

Social Media Influencers and Consumer Culture : A Bibliometric Analysis of Digital Consumption Research in Emerging Economies

¹Loso Judijanto, ²Grace Tahapary, ³Nasaruddin, ⁴Andi Wahyuni Syam, ⁵Agus Yulistiyono

¹IPOSS Jakarta, ²Universitas Pattimura, ³Universitas Cahaya Prima, ⁴Universitas Cahaya Prima, ⁵Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the global research landscape of social media influencers and consumer culture through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in the Scopus database. Using VOSviewer as the primary analytical tool, the study constructs and interprets keyword co-occurrence networks to identify dominant research themes, thematic clusters, temporal evolution patterns, and research density distributions in this rapidly growing field. The analysis reveals that the literature is anchored around consumer culture, marketing, and influencers, with Instagram and authenticity functioning as key mediating constructs linking influencer practice to consumption behavior. The findings show that the field has expanded from early studies of celebrity and brand culture toward themes of sustainability, zero waste lifestyles, generation Z, and digitally mediated consumer identity, with emerging-economy contexts such as China, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Indonesia increasingly represented. Overlay visualization indicates that sustainability, zero waste, and digital marketing are the most recently active themes, while density analysis confirms consumer culture and influencers as the most intensively studied constructs. These findings provide a comprehensive map of the field and identify promising directions for future research on digital consumption in emerging economies.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Social media influencers have become central actors in shaping contemporary consumer culture, mediating relationships between brands, platforms, and audiences through practices of self presentation, endorsement, and lifestyle curation (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). As digital platforms such as Instagram and YouTube increasingly structure everyday consumption, influencers operate at the intersection of commerciality and authenticity, performing identities that audiences interpret as both aspirational and relatable (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), (Hund & McGuigan, 2019). This dual positioning has made influencer culture a particularly rich site for examining how consumer culture is produced, contested, and commercialized in digital environments.

The growing scholarly interest in this phenomenon has produced a heterogeneous body of literature spanning marketing, communication studies, sociology, and cultural studies. Early research concentrated on celebrity culture and brand-driven consumption (Cashmore, 2023), while more recent studies have extended the field toward platform-specific dynamics, including gun influencers on Instagram (Drenten et al., 2023), zero-waste lifestyle promotion (Lu & Lu, 2023), and the gifting economy that links brands to influencers through public relations practices (Aysel & Ersöz, 2024). Parallel streams of research examine how children and Generation Z consumers are socialized into consumer culture through digital marketing and branded content reflecting concerns about the commercialization of childhood and youth identity in digital spaces.

As this literature expands across disciplines and geographic contexts, it becomes increasingly difficult for researchers to maintain a structured understanding of the field's intellectual trajectory and emerging directions. This is especially true for research situated in emerging economies, where digital consumption patterns are shaped by distinct cultural, religious, and economic conditions, as reflected in studies from China (Xu, 2022), (Yang & Waverley, 2026), Saudi Arabia (Abu-bakar, 2024), Brazil (Polivanov & Carrera, 2022), Ecuador (Cordova Duran, 2023) and Indonesia (Salim et al., 2025). Without a systematic overview, scholars risk duplicating prior efforts or overlooking significant thematic gaps in this fast-moving field.

Bibliometric analysis offers a robust quantitative framework for examining the intellectual evolution of a research field by analyzing patterns in publication volume, citation structures, and keyword co-occurrence (Caputo et al., 2018). Applied to social media influencers and consumer culture, bibliometric techniques can reveal how the field has evolved conceptually, which platforms and themes have gained prominence, and how the intersection with sustainability, authenticity, and emerging-economy contexts is reshaping scholarly priorities.

Despite the breadth of existing literature, comprehensive bibliometric investigations that map the global intellectual structure of influencer driven consumer culture research, with explicit attention to emerging economies, remain limited. The present study addresses this gap by conducting a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications on social media influencers and consumer culture. VOSviewer is employed to generate network, overlay, and density visualizations that together provide a multi dimensional view of the field's intellectual structure, its temporal evolution, and its most influential publications.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a bibliometric methodology to systematically examine the global research landscape of social media influencers and consumer culture. Bibliometric analysis is a well-established quantitative approach that enables researchers to evaluate the scientific output and intellectual structure of a research field through patterns in publication volume, citation relationships, and keyword co-occurrence networks. This approach allows for the systematic mapping of a large and diverse body of literature in an objective and reproducible manner, avoiding the subjectivity inherent in traditional narrative reviews. The

methodological design comprises three stages: data collection, data preparation, and bibliometric visualization and analysis.

Data were sourced from the Scopus database, selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature across business, communication, sociology, and cultural studies disciplines. The search was structured using keyword queries centered on social media influencers, consumer culture, and digital consumption, together with related conceptual derivatives such as influencer marketing, Instagram, authenticity, and sustainability. The export was retrieved on 29 June 2026 and yielded a cleaned dataset of 49 Scopus-indexed documents spanning publication years 2013 to 2026, comprising journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings.

Following data extraction, the dataset underwent a systematic cleaning process. Records with incomplete bibliographic information for co-occurrence analysis were removed, and the dataset was exported in RIS format for analysis. Bibliometric analyses were conducted using VOSviewer, a software application specifically designed for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks. The study employed keyword co-occurrence analysis as the primary analytical technique, with a minimum co-occurrence threshold applied to retain only meaningful associations. The resulting network was examined across three visualization modes: the network map, illustrating thematic clustering; the overlay map, depicting the temporal evolution of research themes based on average publication year; and the density map, representing the relative concentration of research activity around each keyword node.

Citation analysis was also conducted to identify the most influential publications within the dataset, ranked by total citation count as reported in Scopus as of 29 June 2026. This analysis supplements the visualization findings by highlighting the specific scholarly contributions that have most significantly shaped the intellectual development of research on social media influencers and consumer culture.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

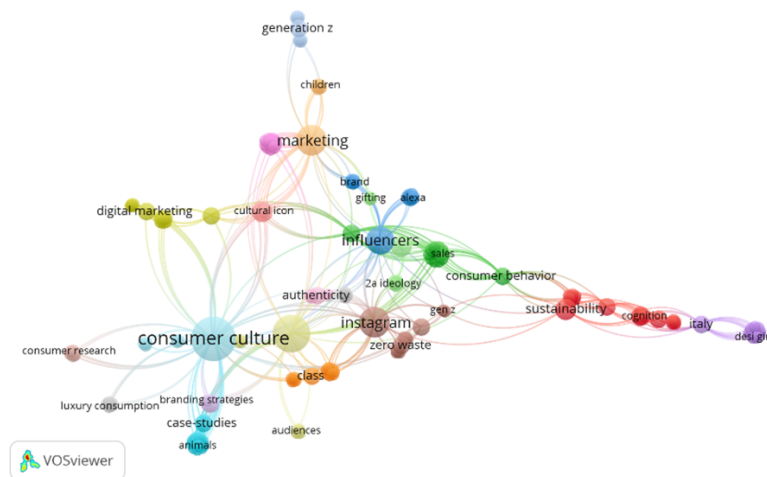


Figure 1. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 presents the keyword co-occurrence network generated from the bibliometric analysis of social media influencers and consumer culture research. The network displays an interconnected knowledge structure organized into several distinct thematic clusters, each differentiated by color. Node size reflects keyword occurrence frequency, while edge thickness represents the strength of co-occurrence relationships between keyword pairs. The visualization reveals a field with a clearly defined conceptual core surrounded

by multiple thematic domains, reflecting the multidisciplinary reach of influencer and consumption research.

At the center of the network, consumer culture and instagram occupy the most prominent positions, functioning as the primary conceptual anchors around which other themes are organized. The cyan cluster encompassing consumer culture, consumer research, luxury consumption, branding strategies, case-studies, and animals represents the cultural and symbolic dimension of consumption, capturing research on how brands, luxury goods, and even animal protagonists are mobilized as cultural symbols within consumer society (Cashmore, 2023), (Wieczorkiewicz & Siedlecka, 2026). The pink orange cluster comprising marketing, children, and generation z reflects a substantial research stream on the socialization of young consumers into digital marketing and brand culture (Chan et al., 2013), (Hains & Jennings, 2021).

The blue cluster, encompassing influencers, brand, gifting, and alexa, indicates a robust research stream examining the commercial mechanics of influencer marketing, including brand-influencer gifting relationships and voice-activated smart devices as objects of digital consumption (Neville, 2020), (Chi et al., 2026). The green cluster linking sales and consumer behavior to consumer culture reflects research connecting influencer activity directly to purchase outcomes (Salim et al., 2025). The brown-khaki cluster grouping instagram, authenticity, class, audiences, and 2a ideology captures the platform-specific and identity-based dimension of influencer culture, reflecting ongoing scholarly attention to how authenticity is performed and negotiated on Instagram (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Finally, the red-purple cluster comprising sustainability, zero waste, cognition, italy, and desi girls represents a newer research stream connecting influencer practice to sustainable consumption and culturally specific audience segments (Lu & Lu, 2023), (Boechat & Paço, 2026), (Ramjaun, 2021).

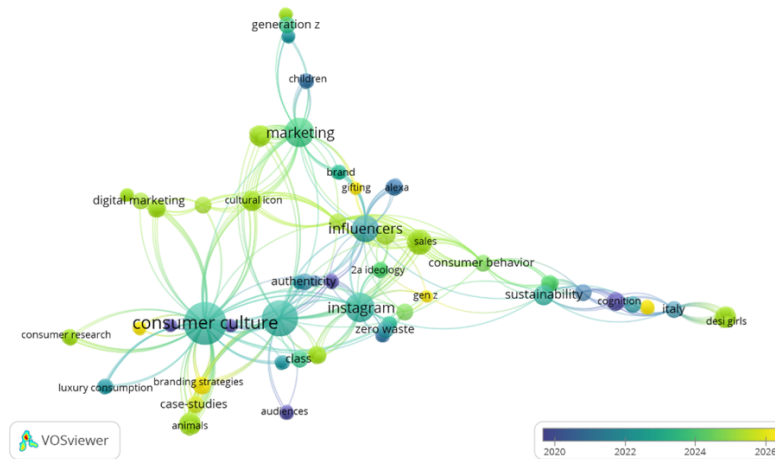


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 presents the overlay visualization of the keyword co-occurrence network, where node color reflects the average publication year of articles associated with each keyword. Darker blue-purple tones indicate keywords predominantly active in earlier years of the study period (around 2020 and before), while greener and yellow tones signal more recently active research themes (2024–2026). This temporal mapping reveals how scholarly attention has shifted over the course of the study period.

Keywords rendered in darker blue-purple tones, including audiences, class, and 2a ideology, reflect earlier research areas associated with foundational studies on celebrity culture, class-based consumption, and audience reception (Cashmore, 2023). In contrast, keywords displayed in lighter green and yellow tones, including sustainability, zero waste, digital marketing, branding strategies, and gifting, signal more recently

active research themes. This pattern indicates that research connecting influencer culture with sustainable and ethical consumption has experienced significant growth in the most recent years of the study period (Boechat & Paço, 2026), (Abu-bakar, 2024). The overlay visualization confirms that influencer and consumer-culture research is undergoing a meaningful thematic shift, with sustainability-oriented and brand-relationship perspectives gaining prominence alongside the field's established cultural and celebrity-focused foundations.

The transitional, mid-spectrum (teal-green) nodes occupying the center of the overlay map, including marketing, influencers, instagram, and consumer behavior, indicate that the field's core constructs have remained continuously active across the entire study period rather than belonging to a single temporal phase. This persistence suggests that while peripheral themes have shifted markedly toward sustainability and ethical consumption, the foundational vocabulary linking influencers, platforms, and consumer behavior continues to be reproduced and reinterpreted by newer studies (Drenten et al., 2023), (Guido et al., 2026). The simultaneous presence of long-standing core themes and rapidly emerging peripheral themes indicates a maturing field that is consolidating its theoretical foundations while actively incorporating new social and cultural concerns, including generational identity and culturally situated consumption in emerging-economy contexts (Yang & Waverley, 2026).



Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 presents the density visualization of the keyword co-occurrence network, in which bright yellow regions indicate high co-occurrence concentration and research intensity, while green and blue areas reflect progressively lower research density. The highest density regions are concentrated around consumer culture, instagram, and influencers, confirming their status as the dominant organizing constructs of the field and the strong interconnectedness between digital platforms, influencer practice, and consumption culture (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021), (Hund & McGuigan, 2019).

Moderate density areas surround marketing, sustainability, authenticity, and consumer behavior, representing well-developed but secondary research areas that attract substantial scholarly attention without reaching the concentration levels of the innermost core (Guido et al., 2026). The peripheral regions of the density map, encompassing terms such as digital marketing, cultural icon, cognition, italy, and desi girls, suggest that while these areas are active, they represent frontier zones with significant potential for further scholarly development, particularly regarding culturally specific and emerging economy consumption contexts (Mora, 2024).

The relatively isolated, low-density nodes such as gen z, zero waste, and 2a ideology indicate niche but conceptually important sub-themes that have not yet been fully integrated into the field's dominant research clusters. Their separation from the high-density core suggests that connections between influencer-driven consumption and emerging concerns such as generational identity, waste reduction, and ideological framing remain underexplored relative to more established themes (Ramjaun, 2021). This pattern points to a promising avenue for future research, as strengthening the linkage between these peripheral constructs and the field's central themes of consumer culture, instagram, and influencers could generate more integrated theoretical models of how digital consumption is shaped by both platform dynamics and broader sociocultural values (Drenten et al., 2023).

Citation Analysis

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title	Publication
127	(Arriagada & Bishop, 2021)	Between commerciality and authenticity: the imaginary of social media influencers in the platform economy	Communication, Culture and Critique
74	(Hund & McGuigan, 2019)	A shoppable life: performance, selfhood, and influence in the social media storefront	Communication, Culture and Critique
45	(Caputo et al., 2018)	The influence of cognitive dimensions on the consumer-SME relationship: a sustainability-oriented view	Sustainability (Switzerland)
35	(Jorge et al., 2018)	I am not being sponsored to say this': a teen youtuber and her audience negotiate branded content	Observatorio
29	(Lu & Lu, 2023)	Performing zero waste: lifestyle movement, consumer culture, and promotion strategies of social media influencers	Environmental Sociology
25	(Drenten et al., 2023)	Curating a consumption ideology: platformization and gun influencers on Instagram	Marketing Theory
16	(Neville, 2020)	The domestication of privacy-invasive technology on YouTube: unboxing the Amazon Echo with the online warm expert	Convergence
15	(Hains & Jennings, 2021)	The marketing of children's toys: critical perspectives on children's consumer culture	Book (Palgrave)
14	(Miyake, 2024)	Virtual influencers: identity and digitality in the age of multiple realities	Book (Routledge)
13	(Ramjaun, 2021)	Exploring the #zerowaste lifestyle trend on Instagram	Critical Studies on CSR, Governance and Sustainability

Source: Scopus, 2026

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer a comprehensive portrait of the global intellectual landscape surrounding social media influencers and consumer culture. Taken together, the network, overlay, and density visualizations reveal a field that is theoretically anchored in the tension between commerciality and authenticity established by (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021) and (Hund & McGuigan, 2019) while simultaneously diversifying into platform-specific, generational, and sustainability-oriented research streams. The consistent prominence of consumer culture, instagram, and influencers across all three visualization modes confirms that the field's core architecture remains centered on the platform-mediated performance of consumption identity.

A particularly significant finding concerns the growing scholarly attention devoted to sustainability and zero-waste consumption as themes connected to influencer practice. The overlay visualization demonstrates that these constructs are among the most recently active in the dataset, signaling a meaningful shift in how scholars conceptualize the social responsibility dimension of influencer marketing (Lu & Lu, 2023). This trend suggests that researchers are increasingly moving beyond examining whether influencers drive purchase behavior toward examining how influencer-mediated consumption intersects with ethical and environmental concerns, particularly in emerging-economy contexts such as Saudi Arabia (Abu-bakar, 2024) Brazil (Polivanov & Carrera, 2022).

The density visualization further reinforces these observations by confirming that while the conceptual core of the field remains tightly organized around consumer culture, instagram, and influencers, emerging thematic zones including digital marketing, gifting, and culturally specific consumption (Italy, China, desi girls) are gaining scholarly momentum. This reflects the field's increasing engagement with geographically and culturally situated consumption practices beyond Western markets.

The citation analysis adds an important dimension by identifying the specific contributions that have most significantly shaped the field's intellectual trajectory. The dominance of (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021) and (Hund & McGuigan, 2019) in citation counts reflects continued reliance on theorizations of platform-mediated authenticity and selfhood. The appearance of (Caputo et al., 2018) and (Jorge et al., 2018) among the top cited works underscores the field's expansion from sustainability-oriented consumer relationships to youth audience negotiation of branded content. The cross-disciplinary reach of the field is also evident, with contributions from environmental sociology (Lu & Lu, 2023), communication studies (Chan et al., 2013) and marketing (Salim et al., 2025) appearing together, confirming that influencer and consumer-culture research has established a broad and diverse scholarly footprint.

Theoretically, the findings suggest that this research field stands at an important juncture. The convergence of established authenticity and platform-economy frameworks with sustainability, generational, and emerging-economy perspectives creates significant opportunities for theoretical enrichment. At the same time, this convergence raises important questions about the conceptual boundaries of influencer-driven consumer culture, particularly as virtual influencers, gifting economies, and culturally specific platform ecosystems increasingly mediate digital consumption (Chi et al., 2026). Addressing these questions represents a timely agenda for future research, especially in under-represented emerging-economy contexts.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that research on social media influencers and consumer culture has developed into an active and increasingly diversified field within global marketing and communication studies. Based on the bibliometric analysis of 49 Scopus-indexed publications from 2013 to 2026, the findings show that the literature is strongly centered on the relationship between consumer culture, instagram, influencers, marketing, and authenticity. The keyword co-occurrence analysis confirms that consumer culture functions

as the main intellectual anchor of the field, while related concepts such as influencers, instagram, and marketing form the core theoretical foundation of the research landscape.

The results also indicate that the field has expanded beyond its original focus on celebrity and brand-driven consumption. Recent studies increasingly connect influencer practice with sustainability, zero waste lifestyles, generation Z socialization, and emerging-economy consumption contexts. This shift demonstrates that current scholarship is no longer limited to examining whether influencers shape consumer behavior, but increasingly investigates how digital consumption is culturally and ethically situated across different markets.

The citation analysis further confirms the strong influence of foundational works by Arriagada and Bishop and Hund and McGuigan on platform-mediated authenticity, alongside the growing influence of sustainability-oriented and youth-focused studies. Overall, this study provides a systematic map of the intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging directions in research on social media influencers and consumer culture. Future studies should give greater attention to the role of virtual influencers, gifting economies, and culturally specific digital consumption patterns in emerging economies to provide a more nuanced understanding of how influencer-driven consumer culture develops across diverse national contexts.

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