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## Mapping a Decade of Source Credibility Research in Influencer Marketing: A Bibliometric Review\*

Alperen YASA<sup>1</sup> Beril DURMUŞ<sup>2</sup> Aypar USLU<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The source credibility model is essential to understanding how influencers can be effectively utilized in marketing communications. Initially explored within the field of communication, the concept later became a crucial component of the celebrity endorsement literature. In recent years, with the rapid rise of influencer marketing, source credibility receives increasing attention from scholars in this domain. Despite this growing interest, there is a lack of a comprehensive literature review specifically examining how source credibility theory is applied within influencer marketing. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore the use of source credibility theory in influencer marketing through a comprehensive literature review supported by bibliometric analysis. To this end, articles indexed in Scopus are reviewed, and 162 eligible articles are identified and analyzed based on predetermined criteria using bibliometric methods. The findings reveal several key insights: the source credibility model is most frequently examined in conjunction with parasocial relationship theory. Among the model's dimensions, trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are the most commonly studied. Furthermore, the study identifies the leading authors and most-cited works in the field, highlights core research themes and trends, and presents a comprehensive discussion of the literature. This research offers a valuable resource for scholars by synthesizing the key contributions, summarizing influential studies, and identifying emerging topics that guide further investigations in the field.

**Keywords:** Source Credibility Model, Influencer Marketing, Celebrity Endorsement, Bibliometric Analysis

**JEL Classification Codes:** M30, M31

### Influencer Pazarlamada Kaynak Güvenilirliği Araştırmalarının On Yıllık Haritalandırması: Bibliyometrik Bir İnceleme


#### ÖZ


Kaynak güvenilirliği modeli, etkileyicilerin pazarlama iletişimde nasıl efektif bir biçimde kullanılabileceğini anlamak için önem arz etmektedir. Konsept, literatürde ilk olarak iletişim alanında araştırılmış ve daha sonra ünlü onayı literatürünün önemli bir bileşeni olmuştur. Son yıllarda etkileyici pazarlamada yaşanan patlama, bilim insanlarının kaynak güvenilirliğine olan ilgisini artırmaktadır. Ancak literatür, artan ilgiye rağmen, kaynak güvenilirliği teorisinin etkileyici pazarlamada nasıl uygulandığını inceleyen kapsamlı bir araştırmadan mahrumdur. Bu boşluğu ele alan çalışma, bibliyometrik analizle desteklenen detaylı bir literatür incelemesi yoluyla etkileyici pazarlamada kaynak güvenilirliği teorisinin kullanımını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla Scopus'ta indekslenen makaleler incelenmiş ve belirlenen kriterlere göre elde edilen 162 makale analize tabi tutulmuştur. Bulgular kaynak güvenilirliği modelinin en fazla parasosyal ilişki teorisi ile incelendiğini ve modelin en sık kullanılan alt boyutlarının güvenilirlik, uzmanlık ve çekicilik olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca bu çalışma ile alanın önde gelen yazarları ve en çok atıf alan çalışmaları belirlenmekte, temel araştırma temaları ve eğilimler vurgulanmakta ve literatürün kapsamlı bir tartışması sunulmaktadır. Bu çalışma alandaki önemli katkıları sentezleyerek, etkili çalışmaları özetleyerek ve gelecek araştırmalara rehberlik edecek yeni konuları belirleyerek araştırmacılar için yol gösterici bir kaynak sunmaktadır.


**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kaynak Güvenilirliği Modeli, Influencer Pazarlama, Ünlü Onayı, Bibliyometrik Analiz

**JEL Sınıflandırma Kodları:** M30, M31

\* This study is based on the first author's doctoral dissertation.

<sup>1</sup>  Res. Assist., Marmara University, Business School, Department of Business Administration, alperen.yasa@marmara.edu.tr

<sup>2</sup>  Prof. Dr., Marmara University, Business School, Department of Business Administration, beril@marmara.edu.tr

<sup>3</sup>  Prof. Dr., Marmara University, Business School, Department of Business Administration, auslu@marmara.edu.tr

## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### Amaç ve Kapsam:

Ünlülerin marka onaylayıcıları olarak kullanılması 18.yy'a kadar uzanmaktadır (Kaikati, 1987). Topluma mal olan bu kişiler markalara yönelik olumlu tüketici tutumlarını şekillendirmede (Kahle ve Holmer, 1985; Wilson ve Sherrell, 1993; Tormala, Briñol ve Petty, 2006), marka anlamlarını aktarmada (McCracken, 1989; Roy, 2018; Torres, Augusto ve Matos, 2019) ve tüketicilerin davranışsal niyetlerini etkilemede (Törn, 2012; Amos vd., 2008; AlFarraj ve diğerleri, 2021) önemli bir role sahiptir. Web 2.0 sonrası sosyal medyanın gelişimiyle beraber ortaya çıkan geleneksel olmayan ünlüler olan etkileyiciler (influencers), geleneksel ünlülerin bu rolünü üstlenerek markalarla pek çok şekilde iş birliği yapmaktadır. Bu noktada etkileyicilerin tıpkı geleneksel ünlülerinki gibi tüketici tutum ve niyetlerini etkileyebilmesi için öne çıkan konulardan birisi de algılanan güvenilirlikleridir.

Hem büyük işletmeler hem de küçük ve orta ölçekli işletmeler iletişim stratejilerinde her geçen gün etkileyicilerin güvenilirliğinden daha fazla yararlanmaktadır. Bu durum, alanda çok sayıda araştırma yapılmasına neden olmaktadır. Ancak markaların hangi etkileyici özelliklerinin güvenilirliğe neden olabileceğini anlaması etkileyici seçimleri için önemli bir kriterdir. Ayrıca araştırmacıların, etkileyicilerin güvenilirliğini oluşturan unsurları ve bu güvenilirliğin etkilerini bir bütün olarak görebilmesi, literatürde boşluk kalan alanları tespit edip bu alanlara yoğunlaşabilmeleri için önem arz etmektedir. Böyle bir tespit ancak veri görselleştirmesi ile mümkün olabilmektedir. Ünlü onayı (Hariningsih vd. 2024), kaynak güvenilirliği (Halder vd. 2021) ve etkileyici pazarlama (Srivastava, 2021) alanında çeşitli çalışmalar yapılmış olsa da hiçbiri etkileyici güvenilirliğini bir bütün olarak ele almamıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma dört araştırma sorusuna odaklanmıştır:

- 1) Alanın önde gelen araştırmacıları kimlerdir ve etkileyici güvenilirliği konusunu nasıl ele almaktadırlar?
- 2) Alanı şekillendiren temel araştırma konuları nelerdir?
- 3) Etkileyicilere yönelik yapılan en önemli çalışmalar (en yüksek atıfa sahip) etkileyicinin güvenilirliğini hangi alt boyutlar ile açıklamaktadır?
- 4) Alandaki mevcut ve gelecekteki araştırmalara rehberlik eden trenler nelerdir?

### Yöntem:

Bu çalışmada ele alınan araştırma sorularının cevaplanabilmesi için alanda yapılan çalışmalar, en fazla eseri barındırdığı bilinen Scopus veri tabanı aracılığıyla elde edilmiş (Elsevier, 2024) ve bibliyometrik analiz yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Analizi gerçekleştirmek için Vosviewer (Van Eck ve Waltman, 2014) ve Biblioshiny (Aria ve Cuccurullo, 2017) yazılımlarından yararlanılmıştır. Analizin Klarin (2024) tarafından önerildiği gibi sistematik bir akış içerisinde gerçekleştirilebilmesi için Aria & Cuccurullo (2017)'nin akışı takip edilmiştir. Eser türüne, makale başlığına, makale özetine, anahtar kelimelere, araştırma alanına göre yapılan eleme sonucu etkileyici pazarlamada kaynak güvenilirliği teorisinden faydalanan 173 makale tespit edilmiştir. Bu makalelerin her birinin özetleri ve anahtar kelimeleri incelenerek çalışmanın kapsamı dışında kalan 11 makale elenmiş ve 162 makale analize sokulmuştur.

### Bulgular:

Bu çalışmanın bulguları alanda yazılan eserlere göre alanın yıllık ortalama büyümesinin %25,3 olduğunu, alanın önde gelen üç yazarının Lou, Yuan ve Djafarova olduğunu, alanın en çok atıf alan üç çalışmasının Lou ve Yuan (2019), Djafarova ve Rushworth (2017) ile Breves vd. (2019)'ne ait olduğunu, alanda öne çıkan teori ve yaklaşımlar arasında parassosyal ilişki teorisi, ünlü kullanım modelleri, ayrıntılandırma olasılığı modeli, kaynak çekiciliği modeli ve uyumun yer aldığını, ele alınan temel araştırma konularının arasında milenyum kuşağı, sanal etkileyiciler, yapay zeka, antropomorfizm, güzellik ürünleri ve reklam ifşasının bulunduğunu, etkileyicinin güvenilirlik boyutlarından en fazla uzmanlık, güvenilirlik ve çekiciliğin incelendiğini, kaynak güvenilirliğinin doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak etkilediği değişkenler arasında en çok çalışılanların güven, marka güveni, marka katılımı, seyahat niyetleri, reklama yönelik tutumlar ve satın alma niyetleri olduğunu ve güvenilirlikleri açısından en çok incelenen etkileyici tiplerinin Instagram etkileyicileri olduğunu tespit etmiştir.

### Sonuç ve Tartışma:

Bu çalışmanın sonuçları alanı inceleyecek araştırmacılara tematik haritalandırma, eş zamanlılık ağı ve trend analizi ile etkileyici pazarlama literatüründe kaynak güvenilirliğinin nasıl ele alındığını, hangi konuların bir arada çalışıldığını, dönemsel olarak popüler alanların neler olduğunu ve araştırma boşluklarının neler olabileceğini göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla çalışma, bu konuda gelecekte çalışacak araştırmacılar için zengin bir yol haritası sunmaktadır.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Celebrity endorsement is one of the most extensively discussed topics in the marketing literature. The use of celebrities as brand endorsers dates back to the 19th century (Kaikati, 1987). Celebrities play a crucial role in shaping positive consumer attitudes toward brands (Kahle & Holmer, 1985; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2006), facilitating the transfer of brand meanings (McCracken, 1989; Roy, 2018; Torres, Augusto, & Matos, 2019), and influencing consumer behavioral intentions (Törn, 2012; Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008; AlFarraj et al., 2021). This role of celebrity not only affects consumers' behavior towards the brand or product but also transforms society (McCracken, 1986; McCracken, 1989). Recognizing this persuasive power, brands have made celebrity endorsement a core element of their communication strategies.

The literature categorizes the main celebrity endorsement models under four primary frameworks: the source credibility model, the source attractiveness model, the meaning transfer model, and the match-up hypothesis. The match-up hypothesis posits that the effectiveness of the persuasion process increases when there is a perceived fit or congruence between the endorser and the product or brand (Kahle & Holmer, 1985; Misra & Beatty, 1990; Kamins, 1990). The meaning transfer model, proposed by McCracken (1986, 1989), suggests that celebrities serve as cultural conduits, transferring symbolic meanings to the brands they endorse. The source credibility model asserts that a communicator must possess certain characteristics—such as trustworthiness and expertise—to be perceived as credible (Hovland et al., 1953; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). On the other hand, the source attractiveness model focuses on attributes such as familiarity, likability, similarity, and physical attractiveness, which enhance consumer interest in the source (McGuire, 1985). Later, Ohanian (1990) developed a composite source credibility model by integrating the source credibility and source attractiveness models.

Undoubtedly, all four theoretical models discussed play a significant role in shaping brand adoption and product consumption. However, this study specifically focuses on the source credibility model. As previously noted in the literature, there has been a substantial surge in scholarly attention to source credibility since the early 2000s (Roy, 2018). Moreover, with the rise and evolution of social media, non-traditional celebrities—commonly referred to as influencers—have emerged as key endorsers, possessing their unique characteristics. According to Statista, as of February 2025, approximately 5.24 billion people, in other words, 63.9% of the global population, reported using social media (Petrosyan, 2025). Furthermore, the Statista Research Department (2025) reported that the influencer marketing market size reached \$24 billion in 2024. In a related projection, Goldman Sachs (2023) estimated that the total influencer economy, valued at \$250 billion in 2023, is expected to grow to \$450 billion by 2027. This situation has raised important questions regarding which influencer characteristics are most persuasive as a credible source, and how these characteristics influence various consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Both established brands and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) increasingly leverage influencers' credibility in their communication strategies. As a result, celebrity endorsement theory has significantly contributed to the rapid expansion of influencer marketing literature. However, to further advance the field, researchers must be able to identify future research directions, recognize the most frequently studied topics and theories, pinpoint gaps in the literature, and discover the leading authors and foundational studies. A comprehensive understanding of the field also requires access to synthesized insights from these key contributions. Such an endeavor is only possible through a bibliometric analysis conducted within a systematic and structured research framework.

With the evolution of celebrity endorsement, a number of early studies have sought to examine the development of the literature (Kaikati, 1987; Erdogan, 1999; Pornpitakpan, 2004). In recent years, comprehensive bibliometric analyses have also been conducted in the field (Wang & Liu, 2022; Shafie et al., 2023). However, these studies typically approach the topic as a very broad whole. In other respects, Rocha et al. (2020) specifically examined celebrity endorsement within the context of marketing communication, while Halder et al. (2021) focused on the credibility dimension. In a more narrowly scoped study, Hariningsih et al. (2024) provided a snapshot of the celebrity endorsement literature, addressing both influencer and traditional celebrities. Moreover, studies on influencer marketing have also been explored from a broader lens using bibliometric analysis (Srivastava, 2021; Tanwar et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies offer researchers a valuable foundation for shaping their scholarly roadmaps. However, within the fields of persuasion literature and communication studies, the

question of which source characteristics contribute to credibility continues to be actively investigated. For this reason, the number of studies that use source credibility theory in influencer marketing is rapidly increasing. Unlike the studies cited above, the present research focuses on a prescription that will guide researchers who will directly examine influencer credibility. In doing so, this study provides future researchers with a structured overview—a focused map within a theoretical context—to navigate a growing and complex body of literature. Based on this rationale, the research questions (RQs) guiding this study are as follows:

**RQ1:** Who are the leading researchers in the field, and how do they approach the topic of source credibility in influencer marketing?

**RQ2:** What are the key research topics that have shaped the field?

**RQ3:** Which dimensions of source credibility are addressed in the most influential studies on influencers?

**RQ4:** What emerging trends guide current and future research in the field?

To conduct this research, the study employs the bibliometric analysis method. For bibliometric analysis to effectively examine a topic from multiple perspectives and provide meaningful insights for researchers, it must follow a systematic and structured workflow (Klarin, 2024). Accordingly, this study adopts the workflow proposed by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017).

The structure of this study is as follows: The next section examines the theoretical background of influencer credibility. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research methodology and systematic workflow adopted for the bibliometric analysis. Subsequently, all retrieved studies were analyzed, and the contributions of leading authors in the field were evaluated. The analysis continues with factor analysis of authors' keywords, followed by the construction of network matrices, including bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence analysis. In the final stages, a comprehensive overview of the literature is presented through thematic mapping and trend topic analysis, highlighting current research directions and gaps in the literature. The study concludes with a general evaluation of the findings and key points for discussion.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Influencer Marketing

In general, influence can be defined as the power to affect a person, situation or event (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 50). Influence is not exerted in isolation; it occurs within a specific context or frame of reference (Levin, 2020). Therefore, for influence to take place, there must be both a stimulating event or message and a target audience or recipient. In this regard, the primary role of an influencer is to affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audience by shaping what they communicate, how they behave, and what they present in digital environments (Vodák et al., 2019).

The earliest studies on interpersonal influence can be traced back to Ryan and Gross's (1943) seminal work, "The Diffusion of Hybrid Seed Corn in Two Iowa Communities", which laid the foundation for the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Valente & Rogers, 1995; Kaminski, 2011). Early adopters play a pivotal role in the dissemination of innovations. Their influence often facilitates the adoption process by encouraging the early majority and late majority to accept and try innovations (Chan & Misra, 1990). Subsequent research highlighted the importance of interpersonal contacts in shaping adoption behavior, as well as the influence of dissenting or opposing leaders on public opinion (Burt, 1999; Valente & Davis, 1999). Academic inquiry into consumer influence formally began with the foundational studies of Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955), which introduced the concept of key opinion leadership (KOL). KOLs are defined as individuals who exert varying degrees of influence over others' decisions (Rogers & Cartano, 1962, p. 453). Practitioners have long recognized the value of KOLs and have utilized symbolic or real figures to shape public perception. For example, Aunt Jemima was introduced in 1889 to personify a pancake mix, Coca-Cola famously employed Santa Claus in 1931, and the Marlboro Man emerged in the 1950s as a lasting symbol of rugged masculinity (Glenister, 2021). These figures served not only as marketing icons but also as opinion leaders, capable of influencing consumers' beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007).

Today, independent third parties, which may also consist of opinion leaders, who shape the attitudes of those who follow them through social media are called "influencers" (Freberg et al., 2011). One of the defining characteristics that distinguishes influencers, as the term is understood in both colloquial and

academic contexts, is that their public recognition originates primarily from social media platforms, rather than from traditional media outlets such as television, radio, or film (Khamis et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Lou and Yuan (2019, p. 59) emphasize that social media content influencers (SCIs) are, above all, content creators. They define SCIs as “one who has a status of expertise in a specific area, who has cultivated a sizable number of captive followers—who are of marketing value to brands—by regularly producing valuable content via social media.” Unlike traditional celebrities, whose interaction with audiences is typically limited and one-directional, social media influencers are able to form more meaningful, sincere, and trust-based relationships through ongoing, personal engagement with their followers (Breves et al., 2019). In this context, the user—positioned as a potential customer—becomes the focal point of influencer marketing. Influencers often function as relatable role models with whom users can identify and emotionally connect (Alassani & Göretz, 2019). Influencer marketing emphasizes interactive, two-way communication, making it a more effective and personalized approach. As noted earlier, the bond established with an influencer tends to be perceived as more credible and trustworthy. In this process, the influencer may serve not only as a distribution channel but also as a strategic intermediary in marketing communication—delivering persuasive texts, images, and videos that foster brand engagement (Carter, 2016).

## **2.2. Source Credibility**

The scientific examination of the concept of credibility is as old as the study of rhetoric, tracing back to Ancient Greek philosophy (Eisend, 2006, p. 2). The term was originally conceptualized as “ethos” by Aristotle, referring to the audience’s trust in the speaker—a foundational element of persuasive communication (Giffin, 1967; Ohanian, 1990, p. 41).

The significance attributed to credibility lies in its ability to enhance the persuasiveness of a message and shape audience attitudes (Hovland & Weiss, 1951, p. 650). From a marketing communication perspective, consumers often rely on intuitive cues to assess the trustworthiness and accuracy of the messages they encounter. Research in the persuasion literature suggests that, rather than engaging in systematic processing of message content, individuals frequently base their judgments on source-related cues, such as the source’s identity (Chaiken, 1980, p. 754). In this context, messages delivered by a credible source are shown to be more effective in influencing attitudes and beliefs compared to those from less credible sources (Hovland & Weiss, 1951, p. 650).

However, individuals may already hold pre-existing opinions about a topic before encountering a persuasive message. In such cases, these initial attitudes serve as a key determinant of how the message is processed and received. The individual evaluates the degree of similarity between their own opinion and the message content. When this similarity is high and the source is perceived as highly credible, the individual is more likely to form a positive cognitive response to the message (Sternthal et al., 1978, p. 252). Moreover, when the message presents strong arguments, and the recipient develops positive thoughts in response, the perceived credibility of the source amplifies the persuasive effect—leading to more favorable attitudes compared to messages from sources perceived as less credible (Tormala et al., 2006, p. 684).

The first seminal study to conceptualize source credibility within the context of celebrity endorsement was conducted by Hovland et al. (1953). Their work established the foundational sub-dimensions of credibility: expertise and trustworthiness, by analyzing the communicator’s role in shaping message effectiveness. Trustworthiness is defined as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid.” (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). In contrast, expertise refers to “the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions” (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). Subsequent research has consistently demonstrated that these dimensions significantly influence attitude change in the message recipient (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993, p. 102).

In addition to these two dimensions, Friedman & Friedman (1976, p. 48) found a strong correlation between trust in political figures and their perceived likability. Similarly, Friedman et al. (1978) identified a significant relationship between trust in celebrities—including actors, athletes, and entrepreneurs—and both likability and perceived similarity. These findings suggest that a celebrity’s

similarity to the audience and their likability play a key role in facilitating trust, thereby enhancing source credibility.

In subsequent research, McGuire (1985) made a significant contribution to the literature by developing the Source Attractiveness Model. Grounded in social psychology, this model posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message is influenced by the familiarity, likability, similarity, and physical attractiveness of the source (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). McGuire's work became a foundational reference point for future studies aiming to determine the dimensions of source credibility. Building on both theoretical frameworks, Ohanian (1990) integrated McGuire's Source Attractiveness Model with the earlier expertise and trustworthiness dimensions proposed by Hovland et al. (1953). This synthesis resulted in a more comprehensive model of source credibility, which has since been widely applied in marketing and communication studies.

As previously emphasized, this study focuses on how source credibility is conceptualized and applied within the influencer marketing context. Accordingly, the ways in which these two theoretical foundations intersect and are reflected in the literature will be discussed in detail in the results and discussion section of the study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Data Collection and Elimination

This two-stage study consists of a comprehensive literature review in the first phase, followed by data visualization in the second phase to provide a holistic perspective on the findings. To achieve this, the most suitable database was first identified. Scopus, one of the most widely used academic databases (Bergman, 2012; Chadegani et al. 2013), was selected as the data source for this study. According to the latest report published by Elsevier (2024) in August 2024, Scopus indexes over 7,000 publishers, more than 25,300 active peer-reviewed journals, and 19 million+ author profiles. Additionally, over 97.3 million publications have been cited more than 2.4 billion times. Based on these statistics, Scopus provides a more comprehensive dataset compared to another widely used database, Web of Science (WoS). WoS offers access to over 22,600 journals, books, and conference proceedings and reports that its database contains 2.26 billion citations for more than 95 million publications (WoS, 2025). Moreover, similar justifications have been applied in bibliometric analyses conducted in similar fields (Rocha et al., 2020; Srivastava, 2021, Halder et al., 2024; Hariningsih et al. 2024), ultimately reinforcing the decision to prefer the Scopus database.

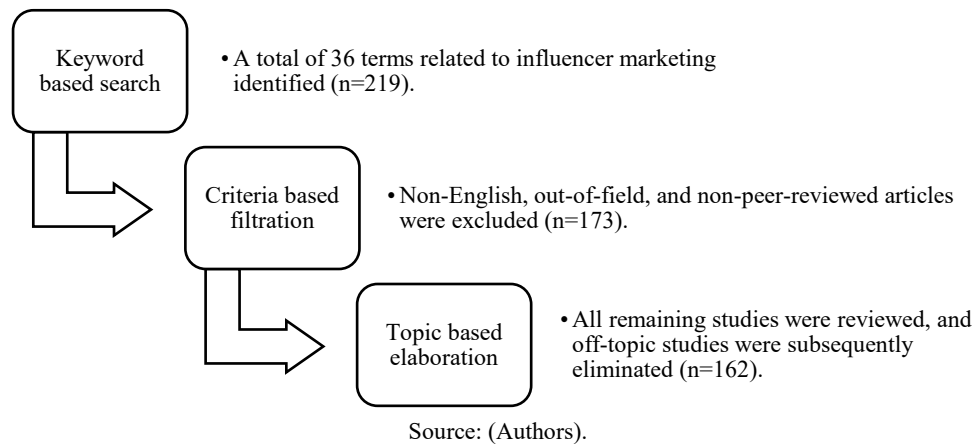
The search criteria were applied by selecting the "article title, abstract, and keywords" tab. The keywords were kept as broad as possible to ensure that no studies related to source credibility theory were overlooked. For this reason, the following criteria were considered when determining the keywords:

- Since this research primarily focuses on studies related to the theory of source credibility in influencer marketing, the abbreviation "IM" (influencer marketing) was included alongside the keyword "influencer marketing," as done in previous studies by Srivastava (2021).
- Influencers are categorized based on their number of followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Therefore, the keywords "mega-influencer," "macro-influencer," "micro-influencer," and "nano-influencer" were added.
- Influencers can also be classified according to the platforms on which they create content. Accordingly, the keywords "Tiktoker," "Instagrammer," "Instafamous," "Youtuber," "Podcaster," "Blogger," "Vlogger," and "Streamer" were included.
- Before the term "influencer" became widely adopted, various other terms were used to describe such individuals. To ensure these studies were not overlooked, the keywords "social media star," "social media celebrity," "social media famous," "content creator," and "digital creator" were also included.
- Finally, the relevant keywords were rewritten by adding plural suffixes.

Based on these criteria, the search query was formulated as follows: ( "source credibility" AND "influencer" ) OR ( "source credibility" AND "influencers" ) OR ( "source credibility" AND "influencer marketing" ) OR ( "source credibility" AND "IM" ) OR ( "source credibility" AND "Youtuber" ) OR (

"source credibility" AND "Youtubers") OR ( "source credibility" AND "Instagrammer") OR ( "source credibility" AND "Instagrammers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "Tiktoker" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "Tiktokers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "Blogger" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "Bloggers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "vlogger" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "vloggers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "streammer" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "streammers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "podcaster" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "podcasters" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "instafamous" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "micro-influencer" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "macro-influencer" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "mega-influencer" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "nano-influencer" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "micro-influencers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "macro-influencers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "mega-influencers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "nano-influencers" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "Social Media Famous" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "social media star" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "social media stars" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "content creator" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "content creators" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "digital creator" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "digital creators" ) OR ( " source credibility" AND "social media celebrity" ) OR ( "source credibility" AND "social media celebrities" ). At this stage, 219 articles were retrieved, with the earliest published in 2011. However, to exclude out-of-scope and irrelevant studies from the analysis, Scopus filtering was applied. The subject areas were limited to “Business, Management and Accounting,” “Social Sciences,” “Economics, Econometrics, and Finance,” “Psychology,” “Arts and Humanities,” and “Decision Sciences.” Non-English studies were excluded. Additionally, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, and letters were removed from the analysis, ensuring that only peer-reviewed scientific articles were retained. The source type was specified as “journal.” After filtering, 173 articles were evaluated, and each underwent content analysis by reviewing their titles, abstracts, and keywords. As a result of the content analysis, 11 additional studies were excluded. These studies were deemed irrelevant as they fell outside the specified scope and were not related to influencer marketing. Therefore, the final dataset comprises 162 articles, with the earliest published in 2015. The complete elimination procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

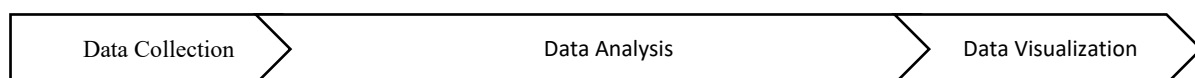
**Figure 1. Elimination Procedure**

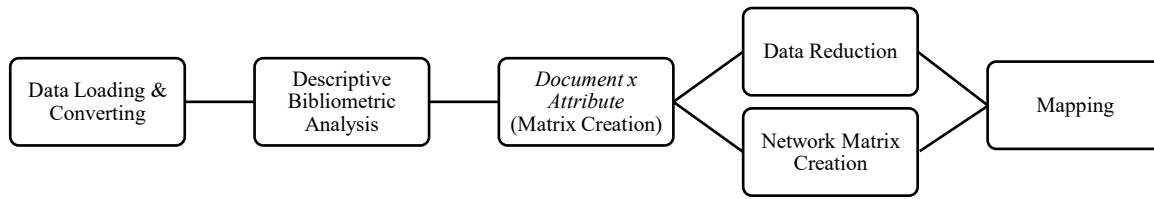


### 3.1. Data Analysis

To address the research questions, conducting a bibliometric analysis and literature review using a systematic approach is essential (Klarin, 2024). This study adhered to the guidelines proposed by Aria & Cuccurullo (2017), as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Systematic Flow**





Source: (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

In this direction, an overview of the data obtained as a result of the elimination procedure was presented. Subsequently, the most influential scholars in the literature were identified, and their contributions were analyzed. The sub-dimensions that constitute an influencer's credibility as a source were examined. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) was applied for data reduction. Bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence network analyses were conducted for network creation. Finally, the general framework and trends were visualized using thematic mapping and a trend map.

The dataset was analyzed using VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014), developed by Leiden University's Centre for Science and Technology Studies, and Biblioshiny, (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) a tool within Bibliometrix, a software package integrated into R-Studio.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Descriptive Details of Bibliometric Analysis

The analysis began with a report on descriptive data, which is summarized in Table 1. After applying the filters and conducting the literature review, it was determined that 162 articles on influencer marketing utilized source credibility theory. The earliest of these articles was published in 2015, resulting in a ten-year dataset. Although influencer marketing has been on the rise, research on the topic dates back to 2011 (Tanwar et al., 2022), and the average age of studies based on source credibility theory was calculated as 2.39 years. The growth rate of articles in this field was 23.11%. Additionally, 131 articles received at least one citation, with a total of 6,951 citations recorded over the ten-year period. This corresponds to an average of 43.17 citations per article. The total number of authors contributing to these studies was 416. Only 14 articles were single-authored, indicating an average of 2.88 authors per article. Furthermore, the international collaboration rate among authors was 27.95%.

**Table 1.** Main Information of Documents

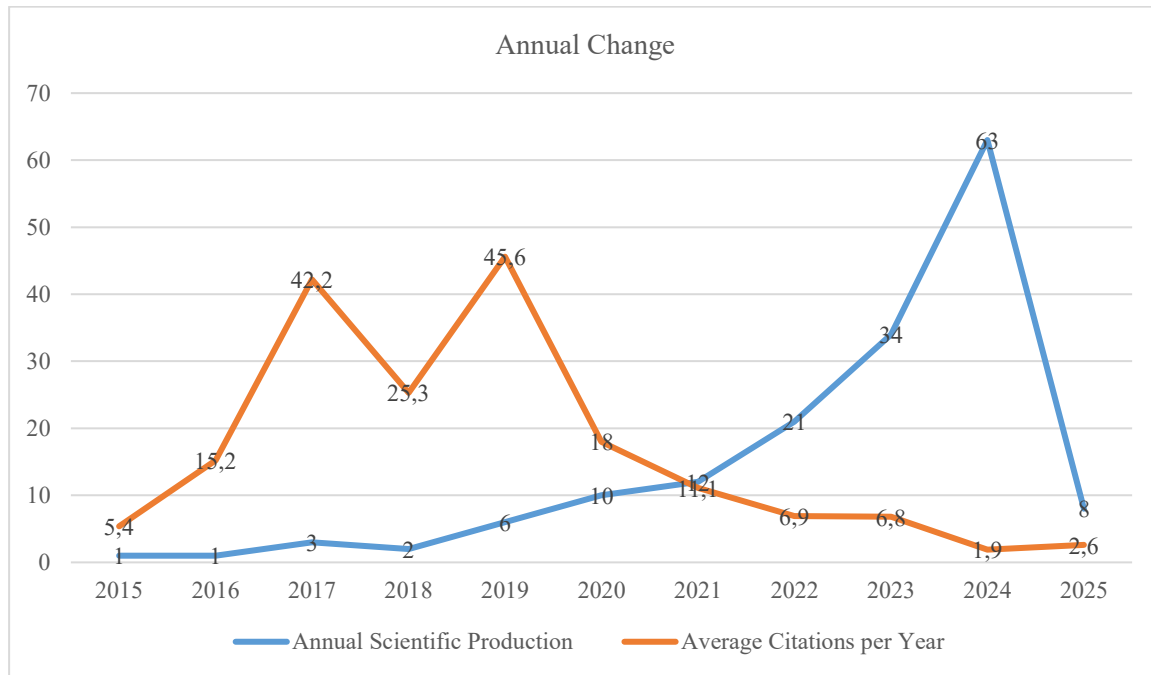
Main Information		Citation Data	
Timespan	2015-2025	Total citations	6951
Annual growth rate	%23,11	Average citations per article	43.17
Average age of articles	2.39	Cited articles	131
Authors		Authors Collaboration	
Authors	416	Co-Authors per article	2.88
Single-authored articles	14	International co-authorship	%27.95
Keyword Information			
Author's Keywords	451	Keyword Plus	206

Source: (Authors).

Finally, descriptive data related to keyword analysis was evaluated. At this stage, two different datasets—referred to as "Keywords" and "Keywords Plus"—were analyzed. Evaluating both datasets was essential, as both are considered valuable in examining the structure of knowledge (Zhang et al., 2016). The term "Keywords" refers to author-assigned keywords that best represent the article's content. In contrast, "Keywords Plus" includes words or phrases that frequently appear in the titles of cited references and are automatically generated by an algorithm, even if they are not explicitly assigned as keywords by the author (Garfield & Sher, 1993). A total of 451 keywords were identified across 162 articles. Additionally, the algorithm-generated Keywords Plus dataset contained 206 terms.



**Graphic 1.** Annual Change of Scientific Production and Average Citations



Source: (Authors).

An analysis of the annual number of articles and growth in the field reveals that the use of source credibility theory in influencer marketing studies has been steadily increasing since 2018. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for the period from 2015 until February 2025 is calculated at 23.11%. However, when considering only the 2015–2024 period, this rate rises to 58.46%. Additionally, studies published between 2017 and 2019 received the highest average number of citations.

**Table 2.** Pioneer Journals

Journal	No. of Articles	Total Citations	h-index	Total Link Strength
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	6	181	5	21
Computers in Human Behavior	5	1154	4	77
International Journal of Advertising	5	361	3	30
Journal of Interactive Advertising	5	1550	5	92
International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising	5	55	4	11
Journal of Promotion Management	4	125	4	15
Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	3	8	1	11
Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising	3	10	2	11
Journal of Product and Brand Management	3	229	3	23
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	3	102	1	16
Journal of Vacation Marketing	3	62	2	10
Psychology and Marketing	3	108	2	12

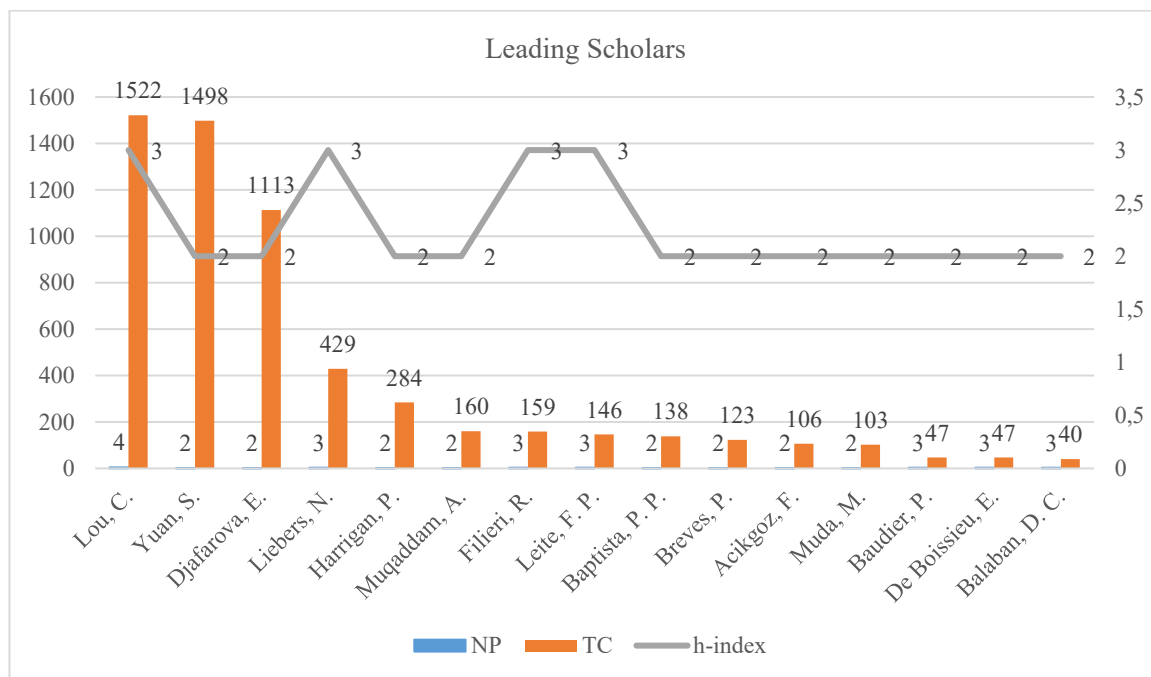
Source: (Authors).

An evaluation of the pioneering journals in the field revealed that VOSviewer identified citations from 105 journals. Each cited source was analyzed, and the journals with the highest number of publications, total citation counts, h-index, and total link strengths were assessed. The results are presented in Table 2. All journals with three or more publications were included in the table. The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services had the highest number of publications. These publications, produced between 2020 and 2025, received 181 citations until February 2025. The most cited publications appeared in Computers in Human Behavior and the International Journal of Interactive Advertising, which also exhibited the strongest citation linkages. The five journals with the highest h-index were, in order: Journal of Interactive Advertising, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Computers in Human Behavior, Journal of Promotion Management, and International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising.

#### 4.2. Leading Scholars and Their Influence in the Field

One of the key measures of author productivity is the number of publications (Potter, 1981). In 1926, Lotka introduced a framework for measuring scientific productivity, which later became known as Lotka's Law, in his work "The Frequency Distribution of Scientific Productivity" (Huber, 2002). Based on this law, author productivity was categorized into percentages according to the number of publications, and the publication patterns of authors contributing to the field were analyzed. The findings revealed that 90.9% of the authors produced only one study, while 9.1% published two or more studies. When these findings are considered alongside other results related to author productivity, it suggests that the number of authors who consistently contribute to the development of the field's literature was relatively low.

**Graphic 2. Leading Scholars**



Source: (Authors). NP: Number of Scientific Product, TC: Total Citation

Specific criteria were established to identify the leading scholars contributing to the field. Given that research on influencer credibility as a source spans only a decade, determining these criteria required special considerations. To ensure selectivity, the productivity criterion established by Lotka (1926) was first applied (Huber, 2002), and authors with fewer than two studies were excluded from the list. Next, the h-index of these authors was examined, and those with an h-index below 2 were also eliminated. Additionally, the total number of citations received by each author was considered as an indicator of their impact on the field, and those with fewer than 100 citations were removed. However, since only a limited number of authors had an h-index above 2, and given that the h-index is regarded as an important indicator of scholarly contribution (Costas & Bordons, 2008), authors with an h-index of 3 or higher

were reinstated on the list even if their total number of citations was below 100. As a result, a final list of 15 leading scholars was compiled.

An evaluation of the most productive authors in the field revealed that one author had four publications, while eight authors had three publications each. The most prolific author, with four articles, was Chen Lou from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University. In two quantitative studies, Lou examined source credibility in four sub-dimensions—expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity—from the perspective of influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020). However, when considering content value, the author also identified entertainment value and informative value as additional sub-dimensions of source credibility (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Lou's most cited study introduced the Social Media Influencer Value Model, which demonstrated that an influencer's informative content value, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity to their followers positively influenced trust in branded posts (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Another study examined how the influencer-follower relationship and influencer-product match-up affect advertising effectiveness. The findings confirmed the mediating role of source credibility in the effect of match-up on brand attitude (Ju & Lou, 2022). In another quantitative study, Yuan & Lou (2020) investigated the mediating role of the parasocial relationship in the effect of influencer credibility and fairness on product interest. The results confirmed that attractiveness, similarity, procedural fairness, and interpersonal fairness serve as mediators in generating product interest. In Lou's most recent study, Lou et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative analysis of cause-related marketing within the influencer marketing context. The study highlighted the role of parasocial relationships with followers, followers' wishful identification, source credibility, and varying levels of congruence as key theoretical foundations contributing to prosocial behaviors promoted by influencers.

The second most influential author contributing to the field is Balaban from Babeş-Bolyai University. In her research, Balaban focused on the persuasive power of influencers (Balaban et al., 2022), young people's motivations for following influencers (Balaban et al., 2020), and the effectiveness of digital manipulation disclosures (Mucundorfeanu et al., 2024). In her first study, Balaban et al. (2020) discovered that the perceived quality of information influences an influencer's trustworthiness, which, in turn, affects whether individuals choose to follow the influencer. While Instagram usage frequency moderates the effect of perceived information quality on an influencer's trustworthiness, YouTube usage frequency did not exhibit a moderating effect. In another study, Balaban et al. (2022) applied source credibility theory for the second time while examining an influencer with 12,000 followers. The authors found that parasocial relationships (PSRs) positively impact the social media influencer's (SMI) credibility, leading to positive brand attitudes, increased purchase intentions, and a greater likelihood of sharing the influencer's content on social media. In addition, in her most recent study, Mucundorfeanu et al. (2024) found that social media users with high levels of product involvement who could recognize digital manipulation tended to perceive SMIs as less credible.

Baudier and de Boissieu from EM Normandie Business School, who are actively engaged in the field and have conducted three studies, have focused on robot influencers as their primary research theme. In two of their studies, source credibility dimensions were examined across five distinct variables. In their most recent study, Baudier & de Boissieu (2025), referencing Ohanian (1990), developed a model that represents attractiveness in two distinct dimensions while integrating source credibility and source attractiveness. According to this model, an influencer's attractiveness consists of physical attractiveness and content attractiveness. In an earlier study, Baudier et al. (2023) contributed to the source credibility literature by examining both human and robot influencers representing luxury brands through semi-structured interviews. In this study, they merged the source credibility and source attractiveness models and introduced effectiveness as a separate dimension, defined by the sub-dimensions of reactivity, investment, and ROI. Another significant contribution of these authors to the literature is their demonstration that source credibility dimensions -including trustworthiness, expertise, physical attractiveness, and content attractiveness- and anthropomorphic appearance influence consumer attitudes (Baudier & de Boissieu, 2025). Additionally, in a cross-cultural study, the authors found that individuals are more inclined to follow virtual influencers regardless of source credibility dimensions (de Boissieu & Baudier, 2023).

Another notable contributor to the field with three studies is Filieri from Audencia Business School, who examined eWOM in relation to behavioral intentions across all three studies. A defining characteristic of Filieri's research is its focus on comparative studies that incorporate different groups (Mainolfi et al., 2022), different products (Filieri et al., 2023a), or different influencers (Filieri et al., 2023b). On the other hand, Leite concentrated on the antecedents of source credibility (Leite et al. 2022; Leite et al. 2024), with a particular emphasis on self-disclosure (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Leite et al., 2022). In one of the most cited studies in the field, Leite & Baptista (2022) found that high levels of intimate self-disclosure can enhance consumers' purchase intentions, with the parasocial relationship (PSR) established with the influencer exerting a stronger influence than source credibility. Another author, Nicole Liebers, contributed to the field with three studies, two of which rank among the most cited works. In all her research exploring influencer credibility as a source, Liebers consistently investigated the role of the parasocial relationship. Contrary to the findings of Leite & Baptista (2022), Breves & Liebers (2025) demonstrated that source credibility is a stronger predictor of attitudes and behavioral intentions than parasocial relationships. Furthermore, Breves et al. (2021) found that individuals who follow influencers develop stronger parasocial relationships than non-followers, and that these relationships influence source credibility, which, in turn, positively affects the evaluation of sponsored posts. Liebers' most cited study revealed that influencer-brand fit positively affects advertising effectiveness and influencer image, particularly when followers exhibit a low parasocial relationship (Breves et al., 2019).

Djafarova conducted two significant qualitative studies that have been extensively cited in the field and have provided a theoretical foundation for numerous studies. In the first study, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) found that participants perceived bloggers and "instafamous" individuals as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of content quality, attractiveness, and composition in shaping influencer credibility. In a later study, Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019) findings, derived from in-depth interviews, revealed that Instagram users prioritize competence over expertise, particularly in the context of micro-influencers. Moreover, several characteristics of micro-influencers—such as social ties, active engagement, and authenticity—were found to enhance online source credibility. These attributes were collectively categorized under the dimension of "online behavior/self-presentation." Through this work, Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019) contributed to theory by proposing a four-dimensional model consisting of trustworthiness, attractiveness, competence, and online behavior/self-presentation.

Another highly cited author in the field is Harrigan. In a study co-authored by Harrigan, Weismueller et al. (2020) found that perceiving a source as attractive, expert, and trustworthy enhances purchase intention. Additionally, the number of followers positively influenced attractiveness, trustworthiness, and purchase intention. Finally, the authors demonstrated the indirect effect of advertising disclosure on purchase intention through attractiveness. In another study involving Harrigan, a comprehensive analysis was conducted on 281 social media users using the source credibility model and signaling theory (Hugh et al. 2022). This study evaluated expertise, trust, and similarity as dimensions of perceived influencer efficacy. The findings confirmed that the parasocial relationship (PSR) influences perceived influencer efficacy, which, in turn, affects perceived brand authenticity. Furthermore, this effect mediated brand engagement and attitudes toward the post.

Among other leading scholars, Muqaddam co-authored two influential studies exploring the effects of influencer posts. In one study, Jin & Muqaddam (2019) found that followers were more likely to react negatively when the influencer was not featured alongside the product in a product placement post. The authors also demonstrated that product placement influences corporate credibility, with this effect being mediated by the parasocial relationship. In another study, Argyris, Muqaddam & Miller (2021) showed that the visual presentation of an influencer's extraversion influences audience brand perceptions and purchase intentions, with this effect being mediated by the influencer's credibility.

In this section of the study, the final leading scholar recognized for her contributions to the field is Muda from Universiti Teknologi MARA. The author has incorporated source credibility theory into several of her academic works. In two notable studies, she examined source credibility through the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, focusing on the impact of user-generated content on

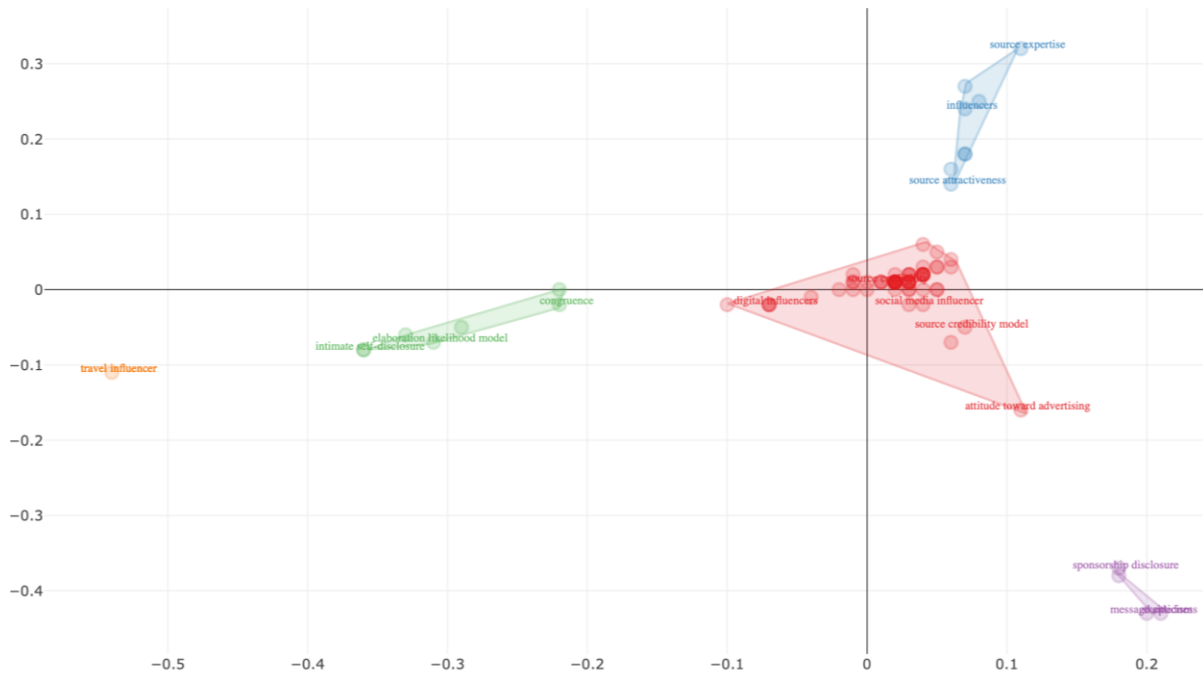
behavioral intentions (e-WOM and purchase intention) on YouTube (Muda, 2019; Muda & Hamzah, 2021). The findings of both studies validated the theory within the YouTube context.

#### 4.3. Data Reduction

##### 4.3.1. Factorial Analysis for Author's Keywords

Biblioshiny enables the examination of overlapping and co-occurring topics by conducting factorial analysis on titles, abstracts, authors' keywords, and Keyword Plus analysis units. For this study, article keywords determined by the authors were selected as the unit of analysis. The number of terms was set at 50, and five clusters were generated using multidimensional scaling.

**Figure 3.** Factorial Analysis for Author's Keywords



Source: (Authors).

As a result of the analysis, source credibility theory was positioned at the center of the axis, forming the largest cluster in terms of word count. Another centrally located theory was parasocial relationship theory, which has been widely applied in the field. A review of leading authors revealed that numerous studies have utilized parasocial relationship theory (e.g., Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Breves et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022). Additionally, some studies have integrated social learning theory alongside these core theories (Le & Hancer, 2021; Qiu et al., 2024; Babu et al., 2024). Other keywords in this cluster included TikTok and YouTube. While the leading studies in the field primarily examine the credibility of Instagram influencers, research on YouTube (Xiao et al., 2018; Muda & Hamzah, 2021; Filieri et al., 2023a) and TikTok influencers (e.g., Jamil et al., 2024; Shoukat et al., 2023; Lawrence & Meivitanli, 2023) has also gained traction, with a higher concentration of studies on YouTube. In addition to these concepts, the most frequently studied keywords include elaboration likelihood model, brand engagement, transparency, native advertising, attitude toward advertising, and purchase intention.

Another cluster revealed that keywords such as source attractiveness, homophily, and word-of-mouth (WOM) were grouped together. A review of the literature indicated that some studies consider source attractiveness as a separate dimension from source credibility (Alboqami, 2023; Martensen et al., 2018). In Cluster 3, congruence was found to be associated with both the elaboration likelihood model (O'Neil & Eisenmann, 2017; Añaña & Barbosa, 2023) and self-determination theory (Shoukat et al., 2023; Leite et al., 2024). Meanwhile, factor analysis identified that sponsorship disclosure, message sidedness, skepticism, and blogs were commonly examined together. Since topics such as influencers' product placement, the effects of these marketing efforts, and their explicit disclosure can significantly impact

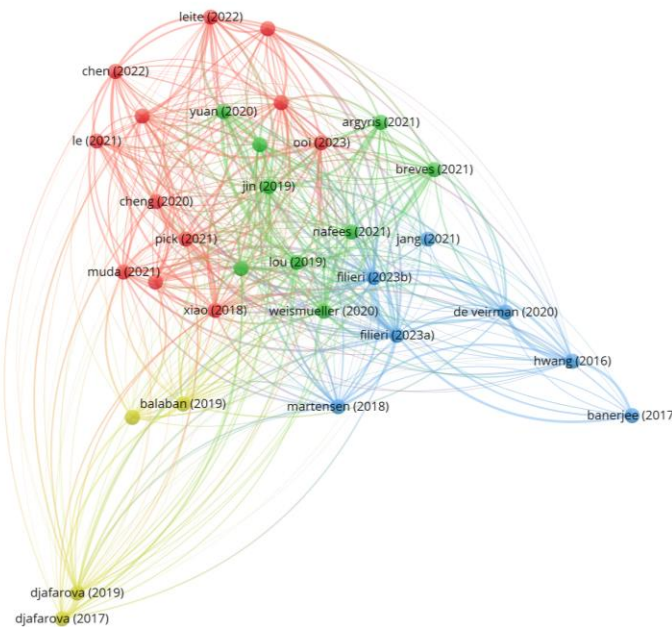
perceived credibility, they hold great importance in the field (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020). In addition to these clusters, a separate cluster was identified, focusing exclusively on travel influencers. A literature review revealed that numerous studies have examined the credibility of travel influencers (Jang et al., 2021; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021; Mainolfi et al., 2022).

#### 4.4. Network Creation

##### 4.4.1. Bibliographic Coupling

Popularized by Kessler's (1963) article, "Bibliographic Coupling Between Scientific Papers," bibliographic coupling refers to a situation in which two publications share a common reference (Egghe & Rousseau, 2002). This means that two publications are considered bibliographically coupled if they both cite the same third publication (Khanra et al., 2021). To conduct a bibliographic coupling analysis, various units of analysis can be selected, including country, organization, source, document, or author (Van Eck & Waltman, 2019). In this study, the author was chosen as the unit of analysis to facilitate visualization. A minimum citation threshold of 50 was applied, resulting in the formation of four clusters, comprising 32 studies with 463 links.

**Figure 4. Bibliographic Coupling**



Source: (Authors).

The study centered on the most cited article in the field, "Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media" by Lou & Yuan (2019). This study combined source credibility and source attractiveness and addressed the dimensions that make up the influencer's credibility as expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity. Unlike studies that focus on specific platforms, this research did not distinguish between social media platforms but rather provided a generalized analysis of all social media influencers. In doing so, it offered a fundamental perspective and made a significant contribution to the theoretical development of influencer marketing.

A similar pattern was observed in other studies within the same cluster. A detailed examination of the articles revealed that six studies integrated Hovland's source credibility model with source attractiveness, as established by Ohanian (1990) (e.g., Weismueller et al., 2020; Breves et al., 2019; Argiris et al., 2021). Several key studies explored both the source credibility model and parasocial relationship theory in conjunction (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020; Breves et al., 2021). In general, it was argued that the parasocial relationship formed between an individual and an influencer

enhances perceived credibility (Breves et al., 2021). Other studies specifically investigated the effects of source fit and personality (Breves et al., 2019; Argyris et al., 2021; Ozdemir et al., 2023). Among these, Ozdemir et al. (2023) was particularly significant, as the authors conducted five experimental studies, demonstrating that human influencers were more effective than virtual influencers. Additionally, the studies in this cluster consistently found that source credibility influences behavioral intentions, including brand attitude and purchase intention. Due to their high citation counts and central positioning within the analysis, the studies in this cluster were categorized as “core studies.”

The cluster shown in blue contained three prominent themes. A comprehensive evaluation of all studies included in the analysis revealed that the most frequently examined influencer group was Instagram influencers, also referred to as Instafamous or Instagrammers. Meanwhile, Cluster 2 featured a higher concentration of studies on blogs (i.e., bloggers, micro-bloggers, and vloggers) compared to other clusters (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2017; Filieri et al., 2023a). Additionally, two studies investigated user attitudes toward sponsored influencer posts and the effect of source credibility on these posts (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). A detailed examination of Cluster 2 revealed that persuasion was the central theme across all studies. For instance, Filieri et al. (2023a) suggested that viewers’ perceptions of vloggers as experts and knowledgeable figures influenced their purchase decisions for utilitarian products. Martensen et al. (2018) demonstrated that the trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, similarity, and familiarity of user-generated content (UGC)—categorized as citizen influencers—affect persuasion. Similarly, Jang et al. (2021) examined travel influencers and found that influencer engagement itself enhances persuasive impact. In light of these findings, Cluster 2 was classified as “persuasion-oriented studies.”

Cluster 3, highlighted in red, contained the highest number of studies. Therefore, this cluster encompassed a diverse range of themes. However, a closer examination of the studies revealed that the dominant topic was the antecedents and consequences of travel influencers’ source credibility. For instance, Chen et al. (2022) demonstrated that parasocial interaction influences the credibility of travel influencers. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2020) argued that multiple dimensions contribute to source credibility (SCR). Their study on vloggers found that self-congruity, perceived authenticity, and parasocial interaction all affect the credibility of travel influencers. In another study, Le & Hancer (2021) showed that social and psychological attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness influence wishful identification. Furthermore, wishful identification was found to impact audience behavioral intentions regarding the characteristics of travel influencers. Other studies have shown the impact of travel influencer credibility on destination brand trust (Cheng et al. 2020; Chen et al. 2022), hedonic and utilitarian motivations (Mainolfi et al. 2022), brand engagement (Mainolfi et al. 2022), and travel intention (Yılmazdoğan et al. 2021). Beyond travel influencers, two studies in Cluster 3 focused on the credibility of beauty influencers (Muda & Hamzah, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022), while another study examined the credibility of influencers targeting predominantly male or female audiences (Pick, 2021). Additionally, six studies explicitly stated that they examined YouTube influencers, making this cluster the most concentrated in terms of vlogger credibility research (Xiao et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2020; Pick, 2021; Muda & Hamzah, 2021; Le & Hancer, 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022). As a result, the majority of studies in Cluster 3 focused on specific types of influencers. Therefore, this cluster was categorized as “specific themes.”

Cluster 4, highlighted in yellow, comprised four studies. Among them, Hayes & Carr (2015) conducted the first study to apply the source credibility model in influencer marketing. As a pioneering study, it examined the impact of bloggers’ credibility on audience attitudes. The remaining three studies in this cluster shared a common objective: exploring the dimensions of source credibility and its consequences through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Balaban & Mustățea (2019) conducted a comparative study between Germany and Romania, analyzing differences in users’ perceptions of credibility. Meanwhile, Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019), in their exploratory study, proposed that credibility encompasses additional dimensions beyond those frequently cited in the literature. Given its exploratory nature, Cluster 4 was categorized as “exploratory studies.”

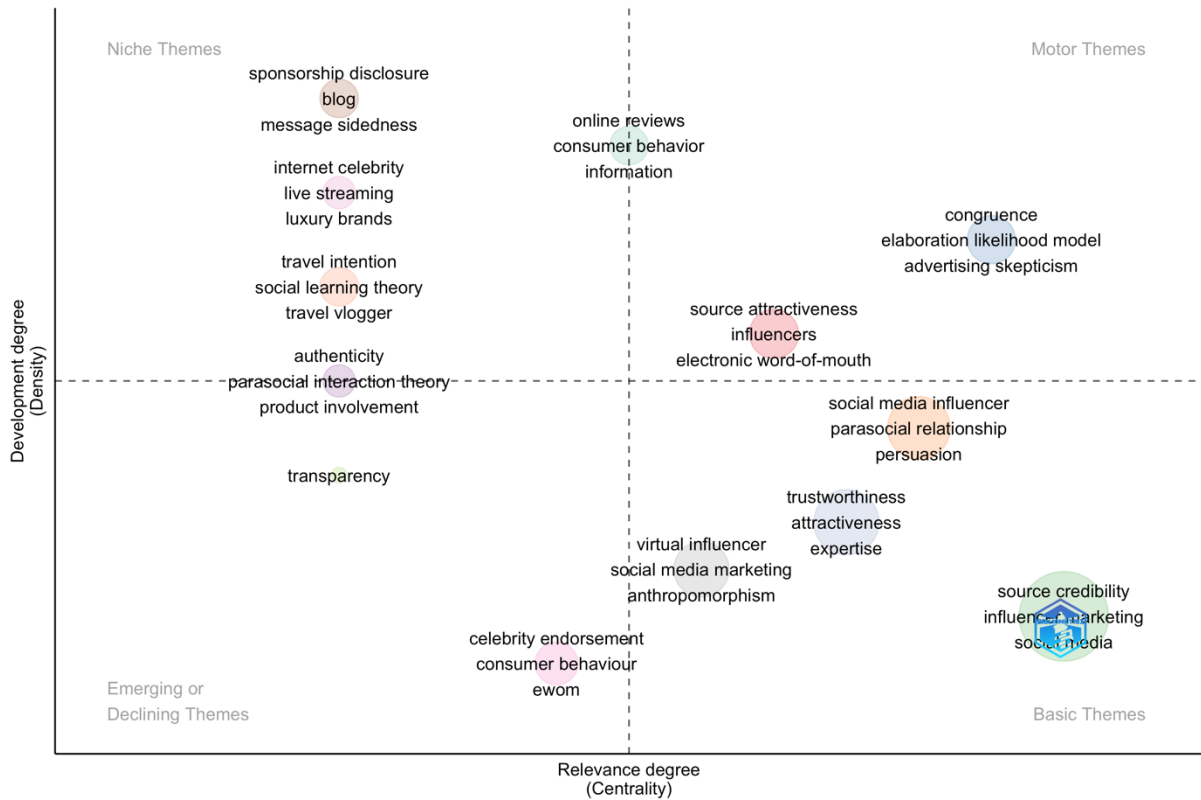






The thematic map classifies interactive articles into four categories (Callon et al., 1983; Tanwar et al., 2022). Basic themes represent foundational studies in the field, located in the center. These studies are critically important but have limitations in terms of further development. Motor themes are highly centralized and rapidly developing. These themes signify fast-growing areas within the field. Niche themes refer to specialized studies with low centrality. Despite their lower centrality, these themes are also rapidly evolving. Finally, themes positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the thematic map are either emerging research areas or underexplored topics. The development of these themes remains limited during the period in which the thematic mapping study was conducted.

**Figure 6. Thematic Map**



Source: (Authors).

In this study, the thematic mapping parameters include keywords determined by the authors, a word limit of 100, and three keyword displays per circle. The top keyword of the circle in the thematic map serves as the representative name of the cluster. The analysis resulted in the creation of 13 clusters.

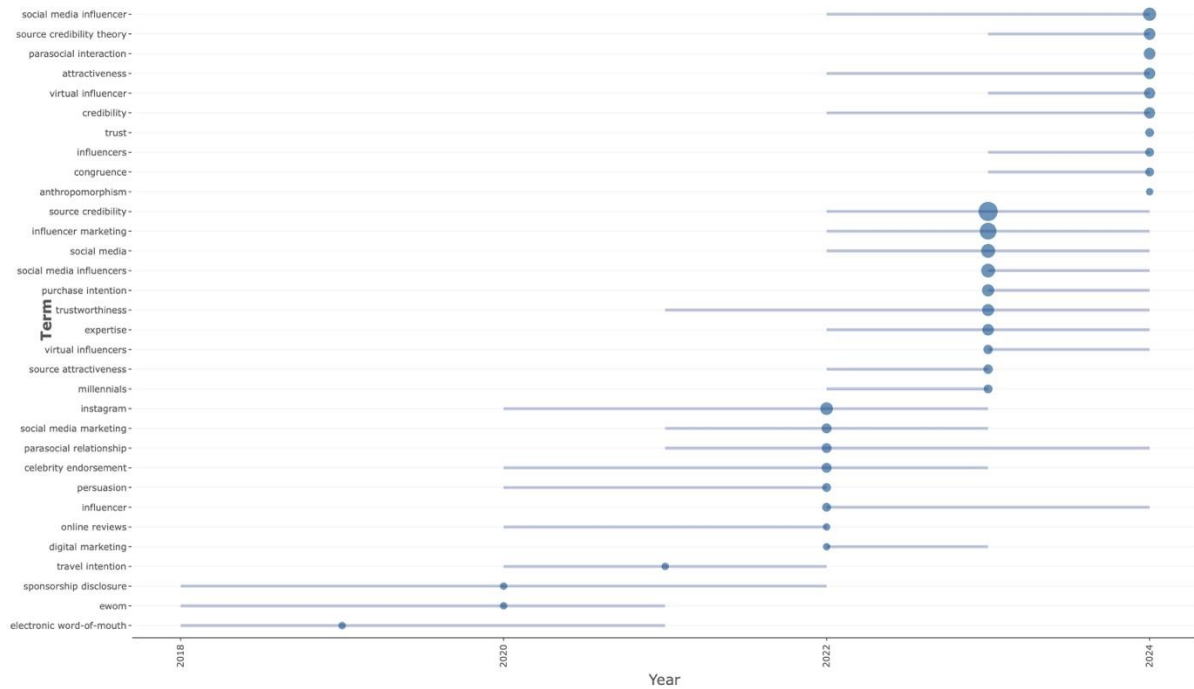
Notably, source credibility, social media influencers, the three most cited dimensions of source credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness), and virtual influencers—a specific type of influencer—formed the central and basic theme. The rapidly developing research areas include the source attractiveness model, congruence, and the elaboration likelihood model, which are frequently studied in conjunction with source credibility and influencer marketing. These, along with the parasocial relationship theory, which is part of the basic theme, represent some of the most commonly applied theories in the field.

While studies on online reviews appear to be developing, they are positioned at the intersection of niche and motor themes. Themes that focus on specialized areas and are rapidly evolving include sponsorship disclosure, travel intention, and internet celebrity—primarily covering research on streamers and vloggers (e.g. Li et al. 2023; Dokumacı, 2024). Authenticity is positioned at the boundary between emerging/declining themes and niche themes. Another theme with low development and limited centrality is transparency. Celebrity endorsement, which encompasses source credibility and incorporates both the meaning transfer model and match-up hypothesis, is situated closer to the center but is not explicitly highlighted as a primary keyword by the authors.

#### 4.5.2. Trend Topics

The trend topics map illustrates which topics have been studied more prominently over time, based on the selected analysis unit. Since article titles and abstracts include meaningless words, “author’s keywords”, which allows authors to clearly label the main topics of their articles, were selected as the analysis unit, as in other analyses in this study. The time frame was set to cover a 10-year period, starting from 2015, the year in which the first relevant study was identified, through to the present day. A word minimum frequency threshold of three was applied to ensure the inclusion of only those keywords that appeared with sufficient regularity across the dataset.

Figure 7. Trend Topics



Before reporting the results, it should be emphasized that the lines on the map indicate the years in which the relevant keyword was studied, and the size of the circles indicate the period in which it was studied the most. Since the minimum frequency of the word was determined as three, keywords from years with relatively fewer studies were automatically eliminated from the analysis. Accordingly, in the periods when studies started to become widespread, the influencer's statement of his/her sponsor as a source and the influencer's credibility creating e-wom as a behavioral intention were taken into consideration more. On the other hand, as the literature review conducted in this study shows, while in the first studies there was an uncertainty about which dimensions the source credibility should be or the dimensions were expressed without being divided into sub-dimensions (i.e. Hayes & Carr, 2015), in the studies conducted in recent years, it was observed that the dimensions of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise suggested by the combined model by Ohanian (1990) were taken into consideration more (i.e. Argyris et al. 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2022; Ooi et al. 2023). In addition, the existence of studies examining the results of the source's compatibility with the brand or target audience represented by the similarity dimension within match-up hypotheses or source credibility is also revealed in this analysis. However, the word that stands out at this point is “congruency” (i.e. Balaban & Mustătea, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The most important point that draws attention is that the Parasocial Relationship Theory, which is frequently studied together with the source credibility study, continues to be examined today, as revealed in the previous titles of this study.

Another notable finding revealed by the trend topics map is that, when influencer types are categorized by platform, Instagram influencers emerge as the most frequently studied group. However, the literature review conducted within the scope of this study also shows a growing scholarly interest in TikTok and YouTube influencers, particularly regarding their credibility. Additionally, the credibility and impact of user-generated content (UGC) have attracted increasing attention in recent years. This body of work is

represented in the trend map under the keyword “online reviews.” It is noteworthy that the topic of “persuasion” has been explored in parallel with online reviews during the same time period, indicating a thematic convergence between message credibility and persuasive communication in digital environments.

In recent years, the keyword “virtual influencer” has emerged as a prominent topic in the literature. This area of study has gained significance, particularly due to advances in artificial intelligence, which have enabled ordinary users to create their own virtual influencers. In parallel, professionally managed virtual personas—such as Lil Miquela—have garnered widespread attention, receiving millions of views on a weekly basis. The advantages and limitations of these non-human influencers, who actively engage in brand communication activities, have become a subject of increasing academic interest. In this context, source credibility theory provides a valuable theoretical lens through which to examine their effectiveness, as it raises critical questions about how audiences perceive credibility in the absence of human authenticity (Ozdemir et al. 2023).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Studies examining the theoretical development of influencer marketing remain limited (Srivastava, 2021; Tanwar et al., 2022). Nevertheless, a substantial body of research has investigated the impact of influencers on consumer behavioral intentions (e.g., Lou & Yuan, 2019; Mucundorfeanu et al., 2024; Baudier & de Boissieu, 2025). Moreover, extensive empirical evidence supports the notion that the perceived credibility of influencers significantly affects consumers' behavioral intentions (e.g., Cheng et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Leite & Baptista, 2022). Given this context, understanding the determinants of influencer credibility is essential. Equally important is the need to offer researchers a structured and systematic classification of studies addressing influencer credibility as a source factor.

To address this need, the present study conducts a comprehensive literature review combined with bibliometric analysis to investigate how source credibility theory is applied within the influencer marketing literature. More specifically, this study: 1) identifies the leading authors contributing to the integration of source credibility in influencer marketing, 2) reveals the most prominent journals publishing research on this topic, 3) provides a thematic classification of the existing studies, 4) determines the most frequently studied topics and theories within the field, 5) traces the evolution of research trends over time, and 6) offers insights into the application of source credibility dimensions in varying contexts.

The findings confirm that the three-dimensional source credibility model (“expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness”), developed by combining the framework introduced by Hovland et al. (1953) with the Source Attractiveness Model proposed by Ohanian (1990), remains the most widely accepted and empirically supported model for evaluating influencers as credible sources. In addition, credibility dimensions such as similarity (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020), likability (Xiao et al. 2018; Jin & Muqaddam, 2019), homophily (Xiao et al. 2018), competence (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019), and authenticity (Alboqami, 2023) have also been explored by researchers in different situations.

Among the scholars who have most significantly contributed to the development of this field are Lou, C., Yuan, S., and Djafarova, E. The most influential studies include Lou & Yuan (2019), Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), and Breves et al. (2019). In addition to these, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Service, Journal of Interactive Advertising, Computers in Human Behavior, International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising, International Journal of Advertising, and International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising journals are seen as leading journals in the field.

The findings indicate that the largest share of samples investigating influencer credibility has been collected from studies focusing on Instagram. However, both trend analysis and topic analysis reveal a notable increase in studies that either do not specify a particular social media platform (e.g., Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021; Ooi et al., 2023) or focus specifically on YouTubers (Xiao et al., 2018; Muda & Hamzah, 2021; Le & Hancer, 2021; Filieri et al., 2023a) and TikTokers (Lawrence & Meivitanwanli, 2023; Jamil et al., 2024; Phan & Nguyen, 2024; Hong et al., 2024). Importantly, each social media platform possesses distinctive characteristics in terms

of format, user base, and content style, which in turn shape influencers' communication practices and competencies. Consequently, it is essential to expand research on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, which now rival Instagram in terms of user base and influence. Further studies are needed to better understand the factors contributing to influencer credibility on these platforms, as well as to identify the antecedents and consequences of credibility in platform-specific contexts. Additionally, the rise of streamers across platforms has attracted growing attention. Given the distinctive nature of streaming content—characterized by real-time interaction and prolonged engagement—there is a pressing need for more research to explore how streamers establish and maintain credibility and how this credibility influences audience attitudes and behaviors.

This study also reveals that the Parasocial Relationship Theory is the most frequently applied theoretical framework in studies examining influencer credibility (e.g., Jin & Muqaddam, 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020; Breves et al., 2021). However, according to Halder et al. (2021), the most commonly employed models within the broader celebrity endorsement literature include the Source Credibility Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Source Attractiveness Model, Match-Up Hypothesis, Attribution Theory, and the Meaning Transfer Model. In line with this, the findings of the present study—particularly the thematic map and other bibliometric visualizations—indicate that researchers frequently employ theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Persuasion Knowledge Paradigm, Source Attractiveness Model, Congruity Theory, and Social Learning Theory when examining influencer credibility. Therefore, the authors can conduct further research on these theories while investigating influencer credibility.

Furthermore, the present study shows that research involving different samples and thematic focuses often leads to contradictory findings. For instance, Chen et al. (2022) found that parasocial relationships influence source credibility, whereas Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021) argued the opposite, suggesting that source credibility affects the formation of parasocial relationships. Resolving this conceptual ambiguity will not only strengthen the theoretical foundations of the field but also provide clearer guidance for both practitioners and future researchers.

Additionally, the trend analysis highlights several emerging and evolving concepts within the literature, including virtual influencers, sponsorship disclosure, congruence, anthropomorphism, online reviews, and millennials. While some of these topics have received considerable attention in past years and are now less frequently studied, others, such as sponsorship disclosure, continue to warrant further investigation. With the increasing regulation of covert advertising and the imposition of substantial legal penalties for violations, the perceived credibility of influencers may be significantly changed. Therefore, there is still a need for more empirical evidence on how such regulations impact influencer effectiveness and user trust. At the same time, some concepts are becoming more popular. For instance, Ozdemir et al. (2023) revealed that virtual influencers are generally perceived as less effective than their human counterparts. In contrast, de Boissieu and Baudier (2023) found that users may be more inclined to follow virtual influencers. This apparent contradiction within the literature underscores the necessity for further research on the conditions under which virtual influencers can establish higher credibility, the mechanisms through which this credibility is formed, and the behavioral consequences it may produce.

In conclusion, the thematic mapping conducted in this study offers a comprehensive visual representation of how key topics within the SCR in influencer marketing literature are interconnected. The trend topic analysis reveals which topics have gained prominence during specific periods, while the co-occurrence network provides a holistic overview of the most influential concepts and themes in the field. These visual analyses serve as valuable tools for researchers, enabling them to identify which theories, topics, social media platforms, and influencer types have been most frequently examined and where research gaps remain. In doing so, this study provides a practical roadmap for scholars seeking to design future studies and contribute meaningfully to the evolving literature on influencer credibility.

#### **DECLARATION OF THE AUTHORS**

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**Appendix 1. Influencer Credibility Dimensions in Most Cited Studies**

Authors	TC	Type	Att	Aut	Com	Cre	Exp	Good	Hom	Lik	OB	Tr	Sim
Hayes & Carr (2015)	60	Blog				x	x						
Hwang & Jeong (2016)	152	Blog										x	
Banerjee et al. (2017)	204	Yelp										x	
Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)	913	General											
Xiao et al. (2018)	305	YT					x		x	x		x	
Martensen et al. (2018)	100	IG					x					x	
Lou & Yuan (2019)	1238	General	x				x					x	x
Breves et al. (2019)	306	IG	x				x					x	
Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019)	200	IG	x		x						x	x	
Jin & Muqaddam (2019)	103	IG	x				x			x		x	
Balaban & Mustăţea (2019)	67	IG&YT	x				x					x	x
Yuan & Lou (2020)	260	General	x				x					x	x
Weismueller et al. (2020)	250	IG	x				x					x	
De Veirman & Hudders (2020)	223	IG	x				x					x	
Cheng et al. (2020)	118	Vlog					x					x	
Wiedmann & V. Mettenheim (2021)	183	General	x				x					x	
Breves et al. (2021)	119	IG					x					x	
Muda & Hamzah (2021)	101	YT	x				x					x	
Nafees et al. (2021)	79	IG					x	x				x	
Pick (2021)	71	IG&YT	x				x					x	
Jang et al. (2021)	68	IG	x				x					x	
Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021)	59	IG	x				x					x	
Le & Hancer (2021)	58	YT					x					x	
Argyris et al. (2021)	57	IG	x				x					x	
Chen et al. (2022)	103	TA					x					x	
Leite & Baptista (2022)	100	IG&YT	x				x					x	
Mainolfi et al. (2022)	53	Blog				x							
Ooi et al. (2023)	74	General	x				x					x	
Alboqami (2023)	64	IG		x			x						
Filieri et al. (2023)	53	YT					x					x	

TC: Total Citation; Type: Types of Platform for Source;

Att: Attractiveness; Aut: Authenticity; Com: Competence; Cre: Credibility; Exp: Expertise; Good: Goodwill; Hom: Homophily; Lik: Likability; OB: Online Behavior / Self-Presentation; Tr: Trustworthiness; Sim: Similarity