-stakes international events, it has become crucial to map the intellectual structure of ambush marketing research (Kartikawati and Uula, 2024; Scott et al., 2021). Doing so can help identify dominant themes, emerging trends, key contributors, and collaborative networks within the field.

The academic exploration of ambush marketing has its roots in the early 1990s when high-profile sports events began to attract considerable commercial attention (Leone, 2008). As the costs of official sponsorship rose, so too did the incentives for companies to find alternative routes to visibility (Scott et al., 2021). This created a new research avenue focused on the tension between innovation and ethics, legality and marketing efficacy (Weeks, 2012). Over the years, literature on ambush marketing has broadened, encompassing themes such as consumer attitudes, regulatory frameworks, branding outcomes, and the psychological mechanisms that underpin consumer responses (Luo and Hussain, 2023). However, a consolidated and quantitative overview of how the field has developed over time has been largely missing, hence the motivation for this bibliometric study (Shekhar and Shah, 2023).

This bibliometric examination covers research publications about ambush marketing indexed in the Scopus database, including journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, and review articles that appeared between 1996 and 2024 (Uçak, 2024; Nurjanah et al., 2024). The research documents research output in various disciplines like marketing, business strategy, law, communication, and media studies (Verma et al., 2023). The compilation includes English-language articles and highlights the

development of the field in understanding trends in publication number, collaboration among authors, dominant journals, and nations making contributions to the field (Bohara et al., 2023; Panigrahy and Verma, 2024). The examination tries to give a macroscopic insight into scholarship about ambush marketing while earmarking certain sub-themes and intellectual clusters.

Its major goal is to provide a systematic, data-informed summary of the research landscape on ambush marketing. In particular, it wants to: (1) characterize the temporal dynamics of publications; (2) highlight the most active authors, influential journals, and affiliated institutions; (3) visualize co-authorship, country collaboration, and network structures; (4) explore keyword co-occurrence as an exploratory tool for finding thematic aggregates; and (5) identify emerging trends, research voids, and future research directions. In doing these, the paper hopes to chart the structure, dynamics, and trends of research on ambush marketing as well as provide future research directions that are evidence-informed.

Bibliometric methods enable researchers to move beyond narrative literature reviews by quantitatively analyzing patterns in scholarly communication (Agac et al., 2023; Alzoubi et al., 2022; Panigrahy and Verma, 2024). In this study, bibliometric indicators such as total publications, citations per document, h-index of authors, and co-citation relationships are used to understand the structure of ambush marketing literature (Ahmad and Arfiansyah, 2024; Bohara et al., 2023). Additionally, network visualizations of co-authorship, country collaboration, and keyword co-occurrence help identify core research communities and thematic hotspots (Babu Panackal et al., 2025; Joseph et al., 2024). By applying bibliometric techniques, this analysis presents a structured lens through which to evaluate the maturity, productivity, and fragmentation of the ambush marketing domain.

To conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, three key software tools Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace were employed (John et al., 2024; Mathew et al., 2024; Panackal et al., 2025). Biblioshiny, an interactive web interface of the Bibliometrix R package, was used to extract descriptive statistics, visualize annual scientific production, and identify top authors, journals, and countries (Ghorbani, 2024; Husain and Mustafa, 2023; Souza de Cursi, 2023). Its intuitive dashboard allowed for detailed exploration of bibliographic metadata from the Scopus database (Thangavel and Chandra, 2023). VOSviewer, on the other hand, was instrumental in constructing and interpreting bibliometric networks (Abbas et al., 2021; Kuzior and Sira, 2022; Van Eck and Waltman, 2010). It enabled the creation of visual maps for co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks (Van Eck and Waltman, 2009; Yu et al., 2020). Nodes and clusters in these networks revealed prominent research themes, active scholars, and the interconnectedness of institutions and concepts (Jose et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2024).

CiteSpace complemented these tools by focusing on intellectual structure and temporal dynamics (Li et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2017). It was used to detect citation bursts, map thematic evolution over time, and generate dual-map overlays that showcase how ideas have diffused across disciplines (Zang et al., 2022; Zhang, 2023).

CiteSpace's strength lies in identifying critical turning points in the literature, revealing how research on ambush marketing has evolved in response to technological, regulatory, and market shifts (Chen et al., 2023; Ye, 2018). Together, these tools provided a triangulated methodology that ensured both depth and breadth in the bibliometric mapping process (Lukose et al., 2025).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bibliographic data for this research were gathered from the Scopus database, chosen because it covers a large amount of scholarly literature, regardless of disciplinary area (Archambault et al., 2009; Harzing and Alakangas, 2016). We conducted a structured search with the search query: TITLE-ABS-KEY Ambush AND TITLE-ABS-KEY Marketing, retrieving 131 records. In order to retain just relevant, scholarly literature, screening was conducted under the PRISMA framework illustrated in Figure 1 (Wang et al., 2014). Thirteen documents were excluded according to document type, consisting of 7 books, 4 review articles, 1 note, and 1 editorial. After screening, 118 documents were shortlisted for analysis, comprising 89 journal articles, 27 book chapters, and 2 conference publications. The shortlisted documents were exported in CSV format and explored with Biblioshiny, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace. The three collectively gave an overall view of the research landscape of ambush marketing.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

3.1. Key Information Regarding the Investigation

Bibliometric review of ambush marketing covers the years 1996-2024 and comprises 118 scholarly articles abstracted from 67 sources consisting of journals, books, and conference papers. The 2.51% annual growth rate of publications signifies modest expansion, with an average document age of 10.8 years, suggesting an otherwise moderately established but gradually expanding domain of research. On average, 13.19 citations per document suggest moderate scholarly influence. The database comprises 4095 references, 35 Keywords Plus, and 275 author-provided keywords, implying a wide-ranging thematic coverage. There are 193 authors represented in the literature, with 31 conducting sole-authored publications. For the 33 sole-authored documents, the average number of paper-based co-authors is 2.25, with an international collaboration percentage standing at 23.73. Document type includes mainly journal articles (89), with book chapters (27) and a few conference papers (2). This further signifies an overabundance of journal-oriented scholarly communication in the domain.

3.2. Scientific Output over the Years

Figure 2 illustrates the annual scientific output on ambush marketing between 1996 and 2024, presenting an uneven but gradually increasing pattern, which indicates fluctuating scholarly interest over the period. The early period was quiet with minimal publications, with few publications in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There were notably none in various early years like 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2006, suggesting minimal focus during this early period. The increase became steady around 2008, with a

significant surge thereafter starting in 2011. The 2012-2018 period experienced an upward trend, with the peak year 2015 seeing 11 publications, with close seconds of 10 publications in 2014 and 10 publications again in 2018. This implies an emerging awareness of ambush marketing as an area worth exploring, an impact likely triggered by significant international events and expanded commercialization in both sports and media. While some volatility exists after 2018, with publications never going under 6, they stayed moderately steady, with an average of 6-7 articles per year, besides a minimal decline in 2023 and reasonable recurrence in 2024. Generally, the information presents sustained interest, with prospects of a continued upward trajectory as emerging marketing strategies, digital media trends, etc., keep evolving.

3.3. Top Influential Researchers

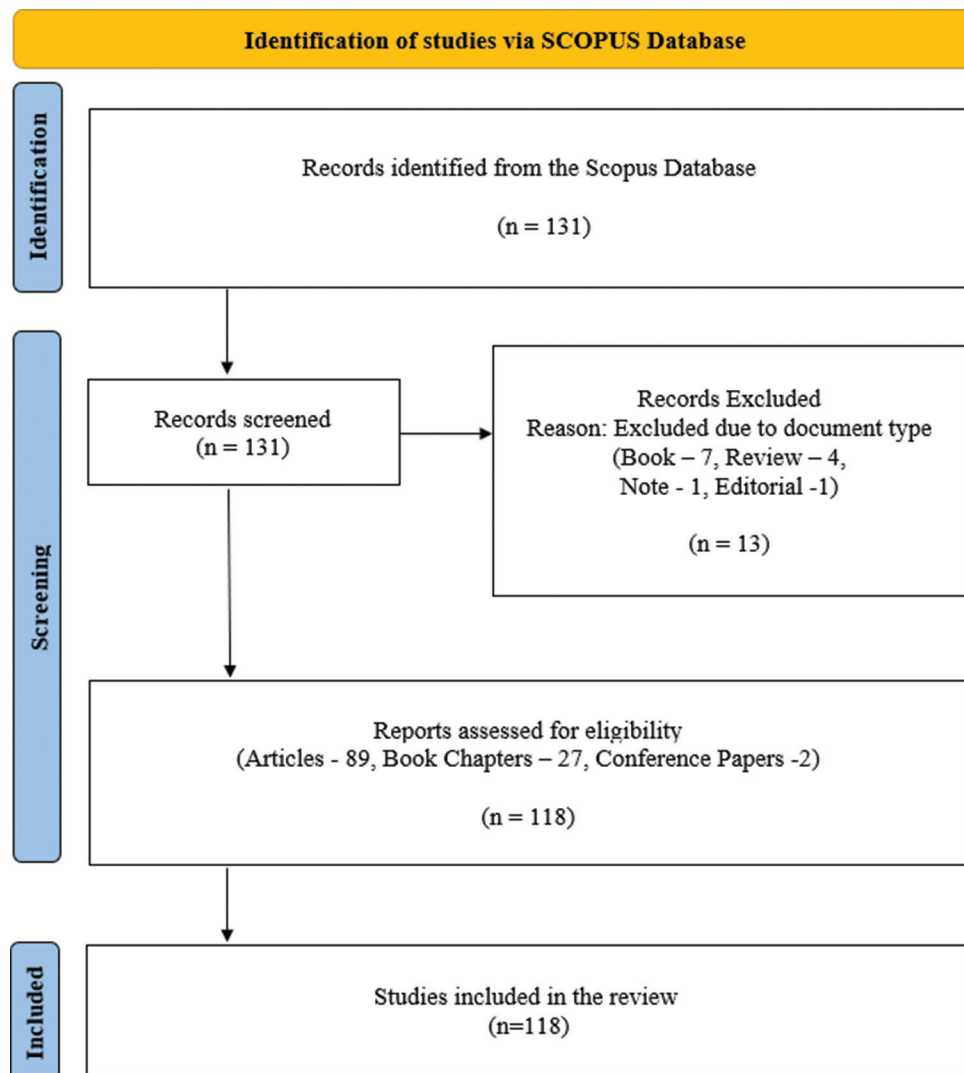
The examination of the most relevant authors in ambush marketing studies, as tabulated in Table 1, identifies the prolific scholars leading research output in this area. Nicholas Burton shines as the most prolific writer, with 10 publications, reflecting his leadership role and continued research involvement in this area. In close pursuit are Benoit Séguin with 8 articles, and Norm O'Reilly with 7 articles, both with considerable contributions to the body of literature, frequently working in unison with research studies encompassing sports marketing and sponsorship. Simon Chadwick, an establishment figure in sports business and marketing, has 5 publications, corroborating his impact on the scholarly discussion surrounding ambush marketing. Researchers such as Cheri Bradish, Nicolas Chanavat, Geoff Dickson, Ran Liu, and Des Thwaites, with 4 articles each, are also key players whose research has assisted in informing various outlooks in the field, such as ethical issues, strategy ramifications, as well as policy reactions to ambush marketing. Finally, Michel Desbordes, with 3 articles, contributes additional richness to the research literature, specifically involving European marketing settings. Overall, this set of researchers constitutes an intellectual core body in ambush marketing scholarship, adding to theoretical development, empirical examination, and policy debates in the field.

3.4. Prominent Scientific Journals

Table 2 presents the most relevant sources contributing to ambush marketing research, with a clear dominance of journals focused on sports marketing and management. The International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship leads with 10 articles, highlighting its central role as a specialized outlet for research on sponsorship-related strategies, including ambush marketing. Psychology and Marketing follows with 7 articles, indicating an

Table 1: Most relevant authors

Authors	Articles
Burton, Nicholas	10
Séguin, Benoit	8
O'reilly, Norm	7
Chadwick, Simon	5
Bradish, Cheri	4
Chanavat, Nicolas	4
Dickson, Geoff	4
Liu, Ran	4
Thwaites, Des	4
Desbordes, Michel	3

Figure 1: The PRISMA flow diagram is used to identify, screen, and include papers in the bibliometric analysis

interdisciplinary interest that explores consumer perception and psychological responses to ambush tactics. Proceedings from the Academy of Marketing Science account for 6 articles, reflecting ongoing scholarly discourse presented at academic conferences. Both the International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing and the Journal of Sport Management have contributed 5 articles each, underscoring the importance of ambush marketing within the context of sports event commercialization. Other sources such as Sport, Business and Management, European Sport Management

Quarterly, and Marketing Intelligence and Planning have each published multiple articles, demonstrating the topic's relevance across broader marketing and strategic management platforms. Collectively, these journals form the core publishing venues where ambush marketing research is disseminated and developed.

3.5. Global Research Contributions by Nation

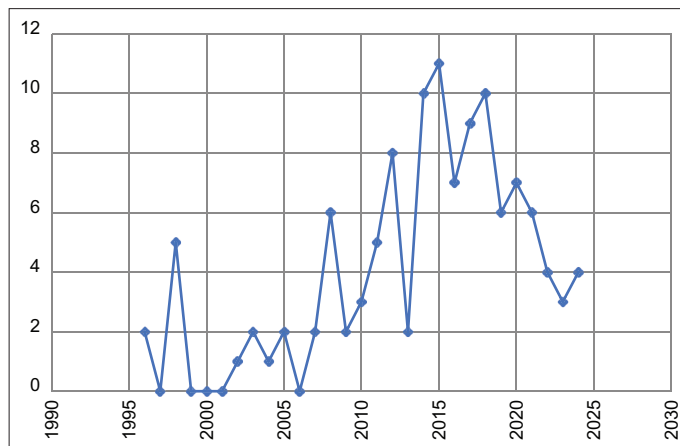
Table 3 highlights the geographical distribution of scientific production, revealing significant contributions from Western and Anglophone countries. The United States leads with 32 documents, underscoring its dominant position in both academic publishing and the commercial sports industry, where ambush marketing is frequently observed. Canada follows with 23 publications, likely reflecting the active involvement of key scholars such as Benoit Séguin and Norm O'Reilly, who have extensively contributed to the field. Australia and the United Kingdom, each with 16 publications, also demonstrate strong academic engagement, possibly driven by their hosting of major international sporting events and associated research interest in sponsorship-related practices. Germany and France, with 11 and 9 documents respectively, highlight the growing interest in ambush marketing within continental Europe, particularly from a legal and regulatory

Table 2: Prominent scientific journals

Sources	Articles
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	10
Psychology and Marketing	7
Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of The Academy of Marketing Science	6
International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	5
Journal of Sport Management	5
Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal	4
European research studies journal	3
European sport management quarterly	3
Marketing intelligence and planning	3
Routledge handbook of sports marketing	3

Table 3: Countries scientific productions

Country/territory	Documents
United States	32
Canada	23
Australia	16
United Kingdom	16
Germany	11
France	9
New Zealand	7
India	6
China	4
South Korea	4

Figure 2: Annual scientific production from 1996 to 2025

standpoint. Emerging contributions from New Zealand (7), India (6), China (4), and South Korea (4) reflect the gradual global diffusion of ambush marketing research, especially in regions where sports marketing, digital media, and international branding are gaining momentum. This distribution reveals a predominantly Western-centric research landscape, with increasing participation from Asian economies in recent years.

3.6. Network Visualization of Co-Citation of Cited Authors

Figure 3 presents the co-citation network visualisation, which reveals 17 major clusters, each reflecting distinct thematic concentrations within ambush marketing research. The largest cluster (Cluster 0: Ambush Marketing), with 76 members, forms the intellectual core of the field. It centers on foundational discussions around definitions, strategic intent, and regulatory debates. Highly cited scholars such as Meenaghan T, Sandler DM, and McKelvey S dominate this cluster. These works establish ambush marketing as a legitimate and contested domain within sponsorship discourse, examining how non-sponsors tactically exploit event visibility. Seminal citing studies by Liu (2014), Burton and Chadwick (2019), and Wolfsteiner et al. (2015) show how this practice influences consumer misidentification and brand recall.

Cluster 1 (Conceptual Framework) and Cluster 2 (Information Processing) expand on the theoretical and psychological dimensions of ambush marketing. Cluster 1, with 48 members, includes work by Aaker DA and Amis J, emphasizing the development of models to conceptualize consumer perceptions

and behavioral responses to ambush tactics. Studies in this cluster delve into constructs such as brand equity, associative memory, and emotional alignment. In contrast, Cluster 2 (45 members), led by authors like Gwinner K and Brewer G, investigates how consumers cognitively process ambush messages, particularly in relation to ad recall, attention, and ethical judgment. These clusters reflect a shift from general commentary to hypothesis-driven, empirical research grounded in marketing psychology.

Cluster 3 (Sponsorship Network) and Cluster 4 (Guerrilla Marketing) illustrate the diversification of the field. Cluster 3, with 39 members, including Pham MT and Carrilat FA, as members, covers relational interaction among events, sponsors, and ambushers. It proposes concepts like misidentification of sponsorship and typicality in events, particularly in digital environments. Cluster 4, with 25 members, crosses ambush marketing with guerrilla marketing, investigating unconventional, attention-calling mechanisms. Researchers like Bean L and Dahlen M talk about implementing these mechanisms across multiple Facebook platforms, taking the discussion into social media marketing, viral campaigns, etc. These clusters illustrate an emerging convergence between ambush marketing and disruptive promotional modes.

Certain niche but influential clusters encompass speciality subtopics. Cluster 6 (Advertising) and Cluster 7 (Ad Appeal) involve creative strategy, along with messaging tactics. Cluster 7 involves, in particular, an examination of ambush marketing appeal with social/cause-related campaign initiatives. Cluster 8 (Sport Sponsorship Announcements) and Cluster 10 (Gladiatorial Sponsorship Arena) discuss the effects of ambush campaigns upon sporting event valuation, consumer memory, and sponsor reputation during mega sporting events. Additionally, Cluster 12 (Consumer Reaction) led by Crimmins J and Bayless A, discusses ways in which consumers respond emotionally, as well as attitudinally, when perceiving ambush attempts, with psychological motivators of liking or dislike of brands.

Lastly, emerging and evolving themes are represented in small but thematically concentrated clusters. Cluster 9 (Revolutionizing Marketing Strategies) and Cluster 16 (Exploring Newsjacking) suggest the growing influence of digital media and Gen Y consumption behavior in shaping marketing strategy. Clusters such as Cluster 11 (Role) and Cluster 13 (Ambush Marketing) highlight legal and institutional responses, such as regulatory mechanisms, such as the London Olympic Games Act. Clusters 15 (Gender Effect), 18 (Attitude), and 20 (Practice) further illustrate nuanced studies of demographic variables, attitudinal shifts, and new dynamics in markets. In general, these clusters illustrate an interdisciplinary and dynamic research landscape where ambush marketing is investigated not just as one aspect of branding strategy but as an evolving socio-legal and psychological phenomenon shaped by global trends in commerce.

3.7. Network Visualization of Co-Citation of Cited Journals

Figure 4 presents the co-citation network visualization of cited journals reveals ten distinct clusters, each representing a thematic

Figure 3: Network visualization of co-citation of cited authors

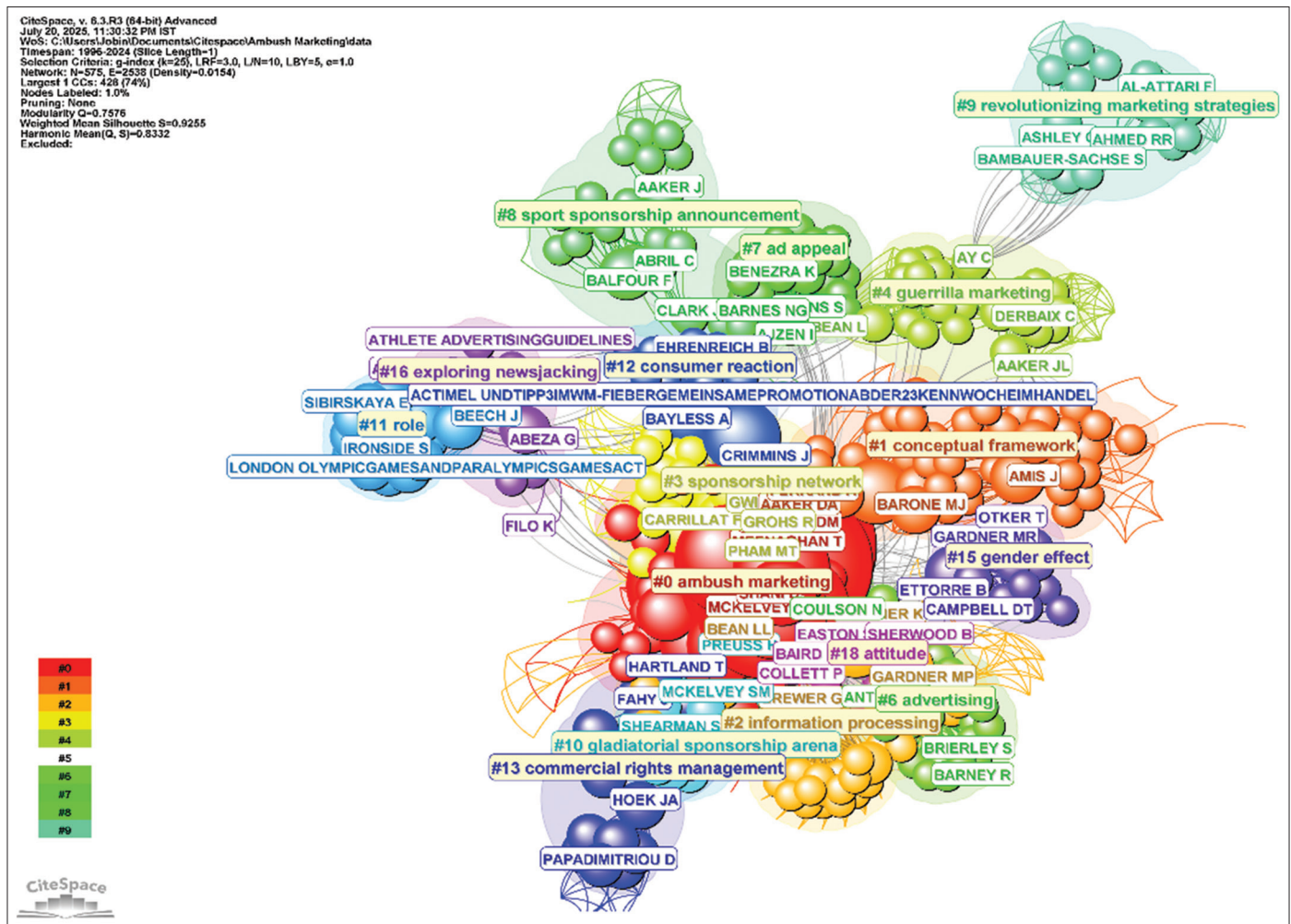
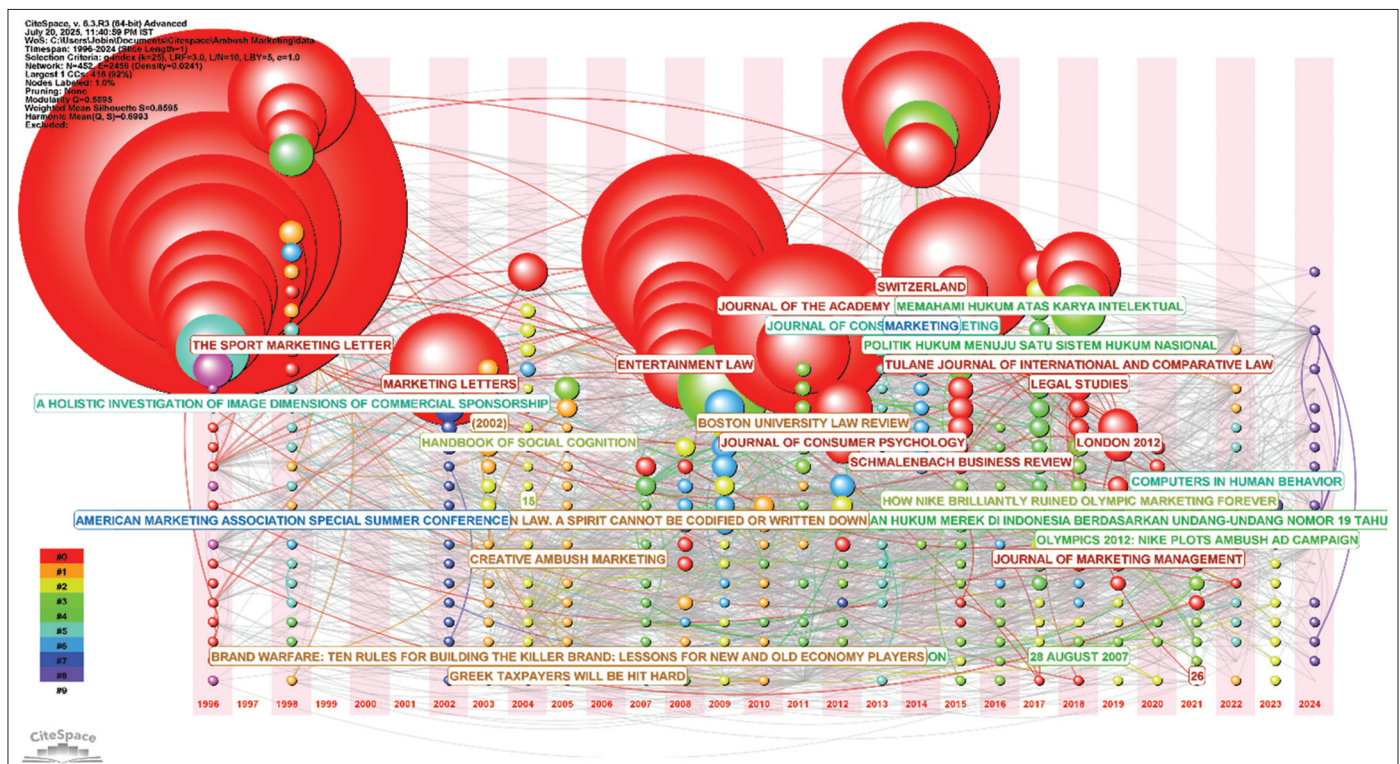


Figure 4: Timezone Network visualization of co-citation of cited journals



strand in ambush marketing research. The largest cluster (Cluster 0: ASEAN Community) comprises 96 members and focuses on broad foundational studies involving marketing concepts, event sponsorship, and ambush strategy effects on brand knowledge. The most cited sources in this cluster are *Journal of Advertising Research* and *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, suggesting an emphasis on applied marketing outcomes and consumer engagement. Influential citing articles by Liu (2014), Schmidt (2018), and Dickson (2018) contribute to defining ambush marketing's impact within both strategic and legislative contexts, especially concerning regional integration and commercialization in sports events.

The second cluster (Cluster 1: Fair Play) consists of 61 members and centers on legal, ethical, and regulatory frameworks around ambush marketing. Highly cited authors such as Weatherill and Ellis explore the intersection of advertising ethics and sport governance, particularly within the European context. Key articles such as O'Sullivan (1998) and Seth (2010) argue for stronger legislative responses to protect official sponsors from ambush tactics. The sources cited in this cluster, like the *Common Market Law Review* and *Sport Management Review*, suggest a rich cross-disciplinary discourse incorporating law, policy, and sports marketing ethics.

Cluster 2 (FIFA World Cup) and Cluster 3 (Framing Ambush Marketing) encircle the concentrated application of ambushes in mega-events, where football and the Olympics are given primacy. The 57-membered Cluster 2 refers to studies around ambush marketing at the FIFA World Cup, wherein Dalakas (2004) and Portlock (2009) assess perceptual awareness among consumers, recall of brands, and campaign response at the international level. Scassa (2011) and Nufer (2016), on the contrary, 55-membered Cluster 3, focus on how legal, media, and regulation frameworks "frame" ambush marketing in conflict-along tactics between innovative brands, right of sponsorship. Journals like the *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* and

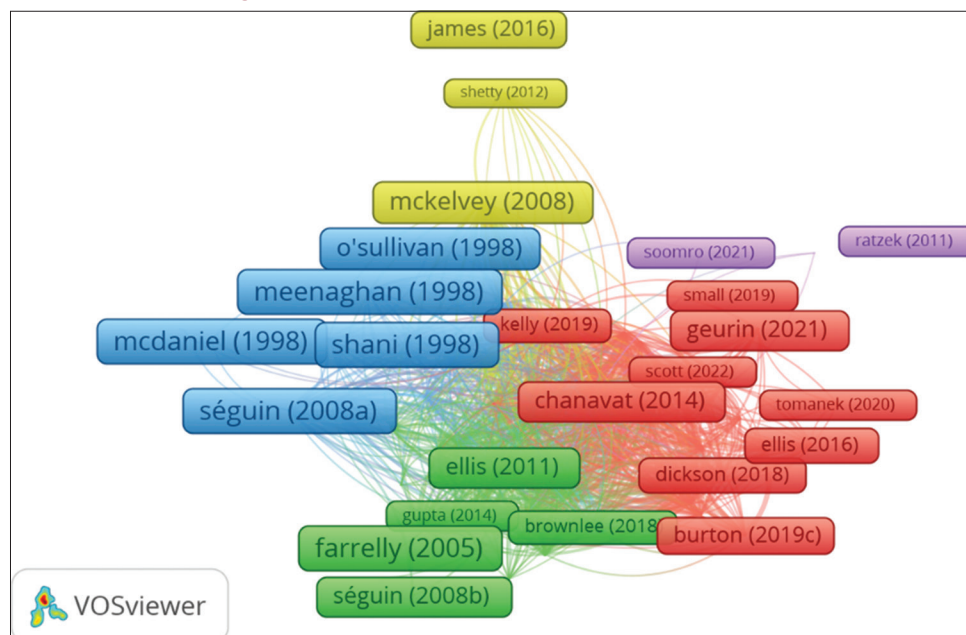
Business Horizons are dominant players both in theoretical expositions and empirical event-level studies.

The other clusters provide specialized understanding into changing marketing trends. Cluster 5 (Guerrilla Marketing) discusses non-conventional strategies, particularly in the online domain, with heavily cited texts such as Meenaghan (1998) and Barbosa (2022) dealing with social media and grassroots popularity. Cluster 6 (Leveraging Case) compiles case studies on Olympic sponsorship leveraging, including McDaniel (1998) and Preuss (2008), while Cluster 7 (Ad Appeal) evaluates the effectiveness of ambush versus cause-related marketing appeals. The smallest clusters, such as Cluster 8 (Revolutionizing Marketing Strategies) and Cluster 10 (The-Ad), reflect emerging themes like Gen Y purchasing behavior and attitude-toward-the-ad constructs. Despite their smaller size, these clusters underscore the diversification of ambush marketing research into digital branding, experimental advertising, and consumer psychology, indicating promising areas for future exploration.

3.8. Network Visualization of Bibliographic Coupling of Documents

Figure 5 illustrates the network visualization of bibliographic coupling of documents, illustrating the thematic structure and intellectual connectivity among ambush marketing studies. Using a minimum citation threshold of 1, the network maps 81 documents grouped into 6 distinct clusters out of 90 eligible ones. Each cluster represents a group of publications that cite similar sources, suggesting they address related topics or conceptual frameworks. The size of the nodes corresponds to the number of citations received, while the thickness of the connecting lines reflects the degree of shared references. For instance, the red cluster (Cluster 1), which includes works by Chanavat (2014), Geurin (2021), and Burton (2019c), is thematically centered on brand strategy, sponsorship dynamics, and consumer engagement. This cluster is densely interconnected, suggesting a strong intellectual coherence among recent empirical and conceptual contributions.

Figure 5: Network visualization of citation of documents



Other clusters reflect different dimensions of ambush marketing research. The blue cluster (Cluster 3) is composed of foundational works by Meenaghan (1998), McDaniel (1998), Shani (1998), and Séguin (2008a), representing early theoretical and definitional debates. The green cluster (Cluster 2) features Farrelly (2005), Ellis (2011), and Gupta (2014), emphasizing sponsorship ethics, legal frameworks, and consumer perceptions. Cluster 4 (yellow) includes regulatory-oriented contributions such as James (2016) and McKelvey (2008), reflecting the legal dimension of ambush marketing, while the purple cluster (Cluster 5) and cyan cluster (Cluster 6) appear more peripheral with isolated nodes like Ratzek (2011) and Soomro (2021), indicating limited citation overlap. Overall, the figure demonstrates that ambush marketing research has evolved into interconnected thematic areas, with strong bibliographic ties between conceptual pioneers and contemporary empirical studies.

3.9. Network Visualization of Co-Occurrence of Author Keywords

Figure 6, the network visualization of author keyword co-occurrence, reveals the thematic structure of ambush marketing research based on 43 keywords (out of 275 total), each occurring at least twice. The graph consists of nine clusters, each represented by a different color, illustrating the interconnectedness and relative prominence of various themes. The most dominant node is “ambush marketing,” with 57 occurrences, followed by “sponsorship” (32 occurrences), forming the core of the network. These two keywords serve as central hubs, connected to multiple other terms like social media, legislation, Olympic Games, and advertising, indicating their foundational role in the field.

Thematic clusters highlight various focal points within the research domain. One cluster, for instance, links “ambush marketing,” “sponsorship,” and “Olympic Games,” reflecting a traditional and recurring concern with unauthorized brand associations during major sports events. Another cluster connects keywords such as “guerrilla marketing,” “unconventional marketing,” and “viral marketing,” pointing to emerging discussions about alternative

and disruptive marketing techniques. Similarly, keywords like “brand equity,” “brand management,” and “advertising” form a cluster concerned with the impact of ambush strategies on consumer perception and brand value. The presence of terms like “legislation,” “trademark,” and “political of criminal law” in another cluster indicates growing interest in the legal and policy implications of ambush tactics.

The overlay visualization adds a temporal dimension, showing that early research (darker blue) focused on event sponsorship, Olympic branding, and sports marketing, whereas more recent keywords (yellow-green) like “social media,” “sentiment analysis,” and “guerrilla marketing” reflect contemporary concerns driven by digital platforms and real-time consumer engagement. The appearance of “ASEAN” also highlights region-specific regulatory challenges and international legal responses. Overall, the network shows a clear evolution from foundational debates on sponsorship ethics to newer themes like online ambush strategies and consumer-brand interaction in the digital era.

3.10. Thematic Map

Figure 7 presents the thematic map, presents the conceptual structure of ambush marketing research by plotting keywords across two dimensions: Centrality (relevance to the field) on the x-axis and density (development within the theme) on the y-axis. The quadrants categorize themes into four types: Motor themes (top-right), niche themes (top-left), emerging or declining themes (bottom-left), and basic themes (bottom-right). This classification provides insight into which topics are foundational, which are mature, and which are new or underdeveloped.

In the top-right quadrant (motor themes), the map identifies highly relevant and well-developed areas such as ambush marketing, sponsorship, Olympic Games, advertising, and sports events. These topics form the driving intellectual engine of the field. Additionally, guerrilla marketing, ambient marketing, and unconventional marketing also appear here, suggesting that alternative marketing strategies have matured and are integral to

Figure 6: Co-occurrence of author keywords

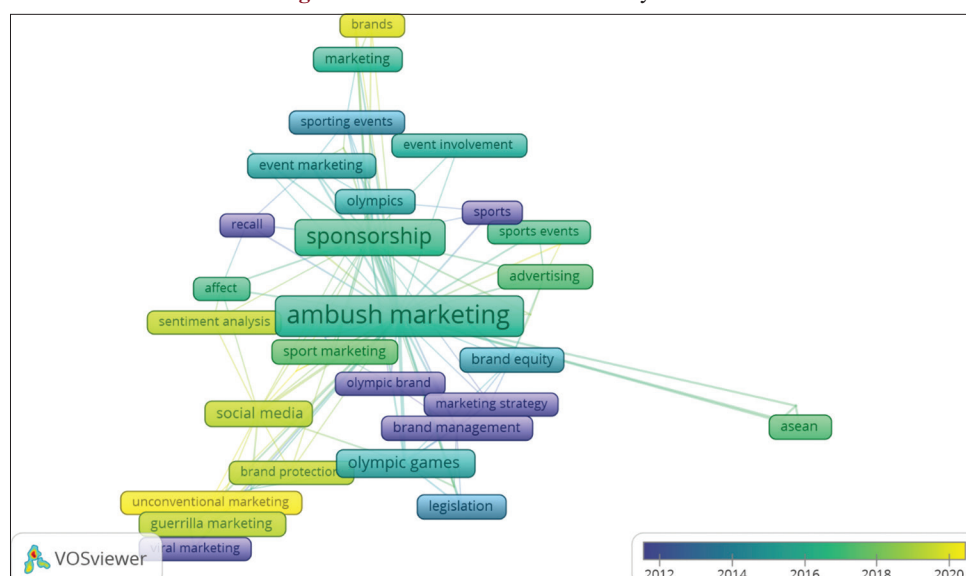
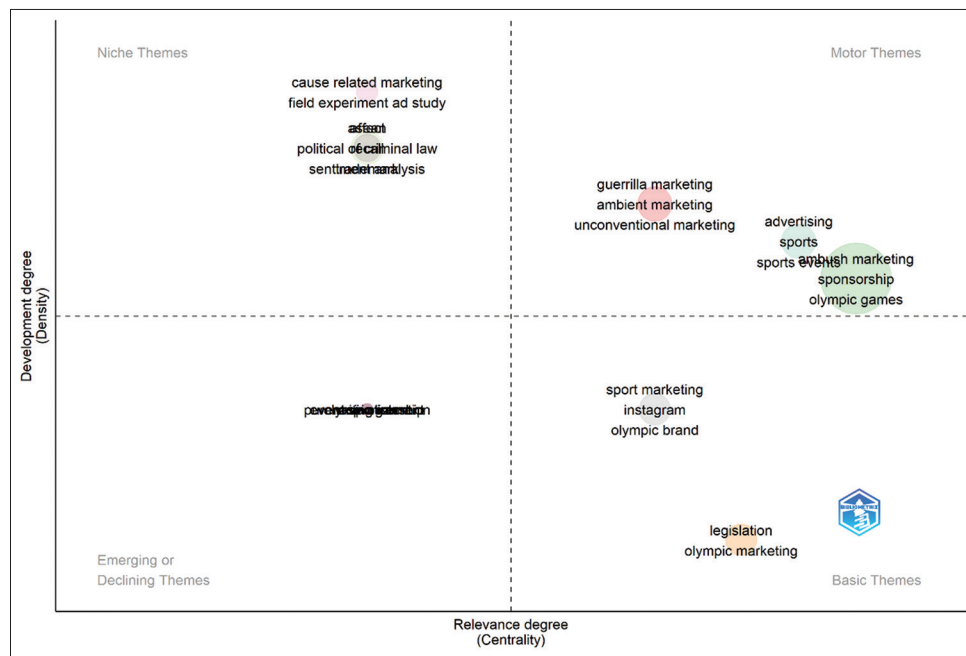


Figure 7: Thematic visualization of keywords

ongoing discussions in ambush marketing literature, particularly in digital and non-traditional contexts.

The top-left quadrant (niche themes) contains focused but less central topics such as cause-related marketing, field experiment ad study, sentiment analysis, ASEAN, political or criminal law, legislation, and trademark. These themes are well-developed in themselves but are limited in scope or integration with the main research stream. Their presence reflects specialized discussions, especially around legal frameworks, regional regulation (e.g., Southeast Asia), and methodological innovation in evaluating consumer sentiment and brand perception.

In the bottom-right quadrant (basic themes), we find legislation, Olympic marketing, sport marketing, Instagram, and Olympic brand. These are highly relevant to the field but currently underdeveloped, indicating foundational areas that may require deeper exploration or updating in the face of digital transformation and global event commercialization. Finally, the bottom-left quadrant (emerging or declining themes) includes dense clusters of overlapping, unclear text, suggesting either underdeveloped or outdated themes with limited current influence. These may represent either older discussions no longer central or nascent themes yet to gain traction. Overall, the thematic map outlines a vibrant research landscape with strong foundational themes and a clear opportunity for growth in legal, digital, and experimental areas.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The bibliometric analysis reveals that ambush marketing has transitioned from a niche academic interest to a moderately matured field with interdisciplinary connections across marketing, law, and communication. The annual growth rate and average citations per article indicate consistent scholarly engagement,

while key contributors like Burton, Séguin, and O'Reilly have driven the discourse through sustained outputs. Major journals such as the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship and Psychology and Marketing serve as core platforms for dissemination. The global distribution, although dominated by Western nations, is gradually diversifying with rising contributions from Asian economies, reflecting expanding commercial and regulatory interest in ambush marketing practices worldwide.

Co-citation and bibliographic coupling network visualizations highlight intellectual depth and thematic maturity in the field. Key themes revolve around psychology and strategy of ambush marketing, with new aggregates involving digital disruption, social media activism, and regulatory aspects. The linkage between old themes and new-age approaches, such as guerrilla marketing, represents an example of flexibility in the field. Concurrently, bibliographic coupling also identifies that newer studies increasingly combine legal, ethical, and behavioral aspects, filling gaps between past rhetoric and prevailing challenges offered by digitalized and globalized event settings.

Co-citation journal analyses and co-occurrence also reflect the thematic richness of the field. Key words such as “ambush marketing,” “sponsorship,” and “Olympic Games” keep the discourse steady, while the rising prominence of keywords such as “social media,” “guerrilla marketing,” and “legislation” indicates movement toward dynamic, digital, and policy themes. The temporal evolution among keywords serves to illustrate how research interest has progressed from classical, event-oriented ambush practice to real-time engagement with brands, sentiment analysis among consumers, and strategic use of sites like Instagram. Some clusters, however, are underrepresented, opening opportunities for empirical studies into digital regulation, psychology, and algorithmically-determined brand positioning.

The thematic map integrates these discoveries into four quadrants of strategic categories. Motor themes like ambush marketing and sponsorship are well-developed and central, underpinning the field's intellectual core. Niche themes like ASEAN laws and criminal liability are methodologically mature but need increased mainstream connection with core marketing literature. Basic themes like Olympic marketing and sport branding are applicable but underdeveloped, needing increased empirical footing in today's digital environments. Emerging/declining themes, while fragmented, could provide rich soil where innovation might take root, particularly in areas like consumer empowerment, ethical branding, and AI-influenced marketing.

From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the need for more research on legal harmonization in global sporting contexts, as well as deeper understanding of consumer responses to digital ambush campaigns. Marketers can use these insights to navigate the thin line between creativity and legality in campaign design. Policymakers and event organizers can also benefit by strengthening frameworks for sponsor protection, especially in online environments. Finally, the identification of underexplored areas offers valuable guidance for scholars aiming to contribute to the next phase of ambush marketing research, particularly in the domains of digital sentiment analysis, real-time consumer engagement, and AI-driven strategy deployment.

5. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis of ambush marketing reveals a dynamic and expanding body of scholarly work, with strong contributions from countries like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The co-citation and bibliographic coupling networks underscore the intellectual influence of key authors and journals, reflecting a well-connected research community. Thematic clusters emphasize core areas such as guerrilla tactics, sponsorship ethics, consumer behavior, and legal considerations. Despite these strengths, notable research gaps remain, particularly concerning enforcement challenges in diverse legal systems, digital ambush strategies, and consumer responses in developing markets. Future studies should examine the cross-cultural implications of ambush marketing and its effect on brand perception. Greater integration of legal, ethical, and marketing frameworks is also essential to deepen conceptual understanding. Practical efforts by regulators and event organizers to establish context-specific guidelines may enhance sponsor protection while maintaining a competitive promotional environment.

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