Trends Patterns and Emerging Topics in Influencer Marketing a Bibliometric

Loso Judijanto[1], Andriya Risdwiyanto[2]
[1] IPOSS Jakarta, losojudijantobumn@gmail.com
[2] Universitas Proklamasi, andriya.risdwiyanto@up45.ac.id
Coresponding Author: losojudijantobumn@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has become a central strategy in digital marketing, driven by the rapid growth of social media platforms and changing consumer behavior. As academic interest in this domain has expanded significantly, a systematic understanding of the intellectual structure, research trends, and emerging themes remains essential. This study aims to map the evolution of influencer marketing research by conducting a bibliometric analysis of scholarly publications indexed in the Scopus database. Using VOSviewer, the study examines publication trends, co-authorship networks, country and institutional collaborations, and keyword co-occurrence patterns to identify dominant research streams and emerging topics. The findings reveal that influencer marketing research is strongly anchored in social media and consumer behavior studies, with trust, credibility, engagement, and purchase intention forming the core conceptual foundations. More recent research trends indicate a growing emphasis on strategic and performance-oriented outcomes, platform-specific dynamics, and technological innovations such as machine learning and immersive media. By providing a comprehensive mapping of the field, this study contributes to theoretical consolidation and offers practical insights for researchers and practitioners seeking to understand and advance influencer marketing in an evolving digital ecosystem.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis; Consumer behavior; Influencer marketing; Social media

INTRODUCTION

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies and social media platforms has fundamentally transformed contemporary marketing practices, giving rise to new forms of brand–consumer interaction [1], [2]. Among these developments, influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most prominent and impactful strategies in digital marketing ecosystems. Influencer marketing refers to the use of individuals with established online credibility, social capital, and audience reach to influence consumer attitudes, perceptions, and purchasing decisions through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter [3], [4]. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing is often perceived as more authentic, relational, and embedded within everyday digital interactions, making it particularly effective in engaging digitally native audiences [5].

The increasing relevance of influencer marketing is closely linked to changes in consumer behavior in the digital era. Consumers today rely heavily on peer recommendations, online reviews, and social media content when making purchase decisions, often trusting influencers more than brand-generated advertising messages [6]. Influencers function not only as opinion leaders but also as content creators who shape narratives, values, and lifestyles that resonate with specific audience segments. As a result, influencer marketing has expanded beyond product promotion to encompass brand storytelling, community building, and long-term relationship management between brands and consumers [7].

From an academic perspective, influencer marketing has evolved into a multidisciplinary research domain that intersects marketing, communication studies, psychology, sociology, and information systems. Early studies primarily focused on source credibility, attractiveness, and trustworthiness of influencers [8], [9], while more recent research has incorporated concepts such as parasocial interaction, social identity, engagement metrics, and algorithmic visibility [10], [11]. This expansion reflects the growing complexity of influencer–audience relationships and the dynamic nature of social media platforms themselves.

The exponential growth of influencer marketing research over the last decade has resulted in a fragmented body of literature characterized by diverse theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and thematic emphases. Studies vary widely in terms of platform focus (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), influencer types (micro-, macro-, mega-influencers), content formats, and outcome variables such as engagement, brand attitude, purchase intention, and loyalty [12]. While this diversity enriches the field, it also creates challenges for scholars and practitioners seeking to identify dominant research streams, emerging topics, and intellectual structures within the literature. In this context, bibliometric analysis offers a systematic and objective approach to mapping the intellectual landscape of influencer marketing research. Bibliometric methods enable the quantitative examination of publication trends, citation patterns, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrences, providing insights into the evolution, structure, and future directions of a research field [13], [14]. By applying bibliometric techniques, researchers can move beyond narrative reviews to uncover hidden patterns, research gaps, and emerging themes that may not be immediately visible through traditional qualitative literature reviews.

Despite the rapid growth and strategic importance of influencer marketing research, there is still a lack of comprehensive bibliometric studies that systematically map trends, patterns, and emerging topics in this domain. Existing reviews often focus on specific platforms, theories, or outcomes, and tend to rely on narrative or systematic literature review approaches that may be limited by subjectivity and sample scope. Consequently, scholars and practitioners lack an integrated overview of how influencer marketing research has evolved over time, which topics dominate the field, which regions and institutions contribute most significantly, and which emerging themes are shaping future research agendas. This gap underscores the need for a robust bibliometric analysis that can synthesize large volumes of scholarly output and provide a holistic understanding of the influencer marketing knowledge structure. The objective of this study is to analyze trends, patterns, and emerging topics in influencer marketing research through a bibliometric approach.

METHOD

This study employed a bibliometric research design to systematically map trends, patterns, and emerging topics in influencer marketing research. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, selected for its broad coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals across marketing, communication, and social science disciplines. The search was conducted using relevant keywords such as "influencer marketing," "social media influencer," and related terms within article titles, abstracts, and author keywords. Only journal articles and review papers published in English were included to ensure academic rigor and comparability, while conference papers and non-scholarly documents were excluded. The retrieved metadata (comprising authors, affiliations, publication years, sources, citations, and keywords) were exported in compatible formats and analyzed using VOSviewer. VOSviewer was utilized to perform citation analysis, co-authorship analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis, enabling visualization of the intellectual structure, collaboration networks, and thematic evolution of influencer marketing research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title
1037	[15]	Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit
979	[16]	Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions
831	[3]	Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda
722	[17]	Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation
629	[12]	More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing
526	[18]	The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions: the role of trust in consumer decision journey
500	[19]	The commercialization of social media stars: a literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media influencers
456	[20]	Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs
439	[21]	Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media
416	[22]	Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers

Source: Scopus, 2025
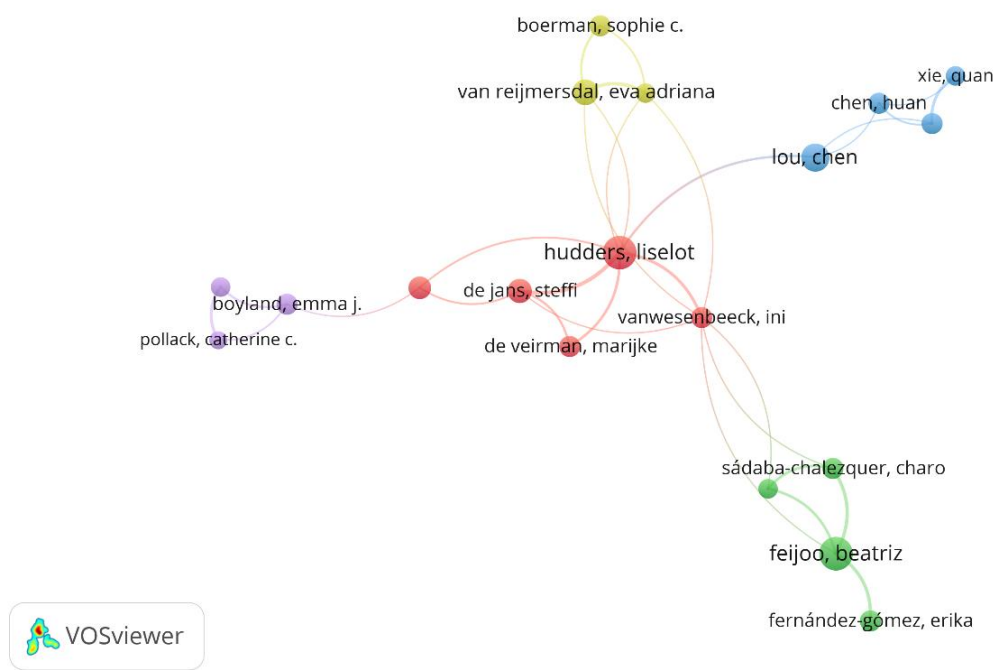
Co-Authorship Analysis

Figure 1. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the intellectual collaboration structure in influencer marketing research, highlighting several distinct yet interconnected author clusters. At the center of the network, Lislot Hudders emerges as a key hub, strongly connected with influential scholars such as Marijke De Veirman, Steffi De Jans, and Ini Vanwesenbeeck, indicating a dominant European research cluster

that has significantly shaped the theoretical and empirical foundations of influencer marketing, particularly in areas such as influencer credibility, sponsorship disclosure, and advertising effectiveness. Surrounding this core, other clusters reflect thematic and regional diversification of the field: a blue cluster led by Chen Lou, Huan Chen, and Quan Xie suggests a stream of research focusing on social media engagement and consumer responses, often linked to Asian or cross-cultural contexts; a green cluster involving Charo Sádaba-Chalezquer, Beatriz Feijóo, and Erika Fernández-Gómez points to research interests in influencer communication, youth audiences, and ethical dimensions; while a yellow cluster featuring Sophie C. Boerman and Eva Adriana Van Reijmersdal highlights scholarship on persuasion knowledge, transparency, and sponsored content recognition. A smaller purple cluster (e.g., Emma J. Boyland and Catherine C. Pollack) reflects a niche but relevant intersection with public health and vulnerable audiences.
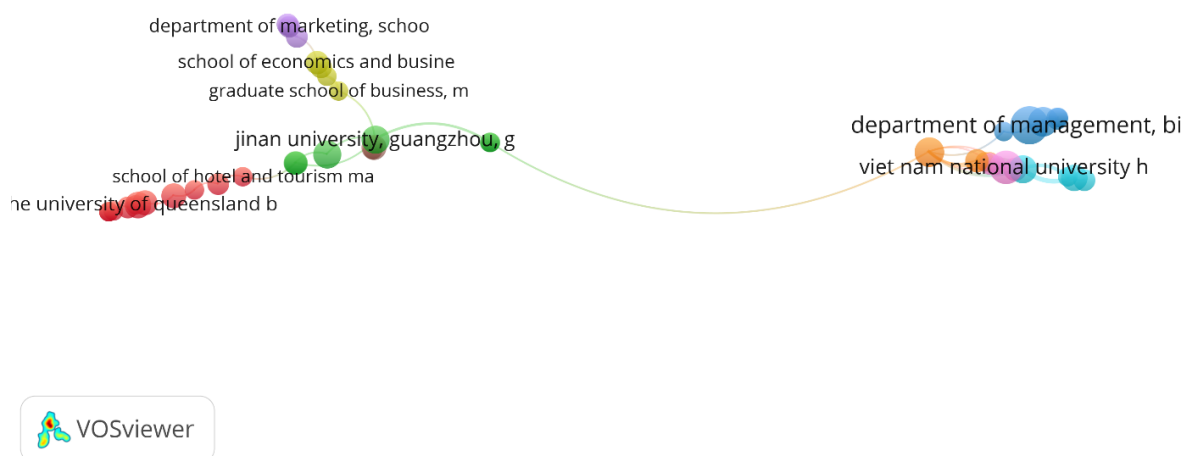

Figure 2. Affiliation Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 eveals the collaborative landscape of influencer marketing research across universities and academic units. The visualization indicates several geographically dispersed clusters, with a notable concentration in business and marketing schools, reflecting the managerial and strategic orientation of the field. Institutions such as The University of Queensland and its associated units (e.g., schools of business, economics, hospitality, and tourism) form a prominent cluster, suggesting strong intra-institutional collaboration and interdisciplinary research within marketing-related domains. Another visible cluster centers on Jinan University (Guangzhou, China), which acts as a bridging institution linking Asian research networks with other international partners, indicating its role in cross-regional scholarly collaboration. On the right side of the network, institutions affiliated with Vietnam National University and departments of management form a separate but well-connected cluster, highlighting the growing contribution of Southeast Asian institutions to influencer marketing scholarship.
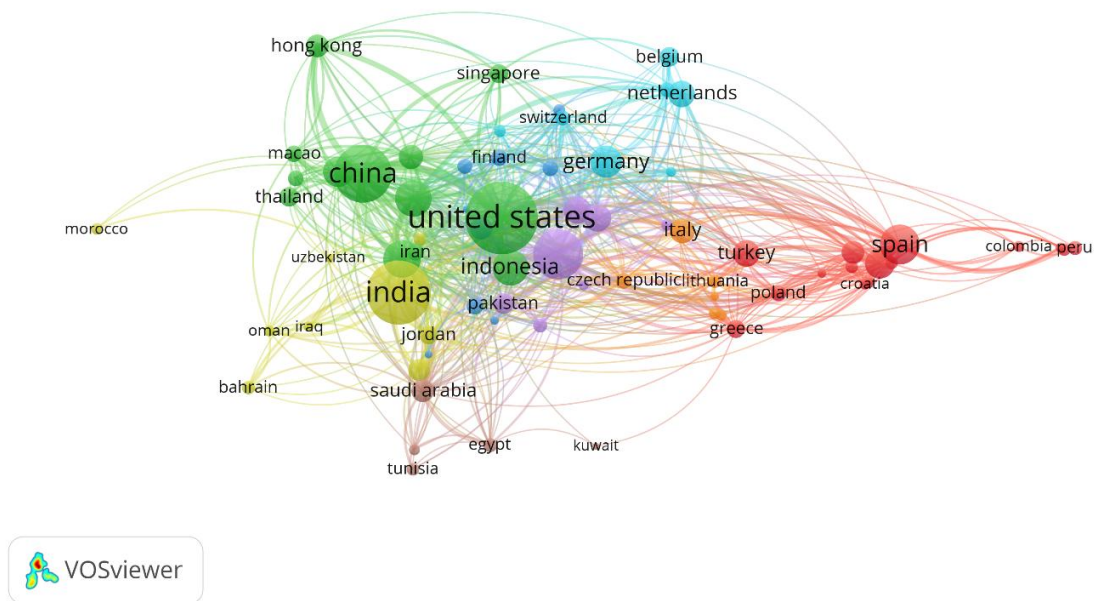
Figure 3. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 illustrates the global structure of influencer marketing research and highlights the unequal yet increasingly interconnected contributions across regions. The United States occupies a central and dominant position, indicating its role as the primary hub of scholarly production and international collaboration, strongly connected with European and Asian countries. China and India emerge as major contributors from Asia, reflecting the rapid growth of influencer marketing research in digitally expanding and platform-driven markets, while also maintaining strong collaborative ties with Western countries. European nations form a dense collaborative cluster, with Spain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands showing high interconnectivity, suggesting a well-established regional research network, particularly around marketing communication, ethics, and digital advertising regulation. The presence of countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey indicates the rising participation of emerging economies, often positioned at the periphery but increasingly integrated into global research collaborations.
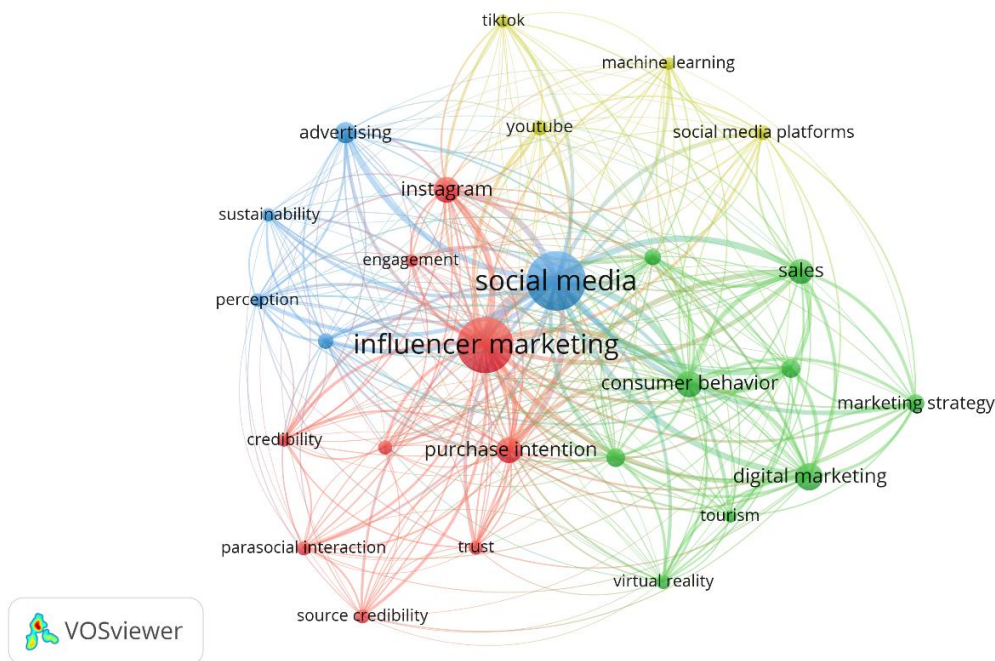
Keyword Co-Occurrence Network Analysis

Figure 4. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the conceptual structure and thematic evolution of influencer marketing research. At the center of the visualization, "influencer marketing" and "social media" appear as the most prominent and highly connected nodes, indicating their role as the core conceptual anchors of the field. The dense interconnections surrounding these keywords reflect the multidisciplinary nature of influencer marketing, linking marketing strategy, consumer psychology, communication theory, and digital technology. This central positioning suggests that influencer marketing research is primarily framed within broader discussions of social media ecosystems rather than as an isolated marketing tactic. A prominent red cluster emphasizes relational and psychological mechanisms underpinning influencer effectiveness. Keywords such as trust, credibility, source credibility, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention dominate this cluster, highlighting sustained scholarly interest in understanding how influencer attributes shape consumer attitudes and behavioral outcomes. This stream of research builds on classical persuasion and endorsement theories, extending them into digital and social media contexts. The strong co-occurrence between trust-related constructs and purchase intention suggests that relational authenticity and perceived credibility remain central explanatory mechanisms in influencer marketing effectiveness.

The green cluster reflects a strategic and outcome-oriented research stream, focusing on consumer behavior, sales, marketing strategy, digital marketing, and sector-specific applications such as tourism. This cluster indicates a shift toward managerial relevance, where influencer marketing is increasingly examined as a strategic tool integrated within broader digital marketing frameworks. The linkage between influencer marketing and sales-related outcomes underscores growing empirical efforts to demonstrate tangible business value, moving beyond attitudinal measures toward performance-oriented metrics. Another distinct cluster, shown in yellow, captures platform-specific and technological developments shaping influencer marketing research. Keywords such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, machine learning, and social media platforms highlight increasing attention to platform affordances, algorithmic visibility, and data-driven influencer selection and evaluation. The presence of machine learning and virtual reality-related terms suggests an emerging methodological and technological frontier, where computational

techniques and immersive technologies are being explored to enhance influencer analytics, content personalization, and audience targeting. The blue cluster highlights broader contextual and ethical considerations, including advertising, perception, and sustainability. This cluster reflects a growing scholarly concern with how influencer marketing intersects with advertising regulation, consumer awareness, and responsible communication practices. The integration of sustainability-related keywords suggests that influencer marketing research is beginning to engage with societal and ethical dimensions, such as transparency, social responsibility, and long-term brand–consumer relationships
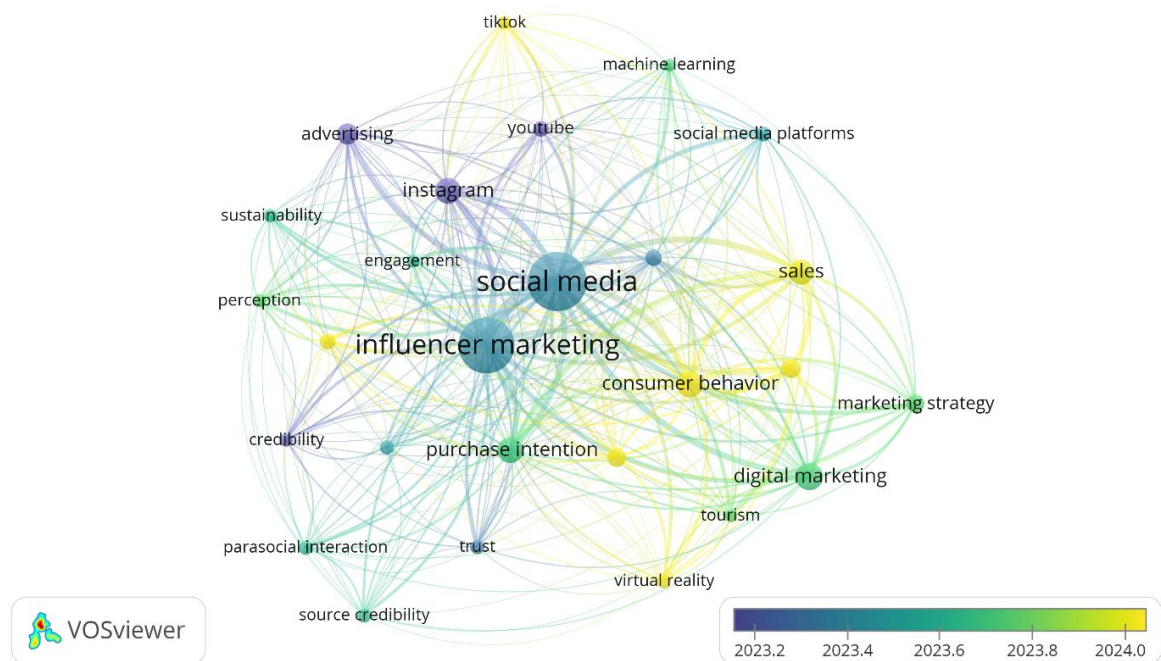
Figure 5. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 illustrates the temporal evolution of influencer marketing research, highlighting how scholarly attention has shifted over time from foundational concepts to more recent, technology-driven themes. Core keywords such as "social media" and "influencer marketing" remain centrally positioned and consistently prominent across time, indicating their enduring role as the conceptual backbone of the field. Earlier research streams, represented by cooler colors, tend to emphasize traditional marketing and communication constructs such as advertising, credibility, trust, source credibility, and parasocial interaction, reflecting an initial focus on persuasion mechanisms and influencer effectiveness. More recent keywords, shown in warmer colors, reveal a growing emphasis on outcome-oriented and strategic perspectives. Terms such as consumer behavior, purchase intention, sales, digital marketing, and marketing strategy indicate a shift toward examining influencer marketing's tangible impact on consumer decision-making and business performance. This evolution suggests that the field has moved beyond validating influencer credibility toward understanding how influencer activities translate into measurable marketing outcomes and strategic value for organizations across sectors, including applications such as tourism. he most recent thematic developments are associated with platform specificity and technological innovation, as reflected by keywords such as TikTok, machine learning, virtual reality, and social media platforms. These emerging topics signal a forward-looking research agenda that integrates data analytics, algorithmic processes, and immersive technologies into influencer marketing studies.
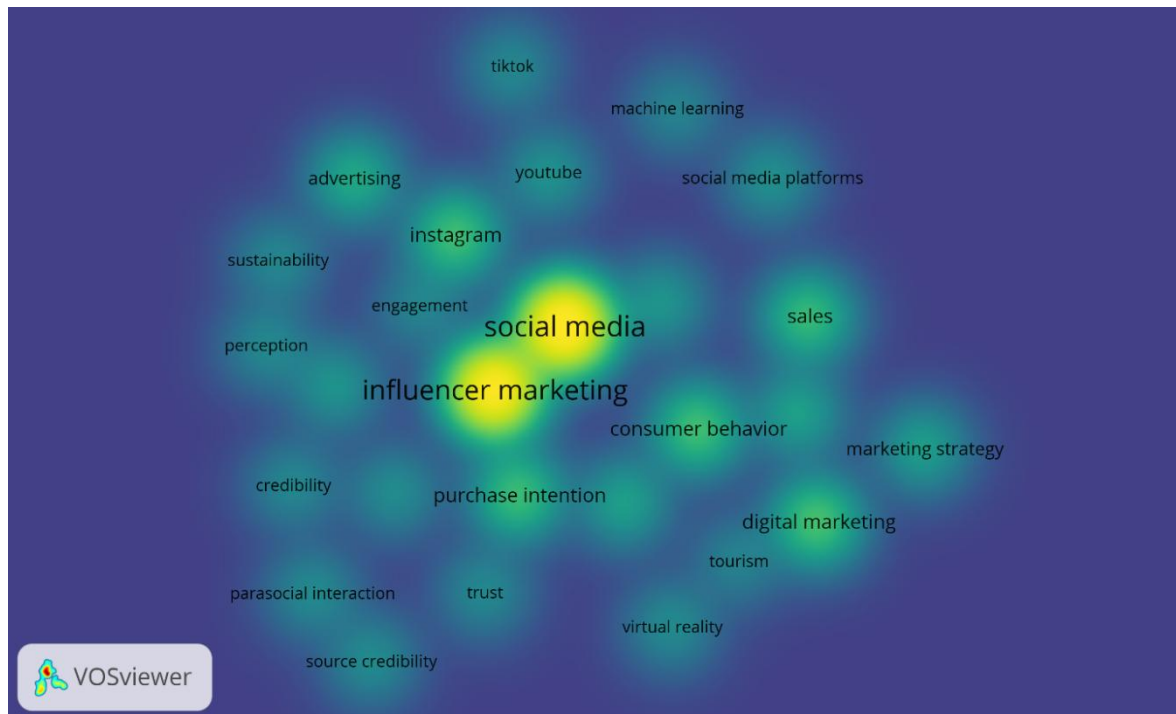
Figure 6. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 6 highlights the concentration and relative prominence of research themes within the influencer marketing literature. The most intense areas, shown in bright yellow, are centered on "influencer marketing" and "social media," indicating that these concepts form the core of the research field and receive the highest level of scholarly attention. Closely surrounding these central nodes are frequently studied themes such as consumer behavior, purchase intention, engagement, and Instagram, reflecting a strong emphasis on understanding how influencer-driven content affects audience responses and decision-making processes across social media environments. Less intense but still visible regions of the map reveal secondary and emerging research areas. Topics such as sales, digital marketing, marketing strategy, and tourism indicate growing interest in the managerial and industry-specific implications of influencer marketing, while themes like machine learning, TikTok, and virtual reality suggest the emergence of technology-oriented approaches and new platform contexts. Peripheral but relevant topics, including trust, credibility, parasocial interaction, and sustainability, highlight ongoing theoretical and ethical considerations that support the field's conceptual foundation.

Discussion
Practical Implications

The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer several important implications for practitioners and policymakers involved in influencer marketing. The dominance of themes such as consumer behavior, purchase intention, engagement, and sales indicates that influencer marketing is no longer viewed merely as a branding or awareness tool, but as a strategic mechanism capable of generating measurable business outcomes. Marketers can leverage these insights by designing influencer campaigns that prioritize trust-building, credibility, and authentic engagement rather than short-term promotional exposure. The growing prominence of platform-specific keywords such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok also suggests that practitioners should adopt platform-tailored strategies that align content format, influencer selection, and audience expectations with each platform's algorithmic logic. Furthermore, the emergence of technology-oriented themes, including machine learning and virtual reality, highlights opportunities for firms to integrate data analytics

and advanced technologies to improve influencer identification, performance measurement, and campaign optimization, thereby enhancing return on investment and strategic decision-making.
Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the influencer marketing literature by providing a comprehensive and structured overview of the field's intellectual and conceptual evolution. By mapping keyword co-occurrence, author networks, and thematic clusters, the analysis demonstrates how influencer marketing research has progressed from foundational theories of persuasion and source credibility toward more complex frameworks incorporating consumer psychology, digital strategy, and technological innovation. The identification of interconnected research clusters—such as relational mechanisms (trust and parasocial interaction), strategic outcomes (sales and marketing performance), and emerging technologies—helps consolidate fragmented streams of research into a coherent knowledge structure. This bibliometric synthesis extends existing narrative and systematic reviews by offering an objective, data-driven perspective on the field, thereby supporting theory building and guiding future empirical studies toward underexplored intersections, such as the integration of artificial intelligence, sustainability, and ethical communication within influencer marketing frameworks.
Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relied exclusively on the Scopus database, which, although comprehensive, may exclude relevant publications indexed in other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, potentially limiting the coverage of the literature. Second, bibliometric methods focus on publication and citation patterns rather than the substantive quality or contextual nuances of individual studies, meaning that influential but less-cited works may be underrepresented. Third, the use of author keywords and abstracts may overlook implicit themes not explicitly stated in metadata. Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms and digital technologies implies that emerging topics may change quickly over time, requiring continuous updates and complementary qualitative reviews. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating multiple databases, longitudinal comparisons, and mixed-method approaches to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing research.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the trends, patterns, and emerging topics in influencer marketing research, revealing a dynamic and rapidly evolving scholarly landscape. The findings demonstrate that influencer marketing is firmly anchored within social media research, with strong emphasis on consumer behavior, engagement, trust, and purchase intention as core explanatory mechanisms. At the same time, the emergence of themes related to sales performance, marketing strategy, platform specificity, and advanced technologies such as machine learning and virtual reality indicates a clear shift toward more strategic, data-driven, and future-oriented research agendas. By mapping the intellectual structure, collaborative networks, and thematic evolution of the field, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how influencer marketing research has matured from foundational persuasion-based perspectives into a multidisciplinary domain with significant theoretical and practical relevance.

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