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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND INFLUENCER MARKETING: MAPPING THE FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract
Purpose: This review aims to map the current body of knowledge on AI in influencer marketing by outlining the theoretical and methodological backgrounds and contexts and identifying key areas for further exploration in this field. *Method:* A systematic literature review of 188 articles published on the Scopus database on AI and influencer marketing was conducted to identify recent research trends in the field. The review was performed based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol guidelines and the TCM organizing framework encompassing theory, context, and methodology analyses. *Findings:* The domain of AI in influencer marketing was found to be in its infancy stage; however, the number of articles published on AI and influencer marketing has been exponentially growing since 2017. The main term used by the authors to name the influencers generated using AI was found to be 'virtual influencer' and is constantly gaining its position. The most followed theories were found to be the Source Credibility Theory, Mind Perception Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Construal Level Theory, and Trust Transfer Theory. Five main research contexts were identified: sender-focused, source-focused, message-focused, receiver-focused, and context-focused. The research methods used in the field of AI in influencer marketing have been identified as three principal approaches: quantitative, experimental, and qualitative. *Contributions/implications:* This paper is among the first review papers mapping the innovative and complex domain of AI and its intersections with influencer marketing. By mapping the existing research scope, it identifies the main theoretical, methodological, and contextual backgrounds of the domain.

Keywords: *AI influencer, Artificial intelligence influencer, Computer-generated influencer, CGI, Digital influencer, Influencer marketing, Virtual influencer.*

JEL codes: *M31; M37; O32.*

Introduction

The contemporary digital landscape and rapid development of social media technology make the application of influencer marketing essential (Ma et al., 2025; Rabby et al., 2025). Social media influencers are 'those who consistently share various aspects of their personal lives and experiences across diverse scenarios, generating data that holds a significant commercial value' (X. Yu et al., 2025). Companies that use the Internet strategically recognize the influence of users who frequently share their brand experiences online (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). As influencer marketing becomes more pervasive, audiences may develop adverse reactions, mirroring resistance seen in traditional advertising (Y. S. Choi et al., 2025).

Research indicates that influencers' credibility has a significant impact on consumers' attitudes, thereby affecting their purchase intentions (Chen et al., 2024). Therefore, marketers face a critical challenge of selecting effective social media influencers for their campaigns (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). Technological advancements have introduced artificial intelligence (AI)-driven, non-human alternatives to traditional celebrity endorsers, designed to engage and influence consumers (Thomas & Fowler, 2021). Such virtual influencers are virtual robots that can emulate human appearance and behavior (da Silva Oliveira & Chimenti, 2021). The first AI-generated influencer is known to be Lil Miquela, who debuted on Instagram in 2016 (Drenten & Brooks, 2020).

Starting from then, AI influencers have become a fascinating, emerging phenomenon: computer-generated characters captivate a sizable audience (Dutta & Sharma, 2025). AI influencers, through human-like appearance and behavior, can evoke effects on consumers comparable to those of A-list celebrities (Alboqami, 2023). Despite the rising interest in AI-generated influencers as brand communication tools, further research is needed to understand how they foster follower relationships and influence brand perceptions and behaviors (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Given the academic and practical need to expand the research and debate on the potential influence of digital influencers, this review aims to map the current body of knowledge on AI in influencer marketing by outlining the theoretical and methodological backgrounds and contexts, and identifying key areas for further exploration in this field. This paper examines the existing research landscape on AI influencer marketing, discussing the key concepts and underlying theories that provide a foundation for AI in influencer marketing, while also presenting the primary methodological perspectives employed by researchers. A systematic literature review is conducted to provide a comprehensive analysis of scientific articles published in international journals on AI influencers, and recent research trends in the field are identified. The review is conducted based on a TCM organizing framework that encompasses analyses of theory, context, and methodology (Paul et al., 2024).

Materials and Methods

To reveal progress in the domain, the most prolific contributions, and prospective trends for further research, systematic analyses of the scientific literature are provided (Pilelienė & Jucevičius, 2023). Therefore, this study is performed in two stages: quantitative (bibliometric) and qualitative (systematic). Bibliometric analyses focus on quantitative parameters, including publication growth, subject area, geographic distribution of publications, productive authors, keywords, and citations (Muchuu & Pilelienė, 2025), which serve as critical indicators for assessing the progress of scholarly articles within a domain (Alsharif et al., 2023). The current study adhered to the guidelines outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Page et al., 2021). On the other hand, systematic literature review (SLR) can be defined as a 'process for assembling, arranging, and assessing existing literature in a research domain' (Paul et al., 2021). Various frameworks can be employed for SLR (Paul et al., 2024), and it is up to the researcher to choose the most suitable one. The current study employs the Theory, Context, and Methodology (TCM) framework, where two authors independently read the selected articles and codified important aspects for analysis, which a third author then validated for quality control and bias reduction.

The review was designed to answer the research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the current publication trends in the field of AI in influencer marketing?

RQ2: What theories compose the background for the development of the field of AI in influencer marketing?

RQ3: What contexts are being considered while researching the field of AI influencer marketing?

RQ4: What research methods emerge in the field of AI in influencer marketing?

To answer the research questions, the Scopus database was chosen. The Scopus database is considered to be relatively superior in the field of the Social Sciences (Kumpulainen & Seppänen, 2022). The search query included keywords "ai-influencer* OR artificial-intelligence-influencer* OR ai-generated-influencer* OR computer-generated-influencer* OR digital-influencer* OR virtual-influencer* OR cyber-influencer*", previously selected based on the relevant literature in the field. The initial search on the Scopus database, using the selected keywords, was conducted on June 9, 2025, and resulted in 603 documents.

Further, eligibility criteria were established, namely:

- Language criterion: documents published in a non-English language were excluded.
- Subject area: only documents published in the Business, Management, and Accounting area were included.
- Document type: only articles were included.
- Publication stage: articles in-press were excluded.

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The final search query was the following: TITLE-ABS-KEY (ai-influencer* OR artificial-intelligence-influencer* OR ai-generated-influencer* OR computer-generated-influencer* OR digital-influencer* OR virtual-influencer* OR cyber-influencer*) AND (EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Portuguese") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Spanish") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Korean") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Russian") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Malay") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "French") OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, "Chinese")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")).

The procedure is depicted in Figure 1.

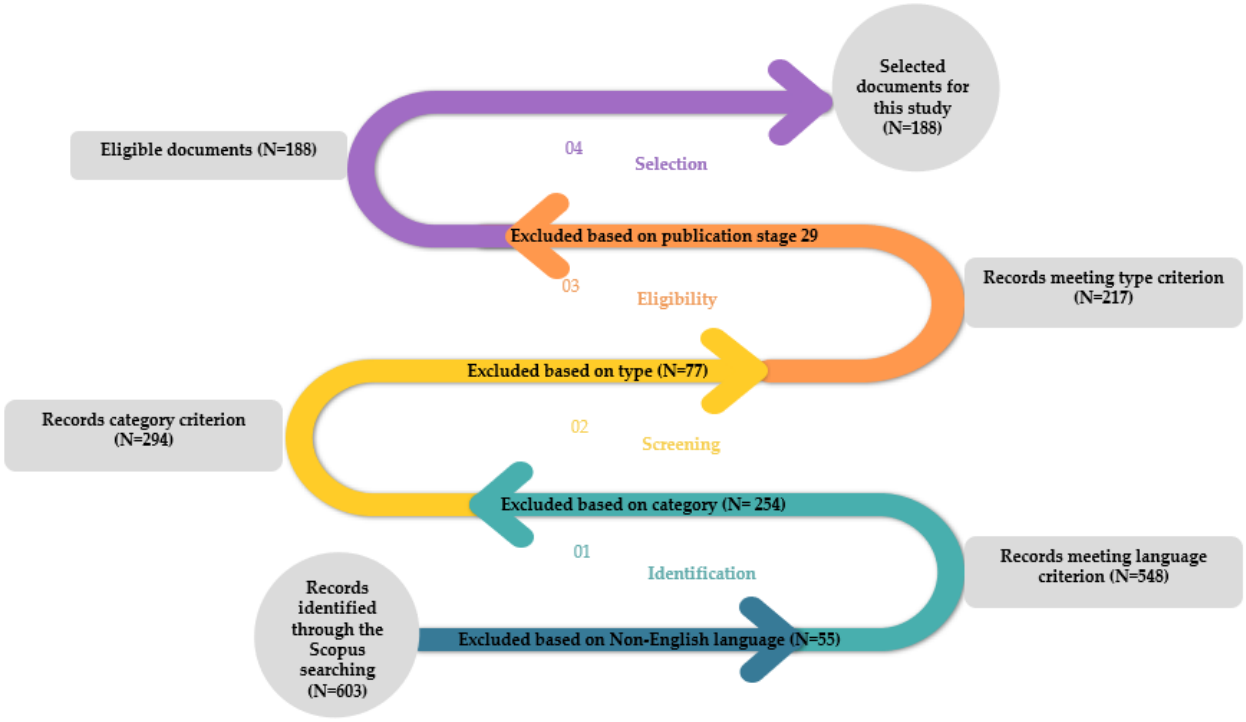

Figure 1. PRISMA procedure of publication inclusion in the review

**Note: Figure design used with permission (Alsharif et al., 2022).*

After providing the selection procedure, 188 articles were chosen for further analysis. VOSviewer software version 1.6.20 was used for data visualization and analysis. As suggested by Alsharif & Isa (2025), the papers were thoroughly scrutinized, starting with the abstracts and conclusions, and followed by a detailed analysis of the full texts. A review of five articles was limited to abstracts due to full article access restrictions.

Results

The current trends in the field of AI in influencer marketing

The analysis of selected articles revealed the exponential growth of articles published in the field of AI in influencer marketing (Figure 2). The first article by Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip was found to have been published in 2014. However, the paper's content analysis indicated that the authors analyzed regular bloggers, calling them 'digital influencers' (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

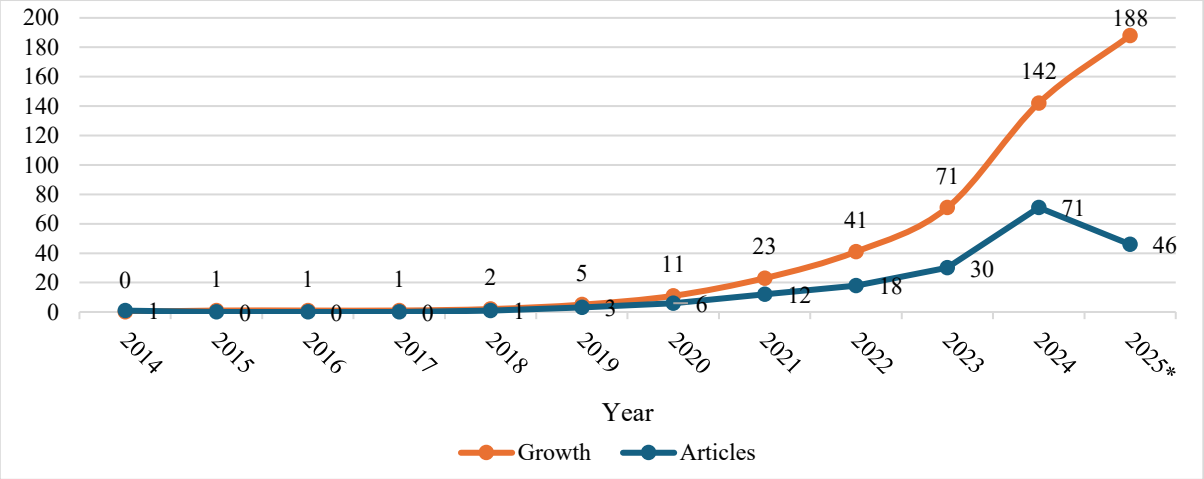

Figure 2. Annual growth of the articles in the field of AI in influencer marketing

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

Evidently, the number of articles published on AI in influencer marketing has doubled every year since 2017. Five hundred eighteen authors representing four hundred nine institutions from forty-six countries have contributed to the development of the field. However, only fifty-one authors have published more than one article, and only eight authors have published more than two. The most productive authors in the field (having published more than two articles on the topic) are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The most productive authors in the field of AI in influencer marketing

Author Name	Total Articles	Total Citations	H-Index	Affiliation	Country
Benckendorff, Pierre	4	143	31	The University of Queensland Business School	Australia
Xie-Carson, Li	4	143	4	University of Melbourne	Australia
Liu, Fanjue	4	66	7	University of Florida	United States
Ferraro, Carla	3	395	21	Swinburne University of Technology	Australia
Sands, Sean	3	395	28	Swinburne University of Technology	Australia
Hughes, Karen	3	138	28	The University of Queensland Business School	Australia
Ameen, Nisreen	3	132	25	Royal Holloway, University of London	United Kingdom
Campos, Roberta Dias	3	64	6	Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing	Brazil

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

As shown in Table 1, the main authors in the field are primarily from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. Australian authors can be identified as leading the development of the field, as five of the eight most prolific authors represented Australia. Moreover, with 395 shared citations, Carla Ferraro and Sean Sands (both representing Swinburne University of Technology) were the most cited authors in the field. Analysis identified that forty-one authors have been cited more than one hundred times each on the date of this review (09/06/2025).

Considering the impact of countries, fifteen countries have been identified as having published five or more articles on the topic. Fourteen of them were collaborating (except Indonesia). Inter-country collaboration is depicted in Figure 3.

Network analysis (Fig. 3) revealed five clusters of countries that make the most significant contributions to the field's development.

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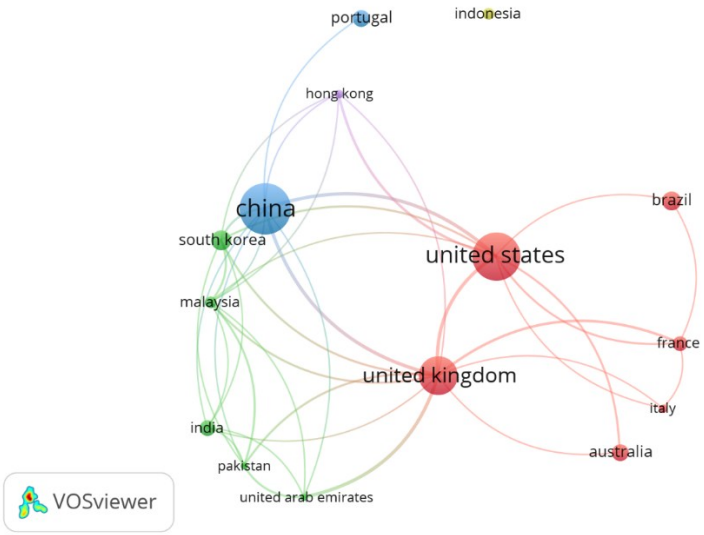

Figure 3. Inter-country collaboration in the field of AI in influencer marketing
**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

The largest cluster (red) comprises six collaborating countries: Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The second cluster (green) comprises five countries, primarily representing the Asian region: India, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates. China and Portugal represent the third cluster (blue). Finally, Hong Kong (purple) and Indonesia (yellow) represent separate clusters.

Considering the most cited documents, twelve have been cited more than one hundred times.

Table 2. The most cited documents in the field of AI in influencer marketing

Author(s), Year	Title	Journal	Times cited
Uzunoğlu, Misci Kip (2014)	"Brand communication through digital influencers: Leveraging blogger engagement"	International Journal of Information Management	386
Jiménez-Castillo, Sánchez-Fernández (2019)	"The role of digital influencers in brand recommendation: Examining their impact on engagement, expected value and purchase intention"	International Journal of Information Management	345
Thomas, Fowler (2021)	"Close Encounters of the AI Kind: Use of AI Influencers As Brand Endorsers"	Journal of Advertising	251
Torres, Augusto, Matos (2019)	"Antecedents and outcomes of digital influencer endorsement: An exploratory study"	Psychology and Marketing	243
Sands, Campbell, Plangger, Ferraro (2022)	"Unreal influence: leveraging AI in influencer marketing"	European Journal of Marketing	219
Hu, Min, Liu, Han (2020)	"Understanding followers' stickiness to digital influencers: The effect of psychological responses"	International Journal of Information Management	178
Lou, Kiew, Chen, Lee, Ong, Phua (2023)	"Authentically Fake? How Consumers Respond to the Influence of Virtual Influencers"	Journal of Advertising	177

Sands, Ferraro, Demsar, Chandler (2022)	"False idols: Unpacking the opportunities and challenges of falsity in the context of virtual influencers"	Business Horizons	153
Franke, Groeppel-Klein, Müller (2023)	"Consumers' Responses to Virtual Influencers as Advertising Endorsers: Novel and Effective or Uncanny and Deceiving?"	Journal of Advertising	147
da Silva Oliveira, Chimenti (2021)	"Humanized Robots": A Proposition of Categories to Understand Virtual Influencers"	Australasian Journal of Information Systems	112
Robinson (2020)	"Towards an ontology and ethics of virtual influencers"	Australasian Journal of Information Systems	105
Mrad, Ramadan, Nasr (2022)	"Computer-generated influencers: the rise of digital personalities"	Marketing Intelligence and Planning	102

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

Terminology used to identify influencers generated by AI

An analysis of the selected articles enabled the identification of fifty-one keywords used to name influencers. Five keywords (i.e., beauty influencers, fashion influencers, hospitality virtual influencer, tourism ambassador, and travel bloggers) were more industry-related and did not reflect any relation to AI. Further, several keywords (e.g., bloggers, celebrity or brand spokesmen) were also identified as not necessarily related to AI or influencer marketing.

Finally, 33 different terms used by the authors to name an influencer generated by artificial intelligence or at least related to it were identified. Among the selected keywords, the keywords '*social media influencer'* and *'influencer'* were retained to demonstrate their connection to directly AI-related keywords (Figure 4).

As the authors can provide their keywords in either singular or plural form, several repetitions occurred in the figure. The main term used to name an influencer generated by AI is 'virtual influencer' (104 occurrences, whether in singular or plural), followed by 'digital influencer' (36 occurrences). The term 'AI influencer(s)' was utilized 8 times. It is also insightful to note that some researchers, instead of influencers, used words such as 'avatars', 'characters', or even 'virtual human' or 'computer-generated images (CGI)'. Moreover, an attempt to coin the term 'non-human influencer' was also found.

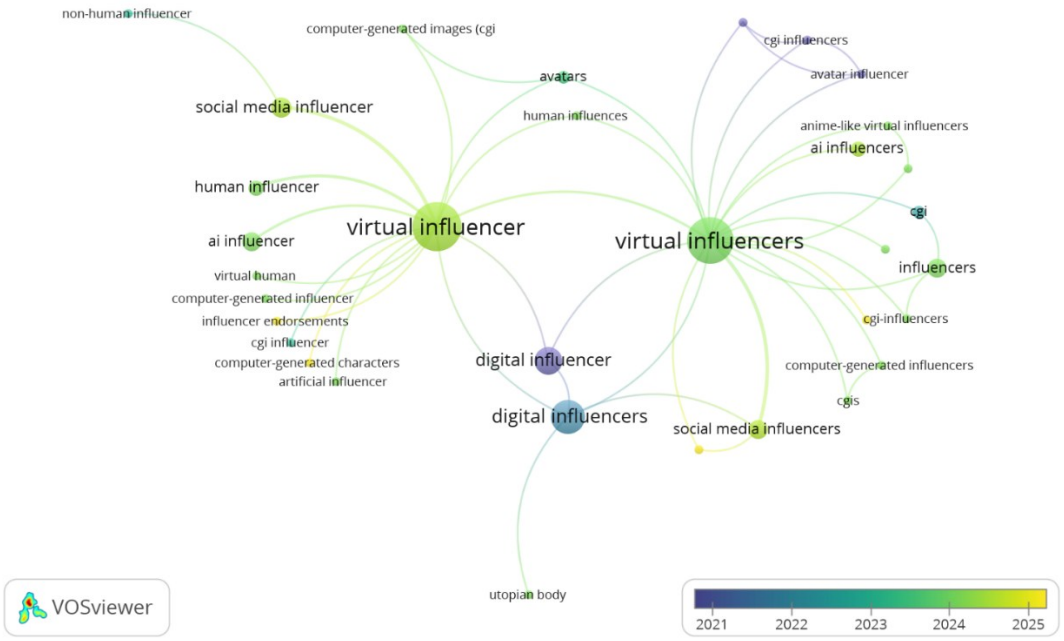

Figure 4. Keywords representing terminology used to identify influencers generated by AI

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

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Theories composing the background for the development of AI in influencer marketing

A variety of theoretical frameworks serve as the foundation for the field (Yashika & Prakash, 2025). Twenty-two theories were directly named in the articles analyzed (Table 3).

Table 3. Theories in the field of AI influencer marketing

Theory	Authors who draw on the theory	Main contribution/ findings
Complexity Theory	Alboqami (2023)	Complexity theory is applied to explore the intricate dynamics between AI influencers and their followers, highlighting how factors such as physical attractiveness, perceived similarity, alignment between influencer and consumer values, and authenticity play crucial roles in building trust toward AI influencers.
Construal Level Theory	Franke & Groeppel-Klein (2024)	Human-like virtual influencers are better suited for high-stakes domains (e.g., finance, healthcare) where trust and reliability are key, while cartoon-like virtual influencers are more effective for innovative product launches due to their novelty and playfulness.
	Mo & Wang (2025)	Temporal alignment between influencer type and narrative tense (e.g., virtual + present, human + past) enhances purchase intention, brand attachment, and brand credibility.
Expectancy Violation Theory	Yang et al. (2023)	Users are more likely to assign blame for source–message mismatch to endorsers who appear visually dissimilar, rather than to those who violate expectations.
Institutional Logics Theory	Da Fonseca et al. (2023)	Entrepreneurial institutional logics influence both users who become digital influencers and those who remain as consumers.
Meaning Transfer Theory	Torres, Augusto, Matos (2019)	Attractive digital influencers aligned with the brand can enhance consumer attitudes and boost purchase intentions.
Mind Perception Theory	Li et al. (2023)	Virtual influencers have been found to reduce the effectiveness of brand endorsements, leading to weaker consumer brand attitudes and lower purchase intentions.
	Willemsen et al. (2025)	Robotic entities are often perceived as having lower agency and experiential capacity, being seen as less capable of intention, action, and emotion.
	X. (Stella) Liu et al. (2025)	Consumers show greater distrust toward virtual compared to human influencers due to their lower perceived experience.
Narrative Transportation Theory	Y. Liu et al. (2024)	Non-linear narratives create more immersive experiences, which help travelers' feel more engaged and lead to more positive attitudes and behaviors.
Objectification Theory	Fowler & Thomas (2025)	Sexualized content from influencers (human or virtual) decreases consumer trust and weakens attitudes toward associated brands.
Parasocial Interaction Theory	Y. Liu et al. (2024)	Interactive, non-linear engagement with virtual influencers strengthens consumer connection, trust, and perceived credibility.
	Melnychuk et al. (2024)	Parasocial interaction with virtual influencers significantly enhances virtual engagement and user stickiness.
Parasocial Relationship Theory	T. Yu et al. (2025)	Emotional engagement and trust in virtual influencers are key to developing parasocial relationships, which strongly impact purchase intentions.
Persuasion Theory	Fayyaz et al. (2025)	Perceived influence and trustworthiness of digital influencers boost consumer involvement, which in turn positively affects attitudes toward endorsed brands.
Similarity-Attraction Theory	Igarashi et al. (2024)	Consumers perceive stronger similarity and authenticity with human influencers, boosting prosocial intentions; however, strong brand affiliation can make virtual influencers equally effective.
Social Categorization Theory	K. Zhang et al. (2025)	People tend to classify virtual influencers as an 'out-group' separate from humans; despite advances in AI, humans are still perceived as a distinct category.
Social Comparison Theory	Nasr et al. (2025)	Upward social comparisons with virtual influencers can evoke envy, jealousy, inspiration, optimism, or admiration, while downward assimilative comparisons may

Theory	Authors who draw on the theory	Main contribution/ findings
		trigger worry or sympathy. Additionally, negative emotions like shame can arise from comparing oneself to non-human influencers.
Social Information Processing Theory	Yoo et al. (2025)	Textual social cues shape perceived attractiveness and attitudinal homophily, which enhance virtual influencer credibility; this credibility then strongly predicts purchase intention.
Social Performance Theory	Duong & Tran (2024)	Virtual influencers primarily promote wildlife conservation using storytelling, visuals, interactive questions, and inspirational messages to advocate sustainability.
Source Credibility Theory	Melnychuk et al. (2024)	Virtual influencers' expertise and trustworthiness positively and significantly enhance parasocial interaction.
	Meng et al. (2025)	Virtual influencers boost cultural destination visits; human influencers are more effective for natural sites, mediated by credibility and self-referencing.
	Agnihotri et al. (2025)	Virtual influencers' credibility and humanized profiles attract followers and influence their buying behaviour.
	De Boissieu & Baudier (2023)	Millennials' and Gen Z's perceptions of human-like virtual influencers are affected by their cultural context and technological familiarity within the luxury sector.
Stimulus Organism Responses Theory	Toyib & Paramita (2024)	Homophily influences consumer cognition through anthropomorphism, which in turn affects responses like the intention to follow AI influencer recommendations.
Theory of Planned Behavior	Fayyaz et al. (2025)	Consumer involvement shapes attitudes and perceived control, boosting positive brand associations; digital influencers serve as trusted opinion leaders influencing these attitudes.
Theory of Sociology of Trust and Risk	Ameen et al. (2024)	Virtual influencers are more persuasive with positive destination messages, whereas human influencers are more effective when conveying negative information.
Trust Transfer Theory	T. Yu et al. (2025)	The source credibility of virtual influencers positively influences product trust, trust in the influencer, and emotional engagement.
	M. Choi et al. (2024)	Gen Z travelers' trust in sellers increases with high trust in the Instagram marketplace, combined with non-sponsored posts for human influencers, and sponsored posts for virtual influencers.
Use and Gratification Theory	Wei et al. (2025)	Followers of influencers adopt different roles (e.g. learners, friends or sponsors) reflecting their motives, influencing purchase intentions: utilitarian followers prioritize product function, while those seeking personal connection focus on symbolic value.

The identified theories were followed by the authors' analysis of various aspects of AI applications in influencer marketing. However, not all the theories that form the field have been named by the authors; therefore, there are still open possibilities for applying other theories as a research background.

Further analysis of keywords enabled the identification of sixty-five keywords representing different theories, models, and theoretical frameworks used in the field (Figure 5). As depicted in Figure 5, the authors' initial interest was drawn to value co-creation and the credibility or falsity of information. Further, research has considered stereotypes, influencer meaning transfer, and expectancy violation. Latter findings have led to an acknowledgement of parasocial relationships and parasocial interaction, psychological distance, and uncanny valley under a mind perception theory.

Recent research trends in the field of AI in influencer marketing have expanded to include the analysis of cultural background and relations, consumer segments, and attitudinal homophily within a social comparison theory framework.

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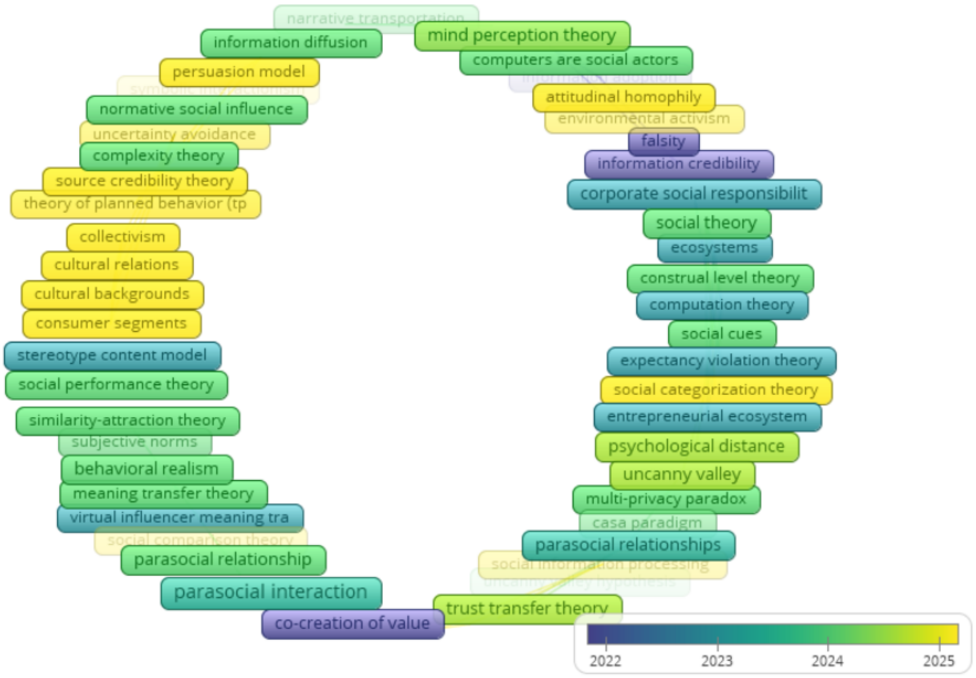

Figure 5. Keywords representing different theories and theoretical frameworks used in the field of AI in influencer marketing

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

Contexts considered while analyzing AI in influencer marketing

Keyword analysis was conducted to identify the primary research contexts and directions. Seven hundred twenty-nine keywords were found to be indicated by the authors. The keywords were analyzed and some were grouped because of the usage of the same word in either singular or plural (e.g., as different authors identified 'virtual influencer' and 'virtual influencers', in the table, those keywords were grouped into 'virtual influencer*'). According to Zipf's law, used to identify the threshold of the most frequently used keywords (Ito et al., 2023), a threshold of 27 (the square root of 729) was set. Analysis of author and index keywords showed that thirty-six keywords were indicated five or more times (Table 4).

Table 4. Most occurrent keywords in the field of AI influencer marketing

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
virtual influencer*	104	674	source credibility	7	47
social media	41	358	attractiveness	6	45
influencer marketing	39	222	influencer*	6	32
digital influencer*	36	229	internet	6	77
marketing	23	236	netnography	6	30
artificial intelligence	20	188	parasocial relationship*	6	55
anthropomorphism	16	91	retailing	6	65
instagram	16	101	advertising	5	44
purchase* intention*	14	83	attitude	5	32
consumption behavior	11	122	comparative study	5	47
social media influencer*	11	57	digital marketing	5	39
virtual reality	11	135	electronic commerce	5	55
authenticity	10	71	experimental study	5	53

trust	9	68	media role	5	57
ai influencer*	8	50	metaverse	5	24
perception	8	79	parasocial interaction	5	31
social media marketing	7	40	trustworthiness	5	26

**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on the 9th of June 2025; '*'- indicates the possibility of existence of additional letters.*

The most occurring keywords were also visualized, emphasizing their connections with other keywords and temporal distribution (Figure 5).

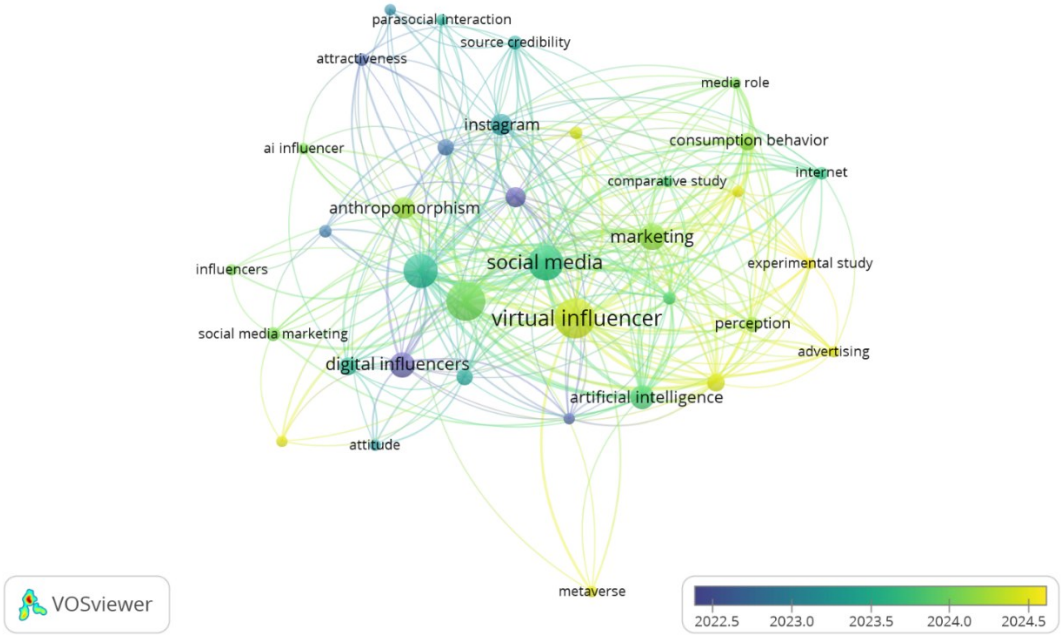

Figure 5. Temporal distribution of keywords in the field of AI in influencer marketing
**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

To better understand the research contexts and trends in the field of AI in influencer marketing, the keywords were qualitatively analyzed and grouped into categories. Analysis enabled the identification of five main research contexts drawing on the classical model of marketing communication: sender-focused, source-focused, message-focused, receiver-focused, and context-focused. These review results demonstrate that, despite technological advancements, classical marketing communication theory remains applicable to AI-based influencer marketing and the virtual influencer communication process.

Table 5 generalizes the author and index keywords characteristic of the sender. In this case, the sender is identified as a company, brand, or product being promoted through influencer marketing using AI. Considering that different keywords mainly characterize brands and products, two sub-categories were identified.

Table 5. Research contexts in the field of AI influencer marketing based on sender-focused keywords

Sub-category	Keywords
Brand/ branding perspective	Brand, algorithmic branding, brand affiliation, brand anthropomorphism, brand associations, brand attachment, brand attitude, brand authenticity, brand communication, brand credibility, brand endorsement, brand effectiveness, brand engagement, brand evangelism, brand expected value, brand experience, brand fidelity, brand followers, brand image recovery, brand intimacy, brand loyalty, brand managers participation, brand perception*, brand performance, brand personality, brand prominence, brand recall, brand salience, brand spokesmen, brand trust, brand value, brand vocal, brand-digital human connections, brand-exclusive digital human, brand-influencer fit types, branding, corporate reputation,

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Sub-category	Keywords
	corporate social responsibility, multiple brand endorsements, person branding, reputation, reputation risks
Product perspective	Experiential product, functional product, product attitude, product attractiveness, product attributes, product congruence, product involvement, product placement, product preferences, product recommendations, product review, product type, product–endorser fit, symbolic product, type of product

In the context of source-focused research, two subcategories can also be identified: research analyzing AI-generated influencers in general and research focused on influencer features (Table 6).

Table 6. Research contexts in the field of AI influencer marketing based on source-focused keywords

Sub-category	Keywords
Influencer perspective	Influence marketing, influencer activism, influencer archetype, influencer attractiveness, influencer credibility, influencer endorsements, influencer marketing, influencer network compression, influencer trust, influencer trustworthiness, influencer type, influencer*, influencer–product congruence, influencing marketing, megaphone effect, social bots, social robot, source, source attractiveness, source credibility, source credibility model, source credibility theory, source trust, spokesperson trust, vtuber performance, trust in digital influencer
Influencer features orientation	Altruism, animism, anthropomorphism, attractive appearance, attractiveness, attractiveness transference, body image, body-without-organs, cartoon-like vs. human-like, celebrity, charisma, charm, color, competence, complexity, congruence*, consistency, coolness, credibility, eeriness, expected values, familiarity, form realism, hominization, human versus virtual influencers, human*likeness, human-like attributes, identity, identity peddling. identity threat, image anthropomorphism, language, language arousal, language style, language type, language typicality, linguistic style, micro-celebrity, novelty, objectification, perceived human nature, physical attractiveness, poor fit, pop divas, robots, sensory cue*, shyness and confidence, social advocacy, social cue*, social presence, trustworthiness, usefulness, utopian body, warmth

Considering the message itself, three research trends (sub-categories) were determined: platform-specific-focused research, information-focused research, and message-focused research. Although all of them are interrelated, some articles were found to concentrate on different message elements (Table 7) specifically.

Table 7. Research contexts in the field of AI influencer marketing based on message-focused keywords

Sub-category	Keywords
Platform/ medium perspective	Blog*, blogger engagement, blogger*, e-marketplace, Instagram, Instagram marketplace, internet, media, media credibility, media platform, media role, online resistance, platform type, social media, social media engagement, social media ethics, social media influencer*, social media marketing, social media platforms, social medium engagement, social network*, social networking (online), social networking services, s-commerce experience, web 2.0, Youtube
Information perspective	Information, information adoption, information and communication technology, information credibility, information diffusion, information management, information needs, information quality, information technology, information usefulness, informational influence, informational social influence, informative, informative value
Message perspective	Advertisement appeal, advertising effects, avatar marketing, content, contextual factors, creativity process, emotional appeal, endorsement, endorsement choice, endorsement effectiveness, endorsement transgression, entertainment, entertainment value, narrative strategies, message, message acceptance, message authenticity, message credibility, message effectiveness, message focus, message source,

	message warmth, presentation formats, paratext, persuasion, sensorial information, sensory marketing, sponsorship disclosure, storytelling, visual cue

The receiver-(consumer)-focused research was found to be the broadest. Three subcategories were identified in this context: consumer characteristics-related research, focusing on different segments, various features, and motives; consumer reaction-focused research, mainly analyzing consumer cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions toward AI in influencer marketing; culture-specific research drawing on cultural differences of consumers and the impact of culture (Table 8).

Table 8. Research contexts in the field of AI influencer marketing based on receiver-focused keywords

Sub-category	Keywords
Consumer perspective	Audience, audience interaction, Chinese consumers, consumer acceptance, consumer behavior*, consumer segments, consumer well-being, egoistic motive*, end-users, future prospect, gender, generation z, gen z traveler, generation y (millennials), human behavior, human computer interaction, millennials, minority influence, on-line communities, personal identity, personalization, public attitude, race, self-brand engagement, self-branding, self-concept clarity, self-discrepancy, self-efficacy, self-improvement product, self-referencing, self-regulation, sensory system, sensory capacities, symbolic interactionism, social rules, social theory, social-psychological distance, societal changes, social behavior, social identity, social impact, social movement, subjective knowledge, subjective norms, user study, user wellbeing, user* experience, user's preferences, youth activism
Consumer reactions	Advertising recognition, affective trust, appearance anxiety, attitude, attitude toward the endorsement, attitude towards information, attitudinal homophily, authentication, behavior, behavioral engagement, behavioral intention, behavioral realism, behavioral research, behavioural model, benefit seeking behaviour, blame judgement, budget control, buying behavior, buying decision, buying intention, choice modelling, co-creation, co-creation of value, cognition, cognitive style, cognitive trust, consumer engagement, consumer involvement, consumer perception, consumer purchase decision, consumer purchase intention, consumer response, consumer-endorser identification, consumption behavior, customer awareness, customer engagement, customer interest, customer purchase desire, dark behavior, decision making, dehumanization, democratization, dual-congruence effect, electronic word*of*mouths, emotional attachment, emotional engagement, emotional labour, emotional trust, engagement, expectancy violation, homophily, identification, implicit behavior, impulse buying, intention to engage, intention to follow, long-term relationships, mind perception, mimetic desire, parasocial interaction, parasocial relations, parasocial relationship*, perception, perceived altruistic motivation, perceived anthropomorphism, perceived authenticity, perceived autonomy, perceived credibility, perceived homophily, perceived influence, perceived interactivity, perceived reciprocity, perceived uniqueness, perceived usefulness, preference behavior, prosocial behavior, psychological distance, psychological response, purchase* intention*, purchasing, repurchase intention, responsibility attribution, satisfaction, social e-WOM, state appearance comparison, stereotypic behavior, stickiness, the uncanny, trust, trust in experts, trust perception, uncanniness, uncanny valley, uncertainty, uncertainty avoidance, user engagement, user engagement behavior, user perceptions, user repost behavior, wishful identification, word*of*mouth
Culture-specific	Collectivism, culture, cultural backgrounds, cultural dimensions, cultural heritage, cultural heritage destination, cultural intermediaries, cultural relations, culture jamming, diversity, Hofstede, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, orientalism, stereotypes

Finally, as all communication is provided within a specific context, context-focused research trends were also mapped. In this case, the keywords were grouped into four sub-categories. Several articles were found to analyze particular industries or product categories, including tourism, fashion, beauty, and luxury. These were generalized into subcategories focusing on the industry perspective. Further, articles were found to have a clear focus on AI, digitization/ digitalization, and information and communication technologies. The topic of AI-related risks and ethical issues also appeared to be emerging. Finally, the sustainability perspective is also emerging in the field (Table 9).

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Table 9. Research contexts in the field of AI influencer marketing based on context-focused keywords

Sub-category	Keywords
Industry perspective	Business, business development, business strategy, beauty, beauty influencers, commerce, destination image, destination types, e-commerce, electronic commerce, e-retailer, entrepreneur, entrepreneurial behavior, entrepreneurial ecosystem, environment and business, fashion, fashion blogs, fashion companies, fashion industry, fashion influencers, fashion marketing, fashionable ideal, football club merchandise, heritage narration, heritage tourism, hospitality, hospitality industry, hospitality virtual influencer, industry lifecycle, international entrepreneurship, luxury, luxury brands, luxury consumption, marketplace ideologies, restaurants, retailing, sales, sharing economy, smart tourism, social commerces, tourism, tourism ambassador, tourism development, tourism influencer marketing, tourism management, tourism market, tourism marketing, tourist destination, travel bloggers, traveler attitude, Uber
Digit(al)ization and technology	Artificial intelligence, artificial intelligence (AI) generated content, casa paradigm, CGI*, computer-generated image*, computers are social actors (CASA), digitization, digital activism, digital advertising, digital avatars, digital communication, digital environment, digital influence, digital influencer*, digital labour, digital marketing, digital natives, digital platform*, digital strategies, digital transformation, generative adversarial networks, generative ai, generative model*, human–machine communication, interactivity, management of technology & innovation, metaverse, metaverse marketing, mobile application use, new technology, technoculture, technological development, technology, technology adoption, technology affordances, search engine optimization, shared reality, virtual consumption, virtual endorser, virtual engagement, virtual environments, virtual flow experience, virtual follower engagement, virtual follower stickiness, virtual human, virtual influence, virtual influencer marketing, virtual influencer meaning transfer, virtual influencer*, virtual influencers (vi), virtual influencers' personalities, virtual product, virtual reality, virtual web celebrity, virtual youtubers, virtuality, virtualization
Risks and ethics	AI ethics, authenticity, certainty, critic, critic 2.0, dark side of social media, data privacy, data vulnerability, cybercrime, ethical considerations, ethical judgments, ethics, fake profile, falsity, governance approach, government censorship*, multi-privacy paradox, national security, political change*, realistic threat, risk, risk factor, risk perception, speciesism, unbalanced privacy risk
Sustainability perspective	Environmental activism, green marketing, green product endorsement, green products, pro-environmental behaviors, public crisis events, sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable purchase intentions, wellbeing

The identified contexts enable mapping the field of knowledge in terms of the emerging research directions; therefore, future authors may rely on Tables 5-9 to better identify the research gaps and under-researched areas in the field of AI in influencer marketing.

Research methods in the field of AI influencer marketing

Like every other domain, the field of AI in influencer marketing is evolving based on various research methods and their combinations. A thorough, in-depth analysis of all 188 extracted articles enabled the identification of a variety of descriptive and exploratory methods used in the field. The most popular approach was found to be quantitative (54 articles), followed by experimental (52 articles) and qualitative (48 articles). Three articles applied a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) and mathematical modelling. Also, a mixed or multi-method approach was found in fourteen articles. One article adopted a practice theory for research. Finally, fourteen papers were found to be based on literature review and theoretical modeling. The method was not presented in the abstracts of the five articles, and there was no possibility of retrieving them due to access restrictions.

Even eighteen articles published in 2025 employed a quantitative approach, whereas in the initial publications in the field, this approach was not as popular. For example, only twelve articles used purely quantitative methods in 2024. Articles adopting quantitative methods were mainly based on questionnaire surveys with followers or experts. The sample sizes varied from 133

(Krywalski Santiago & Serralha, 2022) to 1,385 respondents, comprising three studies (Cheng & Wang, 2025). Structural equation modeling (using partial least squares and covariance-based methods) was found to be the most preferred data analysis method, as chosen by the authors; additionally, SmartPLS was also found to be a popular choice.

It is worth noting that initial articles in the field were based on a qualitative approach, whereas from 2021 onwards, other types of methods began to gain prominence. The most popular qualitative method was found to be interviews (23 cases), followed by focus group discussions, netnography, and content analyses (profiles, posts, comments). The sample sizes of interviews varied from three to one hundred forty-eight (with an average of 32 and a median of 27 participants). Additionally, one article (J. Yu et al., 2024) utilized facial recognition based on 1,028 pictures shared by Lil Miquela to investigate the significance of various emotions in user engagement.

Starting with two articles based on experimental studies in 2022 and six in 2023, this approach gained popularity beginning from 2024. Analyzing the experimental conditions, most of them were provided online, and one to six experiments per study were provided (median = 3). The number of participants varied from 43 to 1,914, with an average of 646 participants per article (encompassing one or more experimental studies). Park et al. (2024) conducted a study with forty-three participants who had Instagram accounts representing AI, influencers, and the public, specifically created for the experiment. The results showed that it was not easy for the participants to distinguish between AI accounts and human ones. On the other extreme, a paper by J. Zhang et al. (2025), based on five experimental studies involving a total of 1,914 participants, demonstrated that virtual influencers are perceived as less sincere and more exciting than human ones.

Finally, mixed or multi-method approaches started gaining popularity among researchers (eight articles were published in 2024). This approach combines several methods to analyze a single phenomenon; therefore, the results can be considered more reliable.

Forty-six method-related keywords were identified by the authors in the selected articles (Figure 6).

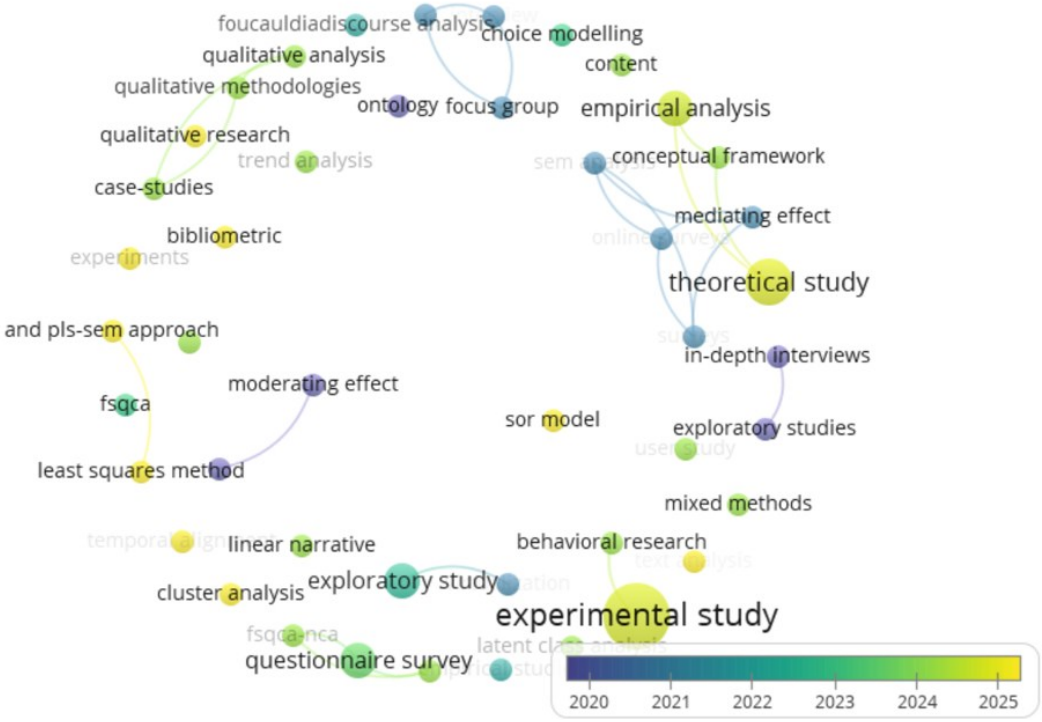

Figure 6. Temporal distribution of research methods in the field of AI in influencer marketing
**Note: based on data extracted from the Scopus database on 9th of June 2025.*

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Discussion and conclusions

This review is among the first attempts to map an emerging and rapidly growing field of research at the intersection of artificial intelligence and influencer marketing. A systematic literature review of the 188 selected articles published in the Scopus database in the areas of Business, Management, and Accounting before June 9, 2025, enabled answering the research questions and framing the initiation of the field.

Bibliometric analysis of scientific literature based on the PRISMA framework enabled the identification of current publication trends in the field of AI in influencer marketing. The number of articles published on AI and influencer marketing has been exponentially growing since 2017. Virtual influencers like Lil Miquela have attracted significant researchers' attention (Drenten & Brooks, 2020, J. Yu et al., 2024). AI-generated characters like Lil Miquela and Shudu can be manipulated to convey brand narratives to consumers (Square, 2021).

Among the five hundred eighteen authors who have contributed to the development of the field, only eight were found to have published more than two articles. While Lotka's law states that "in a given area of science, there are a lot of authors who publish only one study, while a small group of prolific authors contribute with a large number of publications" (Andrés, 2009), a group of eight prolific authors is significantly too small to guide the development of the domain. On the other hand, the domain can be characterized as being in its infancy stage; therefore, more prolific authors are expected to emerge in the future. Currently, the prolific authors are found to represent Australia (five authors), the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. However, considering country productivity, with forty articles, China was found to be the most productive country, followed by the United States (thirty-seven articles) and the United Kingdom (twenty-nine articles).

The infancy stage of the domain's development is also evident in the terminology used to describe the phenomenon. The main term used by the authors to name the influencers generated using AI was found to be 'virtual influencer' (104 occurrences), followed by 'digital influencer' (36 occurrences) and 'AI influencer' (8 occurrences). Such inaccurate usage of synonyms violates the smooth development of the domain. Evidently, 'digital influencer' was the term used in the initial exploration of the field, while 'virtual influencer' emerged in more recent articles and is steadily gaining ground.

Considering the theories that comprise the background for the development of AI in influencer marketing, the authors followed twenty-two theories, addressing different aspects related to the phenomenon. The most followed theories were found to be the Source Credibility Theory, Mind Perception Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Construal Level Theory, and Trust Transfer Theory.

The contexts being considered while researching the field of AI influencer marketing were determined by analyzing author and index keywords. Five main research contexts were distinguished, drawing on the classical model of marketing communication: sender-focused, source-focused, message-focused, receiver-focused, and context-focused. Previous research has highlighted that the infancy and ongoing development of the domain may lead to the emergence of new research trends in the future (Pilelienė & Jucevičius, 2023).

Finally, the analysis of the research methods used in the field of AI in influencer marketing identified three principal approaches: quantitative (54 articles), followed by experimental (52 articles), and qualitative (48 articles). However, a mixed or multi-method approach emerged starting in 2024. Johnson et al. (2007) argued that combining qualitative and quantitative research methods in the same research project, mixed methods-based research is one of the three major "research paradigms" in line with quantitative and qualitative; while multi-method paradigm relies on the combining of two or more methods, with no suggestion that both qualitative and quantitative methods are involved (Anguera et al., 2018).

Another overlooked research approach was found to be neuromarketing. Only one article by J. Yu et al. (2024) adopted a neuromarketing perspective using facial recognition to investigate the significance of various emotions for user

engagement. Neuromarketing tools are convenient for measuring customers' behaviors and emotional reactions toward marketing (Alsharif & Khraiwish, 2024); therefore, this trend should also be considered in the domain of AI and especially in influencer marketing (Khraiwish & Alsharif, 2024).

Several limitations of this review should be acknowledged. The review was based on the articles found on the Scopus database published in the subject area "Business, Management and Accounting". Therefore, some important articles published in a different subject area or another database (e.g., Web of Science) might have been omitted. Moreover, this review considered only articles, while excluding reviews, conference papers, books, or book chapters. Also, for future research, other or more subject-specific keywords can be included in the search inquiry.

This review adopted the TCM framework. Undeniably, using different SLR frameworks can lead to more precise or specific results.

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