
Bibliometric Analysis of Influencer Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a bibliometric analysis of the academic literature surrounding the influencer phenomenon, focusing on its development, key themes, and emerging trends in influencer marketing. By utilizing citation analysis, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrence mapping, the study identifies the most influential works and authors within this field, while mapping the evolution of key research topics. Central themes such as social media, influencer marketing, and authenticity dominate the literature, with newer areas of interest, including virtual influencers, artificial intelligence, and the psychological effects of influencer content, beginning to emerge. This paper contributes to understanding the interdisciplinary nature of influencer research and offers insights into the direction of future studies, emphasizing the growing significance of technological advancements and ethical considerations in influencer marketing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok has transformed the landscape of communication and marketing. Among the most significant outcomes of this transformation is the emergence of influencers—individuals who have the power to shape opinions, drive trends, and influence consumer behaviors through their online presence [1], [2]. Influencers have become integral to digital marketing strategies, with brands increasingly turning to them to promote products, services, and causes. This phenomenon, known as influencer marketing, has gained widespread attention in both academic and professional realms due to its potential to impact various sectors, from

fashion and beauty to politics and social causes [3], [4].

The academic interest in influencer phenomena is growing rapidly, but despite the increasing number of studies on the topic, a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape remains underdeveloped [5]–[7]. Researchers from diverse disciplines such as marketing, communication studies, sociology, psychology, and media studies have contributed to the exploration of influencers and their roles in modern society [1], [8], [9]. While individual studies offer insights into specific aspects of the influencer phenomenon, there has been no extensive bibliometric analysis to map the evolution of this field, identify key themes, and highlight research gaps.

Bibliometric analysis, a powerful tool for quantifying and visualizing scientific output, offers a method to systematically evaluate the academic literature [10], [11]. By analyzing citation patterns, authorship collaborations, and keyword trends, bibliometric studies can reveal the intellectual structure of a research field, track its growth, and uncover the interconnections between various studies. In the case of the influencer phenomenon, bibliometric analysis can provide valuable insights into how the field has developed over time, what topics have dominated the research agenda, and what emerging trends are shaping the future of the discourse.

This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a bibliometric analysis of the academic literature surrounding the influencer phenomenon. Through the application of bibliometric techniques such as citation analysis, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrence mapping, this study will provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in this area. By identifying key authors, influential publications, and emerging themes, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the societal and economic impact of influencers and offer directions for future research.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the methodology used in this bibliometric analysis, including the data collection process and the bibliometric techniques employed. Section 3 presents the findings of the analysis, highlighting key authors, publications, and research themes. Section 4 discusses the implications of the findings, particularly in terms of the direction of future research on influencer marketing. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper by summarizing the key contributions of the study and offering recommendations for both researchers and practitioners in the field of influencer marketing.

2. METHODS

This study utilizes a bibliometric approach to systematically analyze the academic literature on the influencer phenomenon. Bibliometric analysis is an essential method for quantifying and visualizing research output, allowing for the identification of key authors, influential papers, and emerging trends in a specific field. The primary data source for this analysis is academic articles indexed in major databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, which encompass peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly books [12], [13]. These databases were selected for their comprehensive coverage and rigorous indexing criteria, ensuring the reliability and validity of the data used in the analysis. The time frame of the literature review spans from the inception of the influencer phenomenon to the present day, with a focus on studies published in the past five years to capture the most recent developments in the field.

The data collection process involved the use of relevant keywords such as "influencer," "influencer marketing," "social media influencers," and "digital influencers" to extract relevant articles from the selected databases. The search was further refined to include only those articles that were published in English and were open access, ensuring that the findings would be accessible and applicable to a global audience. Once the relevant articles were identified, a dataset of bibliometric information was compiled, including details on the number of citations, publication year, author(s), institutional affiliations, journal name, and keywords. This dataset served as the foundation for the bibliometric analysis.

To conduct the bibliometric analysis, several techniques were employed, including citation analysis, co-authorship analysis, and keyword co-occurrence mapping. Citation analysis was used to identify the most frequently cited papers in the field, highlighting seminal works that have shaped the research agenda on influencers. Co-authorship analysis was applied to map the

collaboration networks among authors, revealing key researchers and institutions involved in the development of influencer-related studies. Finally, keyword co-occurrence mapping was utilized to identify the most prevalent themes and topics within the influencer literature. This technique allowed for the detection of emerging trends

and the identification of research gaps, providing valuable insights for future studies on the influencer phenomenon.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Author Collaboration Analysis

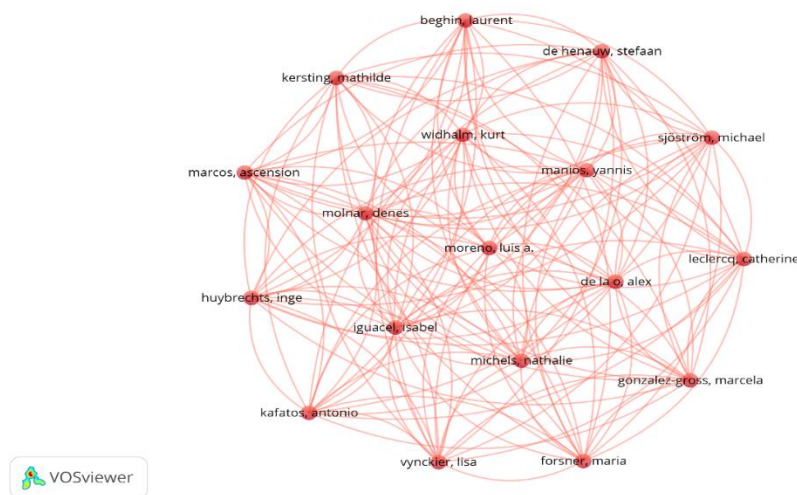


Figure 1. Author Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The visualization in Figure 1 represents the co-authorship network of authors in a specific research domain. Each node corresponds to an author, and the connections between them indicate collaborative relationships based on co-authorship of research papers. The more frequent the collaboration between authors, the stronger and denser the connection. Authors such as Moreno Luis A., Sjöström Michael, and Michels Nathalie are highly central within this network, indicating that they have multiple co-authors. This suggests

that these authors are key contributors to the research field and likely play a significant role in shaping the research agenda. The visualization highlights the collaborative nature of scientific research, where authors are interconnected, contributing collectively to the body of knowledge within this specific domain. The analysis of such networks can help identify influential authors, key research themes, and potential gaps in collaborative research efforts.

3.2 Country Contribution Analysis

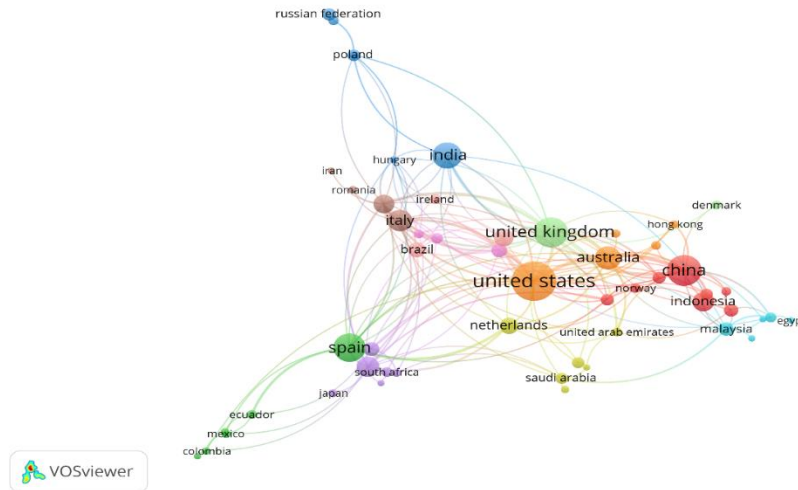


Figure 2. Country Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 represents the country co-authorship network, where each node corresponds to a country, and the connections between them indicate collaborative research activities. The size of the nodes reflects the level of collaboration, with larger nodes representing more active research involvement. Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, China, and India appear to be central in the network, indicating that they are major contributors to global research in this field. The color-coded clusters show regional patterns of collaboration, with

groups of countries from Europe (e.g., Spain, Italy, Netherlands) and Asia (e.g., China, India, Indonesia) forming distinct clusters. This visualization underscores the global nature of scientific collaboration, highlighting the interconnectedness of researchers across different countries. Moreover, it also reveals potential areas for future collaboration between countries that may be geographically distant but still share common research interests, thus fostering more international cooperation in future studies.

3.3 Citation Analysis: Influential Publications

Table 1. Top Cited Research

Citations	Authors and year	Title
2337	Jenkins, H.,Ford, S.,Green, J. (2013)	Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture
1169	Cheung, C.M.K.,Lee, M.K.O.,Rabjohn, N. (2008)	The impact of electronic word-of-mouth: The adoption of online opinions in online customer communities
1139	Khamis, S.,Ang, L.,Welling, R. (2017)	Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of Social Media Influencers
886	Vrontis, D.,Makrides, A.,Christofi, M.,Thrassou, A. (2021)	Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda
453	Leung, F.F.,Gu, F.F.,Palmatier, R.W. (2022)	Online influencer marketing
328	Lou, C.,Kiew, S.T.J.,Chen, T.,... Ong, J.E.C.,Phua, Z. (2023)	Authentically Fake? How Consumers Respond to the Influence of Virtual Influencers

Citations	Authors and year	Title
316	Sands, S.,Campbell, C.L.,Plangger, K.,Ferraro, C. (2022)	Unreal influence: leveraging AI in influencer marketing
234	Stein, J.-P.,Linda Breves, P.,Anders, N. (2024)	Parasocial interactions with real and virtual influencers: The role of perceived similarity and human-likeness
1420	Feisel, L.D.,Rosa, A.J. (2005)	The role of the laboratory in undergraduate engineering education
1350	Scherer, R.,Siddiq, F.,Tondeur, J. (2019)	The technology acceptance model (TAM): A meta-analytic structural equation modeling approach to explaining teachers' adoption of digital technology in education

Source: Scopus, 2026

Table 1 presents the top-cited research articles in the field of influencer marketing, providing valuable insights into the evolution of this academic area. Among the most cited works, Jenkins, Ford, and Green’s Spreadable Media (2013) stands out with the highest citation count of 2,337, highlighting the foundational role of media studies in understanding how value and meaning are created within networked cultures. This article provides a critical framework for analyzing the dynamics of media content spread, which is central to the influencer phenomenon. Other highly cited papers, such as The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth by Cheung et al. (2008), and Self-Branding, 'Micro-Celebrity', and the Rise of Social Media Influencers by Khamis et al. (2017), further explore the mechanisms behind digital influence, particularly through user-generated content and social media

platforms. The more recent studies, such as Social Media Influencer Marketing: A Systematic Review by Vrontis et al. (2021) and Online Influencer Marketing by Leung et al. (2022), reflect the growing academic interest in understanding the effectiveness of influencer strategies in marketing. Additionally, papers like Authentically Fake? by Lou et al. (2023) and Unreal Influence by Sands et al. (2022) delve into emerging trends like virtual influencers and the role of AI in influencer marketing. The increasing diversity in research topics, from virtual influencers to TikTok marketing strategies, underscores the broadening scope of influencer research, demonstrating the significant impact of digital influencers on consumer behavior and marketing strategies.

3.4 Keyword Co-Occurrence and Research Themes

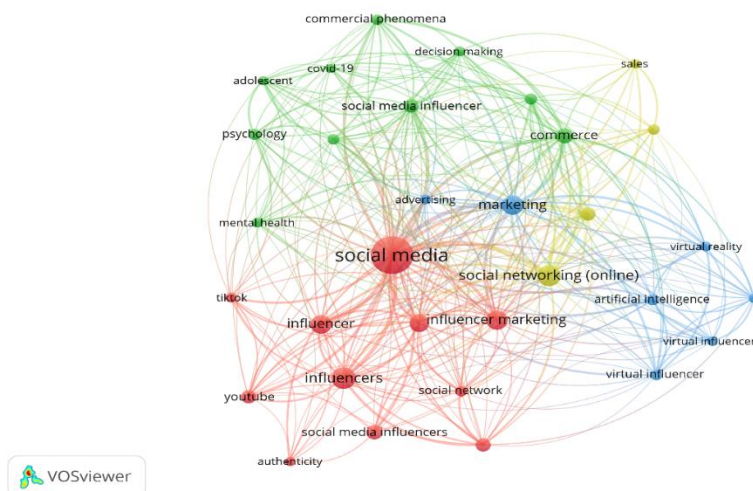


Figure 3. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 presents a network visualization of key themes and keywords related to the influencer phenomenon, with nodes representing the most prominent terms and edges indicating their co-occurrence in the literature. The central node, social media, stands out as the core theme in influencer-related research, with strong connections to influencers, social media influencers, and social networking. This indicates that social media platforms are integral to the study of influencers and their marketing impact. The visualization also highlights other major themes, such as influencer marketing, advertising, marketing, and authenticity, suggesting that these concepts are central to understanding the commercial and psychological aspects of influencer campaigns.

The diverse color clusters reflect the various research areas and disciplinary perspectives related to influencers. The red cluster around social media is linked with terms like TikTok, YouTube, and authenticity, indicating a focus on the platforms and the role of personal branding and credibility in

influencer content. The green cluster encompasses terms related to psychology, adolescent, and mental health, suggesting an increasing interest in the psychological effects of social media influence, particularly among younger audiences. The blue cluster includes terms like virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and virtual influencers, which points to emerging research on the technological aspects of influencer marketing, such as the rise of AI-generated influencers and virtual reality platforms.

This network visualization reveals the complexity and interdisciplinary nature of the influencer phenomenon, with research spanning marketing, psychology, technology, and social media studies. The interconnectedness of these themes underscores the multifaceted ways in which influencers are studied and the evolving dynamics of digital influence. Future research can benefit from exploring the intersections between these clusters, particularly in the context of emerging technologies and their impact on influencer marketing strategies.

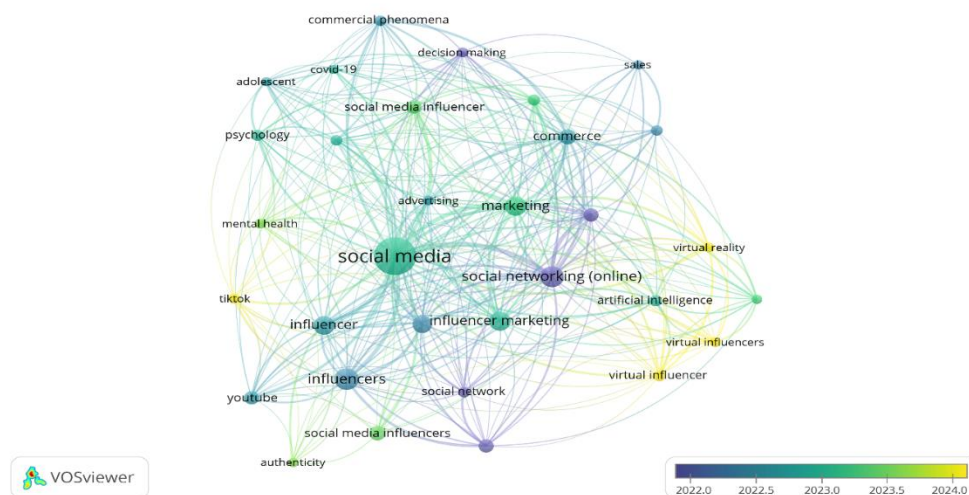


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 presents an overlay visualization of the co-occurrence network, where the colors of the nodes represent the temporal evolution of key themes and keywords in the influencer research domain. The color gradient, ranging from purple

(representing earlier years, around 2022) to green (indicating more recent studies, around 2024), highlights the dynamic nature of the field and the shifting focus of academic interest over time. Central themes like social media, influencer marketing, and social

media influencers have remained consistently significant, but the emergence of newer topics, such as virtual influencers and artificial intelligence, is evident through the increasing prevalence of green nodes, indicating a rise in attention in the last couple of years. Additionally, themes related to mental health, psychology, and COVID-19 are marked with yellow and light green, reflecting the growing recognition of the psychological and social implications of influencer marketing, especially in the context

of the global pandemic. This visualization underscores how academic research in the influencer domain is evolving, with recent studies increasingly addressing technological advancements, the psychological impact of digital influencers, and the commercialization of influencer marketing. The overlay also suggests potential areas for future exploration, such as the intersection of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and influencer strategies.

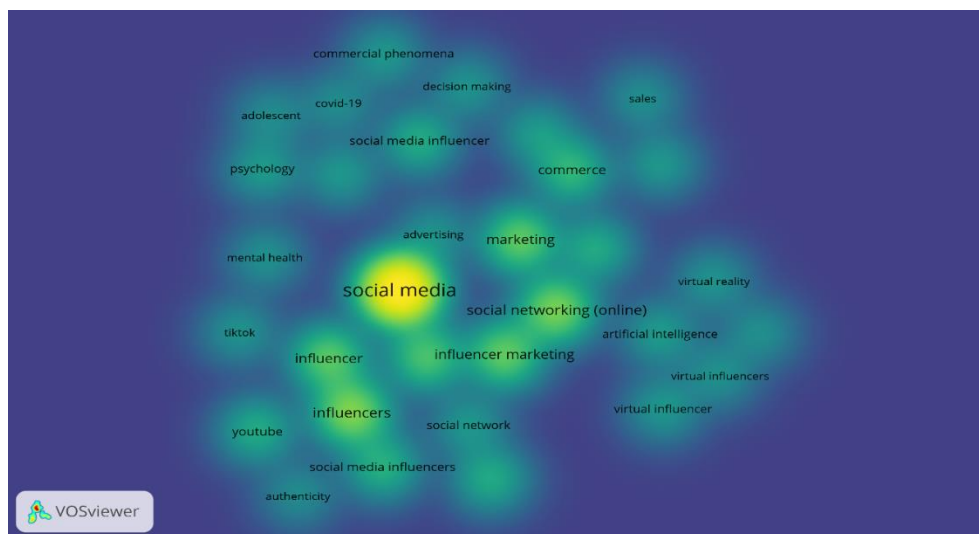


Figure 5. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 showcases a density visualization that highlights the concentration of academic interest in various themes related to influencer research. The bright yellow and green areas, particularly around social media, influencers, and influencer marketing, indicate that these topics are the most researched and frequently discussed in the literature. The centrality of social media as a core theme is particularly evident, with its surrounding terms like social media influencers, influencers, and marketing forming a dense cluster. This suggests that the majority of studies focus on the impact of social media platforms and the role of influencers within them. In contrast, terms such as virtual influencers, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality appear in more peripheral clusters, reflecting their emerging status in the field. The visualization

also reveals that themes like psychology, mental health, and decision making are concentrated in areas where social media overlaps with consumer behavior, indicating that researchers are increasingly interested in the psychological and behavioral effects of digital influencers. Overall, this density map visually underscores the dominant areas of influencer research while pointing to nascent themes that are gaining traction in recent studies.

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis highlight several key themes and emerging trends within the influencer marketing research domain. The central role of social media in shaping the influencer phenomenon is unmistakable, with a significant body of research dedicated to

understanding how platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok enable influencers to shape consumer behavior. The prominence of social media influencers as a core research theme reflects the growing recognition of their impact on branding and marketing strategies. This finding aligns with the increasing commercialization of influencer-driven content and its widespread use in digital advertising campaigns [14]–[17]. It is clear that influencers are no longer seen as mere content creators; rather, they are strategic partners in the marketing ecosystem, facilitating a direct connection between brands and consumers.

One of the most intriguing findings from the analysis is the increasing focus on virtual influencers and artificial intelligence.

These terms are emerging as significant areas of interest, particularly in recent studies, suggesting a shift toward exploring the technological advancements reshaping the influencer landscape. Virtual influencers, powered by AI, offer a new dimension to marketing, where the line between human and machine is increasingly blurred [18], [19]. These digital personas can be programmed to exhibit specific behaviors, personalities, and engagement strategies, opening new possibilities for marketers. However, this trend also raises important questions about the authenticity of these influencers and the ethical implications of using AI-generated personalities to promote products. Future research could delve deeper into the consumer perception of virtual influencers and their effectiveness compared to human counterparts.

Another notable trend emerging from the visualization is the intersection of psychology and influencer marketing, with research increasingly focusing on the emotional and psychological effects of influencer engagement. Terms like mental health and adolescent highlight concerns regarding the impact of influencer-driven content on younger audiences, who may be more susceptible to the pressures of social media. Studies in this area are exploring how influencers contribute to the construction of idealized lifestyles and beauty standards,

which can have both positive and negative effects on followers' self-esteem and body image. This shift in focus underscores the growing recognition of the need to understand the psychological implications of influencer marketing, especially in terms of its long-term effects on consumer behavior.

Finally, the growing attention to authenticity in influencer marketing highlights a critical aspect of successful influencer-brand relationships. As consumers become more discerning and skeptical of overt commercial promotions, the demand for authentic content that resonates with followers' values and beliefs has risen. The emphasis on authenticity indicates a shift toward more transparent and genuine influencer partnerships, where influencers maintain credibility by aligning with brands that reflect their personal values. This trend is not only shaping marketing strategies but also influencing the ethical discourse surrounding influencer practices. Future research could explore how brands and influencers can navigate the delicate balance between commercial interests and authentic engagement, and whether this balance is essential for sustaining long-term consumer trust.

4. CONCLUSION

The bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape surrounding the influencer phenomenon. It highlights the centrality of social media platforms in the development of influencer marketing strategies, with an increasing focus on the evolving role of technology, particularly virtual influencers and artificial intelligence. The study also emphasizes the growing importance of psychological and ethical concerns in the influencer marketing domain, particularly regarding authenticity and the impact on consumer well-being. As the field continues to evolve, future research should address the emerging themes of virtual influencers, AI integration, and the long-term psychological effects of influencer content. This paper serves as a valuable resource for both researchers

and practitioners, offering direction for future studies and practical insights into the dynamic world of influencer marketing.

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