

## The evolution of social media marketing: A comprehensive systematic review of current trends, challenges, and future insights

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**Abstract:** This study systematically reviews the evolving landscape of social media marketing (SMM), focusing on key trends, challenges, and opportunities, drawing insights from 23 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The research follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, utilizing bibliometric analysis and data visualization tools like RStudio, VOSviewer, Python, and Microsoft Excel to analyze the data. The review identifies the dominant role of influencer marketing, user engagement, and the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics, in shaping modern marketing strategies. It highlights the significance of platform-specific strategy, particularly on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, where influencer credibility and parasocial relationships have become crucial drivers of consumer behavior and brand loyalty. The study also uncovers the impact of live shopping, augmented reality (AR), and immersive content on enhancing consumer engagement and influencing purchase intentions. Despite the progress, significant challenges remain, including measurement issues, the rapid evolution of platforms, and the complexity of defining engagement across platforms. The review suggests integrating AI-based tools and cross-platform studies to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of authenticity, transparency, and personalized content to build long-term relationships with consumers. The findings offer practical strategies for marketers and researchers, urging a shift towards more personalized, data-driven, and emotionally resonant content strategies to navigate the dynamic digital marketing landscape.

**Keywords:** digital marketing; social media marketing; user engagement; consumer behavior; platform-specific strategies

### 1. Introduction

Social media has radically transformed marketing strategies, driving profound changes across various domains, including politics, business, and consumer behavior ([Cham et al., 2022](#); [Nalbant & Aydin, 2023](#); [Wan & Li, 2024](#)). Social media marketing (SMM) has become essential for brands and political entities, creating unprecedented engagement opportunities, branding, and customer interaction ([Kumar & Sharma, 2024](#); [Tan et al., 2023](#)). As a result, social media platforms have become a primary avenue for companies to market their products and engage with their audiences. The rapid evolution of social media and its increasing role in business and politics have prompted significant academic interest, particularly in understanding how brands can effectively leverage social media to enhance their marketing efforts and maintain relevance in an ever-changing digital landscape ([Li et al., 2023](#); [Singha, 2024](#)).

The role of social media in marketing is especially evident in recent global trends, such as its substantial impact on political campaigns. For example, during the 2020 US presidential election, over \$1.6 billion was spent on digital marketing, reflecting the growing importance of social media as a platform for political engagement ([Appel et al., 2020](#)). Similarly, brands across industries have increasingly shifted their marketing strategies to focus on digital platforms, incorporating influencer marketing, customer engagement, and content co-creation to foster brand loyalty and drive consumer purchasing behavior ([Bu et al., 2022](#); [Sohaib & Han, 2023](#); [Valmohammadi et al., 2024](#)). These shifts reflect a broader trend in which both public and private entities view social media as a communication tool and an essential driver of engagement, perception, and growth ([Cvetković et al., 2025](#); [Elayah, 2025](#); [Kuai, 2025](#)).

However, despite the growing body of research on social media marketing, there remains a lack of comprehensive frameworks that synthesize the current trends and identify the most pertinent insights ([Ali et al., 2023](#); [Vrontis et al., 2021](#); [Zachlod et al., 2022](#)). While some studies have examined the impact of social media on business marketing, these efforts are fragmented and often fail to offer a holistic understanding of how social media is shaping marketing practices across different sectors ([Diaz Ruiz, 2023](#); [Pascucci et al., 2023](#); [Vargo et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, with the constantly evolving nature of social media platforms and marketing technologies, existing literature often struggles to keep pace with new trends such as algorithmic changes, the rise of new platforms ([Kozinets, 2022](#)), and the increasingly important role of data privacy concerns in shaping consumer behavior ([Quach et al., 2022](#)). These gaps highlight the need for a systematic review of the current state of social media marketing, exploring the trends, challenges, and opportunities that lie ahead for both scholars and practitioners.

In order to respond to these limitations, this study conducts a systematic literature review to consolidate the current trends, challenges, and future insights in social media marketing. It seeks to provide a comprehensive synthesis of how social media marketing has evolved over the last 5 years, identify dominant themes and constructs, and uncover both persistent challenges and emerging opportunities. This review will map the existing scholarly terrain and lay the groundwork for a more unified and future-ready research agenda. Additionally, this study contributes to theoretical development by proposing an integrative framework that connects widely studied variables within social media marketing. This framework is designed to help scholars better conceptualize the interrelationships among content strategies, user engagement, technological affordances, and consumer behavior. For practitioners, the review offers actionable insights for navigating a constantly shifting landscape, especially as emerging technologies like AI and data analytics become increasingly embedded in marketing practice. To guide this inquiry, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1. What are the key trends and emerging themes in social media marketing, particularly regarding platform-specific strategies, influencer marketing, and new technologies?
- RQ2. What methodologies have been used in social media marketing research, and how can traditional and emerging methods be integrated for future studies?
- RQ3. What are the primary challenges and opportunities in understanding the key variables and constructs explored in social media marketing research?
- RQ4. What are the broader implications of the evolving social media marketing landscape for future academic inquiry and real-world marketing applications?

By addressing these research questions and gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of social media marketing, equipping researchers and practitioners with the insights they need to navigate the rapidly changing digital marketing landscape.

## 2. Methods

This study adopts a dual-method approach, combining a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with bibliometric analysis to comprehensively address the research objectives and answer the proposed research questions. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021), this integrated methodology ensures methodological transparency, replicability, and rigor throughout all phases of the review process, including the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies.

### 2.1 Data sources and search strategy

The primary data source for this review was the Scopus database, selected for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in marketing, communication, and digital business research. A comprehensive search was conducted on June 20, 2025, targeting publications from 2020 to 2025. The search strategy used Boolean operators and targeted the article title, abstract, and keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY) fields. Keywords included: "social media marketing", "digital marketing", "online marketing", "social commerce", as well as platform-specific terms such as "Instagram", "Facebook", "TikTok", and "LinkedIn". Additionally, constructs such as "influencer marketing", "content strategy", "user engagement", and "consumer behavior" were included to refine thematic relevance. The complete search syntax and parameters are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Data sources and search strategy

Component	Description
Database	Scopus
Search Period	2020–2025
Search Date	June 20th, 2025
Search Fields	Article Title, Abstract, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY)
Search Keywords	"social media marketing", "digital marketing", "online marketing", "social commerce", "Instagram", "Facebook", "Twitter", "TikTok", "YouTube", "LinkedIn", "influencer marketing", "content strategy", "user engagement", "consumer behavior"
Keyword Combination	(TITLE-ABS-KEY(("social media marketing" OR "digital marketing" OR "online marketing" OR "social commerce")) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(("Instagram" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR "TikTok" OR "YouTube" OR "LinkedIn"))) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(("influencer marketing" OR "content strategy" OR "user engagement" OR "consumer behavior"))
Search Filters	- Publication year: 2020–2025 - Exact keyword filter: "Social Media Marketing", "Social Media", "Marketing", "Facebook", "Digital Marketing", "Instagram", "Twitter", "YouTube", "TikTok", "Internet" - Document type: Article (ar) - Language: English - Source type: Journal (j) - Publication stage: Final

### 2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied (Table 2). Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2020 and

2025 were considered. Studies were included if they reported empirical findings on social media marketing, including strategy, platform usage, user engagement, or content practices ([Cheung et al., 2021](#); [Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021](#)). Conceptual papers, editorials, or articles not focused on digital marketing applications were excluded.

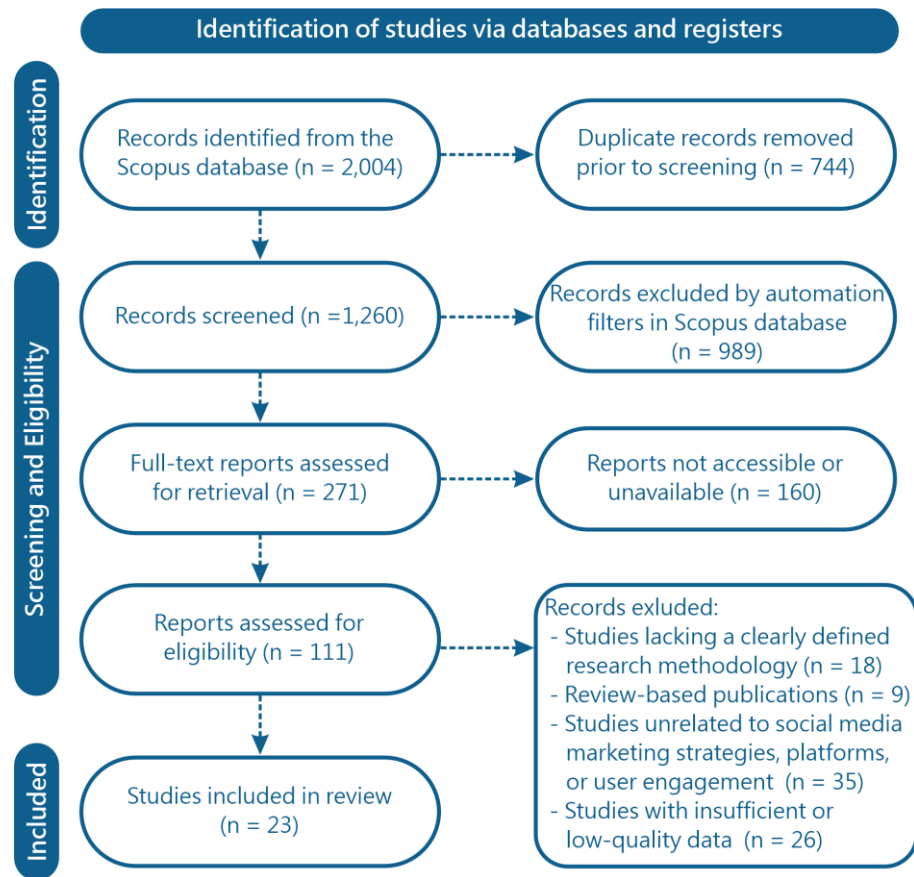
**Table 2.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria type	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Editorials, conference abstracts, book chapters, reviews
Publication Stage	Final published articles	Articles still in press
Timeframe	Published between 2020 and 2025	Published outside this time range
Language	English	Non-English
Research Method	Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods)	Conceptual papers or articles without empirical data
Thematic Scope	Studies related to marketing strategies, digital content, or platform engagement	Studies unrelated to marketing or digital platform usage
Technological Focus	Analysis involving social media or digital tools for marketing purposes	General ICT use is not explicitly related to social media marketing (SMM)
Data Quality	Clearly defined objectives, detailed methodology, and measurable outcomes	Unclear research design, low data quality, or insufficient reporting

### 2.3 PRISMA flow and study selection

The selection process adhered strictly to the PRISMA 2020 protocol and is visually summarized in Figure 1. An initial search of the Scopus database yielded a total of 2,004 records. After removing 744 duplicate entries, 1,260 articles were retained for the initial screening phase. At this stage, 989 records were excluded by Scopus automation filters for various reasons, including language constraints, irrelevant subject areas, and non-journal source types. The remaining 271 full-text articles were subsequently assessed for retrieval; however, 160 were excluded because they were inaccessible or lacked complete archival data. As a result, 111 articles advanced to the eligibility assessment phase.

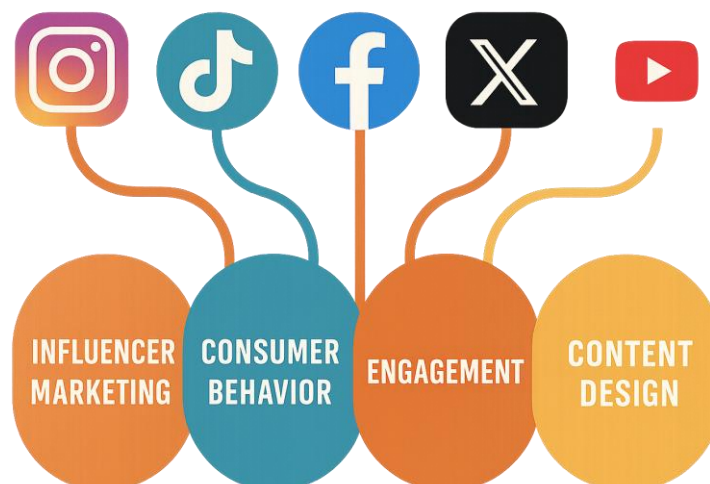
After applying the predefined inclusion criteria, 23 empirical studies were selected for final inclusion in the review. The remaining 82 articles were excluded for reasons such as lack of a clearly defined research methodology ( $n = 18$ ), being review-based rather than empirical ( $n = 9$ ), lacking direct relevance to social media marketing strategies or platforms ( $n = 35$ ), or containing insufficient or low-quality data ( $n = 26$ ). The final 23 studies formed the empirical foundation for the systematic synthesis and the bibliometric analysis.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram of study selection

## 2.4 Mapping key dimensions of social media marketing

This study also constructed a conceptual framework to guide thematic synthesis parallel to the PRISMA-based screening. Figure 2 visualizes the relationships between widely used social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube and other marketing dimensions frequently explored in the literature.



**Figure 2.** Mapping the interplay social media platforms and key marketing dimensions

These dimensions comprise influencer marketing strategies, user engagement patterns, consumer behavior, content creation practices, and platform-specific affordances ([Lou et al., 2023](#); [Wang et al., 2025](#)). Influencer marketing involves strategically using digital personalities to build trust and drive consumer decisions. User engagement patterns include likes, shares, comments, and participatory interactions with branded content ([Zhao et al., 2021](#)). Consumer behavior encompasses shifts in decision-making and brand loyalty shaped by social media experiences. At the same time, content creation practices refer to how marketers tailor, design, and distribute multimedia content across digital channels ([Gârdan et al., 2022](#); [Wang et al., 2025](#)). Lastly, platform-specific affordances highlight the unique technological features of each platform, such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, or TikTok trends that shape how users interact with content. This mapping framework offers a conceptual lens through which to understand how social media technologies, user behaviors, and content strategies interact and co-evolve, while also identifying theoretical gaps and avenues for future investigation ([Dueñas-Ocampo et al., 2023](#); [Saheb et al., 2024](#)).

## 2.5 Analytical procedure

To ensure a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the literature, this study applied a two-stage analytical procedure that combines bibliometric analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis. In the first stage, bibliometric techniques were employed using VOSviewer and Microsoft Excel to generate visual mappings of keyword co-occurrence and source co-citation patterns ([Abdelwahab et al., 2023](#); [Klarin, 2024](#)). This quantitative analysis revealed structural trends within the literature. It helped identify dominant research clusters and key contributors in social media marketing. In the second stage, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to explore core conceptual themes and recurring constructs ([Braun & Clarke, 2022](#); [Naeem et al., 2023](#)). Each of the 23 selected articles was carefully reviewed and coded based on platform-specific marketing strategies, influencer-driven promotional models, user engagement mechanisms, and content personalization approaches. This qualitative synthesis facilitated a deeper interpretation of theoretical advancements and practical implications within the domain ([Al-Kamzari & Alias, 2025](#); [Vedula & Agrawal, 2024](#)). By integrating these two analytical lenses, the study provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of the social media marketing landscape, yielding descriptive insights and strategic guidance for future academic research and industry practice.

## 3. Funding and discussion

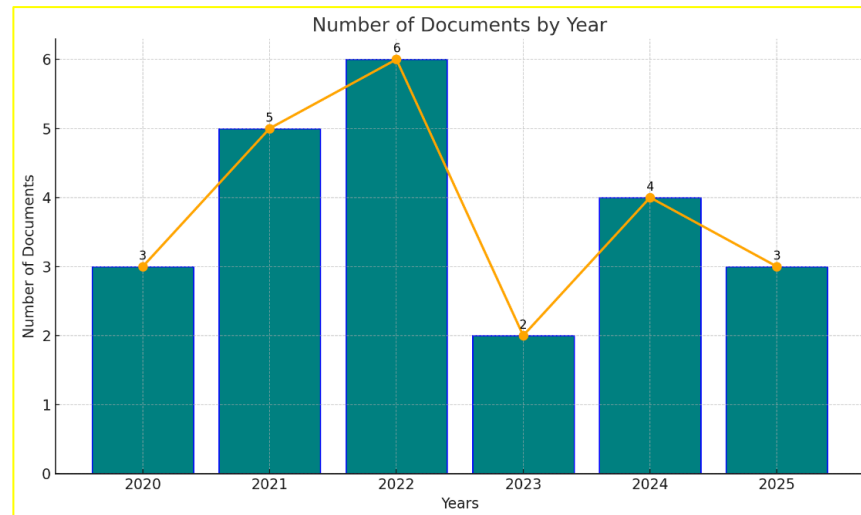
The systematic review yielded a refined dataset of 23 empirical studies selected from an initial pool of 2004 records. These studies, published between 2020 and 2025, span diverse geographical regions and marketing contexts, reflecting the multifaceted evolution of social media marketing (SMM). Integrating PRISMA-based screening and bibliometric analysis has revealed several key patterns and themes in the literature, which are synthesized in response to the proposed research questions.

### 3.1 Trends and themes in social media marketing

*RQ1. What are the key trends and emerging themes in social media marketing, particularly regarding platform-specific strategies, influencer marketing, and new technologies?*

A content analysis of 23 empirical studies reveals that social media marketing (SMM) research predominantly centers on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok, highlighting key themes such as influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, and user engagement.

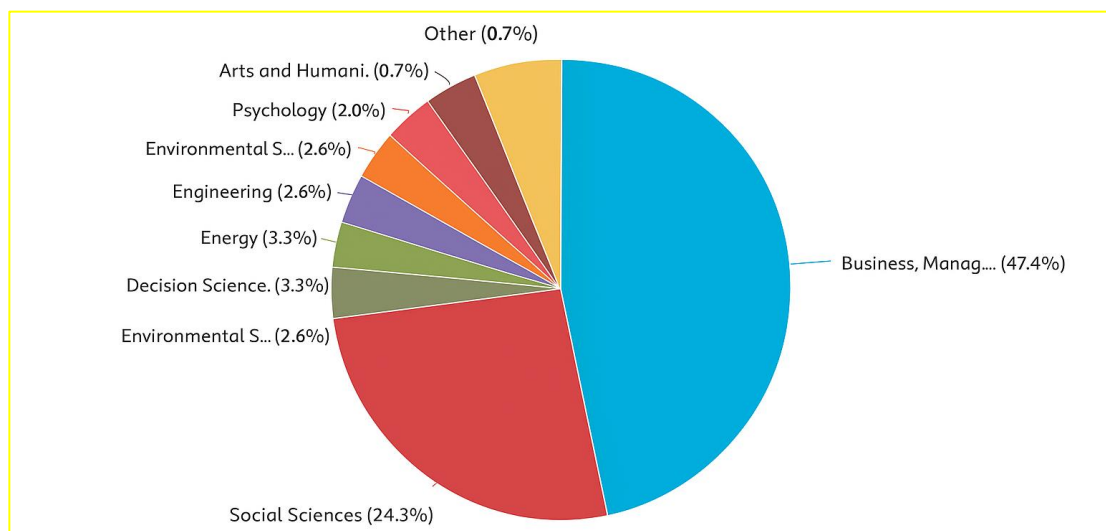




**Figure 3.** Trends in social media marketing research publications (2020-2025)

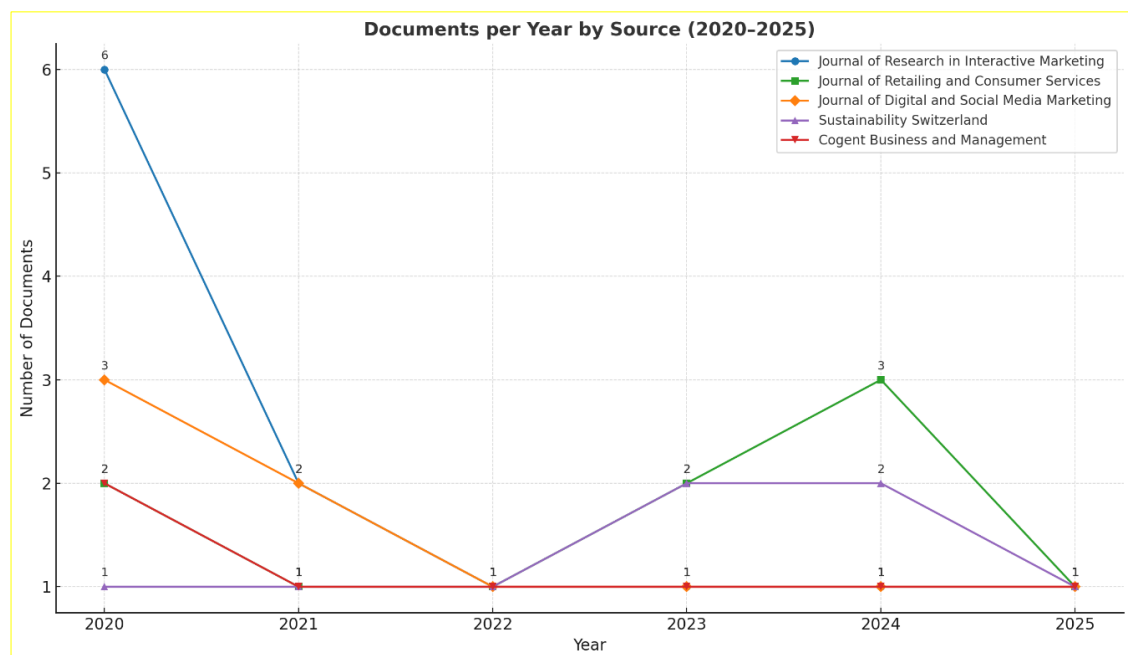
As illustrated in Figure 3, the analysis of the number of documents published in this field from 2020 to 2025 shows a marked increase in research activity, peaking in 2022. The number of publications in 2020 was relatively low, with just three articles, but this number gradually rose to 6 in 2022. In 2023, the publication count dropped to 2, but by 2024, there was a slight rebound, reaching four publications. The data reflects a growing acknowledgment of social media platforms' transformative role in the evolving marketing landscape, particularly influencer marketing, parasocial relationships, and user engagement. This upward trajectory in research publications emphasizes social media's continued importance and rapid development as a key marketing tool in academic inquiry and real-world applications.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of academic articles published between 2020 and 2025 in social media marketing (SMM), categorized by subject area. The chart reveals that the most significant proportion of articles, 47.4%, falls under the Business and Management category, signifying that social media marketing research predominantly focuses on business practices, marketing strategies, and management techniques. This highlights the central role of SMM in shaping contemporary business strategies, particularly in digital marketing and consumer behavior.



**Figure 4.** Subject area distribution of social media marketing research (2020-2025)

Following Business and Management, Social Sciences contribute 24.3% of the articles, underscoring the interdisciplinary nature of SMM research. This indicates that SMM is concerned with business aspects and engages with broader societal issues such as communication, culture, and psychology. Research in this category likely explores how social media influences social structures, individual behavior, and societal norms. Smaller articles are allocated to other subject areas, including Decision Science (3.3%) and Energy (3.3%), reflecting studies examining the influence of social media trends on decision-making processes and the energy sector. Engineering, Environmental Sciences, and Psychology contribute around 2.6% to 2.0%, highlighting more niche applications of SMM in these fields. For instance, Engineering could address the development of social media technologies. At the same time, Environmental Sciences may explore how social media platforms are used to raise awareness about environmental issues. The Arts and Humanities (0.7%) and Other (0.7%) categories represent the smallest portions of research in this period, suggesting that social media marketing's direct impact on creative fields and general topics is relatively minimal compared to its dominant focus on business, social sciences, and applied sciences.



**Figure 5.** Subject documents per year by source in social media marketing research

Figure 5 illustrates the number of documents published per year by source from 2020 to 2025. The sources tracked include the Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing, Sustainability Switzerland, and Cogent Business and Management. The Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing (blue line) began with six publications in 2020 but saw a steady decline in subsequent years, reaching only one publication by 2025. The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (green line), which started with three publications in 2020, experienced a decline until 2022 but saw a resurgence, ending with three publications in 2025. The Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing (orange line) had three publications in 2020 and 2021, after which its activity decreased significantly, with only one publication recorded in 2025. Sustainability Switzerland (purple line) had a single publication in 2020 and 2021, maintaining a steady output of 1 publication each year through to 2025. Lastly, Cogent Business and Management (red line) remained stable, with one publication each year starting in 2020 and continuing through 2025. This chart visualizes the distribution of research outputs in social media marketing, showing significant publication fluctuations across different sources. The data illustrate how different journals have contributed to the scholarly conversation.



Notably, journals like Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services show higher engagement, with the former peaking in 2020 before declining. These findings align with the previous content, emphasizing social media's strategic role in brand communication and consumer engagement.

Table 3 outlines various studies in social media marketing research (focusing on influencer marketing, parasocial relationships, content personalization, and consumer behavior) that have been published in these journals. This points to a growing interest in understanding the nuanced relationship between social media influencers, consumer behavior, and the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies across various platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok.

**Table 3.** Summary of key research on social media marketing

No	Author/Country	Platform/media used	Key research focus/themes
1	( <a href="#">Zhang et al., 2025</a> )/ United States	YouTube, Vlogs, Social Media Marketing	Influencer marketing, parasocial relationships, social media interactions, and influencer credibility
2	( <a href="#">Irawan &amp; Cheng, 2025</a> )/ Indonesia	Owned Social Media (OSM) - Twitter	Customer Brand Advocacy (CBA), Personal Values (self-transcendence, self-enhancement, openness to change, conservation), Social Media Engagement
3	( <a href="#">Luarn et al., 2025</a> )/ Taiwan	Instagram, Social Media Influencers, Fashion Marketing	Source credibility, Parasocial relationship, Advertising attitude, Self-brand connection, Marketing effectiveness
4	( <a href="#">Gu et al., 2024</a> )/ China	Influencer Marketing, Social Commerce, Livestreaming	Influence of influencer strategies (big vs small influencers) on product sales
5	( <a href="#">Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024</a> ) / Spain and Serbia	TikTok	Influencer credibility, trust, purchase intention, and recommendation behavior
6	( <a href="#">Park et al., 2024</a> )/ South Korea and Canada	Influencer Marketing, YouTube	Influencer Recommendation, Graph Neural Networks (GNN), Link Prediction, Sentiment Analysis
7	( <a href="#">Poureisa et al., 2024</a> )/ Malaysia and United Arab Emirates	Instagram Commerce	Social commerce, influencer marketing, purchase intention, social commerce trust, organic food industry
8	( <a href="#">Myers et al., 2023</a> )/ United States	Social Media Platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	Religious Influencers, Social Media Engagement, Religious Cues, Promotional Cues
9	( <a href="#">Ingrassia et al., 2022</a> )/ Italy	Instagram, Influencer Marketing	Influencer Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Tourism, Food Promotion
10	( <a href="#">Saffanah et al., 2023</a> )/ Indonesia	Instagram Shopping	Social media marketing, live shopping, user engagement, and information technology affordance

No	Author/Country	Platform/media used	Key research focus/themes
11	( <a href="#">Molina-Prados et al., 2022</a> )/ Spain	Instagram (Fashion Industry)	Consumer-brand engagement (CBE), Self-brand connection (SBC), Social commerce, Fashion consumer behavior on social media platforms
12	( <a href="#">Silaban et al., 2022</a> )/ Indonesia	YouTube, Social Media Marketing	Parasocial Interaction, Hedonic and Utilitarian Responses, Purchase Intention
13	( <a href="#">Gkikas et al., 2022</a> )/ Greece	Facebook Analytics (Fashion Industry)	Text readability, post length, hashtags, user engagement, and brand awareness
14	( <a href="#">Muda &amp; Hamzah, 2021</a> )/ Malaysia	YouTube, User-Generated Content (UGC)	Source credibility, eWOM, purchase intention, source homophily, social identity theory
15	( <a href="#">Boerman &amp; Müller, 2022</a> )/ Netherlands	Instagram Influencer Marketing	Influencer marketing, persuasion knowledge, disclosures, and brand presence
16	( <a href="#">Rohde &amp; Mau, 2021</a> )/ United Kingdom and Germany	YouTube, Influencer Marketing	Social influence heuristics (reciprocity, social proof, consistency, scarcity, liking, authority, unity) in influencer marketing on YouTube
17	( <a href="#">Cuevas et al., 2021</a> )/ United States	Instagram	Social search, flow experience, content quality, system quality, mental simulation, task ease, purchase intention
18	( <a href="#">Harrigan et al., 2021</a> )/ Australia	Social Media (Twitter)	Influencer marketing, Market mavens, Social media analytics, Big data
19	( <a href="#">Dobre et al., 2021</a> )/ Romania	Social Media Marketing in Luxury Brands	Perceived value of social media in luxury marketing, compatibility between luxury brands and social media, Generation Y and Z behaviors
20	( <a href="#">Mahmoud et al., 2022</a> )/ Sub-Saharan Africa (Uganda and Nigeria)	Instagram, Fashion Brands, Social Media Marketing	COVID-19 impact, Tech-native vs non-native generations, User engagement, Instagram branding
21	( <a href="#">Jin &amp; Ryu, 2020</a> )/ United States and South Korea	Instagram celebrity-based influencer marketing	Parasocial interaction, envy, social comparison, materialism, compulsive buying, brand trust, buying intention
22	( <a href="#">Lim &amp; Childs, 2020</a> )/ United States	Instagram	Visual storytelling, photo narrative, telepresence, self-brand connection
23	( <a href="#">Corrêa et al., 2020</a> )/ Brazil	YouTube, Social Media Marketing	Influence of YouTubers on followers' brand use intention, Engagement, Trust, Self-connection, Brand love

Analysis of Table 3 reveals several key trends in social media marketing (SMM) research between 2020 and 2025. First and foremost, influencer marketing remains the dominant theme, as evidenced by the numerous studies ([Boerman & Müller, 2022](#); [Jin & Ryu, 2020](#); [Zhang et al., 2025](#)) examining influencers' credibility and trustworthiness. These studies underscore the significance of parasocial relationships, where influencers create strong emotional connections with their audiences. This connection is a powerful driver of consumer behavior, influencing purchase intention and fostering brand loyalty. Second, Instagram is the most frequently studied platform,

followed by YouTube and TikTok, each offering unique opportunities for marketers. Instagram is strongly associated with visual storytelling and fashion marketing, particularly through celebrity-based influence, as seen in studies by ([Ingrassia et al., 2022](#); [Luarn et al., 2025](#)). In contrast, YouTube is explored more for its role in user-generated content (UGC), vlogging culture, and engagement-driven marketing strategies ([Muda & Hamzah, 2021](#); [Silaban et al., 2022](#)). TikTok also emerges as an important platform, particularly for ([Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024](#); [Gu et al., 2024](#)), who highlight its influence on product sales and purchase intention through influencer credibility. Third, the research landscape shows a growing interest in contextual and cultural influences on SMM. For example, studies by ([Mahmoud et al., 2022](#); [Myers et al., 2023](#)) explore the impact of religious cues and generational differences on social media engagement and branding, particularly in the context of Instagram and fashion brands. Similarly, ([Dobre et al., 2021](#); [Molina-Prados et al., 2022](#)) investigate luxury branding and fashion consumer behavior across different regions, pointing to the global nature of social media marketing.

Additionally, technological tools and analytics are becoming increasingly important in SMM research. For instance, a study by ([Park et al., 2024](#)) employed Graph Neural Networks (GNN) and sentiment analysis to refine influencer recommendation systems, signaling a shift towards AI-driven marketing intelligence. Similarly, ([Gkikas et al., 2022](#); [Harrigan et al., 2021](#)) emphasize using big data and analytics to optimize content effectiveness and audience targeting, demonstrating the growing reliance on data-driven insights in social media marketing. Finally, emerging practices like live shopping and emotional engagement through visual content are becoming significant. According to ([Saffanah et al., 2023](#)) explore how live shopping on platforms like Instagram can boost user engagement and drive sales, while ([Lim & Childs, 2020](#)) discuss how visual storytelling and telepresence enhance self-brand connection and emotional engagement, showing how immersive content is shaping consumer decision-making. These trends illustrate how SMM continues to evolve by incorporating interactive features and leveraging new technologies to influence consumer behavior.

### 3.2 Methods and frameworks in existing research

*RQ2. What methodologies have been used in social media marketing research, and how can traditional and emerging methods be integrated for future studies?*

The research question examines the methodologies and frameworks utilized in existing social media marketing research and how these approaches can be combined into a cohesive framework for future studies. By understanding the range of methodologies used, it is possible to identify key trends and methodologies that can provide a more holistic view of social media marketing, influencer credibility, and consumer behavior.

**Table 4.** Overview of research methodologies and key findings in social media marketing research (2020–2025)

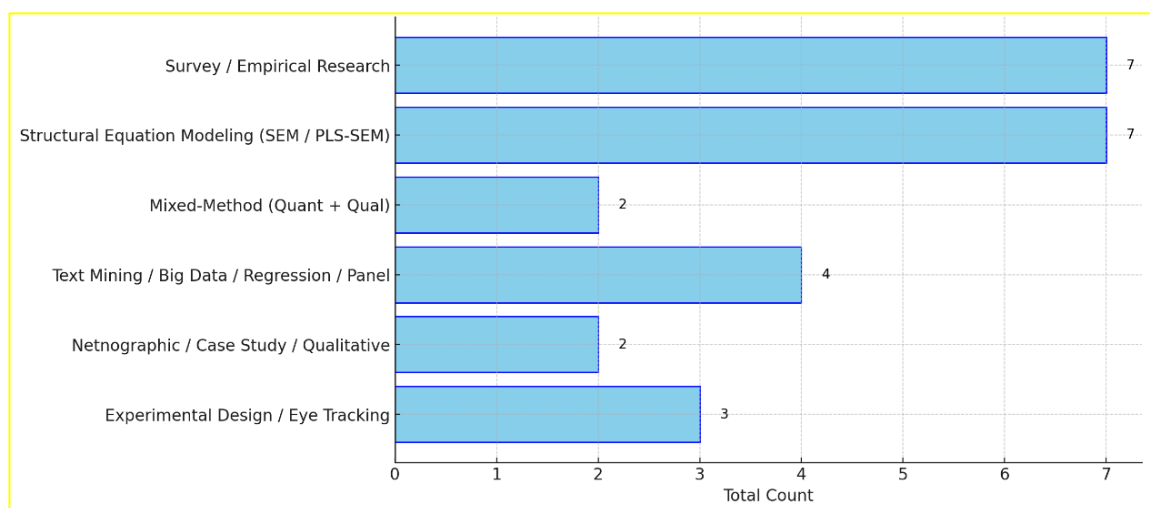
No	Author	Methodology	Key findings
1	( <a href="#">Zhang et al., 2025</a> )	Empirical study (online survey, SEM)	Enjoyment of vlogs strengthens parasocial relationships, increasing perceived influencer credibility and purchase behaviors. Social media interactions mediate the effect.
2	( <a href="#">Irawan &amp; Cheng, 2025</a> )	Text mining, econometric analysis (panel data)	Personal values (self-enhancement, conservation) significantly boost CBA, while

No	Author	Methodology	Key findings
		from Fortune 500 companies)	self-transcendence and openness to change have less impact.
3	( <a href="#">Luarn et al., 2025</a> )	Empirical research, Survey method	High credibility influencers lead to positive attitudes and self-brand connection. Parasocial relationship moderates the effect of influencer credibility on self-brand connection.
4	( <a href="#">Gu et al., 2024</a> )	Data Analysis (Panel Data, Regression)	Big influencers generate more sales, while small influencers drive higher conversion rates. Adverse interaction effect when both types are used together.
5	( <a href="#">Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024</a> )	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Neural Network Model	Credibility, especially perceived expertise, is the most significant determinant of influencer trust on TikTok, influencing loyalty, purchase intention, and product recommendation.
6	( <a href="#">Park et al., 2024</a> )	Data-driven, GNN-IR, Link prediction, Hybrid filtering	Introduces the GNN-IR framework for influencer recommendations. High performance in metrics like Precision@k (96.51%) and Recall@k (41.50%).
7	( <a href="#">Poureisa et al., 2024</a> )	Quantitative (PLS-SEM), Survey	Instagram's social commerce, influencers' endorsements, and social influence positively affect purchase intentions. Trust in social commerce impacts purchasing behavior.
8	( <a href="#">Myers et al., 2023</a> )	Archival Data (Social Media Posts)	Religious cues lead to higher engagement; promotional cues decrease engagement. Hashtags and mentions had mixed effects on engagement.
9	( <a href="#">Ingrassia et al., 2022</a> )	Netnographic analysis, AGIL Model	Explores Chiara Ferragni's Instagram promotion of Italian tourism and food, showing how storytelling boosts engagement and purchase intentions.
10	( <a href="#">Saffanah et al., 2023</a> )	Mixed-method (survey + interviews)	Visibility and metavoicing in live shopping improve immersion and interactivity, leading to buying behaviors. Poor visibility and lack of interaction may limit engagement.
11	( <a href="#">Molina-Prados et al., 2022</a> )	Structural equation modeling (SEM), Online survey	CBE dimensions are influenced by consumer involvement and SBC. Gender moderates the relationship between activation and brand loyalty. SBC positively influences all CBE dimensions.
12	( <a href="#">Silaban et al., 2022</a> )	Quantitative (Survey, Structural Equation Modeling)	Parasocial interaction significantly influences hedonic and utilitarian responses. Hedonic and utilitarian responses affect purchase intention.
13	( <a href="#">Gkikas et al., 2022</a> )	Empirical study (quantitative analysis with	Text readability, post length, and hashtags positively correlate with engagement and brand awareness. Higher readability and hashtags lead to better performance.

No	Author	Methodology	Key findings
		Facebook post data)	
14	( <a href="#">Muda &amp; Hamzah, 2021</a> )	Survey (snowball sampling), PLS-SEM analysis	Source credibility positively affects attitudes toward UGC, eWOM, and purchase intention. Source homophily enhances credibility, boosting purchase intention.
15	( <a href="#">Boerman &amp; Müller, 2022</a> )	Eye tracking study (N=67) and online experiment (N=371)	Instagram users recognize influencer marketing but make mistakes. 'Paid partnership' labels attract the most attention; macro vs nano influencer types impact persuasion knowledge.
16	( <a href="#">Rohde &amp; Mau, 2021</a> )	Qualitative case study, video analysis	Influencer marketing in YouTube long-form videos utilizes all seven social influence heuristics, emphasizing reciprocity, fan rewards, and scarcity for engagement.
17	( <a href="#">Cuevas et al., 2021</a> )	Online survey, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	Visual aesthetics, textual information, and interactivity increase flow experience, leading to higher purchase intention. Mental simulation mediates the process.
18	( <a href="#">Harrigan et al., 2021</a> )	Mixed-method (Self-report survey + big data scraping)	Market mavens have more followers and share more market-related information. Mavens' posts are less readable but use more capital letters and hashtags.
19	( <a href="#">Dobre et al., 2021</a> )	Empirical study using regression, confirmatory factor analysis, and an independent-samples t-test	Social media enhances luxury brands' perceived value for Millennials and Generation Z, boosting engagement and purchase intentions.
20	( <a href="#">Mahmoud et al., 2022</a> )	Empirical, Quantitative (PLS-SEM)	COVID-19 perception positively influences enjoyment, usefulness, and satisfaction, moderating the intention to follow and recommend fashion brands.
21	( <a href="#">Jin &amp; Ryu, 2020</a> )	Three between-subject experiments using factorial designs with Instagram photo and celebrity manipulation	Envy and parasocial interaction with Instagram influencers influence buying intention and brand trust. Gender and photo types moderate these effects.
22	( <a href="#">Lim &amp; Childs, 2020</a> )	Experimental design (between-subjects), two studies	Implied motion enhances transportation and emotional responses, affecting self-brand connection. Telepresence enhances these effects.
23	( <a href="#">Corrêa et al., 2020</a> )	Survey, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	Followers' engagement with YouTubers (cognitive, affective, behavioral) influences their intention to use endorsed brands. Trust, self-connection, and brand love mediate the effect.

Analysis of Table 4 reveals several key trends in the methodologies and findings within the social media marketing (SMM) research landscape between 2020 and 2025. First, empirical studies and surveys dominate the research, focusing significantly on influencer credibility and parasocial relationships. Studies by (Luarn et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025) highlight the role of influencers in driving consumer behavior. In particular, (Zhang et al., 2025) found that enjoyment in vlogs strengthens parasocial relationships, enhancing influencer credibility and encouraging purchase behavior. This highlights the powerful emotional connections that influencers establish with their audience, impacting purchasing decisions. Second, quantitative techniques such as panel data analysis and econometric models are commonly employed. Studies by (Irawan & Cheng, 2025) use econometric models to understand how personal values affect consumer brand attitudes. Their findings show that self-enhancement and conservation values significantly boost consumer brand attitude (CBA), demonstrating the importance of personal values in shaping consumer behavior. Third, structural equation modeling (SEM) is extensively used across studies like (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Molina-Prados et al., 2022). These studies examine the relationship between influencer trust and purchase intention. For example, (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024) emphasize that perceived expertise is the most crucial determinant of influencer trust, particularly on platforms like TikTok, where influencer credibility significantly affects consumer loyalty and purchase intention.

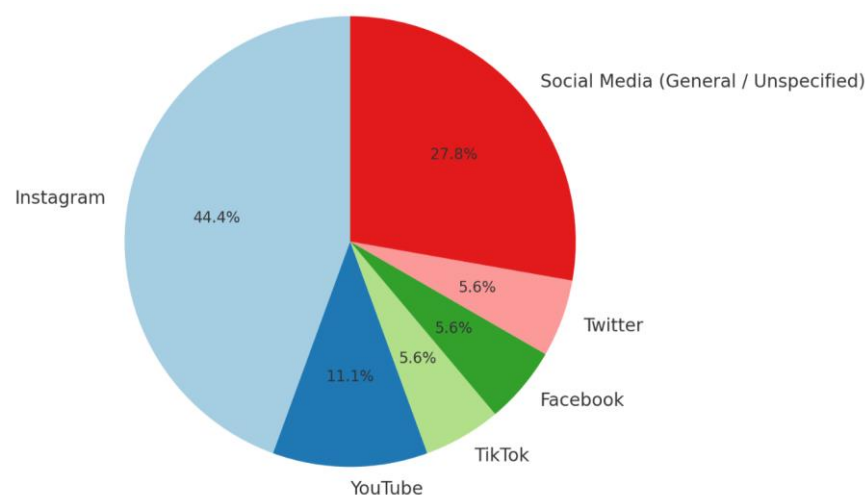
There is growing interest in mixed-method approaches, which combine quantitative surveys with interviews and big data scraping. Studies like (Harrigan et al., 2021; Saffanah et al., 2023) explore how live shopping and market mavens influence consumer engagement and purchasing behavior. A study by (Saffanah et al., 2023) found that visibility and interactivity in live shopping improve user immersion and engagement, leading to higher purchase behaviors. Furthermore, emerging machine learning models are gaining prominence in influencer marketing research. For instance, (Park et al., 2024) introduced the GNN-IR framework, which utilizes graph neural networks (GNN) for influencer recommendations. This framework achieved impressive performance in metrics such as Precision@k (96.51%) and Recall@k (41.50%), indicating the growing role of artificial intelligence in influencer marketing. Finally, netnographic analysis and case studies provide qualitative insights into the cultural and contextual factors affecting social media marketing. Studies like (Ingrassia et al., 2022) explore the impact of storytelling on Instagram, showing how cultural narratives boost engagement and purchase intentions, particularly in influencer promotions.



**Figure 6.** Analysis of methodology distribution in social media marketing research



The bar chart illustrates the frequency distribution of research methodologies employed in social media marketing studies between 2020 and 2025, based on Figure 6. This data reveals several trends in the methodology choices of researchers during this period. The most frequently used methodology is survey/empirical research, employed in 7 studies ([Corrêa et al., 2020](#); [Dobre et al., 2021](#); [Gkikas et al., 2022](#); [Luarn et al., 2025](#); [Mahmoud et al., 2022](#); [Muda & Hamzah, 2021](#); [Zhang et al., 2025](#)). This method provides valuable insights into consumer behavior, influencer credibility, and purchase intentions using large sample sizes. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM/PLS-SEM) also appears in 7 studies, demonstrating its widespread use to test complex models and analyze relationships between variables such as influencer trust and consumer behavior ([Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024](#); [Corrêa et al., 2020](#); [Cuevas et al., 2021](#); [Molina-Prados et al., 2022](#); [Poureisa et al., 2024](#); [Silaban et al., 2022](#); [Zhang et al., 2025](#)). Text Mining, Big Data Analysis, Regression, and Panel Data analysis are used in 4 studies ([Gu et al., 2024](#); [Myers et al., 2023](#); [Park et al., 2024](#); [Zhang et al., 2025](#)), reflecting the growing reliance on large datasets and statistical techniques to analyze trends in social media content and brand awareness. Experimental Design and Eye Tracking methods are utilized in 3 studies ([Boerman & Müller, 2022](#); [Jin & Ryu, 2020](#); [Lim & Childs, 2020](#)), focusing on consumer responses to specific stimuli such as social media ads and providing insights into visual engagement. Additionally, Mixed-Method approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, are applied in 2 studies to capture a more comprehensive understanding of social media dynamics through surveys, interviews, and case studies ([Ingrassia et al., 2022](#); [Rohde & Mau, 2021](#)). Lastly, Netnographic/Case Study/Qualitative methods are used in 2 studies, offering more profound insights into real-life consumer behavior and influencer campaigns through qualitative analysis ([Harrigan et al., 2021](#); [Saffanah et al., 2023](#)). Survey-based research and SEM dominate the field, while newer methodologies like text mining and big data analysis are gaining traction. A comprehensive multi-method approach combining these methodologies will offer a richer and more complete understanding of consumer engagement and behavior on social media.



**Figure 7.** Distribution of social media platform usage

As depicted in Figure 7, the pie chart illustrates the distribution of social media platform usage in a given dataset. Instagram dominates with the largest share, accounting for 44.4%, followed by Social Media (General/Unspecified) at 27.8%, representing platforms not explicitly mentioned. Other social media platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter, contribute 5.6% of the total usage. The chart reflects the significant popularity of Instagram compared to the other platforms, with a relatively small proportion of users engaging with Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube.



**Figure 8.** Keywords in social media marketing research

The word cloud in Figure 8 visually represents the most common social media marketing research keywords. "Social media" and "Influencer marketing" appear as the most prominent terms, highlighting their central role in current studies. Other notable terms include "Marketing," "Instagram," and "Social media marketing," indicating a focus on digital marketing, especially within social platforms. Words like "Twitter," "YouTube," and "Facebook" show the relevance of specific social networks. At the same time, terms such as "Consumer behavior," "User engagement," and "Purchase intention" suggest a focus on the psychological and behavioral aspects of marketing strategies. The presence of terms like "Social commerce," "E-commerce," and "Digital marketing" reflects the growing intersection between online commerce and marketing strategies. The word cloud demonstrates the increasing importance of social media platforms and influencer marketing in driving consumer engagement and behavior.

### 3.3 Key challenges and research opportunities

*RQ3. What are the primary challenges and opportunities in understanding the key variables and constructs explored in social media marketing research?*

Understanding social media marketing research's key variables and constructs presents challenges and opportunities. As social media platforms evolve rapidly, capturing the nuances of consumer behavior and the effectiveness of marketing strategies becomes increasingly complex. A primary challenge is measuring and interpreting intangible constructs such as trust, emotional engagement, brand loyalty, and consumer intentions. These constructs are often intertwined, influenced by platform-specific dynamics, and subject to rapid changes in user behavior and content formats (Boerman & Müller, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Furthermore, distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial content remains blurred, especially as influencers increasingly mix personal content with promotional posts, complicating the measurement of advertising impact (Pan et al., 2024; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2025). Traditional metrics like follower count also fail to capture the quality of interactions between influencers and their audiences, which can vary significantly across demographic groups and platforms (Harrigan et al., 2021; Silaban et al., 2022).

Another challenge lies in measuring the actual impact of influencer marketing, as factors such as influencer credibility, perceived expertise, and platform algorithms influence effectiveness, making it difficult to establish consistent and reliable metrics across platforms (Gu et al., 2024; Park et al., 2024).

2024). The variable definitions of engagement (likes, shares, comments) across platforms add another layer of complexity, as the implications of these behaviors differ depending on the platform and target audience ([Myers et al., 2023](#)).

Opportunities for future research lie in integrating advanced data analytics, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), to analyze large-scale social media data. AI-based sentiment modeling and multimodal data (e.g., text, images, videos) could help overcome issues like data sparsity, subjective self-reporting, and the rapidly changing nature of social media environments, offering more profound insights into how consumer behaviors align with marketing efforts ([Harrigan et al., 2021](#); [Park et al., 2024](#)). Moreover, exploring underexplored dimensions, such as the moderating role of industry types, cross-cultural differences in social media engagement, and the ethical implications of influencer marketing ([Muda & Hamzah, 2021](#); [Poureisa et al., 2024](#)), could lead to significant advances in understanding the dynamics of social media marketing. The rise of augmented reality (AR), live shopping, and other immersive features presents an opportunity to study consumer engagement's interactive and immersive aspects ([Molina-Prados et al., 2022](#); [Saffanah et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, exploring the impact of identity-aligned content, where influencers resonate with followers on a deeper emotional level, could shed light on how these connections foster long-term brand loyalty ([Bhatia et al., 2023](#); [Minina Jeunemaitre et al., 2025](#)). In conclusion, the primary challenges in understanding social media marketing variables stem from the rapid evolution of platforms, the complexity of measuring subjective constructs, and the difficulty in capturing the long-term effects of influencer marketing. However, these challenges open up significant opportunities for refining measurement tools, exploring new theoretical frameworks, and leveraging advanced technologies like AI to better understand and predict consumer behavior in the dynamic world of social media marketing.

### 3.4 Implications for future research and practice

*RQ4. What are the broader implications of the evolving social media marketing landscape for future academic inquiry and real-world marketing applications?*

As explored in the studies reviewed, the evolving landscape of social media marketing presents profound implications for academic research and real-world marketing practices. One of the most significant shifts highlighted by several authors is the growing importance of emotional connection and trust between influencers and consumers, moving beyond traditional brand-driven messaging ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)). This shift signals a necessary change in academic research, requiring a deeper exploration of the psychosocial dynamics and emotional bonds formed with influencers ([Luarn et al., 2025](#)). For practitioners, the emphasis is on leveraging influencers for their reach and value congruence with the target audience. Influencers must be seen as long-term relationship agents rather than just campaign tools ([Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024](#); [Irawan & Cheng, 2025](#)).

Academically, this evolving landscape challenges researchers to expand existing marketing theories by integrating psychological and computational perspectives, explicitly focusing on the alignment between consumer psychology and brand messaging ([Irawan & Cheng, 2025](#)). Future studies must explore how immersive technologies like AR and VR, alongside platform-specific features (e.g., Instagram, TikTok), influence consumer behavior, brand loyalty, and engagement ([Molina-Prados et al., 2022](#); [Saffanah et al., 2023](#)). Additionally, the rise of user-generated content (UGC) and social search should encourage research into how consumer-driven content strategies enhance engagement beyond product promotion ([Cuevas et al., 2021](#)). There is also an opportunity to incorporate cross-platform studies to understand better how platform-specific dynamics influence consumer behavior and brand engagement ([Gkikas et al., 2022](#)).

Practically, marketers are urged to transition from broad content strategies to personalized content that resonates with their audience's emotional and cognitive needs. This includes using micro-influencers and UGC to foster genuine trust and brand loyalty, particularly in niche markets ([Boerman & Müller, 2022](#); [Muda & Hamzah, 2021](#)). Integrating data analytics and social commerce demands that brands adapt rapidly to shifting consumer behaviors and leverage new interaction formats, such as shoppable videos and interactive product demonstrations ([Cuevas et al., 2021](#); [Saffanah et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, cross-platform strategies that tailor content to each platform's specific audience should be integrated to maximize engagement and brand reach ([Gkikas et al., 2022](#)).

As influencer marketing continues to evolve, marketers must prioritize authenticity and credibility, focusing on transparent marketing disclosures to build long-term consumer trust ([Boerman & Müller, 2022](#); [Rohde & Mau, 2021](#)). The increasing importance of inclusive marketing strategies, such as aligning brand messaging with diverse consumer identities, also emerges as a crucial area for research and practice ([Molina-Prados et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, as global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic reshape consumer attitudes, brands must adapt their strategies to be more empathetic and socially responsible in their approach ([Mahmoud et al., 2022](#)). Academics must also address the complexities of cross-platform consumer behavior and social influence, focusing on how different platforms like TikTok and Instagram foster unique engagement levels and consumer behavior patterns ([Gkikas et al., 2022](#); [Ingrassia et al., 2022](#)). Research into self-brand connections and the psychological impact of influencer marketing will help bridge the gap between theory and practical application, enabling brands to tailor more effective strategies ([Corrêa et al., 2020](#); [Mahmoud et al., 2022](#)). In conclusion, the evolving social media marketing landscape requires theoretical innovation and practical agility. Future research must focus on interdisciplinary approaches, merging behavioral science, data science, and marketing to explore the evolving relationships between consumers, brands, and influencers. Marketers, meanwhile, must leverage data-driven, personalized strategies, stay ahead of technological advancements, and emphasize authentic engagement to build deeper, long-lasting connections with their audiences.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive synthesis of social media marketing (SMM) trends, challenges, and opportunities, drawing from 23 empirical studies conducted between 2020 and 2025. It highlights key themes such as influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, user engagement, and the evolving impact of emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and live shopping. A significant finding is the increasing importance of emotional connections between influencers and their audiences, which are pivotal in shaping consumer behavior and driving brand loyalty. Additionally, platform-specific strategies, particularly on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, have become central to marketing strategies, with influencer marketing emerging as the dominant theme.

Despite the substantial growth of research in this field, key challenges persist. The primary difficulties lie in measuring intangible constructs such as trust, engagement, and brand loyalty, which are influenced by rapid changes in social media dynamics. The blurring of lines between commercial and non-commercial content and the lack of reliable metrics for measuring influencer effectiveness are key barriers that must be addressed. However, these challenges provide significant opportunities for future research to refine measurement tools, integrate AI and machine learning technologies, and explore cross-cultural differences in social media engagement.

## 5. Limitations and future insights

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it is based solely on the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant articles published in other reputable journals or sources. Additionally, the analysis focuses on studies published in English between 2020 and 2025, which limits the scope to only those articles that meet these criteria. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data and survey-based methodologies in many studies, which can be prone to bias. Furthermore, the fast-evolving nature of social media platforms and marketing technologies means that the findings may become outdated as new platforms and features emerge. Finally, this study does not address potential ethical concerns, such as the impact of data privacy and the increasing demand for authenticity in influencer marketing, which are becoming more significant in the industry.

Future research should focus on developing more comprehensive frameworks to understand the complex interplay between social media platforms, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior. Research should also incorporate a broader range of social media platforms and technologies, such as live shopping, social commerce, and virtual influencers, to keep pace with rapid changes. Additionally, cross-platform studies that examine how platform-specific dynamics shape user engagement, behavior, and marketing effectiveness will be crucial for refining strategies for brand engagement. Integrating advanced analytics, such as sentiment analysis, big data mining, and machine learning, will help overcome the limitations of traditional metrics and provide deeper insights into consumer behavior. Finally, exploring the ethical implications of influencer marketing, including transparency in advertising and data privacy concerns, will be vital as the industry continues to evolve.

## Author's declaration

### Author contribution

**Muhammad Dimas Prasetya:** Conceptualization, methodology, writing - original draft, writing - review & editing, formal analysis, project administration, investigation, visualization. **Puteri Ananda:** Data validation, validation, writing - review & editing, visualization, resources. **Beby Karina Fawzee Sembiring Ananda:** Conceptualization, methodology, writing - original draft, data curation, supervision. **Fadli:** Data validation, visualization, writing - review & editing, funding acquisition.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no competing interests related to the research or publication of this article.



## Ethical clearance

This research is a systematic review of existing literature, and as such, it does not involve human or animal subjects. Therefore, ethical clearance is not required. All studies included in the review were conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines, as indicated by the original authors of the empirical studies reviewed.

## AI statement

This article is the original work of the authors without using AI tools for writing sentences and/or creating/editing tables and figures in this manuscript.

## Publisher's and Journal's note

Universitas Negeri Padang as the publisher, and the Editor of Jurnal Pendidikan Teknologi Kejuruan state that there is no conflict of interest towards this article publication.

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