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Bibliometric Mapping of Social Media and Brand Engagement Research: Trends, Themes dan Future Direction

Nia Anggraini[1*)], Awliya Afwa[2)], Elondri[3)]
[1*)]Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Persada Bunda Indonesia University Kota Pekanbaru, Riau, 28289
[2)]Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Islamic University of Riau Kota Pekanbaru, Riau, 28284
[3)]Department of Management, Khatulistiwa Institute of Technology and Social Sciences Kabupaten Pasaman Barat, Sumatra Barat, 26311
***E-mail**: Corresponding Author: niaanggraini0414@gmail.com*

ABSTRACK

The rapid evolution of social media has transformed how brands communicate, engage, and build relationships with consumers in the digital era. Despite extensive studies on social media marketing, limited bibliometric analysis has been conducted to systematically map research trends related to brand engagement. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the scientific development and thematic patterns of publications discussing the role of social media in building brand engagement from 2015 to 2025. The research population comprises all Scopus-indexed articles within this topic, resulting in 1,770 publications being identified. Using the bibliometric method, data were analyzed through VOSviewer software to visualize keyword co-occurrence, relevance, and publication trends, which were subsequently classified into thematic clusters. The analysis reveals five major clusters representing the dominant themes in this field: social media marketing, customer engagement, influencer marketing, brand community, brand loyalty, and brand equity. The findings indicate that research has increasingly focused on interactive, technology-based, and emotionally driven engagement strategies. The presence of virtual influencers and AI-powered engagement tools signifies a growing emphasis on authenticity and personalization in digital brand communication. This study contributes novelty by offering a comprehensive bibliometric mapping that integrates both behavioral and technological dimensions of brand engagement. The implications highlight how social media has evolved from a communication tool into an interactive ecosystem for co-creation and emotional bonding between brands and consumers. The findings provide valuable insights for academics and practitioners to develop more adaptive, data-driven, and ethically grounded marketing strategies in the digital era.

Keyword: *Bibliometric Analysis; Brand Engagement; Brand Loyalty; Customer Engagement; Social Media Marketing*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about significant transformations in the modern marketing landscape. One of the most notable impacts of this advancement is

the emergence of social media as a primary medium for marketing activities (Ashley, 2015; Heggde, 2018; Lee, 2025). Social media functions not only as a platform for communication and entertainment but also as a strategic tool for businesses to build closer relationships with consumers (Dessart, 2017; Jiang, 2025; Kim, 2025; Morgan, 2025; Veloso, 2023). In today's digital era, companies as well as micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are required to adapt to the changing behavior of increasingly active consumers in the online environment (Joshi, 2025).

Social media provides vast opportunities for businesses to build and strengthen brand engagement through intensive and two-way interactions with users. In the past, marketing activities were predominantly one-way, relying on conventional media such as television, radio, or print brochures; however, communication between brands and consumers has now become far more interactive. Such interactions foster stronger emotional involvement and have the potential to enhance brand loyalty (Bazi, 2023; Dong, 2024; Foroughi, 2024; Wies, 2023). Through creative, engaging, and relevant content, social media serves as an effective medium for shaping consumers' positive perceptions toward a brand (Allal-Chérif, 2024; Bastrygina, 2024; Borges-Tiago, 2023; Lou, 2023b; Zhou, 2024).

Based on reports from We Are Social and Business of Apps as of June 2025, the number of social media users worldwide continues to rise, reaching 5.41 billion users, up from 5.31 billion in April 2025. Facebook remains the platform with the highest number of active users globally, totaling 3.07 billion, followed by WhatsApp with 3 billion, YouTube with 2.54 billion, Instagram with 2 billion, and TikTok with 1.94 billion users. Most social media users utilize these platforms to stay connected with family and friends, fill their leisure time, seek news, and discover content in the form of videos or articles (Katadata, 2025). The sheer number of users highlights the enormous potential of social media as a medium for building strong brand engagement with digital audiences.

Based on secondary data obtained from katadata Insight Center (Katadata, 2025), social media usage in Indonesia also shows an upward trend, with 143 million users as of January 2025, representing a 2.9% increase compared to the previous year. Indonesia ranks among the top ten countries with the longest average daily social media usage, reaching 188 minutes per day. The most popular platforms in Indonesia are WhatsApp (91.7%), followed by Instagram (84.6%), Facebook (83%), and TikTok (77.4%). This indicates that social media has become an integral part of Indonesia's digital culture—serving as a tool for communication, entertainment, and information seeking.

By leveraging social media optimally, business actors can introduce brand identity,

build sustainable interactions, and better understand consumer needs and preferences (Foroughi, 2024; Lim, 2022; Santos, 2022). Through an appropriate strategic approach, social media functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a space for fostering emotional closeness between consumers and brands (Bazi, 2023; Dong, 2024; Leung, 2022). The role of social media in building brand engagement has become a crucial aspect of digital marketing strategies in the modern era (Allal-Chérif, 2024; Cheung, 2022; Zhou, 2024).

The phenomenon of increasing social media usage intensity among consumers, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, has made research on the role of social media in building brand engagement increasingly relevant and urgent. In the current digital era, consumers are no longer merely recipients of messages but also act as co-creators in shaping a brand's image and value through their active participation on digital platforms. This condition reflects a paradigm shift in the relationship between brands and consumers, which is no longer one-directional.This study offers novelty by focusing on how interactions that occur on social media can foster sustainable emotional attachment (engagement) between consumers and brands amidst the growing intensity of digital competition. Moreover, the urgency of this research lies in its contribution to providing valuable insights for business actors particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) regarding effective strategies to leverage social media in strengthening consumer loyalty and enhancing brand competitiveness in the era of digital marketing.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in building brand engagement in the digital era through a bibliometric analysis approach utilizing VOSviewer software as the primary analytical tool. The objectives of this research are to identify patterns in the utilization of social media by business actors to strengthen relationships with consumers, to examine forms of interaction that contribute to enhancing brand engagement, and to map the trends of scientific publications related to the topic of social media and brand engagement based on relevant keywords.This study seeks to identify the most frequently cited articles in this field to provide insights into the direction and development of recent research. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of digital marketing studies and offer practical implications for business practitioners particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in designing effective strategies to enhance consumer loyalty and brand competitiveness amid the increasingly dynamic landscape of digital competition.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive design employing a bibliometric analysis approach. The analysis is based on scientific publications that explore the relationship between social media and brand engagement. The study relies on secondary data as the main source of information. A systematic literature search was carried out using the Scopus database via the Publish or Perish software, utilizing the keywords *"Social Media"* and *"Brand Engagement"*, with the publication period limited to 2015–2025. The search yielded 1,770 relevant articles. Subsequently, VOSviewer software was employed to visualize research developments through the creation of a keyword co-occurrence map. The bibliographic records were compiled in RIS format, imported into VOSviewer, and analyzed based on article titles and abstracts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Media in Building Brand Engagement

Social media plays a highly significant role in building brand engagement through content strategies, digital technology utilization, and collaborations with influencers. (Liu, 2021) emphasizes the importance of employing big data analytics and natural language processing to understand customer engagement patterns on social media, while (Tafesse, 2021) highlights the role of content quality and influencer interaction strategies in driving audience engagement. (Leung, 2022) demonstrates that the effectiveness of influencer marketing lies in the influencer's ability to create authenticity and emotional closeness with audiences, whereas (Lim, 2022) emphasizes that social media serves as a dynamic ecosystem where customer engagement is formed through two-way communication and active user participation. (Lou, 2023a) explores the phenomenon of virtual influencers and finds that perceived authenticity is a key factor in building consumer trust and engagement with brands, while (Wies, 2023) adds that the highest level of engagement is achieved through "Goldilocks influencers," or influencers with an ideal number of followers not too large to remain personal, yet sufficient to reach a broad audience.

(Bastrygina, 2023) finds that Instagram influencers strengthen brand image and trust through personal and emotional connections with their followers, while (Alla, 2024) highlights the role of AI-powered virtual influencers in enhancing campaign effectiveness through consistent and adaptive interactions. (Joshi, 2025) asserts that social media influencer marketing has evolved into a fundamental driver of brand attachment due to the credibility and social closeness established by influencers, whereas (Kim, 2025) shows that the playfulness and expertise of virtual influencers significantly foster consumer trust and encourage positive

behavioral responses toward brands. Consequently, social media now functions not merely as a marketing communication tool but as an interactive ecosystem that reinforces loyalty, identity, and emotional connections between brands and consumers in an increasingly dynamic digital era. **Citations of Articles on Social Media in Building Brand Engagement from 2015 to 2025**

The search results identified a total of 1,770 articles discussing the topic of social media in building brand engagement, all indexed in the Scopus database. Among these publications, the ten most-cited articles were identified, as presented in Table 1. The article with the highest number of citations is titled *"Creative Strategies in Social Media Marketing: An Exploratory Study of Branded Social Content and Consumer Engagement"* by C. Ashley, which has received a total of 983 citations. The remaining articles ranked second to tenth are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Top Most Cited Articles from 2015-2025

No.	Year	Author	Title	Source	Citations
1	2015	C. Ashley	Creative Strategies in Social Media Marketing: An Exploratory Study of Branded Social Content and Consumer Engagement	Psychology and Marketing	983
2	2015	L. Dessart	Consumer engagement in online brand communities: A social media perspective	Journal of Product and Brand Management	894
3	2018	D. Lee	Advertising content and consumer engagement on social media: Evidence from Facebook	Management Science	719
4	2019	D. Buhalis	Real-time co-creation and nowness service: lessons from tourism and hospitality	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	643
5	2017	P. Harrigan	Customer engagement with tourism social media brands	Tourism Management	613
6	2016	R. Dolan	Social media engagement behaviour: a uses and gratifications perspective	Journal of Strategic Marketing	578
7	2020	Y. Li	Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? An Empirical Study of Image Content and Social Media Engagement	Journal of Marketing Research	573
8	2019	C. Hughes	Driving Brand Engagement Through Online Social Influencers: An Empirical Investigation of Sponsored Blogging Campaigns	Journal of Marketing	520
9	2019	J. Huang	Vaping versus JUULing: How the extraordinary growth and marketing of JUUL transformed the US retail e-cigarette market	Tobacco Control	499

10	2015	K. Filo	Sport and social media research: A review	Sport Management Review	465

Top Keywords

Through the VOSviewer data analysis of studies focusing on social media and brand engagement, ten key keywords were identified as having the highest frequency of occurrence and strongest relevance within the analyzed publication metadata. A comprehensive overview of these keywords is provided in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Most Frequently Occurring Keywords

No	Term	Occurences
1	Customer Engagement	111
2	Brand Loyalty	49
3	Social Media Merketing	44
4	Influencer Marketing	39
5	Branding	38
6	Brand Equity	33
7	Brand Community	32
8	Social Media Influencer	31
9	Consumer Brand Engagement	28
10	User Engagement	24

Through bibliometric analysis conducted with VOSviewer, ten major keywords were identified as the most commonly appearing terms within the body of literature on social media and brand engagement. The most dominant keyword was **"customer engagement"** (111 occurrences), reflecting that most studies focus on how social media platforms foster active participation and emotional connection between consumers and brands. This was followed by **"brand loyalty"** (49 occurrences) and **"social media marketing"** (44 occurrences), indicating that researchers place significant emphasis on how engagement strategies contribute to long-term customer retention and the effectiveness of social media as a marketing channel. Furthermore, keywords such as **"influencer marketing"** (39 occurrences) and **"branding"** (38 occurrences) highlight the growing role of influencers and brand identity formation in driving online engagement. Other terms like **"brand equity"** (33 occurrences), **"brand community"** (32 occurrences), and **"social media influencer"** (31 occurrences) demonstrate the importance of community-based interactions and trusted figures in enhancing perceived brand value. Finally, **"consumer brand engagement"** (28 occurrences) and **"user engagement"** (24 occurrences) underscore the centrality of consumer participation and digital interaction as core constructs in brand engagement research. These findings collectively

suggest that current research trends are increasingly oriented toward understanding the dynamics of consumer involvement, influencer impact, and brand-building efforts within the social media ecosystem.

Table 3. Most Relevant Keywords

No	Term	Relevance
1	Consumer Behavior	3.42
2	Virtual Influencer	3.05
3	Social Media Brand Community	1.90
4	Influencer Marketing	1.82
5	Follower	1.55
6	Social Media Platform	1.31
7	Branding	1.17
8	Social Network	1.14
9	Social Media Brand Engagement	1.11
10	Brands	0.89

Based on the relevance term data, the ten keywords with the highest relevance scores represent the core areas of scholarly focus in research concerning social media and brand engagement. The top-ranked keyword, **"consumer behavior" (3.42)**, highlights the central role of understanding consumer actions and decision-making processes in shaping engagement strategies on social media platforms. This is followed by **"virtual influencer" (3.05)**, which reflects the growing academic and practical interest in AI-generated personalities as new tools for building brand connections. Keywords such as **"social media brand community" (1.90)** and **"influencer marketing" (1.82)** indicate that digital communities and influencer collaborations remain key mechanisms for fostering engagement and loyalty. Other terms like **"follower" (1.55)** and **"social media platform" (1.31)** emphasize the importance of platform dynamics and audience relationships in determining the effectiveness of social media strategies. Meanwhile, keywords such as **"branding" (1.17)**, **"social network" (1.14)**, and **"social media brand engagement" (1.11)** show that research continues to explore the interconnectedness between brand identity, social interactions, and engagement outcomes. Lastly, the keyword **"brands" (0.89)** reinforces the overarching focus on how digital communication and community participation contribute to strengthening brand presence and perception in the online environment. These results indicate that recent studies on social media and brand engagement have increasingly focused on the interconnection between consumer behavior, influencer roles, and the development of digital brand communities.

Publication Development Map Based on VOSviewer Results

The publication mapping of Social Media and Brand Engagement, generated through VOSviewer, identifies five major clusters that encompass interconnected research themes in this area. As depicted in Figure 1, the network visualization illustrates the relationships among keywords found in studies addressing social media and brand engagement. This visualization assists researchers in recognizing and examining the most frequent and thematically significant keywords, offering deeper insight into the conceptual framework and key focus areas of research within this domain.

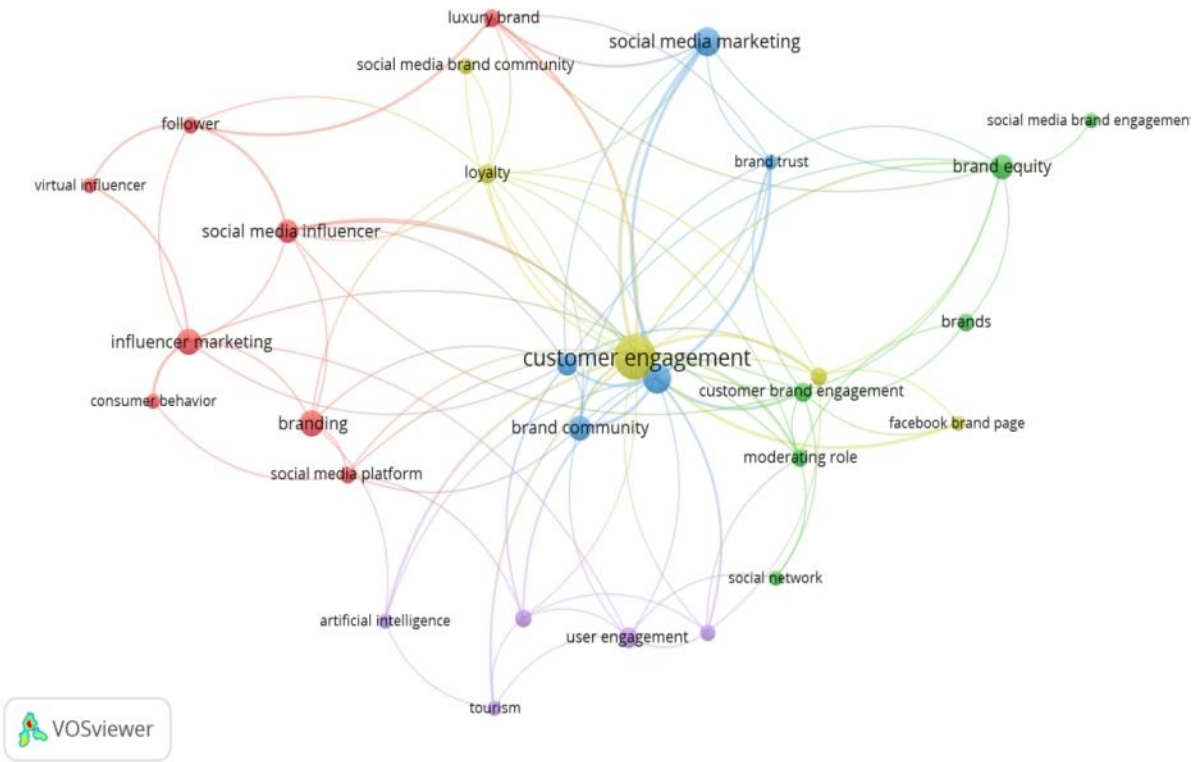


Figure 1. Publication Development Map Based on Network Visualization Results

The following section elaborates on the thematic composition of each cluster:

1. Cluster 1 – Red (8 items): Consists of virtual influencer, follower, social media influencer, influencer marketing, consumer behavior, branding, social media platform, and luxury brand. This cluster emphasizes the growing influence of social media personalities and virtual influencers in shaping consumer behavior and brand perception. It highlights how influencer marketing and branding strategies intertwine within social media platforms to enhance brand visibility, particularly in luxury brand contexts where authenticity and consumer trust play crucial roles.

2. Cluster 2 – Green (6 items): Includes social media brand engagement, brand equity, brand, customer brand engagement, moderating role, and social network. This cluster focuses on the relationship between brand equity and consumer engagement across social networks. It underscores how customer brand engagement acts as a moderating factor that strengthens brand equity through consistent interaction and participation in online brand-related activities.
3. Cluster 3 – Blue (5 items): Comprises social media marketing, brand trust, brand community, brand loyalty, and consumer brand engagement. This cluster illustrates how effective social media marketing strategies can foster trust and loyalty among consumers by building strong brand communities. It highlights the importance of continuous engagement and emotional connection as central mechanisms for sustaining consumer–brand relationships in digital environments.
4. Cluster 4 – Yellow (5 items): Consists of social media brand community, loyalty, customer engagement, brand love, and facebook brand page. This cluster highlights the emotional dimension of customer engagement, emphasizing how brand love and loyalty are cultivated through active participation in social media brand communities. Platforms such as Facebook serve as key touchpoints where customers engage, express attachment, and co-create value with brands.
5. Cluster 5 – Purple (5 items): Includes artificial intelligence, tourism, social networking site, user engagement, and online brand community. This cluster reflects the integration of technology and user interaction in digital ecosystems. It shows how AI and social networking sites contribute to user engagement and the formation of online brand communities, particularly in sectors such as tourism, where personalized digital experiences enhance customer satisfaction and brand connection.

Figure 2 presents the results of the Overlay Visualization, which illustrates the temporal evolution of research on social media and brand engagement. This visualization maps the distribution of keywords appearing across various scholarly publications, where the color gradients represent different time periods of keyword emergence. Darker shades indicate earlier research themes, whereas lighter colors highlight more recent topics and emerging trends in the field. Through this visualization, researchers can observe how studies on social media and brand engagement have evolved over time, identify currently dominant areas of focus, and uncover potential gaps for future exploration.

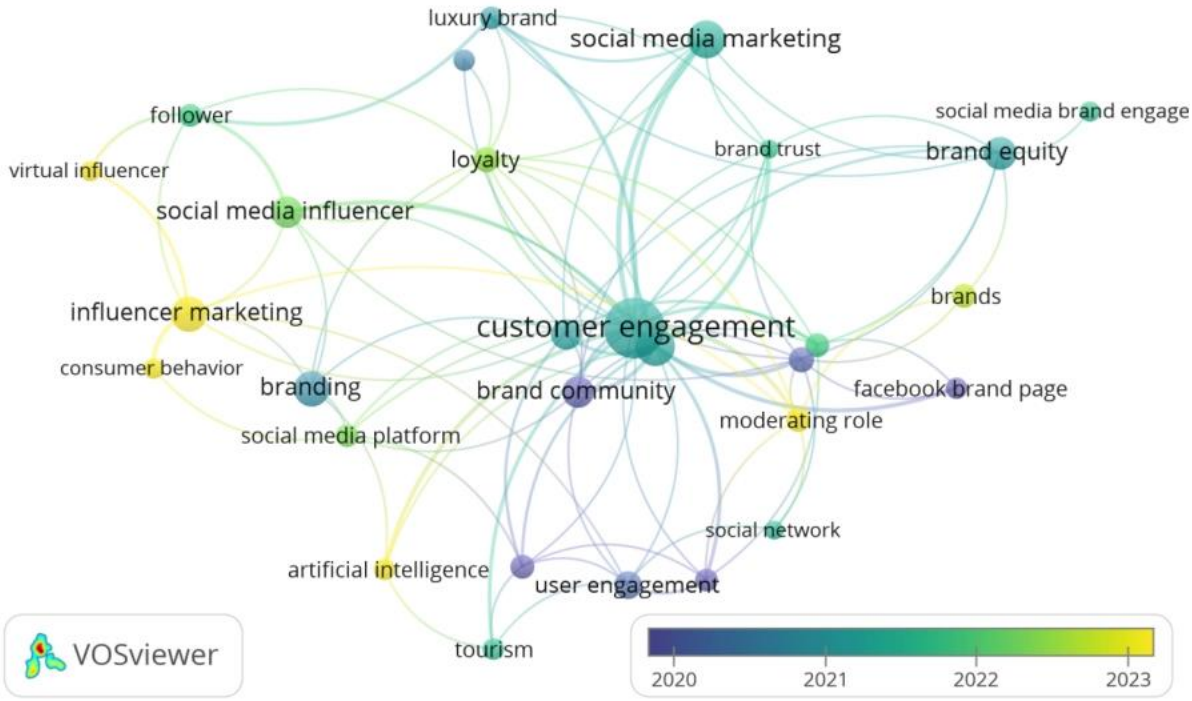


Figure 2. Publication Development Map Based on Overlay Visualization Results

The lighter colors in the Overlay Visualization represent the most recent and emerging keywords in research related to social media and brand engagement. Several terms highlighted in lighter shades such as virtual influencer, influencer marketing, consumer behavior, and artificial intelligence indicate a growing research focus on the integration of technology and human interaction in shaping brand engagement. These trends show that in recent years, scholars have increasingly explored how influencer marketing, particularly through virtual influencers and AI-based tools, contributes to building stronger emotional connections and authenticity between brands and audiences.

The prominence of *customer engagement* and *social media marketing* suggests that researchers are deeply interested in understanding how interactive digital environments and strategic content dissemination drive consumer participation and brand connection. Meanwhile, *brand community*, *brand equity*, and *brand loyalty* underscore the importance of long-term relationship building and the emotional attachment consumers form through consistent social media interactions. Additionally, the rise of *virtual influencer* and *AI-driven branding* points to a growing trend toward technologically enhanced engagement strategies that combine authenticity, personalization, and automation. Overall, the visualization reveals that recent research has shifted toward exploring how social media ecosystems function as interactive, data-driven platforms that foster sustained engagement, trust, and loyalty between

brands and consumers in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving role of social media in building brand engagement within the digital era. By analyzing 1,770 Scopus-indexed publications from 2015 to 2025, the research identifies five major thematic clusters that reveal how *social media marketing*, *customer engagement*, *influencer marketing*, *brand community*, *brand loyalty*, and *brand equity* are interlinked as core constructs in the field. The findings demonstrate that recent scholarly attention has shifted toward interactive, technology-driven, and emotionally oriented engagement strategies. Social media has transformed from a mere promotional medium into an integrated ecosystem for *co-creation, personalization,* and *emotional bonding* between brands and consumers. The emergence of *virtual influencers* and AI-assisted marketing further underscores the growing emphasis on authenticity, personalization, and data-driven communication in strengthening consumer–brand relationships.

The study's main contribution lies in mapping how the convergence of influencer marketing, AI integration, and community-based interactions collectively enhance trust, loyalty, and brand value in the social media environment. Practically, these findings provide valuable insights for businesses—particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs)—to optimize their social media strategies through interactive content, community engagement, and credible influencer collaborations.

This study is limited by its reliance on Scopus-indexed publications and a bibliometric approach that focuses on keyword co-occurrence without deeper qualitative analysis of content or context. Future research could expand the dataset by incorporating other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, employ mixed-method or content-based analysis to explore conceptual developments, and examine specific sectors or regions for more contextualized insights.

In terms of recommendations, researchers are encouraged to further investigate the effectiveness of *AI-based personalization, virtual influencer credibility,* and *consumer emotional dynamics* in social media engagement. Policymakers and business practitioners should also consider establishing digital marketing ethics and data transparency guidelines to ensure responsible and sustainable engagement strategies in the increasingly complex landscape of digital brand communication.

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