Mapping the influence of influencer marketing: a bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – The advent of social media has led to the emergence of influencers and the domain of influencer marketing (IM). Despite being a popular and evolving research domain, it still lacks a comprehensive and systematic bibliometric analysis in the field. This study attempts to fill this critical gap by mapping the influence of IM to understand the intellectual structure and propose a future research agenda for scholars working in the domain.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors have used VOSviewer and Biblioshiny packages for conducting a variety of analyses such as citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, keyword analysis and three-field plot analysis.

Findings – The main findings include identifying six clusters in the domain, i.e. "mechanism of IM," "measuring the impact of IM," "persuasive cues in IM," "likability factors of influencers," "authenticity of influencers" and "understanding followers." Future research guidelines have been proposed in each of the six clusters, followed by research and managerial implications, conclusion and limitations.

Originality/value – This study is probably the first attempt at providing a comprehensive bibliometric analysis in the domain using a combination of VOSviewer and Biblioshiny packages.

Keywords Influencer marketing, Social media influencers, Bibliometric analysis, Bibliographic coupling, VOSviewer, Biblioshiny

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the growing popularity of social media, many brands have changed their marketing communication strategies and are increasingly relying on social media to engage with consumers. Social media has spawned the rise of social media influencers who, as individual content creators, have utilized social media as a megaphone (Mcquarrie *et al.*, 2013) to share their opinions with large audiences in an authentic manner (Morris and Anderson, 2015). For gaining the attention and trust of consumers, brands are using social media influencers whose social media accounts are followed by millions of people. A significant budget is devoted to influencer marketing (IM), with projected worldwide spending of USD 15 bn in 2022 (Waller, 2020). While 55.4% of companies employed IM in 2019, this number was reported as 62.3% for 2020 and is expected to touch 72.5% by 2022 (Williamson, 2021). With greater budget allocation, IM has emerged as an important research domain, with practitioners and researchers devoting time and resources to understand the phenomenon.

Even though IM is a recently emerged domain, the last few years have seen many papers with Scopus reporting more than 90 pieces published in 2020 alone. As the domain grows, there is a need to understand the scattered research in IM and the evolution of this domain. To understand this domain, we have used bibliometric analysis techniques that are considered unbiased and free from researchers' subjectivity (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). The study aims to understand the core knowledge structure of the IM domain. More specifically, we intend to develop the intellectual structure of the domain. With this study, we also identify an objective list of the most influential content, prolific and most cited researchers, their

affiliations and networks among authors and journals, which can foster cooperation among current and prospective researchers in this domain. We also provide future research pathways in this field by providing a detailed set of recommendations for future research. Given the evolving nature of this domain, we think such an endeavor is important and timely. Understanding the budding nature of an emerging field is also not without precedence. Some of the previous bibliometric studies (e.g. Mustak *et al.*, 2020) have been conducted on contemporary topics such as artificial intelligence.

This paper contributes in three important ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, we have not come across any comprehensive bibliometric analysis paper in the domain of IM. Thus, this is the first complete systematic quantitative analysis of the domain. Second, based on the bibliometric analysis, we propose six clusters that provide clear pathways for researchers who want to increase the depth and breadth of research in this domain. Third, we have used *Biblioshiny*, a new software, which–to the best of our knowledge–has not been employed until now for bibliometric analysis studies in marketing.

Theoretical background of influencer marketing

IM started becoming vital with the emergence of social media platforms and user-generated content. While firms and brands were using their own social media channels to create online buzz, they started investing in the content of third-party social media channels to disseminate product information (Zhou and Duan, 2015). Consumers started preferring many of these seemingly independent social media channels and these seem to exert more influence on consumers than firm operated social media channels (Gu *et al.*, 2012). An academic search of the term "influencer marketing" showed that the term was first used in 2008 in a book by Brown and Hyes (2008) with the same name. The first peer-reviewed article in the domain was published in 2011. Freberg *et al.* (2011, p. 90) defined social media influencers as a "new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media applications." The main premise is that a similar message is perceived as more authentic and credible when it is provided by a fellow consumer than an advertiser (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). The influencer, projected as a fellow consumer, used social media channels to spread the news to her followers, very similar to how opinion leaders used mass media to pass on information to the general public (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Researchers have explained the higher impact of third-party social media channels and their user-generated content through different theories. Amongst all the views, para-social interaction (Horton and Wohl, 1956) is the most widely quoted theory.

Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed parasocial interaction in the context of mass media options like radio, television and movies. They contended that the spectator and media characters develop a relationship which is very similar to the one between consumer and those in the primary reference group. While playing the fictional role, the characters use direct address mode and are engaged with others as if conversing personally. Consequently, the spectator assumes that one is meeting the character as if the character is in the circle of one's peers (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

In the context of social media marketing, Kim *et al.* (2015) found that social networking site usage is positively related to the development of a parasocial relationship with celebrities. Unlike mainstream celebrities, influencers are believed to be more easily believable, intimate and easy to relate (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Also, as influencers are easily accessible to their followers and interact with them through the textual and visual narration of their lives, they are said to generate parasocial interactions (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Social network users can create such a parasocial relationship with influencers who are content creators on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram by subscribing to their channels and following their posts published on social media (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). As a result, recent research in IM has employed parasocial interactions to explain the phenomenon of IM.

With the emergence of IM as an exciting area of research, many scholars have focused on understanding the nuances of this topic. Scopus research of systematic review of papers on IM till December 2020 showed that early work in understanding the comprehensive nature of this domain focused on systematic literature reviews (SLRs). This included works by Sundermann and Raabe (2019), De Veirman *et al.* (2019), and Nafi and Ahmed (2019). While Sundermann and Raabe's (2019) work focused on strategic influencer communication, De Veirman *et al.* (2019) focused on the effects of IM on young children under 12 years. Nafi and Ahmed's (2019) paper discusses the ethical use of influencers in the tourism sector. The recent two papers by Hudders *et al.* (2020) and Vrontis *et al.* (2021) also focus on SLR with the former providing insight into the research on the strategic use of social media influencers and later presents an integrative multidimensional framework that considers antecedents, mediators and moderators of social media influencer, as well as contextual factors that translate into consumer behavior. While SLR papers are considered useful when the scope of review is specific and the dataset is small and manageable enough so that its contents can be manually reviewed (Donthu *et al.*, 2021), its use is not recommended when the dataset is large and the scope of review is broad. Since we wanted this research to be comprehensive and not be specific on any particular theme, we decided to use bibliometric analysis as per the recommendations of Donthu *et al.* (2021).

Materials and methods
Data collection
We used Elsevier's Scopus database to obtain the data for the study. Scopus is a highly reputed abstract and citation database that contains significant publications from renowned journals and research scholars (Van Eck and Waltman, 2014). As of January 2020, there are more than 25,000 (over 23,452 peer-reviewed) journals listed on Scopus, with over 77.8 m publications having 1.7 bn citations (Elsevier, 2020). The choice of Scopus over other popular databases was made due to multiple reasons. First, though there are other databases available for conducting bibliometric analysis such as PubMed and Web of Science (WoS) (AlRyalat *et al.*, 2019), PubMed focuses more on life sciences and bio-medicinal research (AlRyalat *et al.*, 2019), as against Scopus and WoS, which offer multidisciplinary coverage. Second, Scopus has wider coverage than WoS as it has over 25,100 journals as against 21,419 listed on WoS. Further, Scopus guarantees access to 1.7 bn citations against 1.6 bn on WoS (Elsevier, 2020; WoS, 2021). This comparison convinced us to go ahead with Scopus for data collection.

The first search query was "TITLE-ABS-KEY (((influencer AND "social media") OR ("IM" AND "social media")))". This resulted in 757 documents. Since we wanted to restrict our search till October 2020 (the data were obtained from Scopus on November 1, 2020), we excluded the year 2021 from our search criteria, which resulted in 745 documents. We then restricted the subject area to "Business & Management," due to which 204 documents remained in the output. As per Ramos-Rodrí gue and Ruíz-Navarro (2004), published articles, articles in the press, and reviews are considered "certified knowledge." Hence, the search was restricted to them in terms of inclusion criteria, which resulted in 172 documents. We then restricted our search query to only journal articles and thus excluded documents such as conference proceedings, theses, book chapters and so on. With this filter, two documents were excluded. Finally, 168 articles remained in our search output after excluding all non-English articles. Citation information, bibliographic information, abstracts and keywords, and references of these 168 articles were downloaded in a comma-separated file (.csv) from Scopus.

Data analysis
We used *Biblioshiny* and *VOSviewer* to conduct a variety of analyses. *VOSviewer* was used to identify the top ten most influential authors, journals, countries and articles. Bibliographic

coupling was also performed using the same tool. Other analyses were performed on *Biblioshiny*. First, keywords analysis was used to obtain the thematic map, treemap, word cloud and trend topic matrix. Then, a three-field plot was also obtained to view the interaction between countries, keywords and journals. Lastly, few additional analyses were performed, which provided us with an annual scientific production graph, average article citations per year, country scientific production map, author impact, source impact and most local cited sources.

Results and discussion

Descriptive details of publications

The first output pertained to the annual scientific production of 168 documents in the domain of "IM." Research in the domain emerged in 2011 (with four documents), gained momentum post-2016, and is now witnessing massive growth with 41 documents published in 2019 and 77 documents published by October 2020 with an annual growth rate of 38.9% [1]. The second output depicts the average article citations per year. The average citation per year is maximum in the year 2017 (11.3) followed by 2011 (9.1) and 2019 (7.5). This might be due to the most cited article in the domain by De Veirman *et al.* (2017) (177 citations), followed by Freberg *et al.* (2011) (167 citations) and Goodman *et al.* (2011) (141 citations). The article-wise analysis resulted in 74 such documents, which have at least three citations. Out of these 74 articles, it was found that only 33 were linked to each other. The figure indicates the presence of two seminal studies in the domain (Freberg *et al.*, 2011; De Veirman *et al.*, 2017).

An author-wise analysis on *VOSviewer* revealed that 134 such authors have at least one document and five citations. *De Veirman M.* and *Hudders L.* have the same number of citations (193) on the two articles they authored together (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; De Veirman and Hudders, 2020). Cauberghe V. stands next with 177 citations for the same article (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). It was found that *Jin S. V.* had the maximum number of documents (i.e. four), but her documents received only 42 citations, and hence she could not make it through the top10 list. In this context, a more important analysis, i.e. author impact analysis was also conducted on *Biblioshiny,* which revealed that *Jin S. V.* has maximum h-index (i.e. three). Since *De Veirman M.* and *Hudders L.* both have only two documents, they remained in the fifth position. The table also presents additional information such as g-index, m-index and year of first publication by authors.

A source-wise analysis on *VOSviewer* was also conducted, resulting in 26 journals with at least two articles published in the domain with at least two citations. With five documents and 221 citations, *International Journal of Advertising* is at the top position, followed by *Public Relations Review* (seven documents, 219 citations) and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (four documents and 93 citations). In order to get a more in-depth understanding of sources and their impact, some additional analyses were conducted on *Biblioshiny*. As per the results of source impact analysis, *Journal of Marketing Management* has the maximum h-index and the maximum number of articles (i.e. nine), followed by *Public Relations Review* (seven documents) and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (four papers). In this list, *International Journal of Advertising* is at the fourth position since its h-index is three despite having the maximum number of total citations (TCs). Other additional information such as g-index, m-index and year of first publication in the domain by a journal is also given in the table. We also analyzed most local cited sources. *Journal of Advertising* is the most locally cited source in the domain with 225 local citations (LC), followed by *Journal of Consumer Research* (213 LC) and *Journal of Marketing* (207 LC).

Our next analysis was about understanding the top countries in IM based on the number of citations. With 70 documents and 840 citations, the USA stands at the top position. Though

the UK has 18 documents, it still stands at number three position with 188 citations after Belgium, which has only two documents but 193 citations. The reason is that the most influential authors in the domain (i.e. *De Veirman M.* and *Hudders L.*) belong to Belgium.

Keyword analyses

We analyzed the top 30 most salient keywords and created the treemap of the top 10 keywords. Results showed that "social media" is the most frequently used keyword (26%) in the domain, followed by "social networking (online)" (16%) and "Internet" and "marketing" (both 12%).

Trend topic analysis was also performed to understand the top three most trending topics in the domain. The abstract was chosen as the field of analysis, while the minimum word frequency was set to ten. Trend topic analysis shows that in the year 2020, "influencer" and "brand" are trending while "social," "media" and "marketing" were the top three trending topics in the year 2019. We can also conclude from the analysis that the topics are changing continuously every year, demonstrating the evolving nature of the domain.

Finally, to obtain the evolving themes in the domain of IM, a thematic map analysis was conducted through *Biblioshiny*. The analysis was run with 200 keywords and a minimum of 10 cluster frequency (per thousand documents), which resulted in 7 clusters. The size of the circles is proportional to the number of keywords occurring in that cluster (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). For instance, under the "social media" theme, 36 separate keywords have appeared 56 times cumulatively, making it the biggest cluster followed by "social networking (online)" having 24 separate keywords while "conceptual framework" is the smallest with only five keywords. The thematic map has been created based on two dimensions, i.e. centrality and density. *Centrality* of a given cluster measures *"the intensity of its links with other clusters"* (Callon *et al.*, 1991, p. 164). It measures the significance of a theme in developing a particular domain (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). Thematic map analysis shows that "social networking (online)" is the most significant theme in the domain since it has maximum linkages with the other clusters and has high centrality. On the other hand, the theme "conceptual framework" has very low centrality, which means that it has minimum linkages with other clusters in the domain. *Density* refers to *"the strength of the links that tie the words making up the cluster together"* (Callon *et al.*, 1991, p. 165). It represents the theme's ability to maintain and develop itself over a period in the domain (Callon *et al.*, 1991; Cobo *et al.*, 2011). Thematic map analysis shows that the two themes having maximum density are "behavioral research" and "websites." This represents that the keywords falling within these clusters are closely tied up and linked together. While "conceptual framework" and "social media" both have low density indicating their lesser ability to maintain and further develop themselves in due course of time, and hence may soon disappear in the IM domain.

In a nutshell, we can say that centrality indicates "importance," while density indicates "development" of a theme. From the figure, we can further conclude that "social networking (online)" and "behavioral research" both are *motor-themes* since they are both important and well-developed themes (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). "Social media," however, is a highly developed but isolated theme and hence losing its importance in the domain (Cobo *et al.*, 2011). "Collaborative filtering" and "conceptual framework" fall under the quadrant of emerging or declining themes as per Cobo *et al.* (2011) since they carry both low-centrality and low-density. This can be further confirmed by looking at the keywords falling under these themes. Under "collaborative filtering," the presence of keywords such as "data mining," "factorization," "matrix factorization," "social media analysis" and so on indicates that this is an emerging theme in the domain and needs further attention and development. Finally, thematic map analysis shows that none of the clusters completely falls in the fourth quadrant; however, "websites" and "community" partially belong here, which represents that these

themes are significant for the IM domain, but they are still developing and need the attention of IM scholars (Cobo *et al.*, 2011).

Three-field plot
Figure 1 presents the three-field plot for the country, keywords and journal. This figure is based on the more popular Sankey diagrams (Riehmann *et al.*, 2005). The size of the boxes is proportional to the frequency of occurrences (Riehmann *et al.*, 2005), hence we can say that the USA has the maximum number of publications in the domain, and its scholars are publishing more on "social media," "IM" and "social media influencers." The main interest of IM scholars in the UK and Australia is also "social media," while in Canada, IM researchers' favorite theme is "social media marketing." Germans are also publishing majorly on "social media" and "IM," the keyword "influencer" is popular among Indians, while for Indonesians, it is "purchase intention." If we see, journal-wise, the keyword "IM" is well-accepted by the *Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing,* "Twitter" is popular among USA scholars and is published in *Journal of Interactive Advertising* and *Public Relations Review,* whereas "Instagram" is more prevalent in *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research* and *International Journal of Advertising.*

Bibliographic coupling
Bibliometric coupling was conducted using *VOSviewer* to better understand the IM domain and its evolving themes. While conducting this analysis, units of analysis can be author, document or source (Van Eck and Waltman, 2019). In this study, "document" was selected as the unit of analysis, and the fractional counting method was chosen. The minimum threshold for the number of citations was set to ten, which resulted in 38 documents, out of which 33 were linked together (Figure 2). As we can see, six clusters were obtained. The first cluster was identified with yellow color having four articles with the theme *"Mechanism of influencer marketing."* The second cluster, identified with red color, was the biggest one with eight articles having a theme of *"Measuring the impact of influencer marketing,"* third with purple having a theme of *"Persuasive cues in influencer marketing,"* fourth with blue color and *"Likability factors of influencers"* theme, fifth with green and *"Authenticity of influencers"* theme and sixth cluster present *"Understanding followers"* theme depicted with aqua color. Table 1 provides cluster-wise listing of papers, along with their main findings.

Future research directions
One of the aims of this study was to propose guidelines for future researchers working in the domain of IM. We have listed the future research direction for each cluster separately.

Cluster 1: Mechanism of influencer marketing

Future research in this theme is important to understand various mechanisms by which researchers can understand the working of IM in different contexts. In the last couple of years, many research papers in the IM domain (e.g. Jin *et al.*, 2019; Jin and Muqaddam, 2019) have used parasocial interaction as a theoretical basis to explain the phenomenon. However, given the role of influencers being similar to celebrity endorsers, researchers can also look at the celebrity endorsement theories to examine the working mechanism of IM. One can go beyond the source theories and consider the product match-up hypothesis (Kamins and Gupta, 1994) and the meanings transfer model (McCracken, 1989). It has been observed that the congruence between product/brand and celebrity (Lee and Thorson, 2008) and between celebrity and consumer (e.g. Choi and Rifon, 2012) work in the context of celebrity endorsement, so it will be worthwhile to examine if the same is tenable for IM. Different
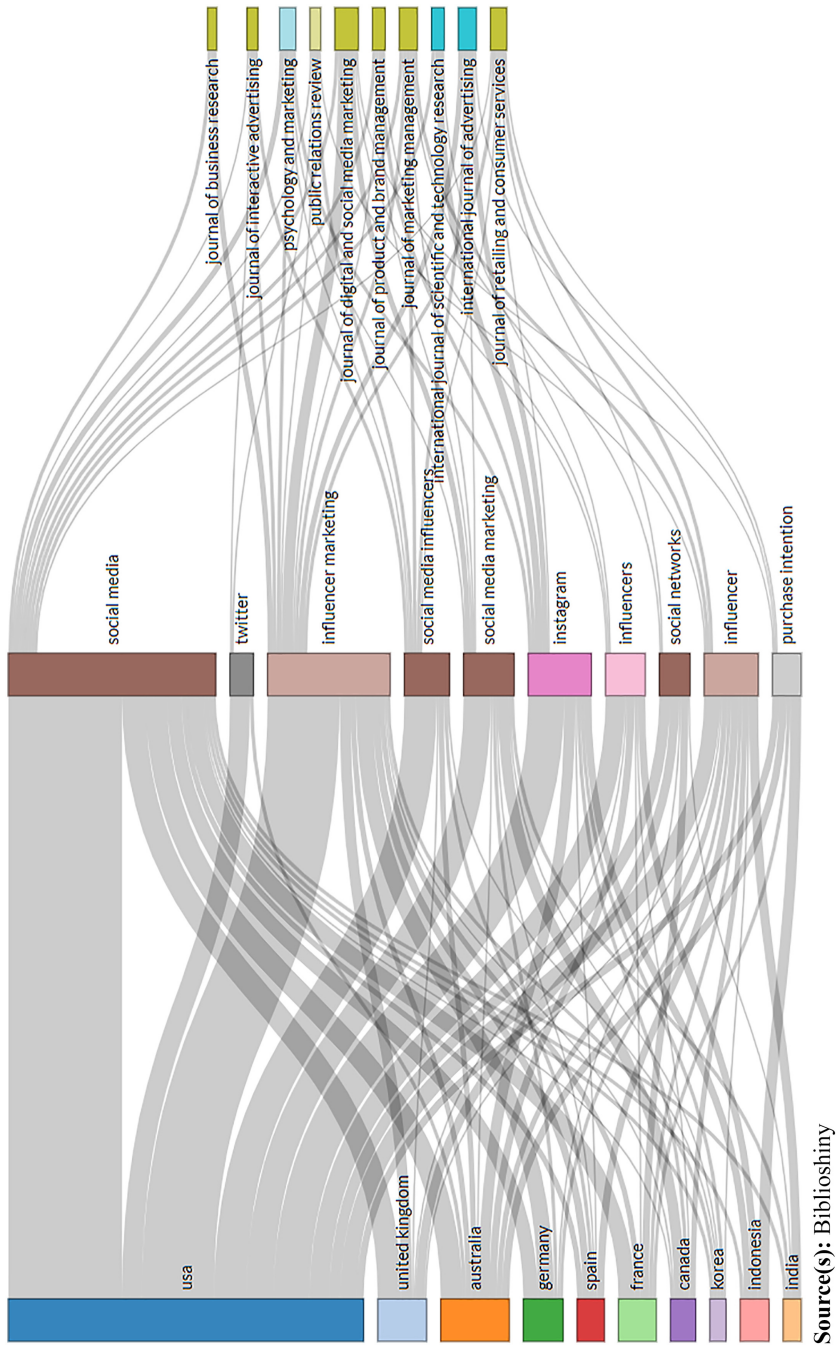
Figure 1.
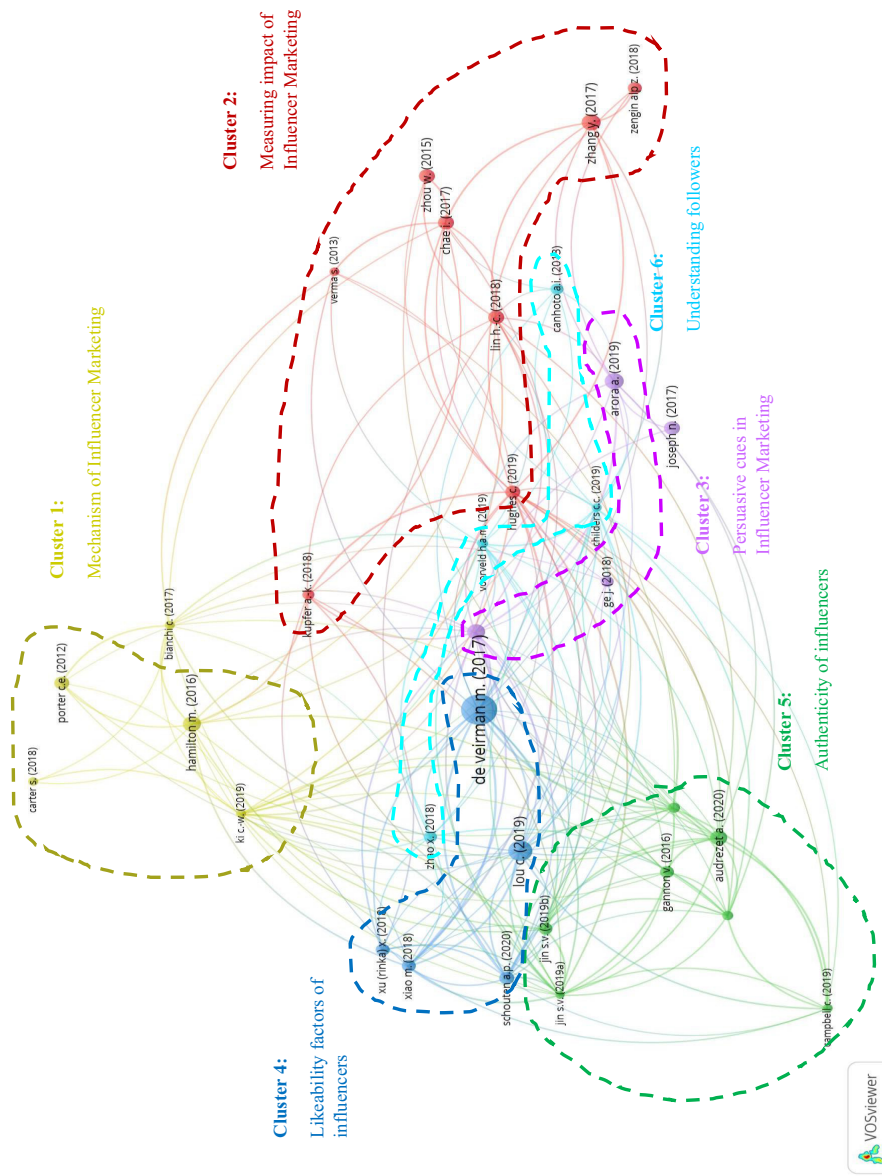A three-field plot of
country, keyword and
journal

Source(s): Biblioshiny

Figure 2.
Bibliographic coupling
of 33 articles

Cluster 2:
Measuring impact of
Influencer Marketing

Cluster 1:
Mechanism of Influencer Marketing

Cluster 6:
Understanding followers

Cluster 3:
Persuasive cues in
Influencer Marketing

Cluster 5:
Authenticity of influencers

Cluster 4:
Likeability factors of
influencers

Source(s): *VOSviewer*

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
1	1	Carter and Yeo (2018)	Internet-enabled collective intelligence as a precursor and predictor of consumer behavior	Empirical – Ethnographic content analysis	Based on the online buying experience of 43 respondents, a preliminary collective intelligence (CI) effect framework is developed. This CI framework consists of four elements–form of communication, the language of communication, criteria for choice, opinion leaders and influencers on both prior and post-purchase behavior–and their predictive effect on the consumer purchase process	12	3	2
	2	Hamilton et al (2016)	Social media and value creation: The role of interaction Satisfaction and interaction immersion	Empirical – Survey	This study collects data from 125 respondents on brand-consumer interactions to understand the effect of social media brand-consumer interaction on three types of customer value namely customer lifetime value (CLV), customer influencer value (CIV) and customer knowledge value (CKV). Results suggest that interaction satisfaction positively influences CLV and CIV, whereas interaction immersion impacts CIV and CKV.	40	17	15
	3	Ki and Kim (2019)	The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic	Empirical - survey	This research collects data from 395 respondents to test the social media influencers' influencer mechanism which the study proposes. The influence mechanism works through four stages and identified five aspects of influencing posts, i.e. attractiveness, prestige, expertise, information and interaction	11	21	20
	4	Porter et al. (2012)	Gender differences in trust formation in Virtual communities	Empirical - survey	Based on the survey of 232 respondents from virtual communities, the paper explores if gender difference exists in the process of online trust formation. Findings suggest that gender moderates the effect of managerially controlled trust influencers	26	6	5

Table 1.
Details of clusters

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
2	1	Chae et al. (2017)	Spillover effects in seeded word-of-Mouth marketing campaigns	Empirical – Dataset	This research used data from 390 social media campaigns across 192 product categories to test for three types of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) spillover effects, namely focal product spillovers, brand spillover and category spillovers. The finding suggests brand spillover and category spillover effects exist which goes beyond the normal product-related intended eWOM	29	11	13
	2	Hughes et al. (2019)	Driving brand engagement through online social influencers: An empirical investigation of sponsored blogging campaigns	Empirical – Dataset and experiment	The research used real in-market customer response data and data from an experiment to explain that blogger characteristics and blog post content affect online engagement and it gets moderated by social media platform type and campaign advertising intent	26	22	29
	3	Kupfer et al. (2018)	The role of the partner Brand's social media power in brand alliances	Empirical – Dataset	A data set featuring 442 movies, including 1,318 actor–movie combinations and weekly social media data was used to test a conceptual framework about the influence of the social media power of partner brands on brand alliance success. The power of partner brands was explained using three concepts viz social media power potential (size and activity of the social media network), social media power exertion (different posting behaviors and comments) and their interaction	17	12	13
	4	Lin et al. (2018)	Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services	Conceptual	This article proposes that online opinion leaders can serve appeal leadership functions, serve knowledge leadership functions and take multiple roles to promote different types of products and services. A five-stage planning process consisting of planning, recognition, alignment, motivation and coordination was also proposed	30	18	12

Table 1.

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
	5	Verma (2013)	Effectiveness of social network sites for influencing consumer purchase decisions	Empirical - survey	A survey of 138 respondents was analyzed using regression to provide support for dependency relationship wherein ten different communication forms in social networking sites act as an influencer to various stages of consumer purchase decision	12	7	5
	6	Alp and Öğüdücü (2018)	Identifying topical influencers on Twitter based on user behavior and network topology	Empirical – Dataset and experiment	This research is using data from 20 influencers on Twitter to create a model to identify topical influencers on Twitter who are experts on a special topic. The model integrates data from the information obtained from network topology and the information obtained from user actions and activities in Twitter	23	3	4
	7	Zhang et al. (2017)	Modeling the role of message content and influencers in social media rebroadcasting	Empirical – Dataset	The paper develops a model to examine the role of content, influence and content-user fit on social media rebroadcasting behavior. Results from individual-level split hazard model analysis show that rebroadcasting a message depends not only on message content but also on the message's fit with a user	47	7	10
	8	Zhou and Duan (2015)	An empirical study of how third-party websites influence the feedback mechanism between online word-of-Mouth and retail sales	Empirical – Dataset	Based on data from the sale of online software, this study examines the impact of eWOM by third-party websites (called external eWOM) and third-party free sampling influence on eWOM of the retailer-hosted website (called internal eWOM). Findings suggest that external eWOM amplifies the impact of past sales on the volume of internal eWOM and third-party free sampling weakens the impact of past sales on internal eWOM	29	6	4

(continued)

Table 1.

Table 1.

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
3	1	Arora et al. (2019)	Measuring social media influencer index-insights from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram	Empirical – Dataset	The research proposes a mechanism for measuring influencers' influence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Findings suggest that engagement, outreach, sentiment and growth can play a key role in identifying the influencers for social media promotion and engagement for larger outreach	43	18	16
	2	Ge and Gretzel (2018)	Emoji rhetoric: a Social media influencer perspective	Empirical - dataset	Based on 600 posts by the top 200 Weibo influencers, this research develops a taxonomy of six influencer moves supported by emojis which social media influencer's attempts to initiate engagement with their followers	21	9	4
	3	Sokolova and Kefi (2020)	Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions	Empirical – Survey	The research investigates the role of physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, and social attractiveness on purchase intention through mediating role of credibility and para-social interaction. The findings suggest that attitude homophily is positively related to parasocial interaction and there is no evidence of a positive relationship between physical attractiveness and credibility	40	23	33

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
4	1	De Veirman et al. (2017)	Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude	Empirical – Experiment	This research, using a set of two experiments with 235 respondents in total, shows that Instagram influencers with a high number of followers are found more likeable and if the influencer follows very few accounts herself, this can negatively impact influencers' likeability	177	26	38
	2	Lou and Yuan (2019)	Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility Affect consumer trust of Branded content on social media	Empirical - survey	This research collects data from 538 participants to check the validity of the social media influencer value model. PLS path modeling results show that the informative value of influencer-generated content, influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity to the followers positively affect followers' trust in influencers' branded posts	72	21	25
	3	Schouten et al. (2020)	Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit	Empirical - experiment	The study compares the effectiveness of celebrity vs. influencer endorsements on advertising effectiveness, moderated by product-endorser fit. Two experiments with 567 respondents examine the comparison with two potential mediators namely identification and credibility	25	19	27
	4	Xiao et al. (2018)	Factors affecting YouTube IM credibility: a heuristic-systematic model	Empirical - survey	The study collects data from 497 respondents to test the model in which informational cues influence the credibility of YouTube influencer. Findings suggest that trustworthiness, social influence, argument quality, and information involvement are important cues among the different cues mentioned in the model	22	18	32
	5	Xu and Pratt (2018)	Social media influencers as endorsers to promote travel destinations: an application of self-congruence theory to the Chinese generation Y	Empirical - survey	This research compares the impact of social media endorser-destination congruence and social media endorser-consumer congruence on visit intentions for tourist destinations. Results, from data of 234 respondents, show that both types of congruence positively contribute to visit intentions	22	15	13

(continued)

Table 1.

Table 1.

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
5	1	Audrezet *et al.* (2020)	Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation	Empirical -qualitative	With the increasing use of social media influencers (SMIs), the brand engages with SMIs which can lead to tensions for SMIs' authenticity in minds of SMI followers. Findings from a qualitative approach to examine this phenomenon suggests that passionate and transparent authenticity are two authenticity management strategies to manage the authenticity of influencers	36	22	23
	2	Campbell and Grimm (2019)	The challenges native advertising Poses: Exploring potential Federal Trade commission responses and identifying research needs	Conceptual	This research traces the evolution of deception for native advertising and identifies the shortcomings. It proposes remedies that the Federal Trade Commission or industry could adopt to prevent consumer harm, detect infractions, and enforce its regulations from native advertising which also includes posts by social media influencers	11	12	16
	3	De Veirman and Hudders (2020)	Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: The role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising	Empirical - experiment	Research using data from 414 respondents shows that including a sponsorship disclosure (compared to no disclosure) negatively affects brand attitude. Further findings suggest that brand attitude is negatively affected when the influencer use a one-sided message in comparison to when the message is two-sided	16	19	24.5
	4	Dhanesh and Duthler (2019)	Relationship management through social media influencers: Effects of followers' awareness of paid endorsement	Empirical - survey	This study examines associations between followers' awareness of paid endorsement done by social media influencers and cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes on followers. Data analysis using 269 respondents shows that ad recognition does not affect the influencer-follower relationship but ad recognition is correlated with the purchase and eWOM intentions	13	18	16

(continued)

Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
	5	Gannon and Prothero (2016)	Beauty blogger selfies as authenticating practices	Empirical - qualitative	This research examines the use of beauty blogging selfies in conveying consumer authenticity. Findings of qualitative research using 20 in-depth qualitative interviews suggest that bloggers use selfies as records of product trial, success and failure via specific sub-types	23	8	9
	6	Jin and Muqaddam (2019)	Product placement 2.0: "Do brands need influencers or do influencers need brands?"	Empirical – Experiment	This research tries to understand the effects of Instagram posts' source types and product-placement types on brand attitude and credibility perception. Data analysis using 304 respondents shows the main effect of source types on perceived trustworthiness and interaction effects of product placement and source types on perceived expertise, corporate credibility, and attitude toward brand posts	10	21	35
	7	Jin et al (2019)	Instafamous and social media IM	Empirical – Experiment	This study tests the effects of two types of celebrities (Instagram celebrity vs traditional celebrity) on source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy and social presence. Findings suggest that consumers exposed to Instagram celebrity's brand posts perceive the source to be more trustworthy, show a more positive attitude toward the endorsed brand, feel a stronger social presence and feel more envious of the source than those consumers exposed to traditional celebrity's brand posts	23	17	19

(continued)

Table 1.

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Cluster no	S. no	Article	Title	Article type	Summary of main idea	Citations	Links	Total link strength
6	1	Canhoto et al. (2013)	Emerging segmentation practices in the age of the social customer	Empirical -qualitative	Using data from 19 interviews, this research conducts an exploratory study about segmentation practices of organizations with a social media presence. It investigates the relevance of traditional segmentation approaches in a new socio-technical environment and identifies emerging practices	20	6	2
	2	Childers et al. (2019)	#Sponsored #ad: Agency perspective on influencer marketing campaigns	Empirical -qualitative	This study provides insight into the experiences and perceptions of IM among those working in advertising agencies. Based on data from 19 interview, this paper suggests a shift in the agency process for effective implementation of IM	11	23	15
	3	Voorveld (2019)	Brand communication in social media: A research agenda	Empirical – Survey	This paper provides an agenda for future research on brand communication in social media after examining the current state of research, a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual challenges of brand communication in social media, and a survey about the expectations of the media and advertising industry	14	22	18
	4	Zhao et al. (2018)	Disentangling social media influence in crises: Testing a four-factor model of social media influence with large data	Empirical - dataset	This research tries to develop a systematic conceptualization and a valid measure of social media influence in the crisis context. Findings from an analysis of the dataset of Twitter feeds during four crises provides an integrated framework by incorporating the network perspective	21	14	8

dimensions of self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982), namely actual self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal self-congruity, should also be employed to understand IM effectiveness.

The meanings transfer model (McCracken, 1989), along with social influence theory (Kelman, 1961) and social learning theory (Bandura *et al.*, 1961), can be used to explain the mechanism of influence exerted by influencers. Researchers can also explore theories from communications [e.g. elaboration likelihood model by Petty *et al.* (1983); information processing theory by Bettman and Park (1980); persuasion knowledge model by Friestad and Wright (1994)] and social psychology [construal level theory by Trope and Liberman (2010); regulatory focus theory by Higgins (2012)], which have been widely used in the advertising field to explain the working of IM. The trust formation process between influencers and followers also needs to be understood for better effectiveness of IM. The factors related to followers, like motivation and personality traits, can be used to better understand the mechanisms. Whether these mechanisms differ across generation, gender, race and culture are additional potential extensions of research in this theme. Understanding gender may be necessary as female and male users differ across their preferences for social media platforms (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017), and females are more susceptible to social influence than males (Eagly, 1983).

Cluster 2: Measuring the impact of influencer marketing

To understand the effectiveness of IM, research about the impact of IM campaigns can be examined in terms of process and outcome. Customer decision journey (CDJ) (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) can be a useful framework to explore the process impact of IM. Batra and Keller (2016) contend that to generate short-term purchases and build long-term loyalty and brand value, it is crucial to understand consumers' pressing needs at different stages in the CDJ and then match those needs with a focused marketing message. How social media is driving CDJ is already being discussed as a social customer journey (Hamilton *et al.*, 2021), the impact of IM on different stages of the CDJ can provide insights about how IM can deliver on this aspect.

The direct impact of IM campaigns can be measured in terms of engagements, likes and clicks. Sentiment analysis of engagement post can provide real-time inputs to brands on working of IM campaigns. It is also possible to measure the direct impact of purchase intentions by inserting a clickable purchase link or by providing influencer-specific promo code. Taking a cue from celebrity endorsement where positive and negative impact on economic returns of sponsoring companies is well-documented (Agarwal and Kamakura, 1995; Chung *et al.*, 2013), similar research should be carried out for IM campaigns. Chae *et al.* (2017) examined the multiple spillover effects of influencer-induced campaigns, but more research needs to be done to understand the indirect impact of IM campaigns. The indirect impact can be understood by using brand tracking studies to measure the long-term consumer brand equity of promoted brands. Research needs to be conducted to understand the direct and indirect impact across different social media platforms for a holistic understanding of IM campaigns' impact.

IM is most likely to be used in conjunction with other marketing communication tools. The effectiveness of an IM campaign combined with other marketing communication tools should be studied for its employability by managers. Also, given the rising incidence of "troll" accounts, influencers' posts may have to face backlash in some instances. "How does this impact the overall effectiveness of IM campaigns?," will be an exciting area of research.

Cluster 3: Persuasive cues in influencer marketing

The third cluster's theme provides multiple opportunities for researchers to further the understanding of persuasion cues on followers. The persuasion cues can be attributed to the

message and the sender (Lasswell, 1948). Since we will cover persuasion cues related to influencers in the next section, we focus on persuasion cues related to the message. The first possible research area in this theme can be about understanding the effectiveness of implicit and explicit brand promotions by influencers. How influencers promote the brand through their posts can have a differential impact, given influencers' trust among followers. Another possible area of research can be to understand the role of rational versus emotional persuasion cues in IM. While all rational arguments may not be useful in IM, research can examine the effectiveness of some themes like rhetorical, inoculative and framing arguments. Similarly, research can be done to understand emotional appeals like humor and warmth. Both these appetitive motivational appeals have different typologies which present several research possibilities. Two possible extensions in this theme can be examining the message persuasion cues concerning types of platforms and the nature of products. Research examining persuasion cues for each platform separately considering their content specificity will help understand the IM phenomenon (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Researchers can also investigate the role of different persuasion cues across hedonic and utilitarian products, products differing in involvement levels and products with varying familiarity levels.

Cluster 4: Likability factors of influencers

In this cluster's theme, future research can examine various factors that drive the likability of influencers. Followers' liking of influencers is based on the perception of influencers. De Veirman *et al.* (2017) looked at this aspect by examining the number of followers and concluded that influencers with high numbers of followers were found more likeable as it was seen to increase the influencer's perceived opinion leadership. However, an increased number of followers, i.e. higher reach, also reduces engagement with followers as it is not possible for an influencer to give individual replies. Reduced engagement can again happen due to fake followers, which will also impact the likability of influencers. Furthermore, influencers' growing popularity, especially in the case of mega influencers (having more than 1 million followers), may lead to influencers promoting multiple products. This may have an adverse impact on the likability of influencers. Both these points need to be examined in detail to understand the likability aspects of influencer.

Source theories from celebrity endorsement (source credibility model and the source attractiveness model) can be employed to understand the different factors driving influencers' likability. While source credibility is driven by the endorser's perceived expertise and trustworthiness, source attractiveness refers to the endorser's physical appeal, and consumers have a positive attitude toward the message and brand due to similarity, familiarity and liking for an endorser (McGuire, 1985). Xiao *et al.* (2018) looked at expertise, trustworthiness and likability, but further research needs to be done using more factors for different products in different social media platforms. For understanding the factors related to influencers, research can examine different personality traits of influencers as well. This can be implemented by examining the role of persuasion cues in the message in conjunction with personality frameworks like Big Five, Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and 16 Personality Factors. Understanding the personality of influencers and their impact on followers can help practitioners to identify suitable influencers in different use cases.

Cluster 5: Authenticity of influencers

Future research directions for this theme become significant as IM is increasingly used for brand promotions by firms. Research looking into influencers' authenticity needs to explore the credibility of influencers, the reputation of the promoted brand and message design elements. Credibility has been explained using different dimensions like competence, extraversion, composure, character and sociability (Bühlmann and Gisler, 2006), and an

influencer's authenticity can be driven by any of these dimensions. On a similar line, the reputation of a promoted brand can impact an influencer's authenticity. One can explore the interaction effect of the credibility of influencers and the reputation of a brand. Also, how a combination of messages and images can be manipulated to enhance the believability and authenticity of the promoted message is another potential area of research as images may have an interactive impact in combination with text messages. It would be interesting to examine the impact of language elements such as typos and language errors, using foreign languages, slang or dialects on the authenticity of influencers (De Veirman and Hudders, 2020). In some of the promoted messages, influencers also embed buying options through affiliate links or promo codes that followers can avail of when making purchases. Their impact also needs to be investigated in the context of IM.

The authenticity of influencers and disclosures about brand promotion in IM are important for ad deception–related policy. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has already provided clear guidelines in 2019 for influencers when they work with brands. FTC guidelines call for disclosure when influencers have any financial, employment, personal or family relationship with a brand. Depending upon the social media platform's nature, these disclosures can be in textual, visual or audio-visual formats. The different disclosure formats used and the context of IM should be examined to understand what types of disclosures should be employed to avoid ad deception. It will also be worthwhile to research if sponsored posts as an advertising medium are distinct from other forms of advertising that consumers view unambiguously as paid advertising (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). This will help in enhancing the authenticity of influencers and hence the effectiveness of IM.

It also needs to be investigated if influencer's authenticity is the same across typical fast moving consumer goods products, expensive products, and experience products. De Veirman and Hudders (2020) state that expensive and experience products may lead to higher feelings of envy and may result in more negative effects when disclosing financial or material compensation.

Cluster 6: Understanding followers

Cluster six provides direction for researchers to examine the data from social media influencers' messages and followers' and uncover new patterns. Canhoto *et al.* (2013) suggested that empirical data provided by social media can be used to address the problems associated with traditional segmentation. The message features related to social media influencers' messages and responses by followers provide rich data points for marketers to develop segmentation schema for delivering customized communication. For example, researchers can uncover or augment the customer segmentation schema based on affective, cognitive and conative messages sent by influencers. Researchers can also try to segment followers based on their responses regarding beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (Zhao *et al.*, 2018). We have seen research on segmentation using social media (e.g. Ahani *et al.*, 2019; So *et al.*, 2021), but no published work is available in the context of IM. Given the vast data accessibility for researchers and advances in text data analytics, there is enough possibility for future research in this context. These analyses can be further expanded by understanding the messages and responses in various contexts. For example, how followers' responses can be used for segmentation during crises, new product introductions and other situations. An examination of messages across different social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter can provide useful insights for comparisons. The analysis can also be extended to a business-to-business (B2B) context by examining LinkedIn and Twitter posts by social media influencers.

Research contributions
One of the main objectives of this research is to conduct a comprehensive and systematic bibliometric analysis to identify the intellectual structure of this domain. This research also

aims to identify future areas of research for researchers working in the domain of IM. This paper helps in the identification of six clusters that provide clear pathways for researchers who want to increase the depth and breadth of research in this domain. Among the different clusters identified in this research, the first cluster, namely "mechanism of influencer marketing," is particularly important for researchers working in the IM domain as these papers present different theoretical frameworks. The second important contribution of this research is in terms of identifying the research gaps and proposing future research directions for all six themes. This includes several aspects like testing of different theoretical frameworks to explain the mechanism of influence exerted by influencers, understanding the direct and indirect impact across different social media platforms (also in conjunction with other marketing tools), understanding diverse persuasive cues across different contexts and uncovering the customer segmentation schema based on affective, cognitive and conative messages sent by influencers.

The third research contribution is the identification of dominant research and data approaches for IM in general and each cluster in particular. Among the 33 papers used for bibliometric analysis, only two are conceptual and the remaining 31 are empirical, suggesting that analysis based on data is the dominant paradigm. While the different clusters provide idea about the popular types of data employed by researchers in examining a particular theme, overall IM research has employed data from survey (10 articles), dataset (9 articles) and experiment (7 articles). Data from qualitative research have also been used in five papers. Among the various papers, there are only two papers that have used data from multiple sources in their research. This also highlights that there is a need to increase the application of the mixed-method approach for research in the IM domain. Our research contribution is using *Biblioshiny* which–to the best of our knowledge–has not been employed until now for bibliometric analysis studies in marketing. Our exploration about *Biblioshiny* showed that till now its use has not been made for conducting bibliometric analysis in the "Business and Management" subject area. Given the ease of use and user-friendly interface of the software, this tool can become a useful resource for researchers conducting bibliometric analysis.

Managerial contributions
This paper presents a wide spectrum of managerial implication. Identification of six clusters helps in creating a wide body of knowledge that can help practitioners in understanding the working of IM, thus being useful while employing IM. The emergence of three themes/ clusters, namely "persuasive cues in influencer marketing," "likability factors of influencers," and "authenticity of influencers," are useful input issues for practitioners. For the practitioners interested in designing the persuasive cues for the IM campaign, articles in this cluster can provide useful insights. Similarly, for selecting the influencers in IM, papers in the fourth cluster (likability factors of influencers) and the fifth cluster (authenticity of influencers) can be useful. Marketing managers implementing IM campaigns also want to understand the return on investment to justify the marketing spend. Papers in the second cluster, namely "measuring the impact of influencer marketing," will provide valuable insights to practitioners about different ways in which they can understand the impact made by IM campaigns. As the impact analysis in the domain was done using data from diverse dataset sources, such as Twitter (Alp and Öğüdücü, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2017), Facebook (Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Kupfer *et al.*, 2018) and other independent websites like Naver (Chae *et al.*, 2017) and Amazon (Zhou and Duan, 2015), learnings from papers of this cluster has relevance for IM campaigns across different platforms.

Conclusion and limitations
This study's primary objective is to understand the evolving nature of IM and suggest possible areas of future exploration. The understanding of emerging themes of IM from this

study will help researchers to plan future research in this field. This study, like many other studies, has certain limitations. The bibliometric study utilizes Scopus as a single source for collecting data, which may have led to excluding publications from other databases. This may have led to some biases. Future studies may like to work on multiple databases to eliminate this bias. Since IM is a relatively new research area (with only five papers from years before 2017), similar studies need to be carried in the future to understand the evolving nature of the topic. Despite these limitations, this study offers an encompassing view of this field and provides a sound start for researchers who want to explore this topic further.

Note

1. A compendium of all outputs for this paper is available with authors which can be made available on request.

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