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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A BUSINESS TOOL: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW ON BRAND BUILDING AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract:

The increasing integration of social media into business strategies has transformed how firms build brands and engage customers, prompting a surge in academic interest across multiple disciplines. Despite this growing body of literature, there remains a need for a structured overview of research trends, key contributors, and thematic developments in this area. This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to explore the research landscape on social media as a business tool: building brands and engaging customers. Using the Scopus database, a refined search strategy was applied with the keywords social media, business, and firm, limited to English-language journal articles published between 2007 and 2023. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 643 relevant journal article were identified for analysis. To examine the dataset, a combination of bibliometric tools which are Scopus Analyzer, OpenRefine, and VOSviewer was utilized to extract and visualize data on publication trends, influential articles, author collaboration networks, country productivity, and keyword co-occurrence. The results reveal that the United States leads in publication output, while high impact articles focus on firm-generated content, customer engagement, and business transformation. Popular keywords such as social media marketing, entrepreneurship, firm performance, and customer behavior indicate key research directions. VOSviewer's mapping further highlights emerging themes like sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation. The study also uncovers notable

international collaborations, with strong research linkages between developed and emerging economies. These findings provide valuable insights into the intellectual structure and evolution of the field, offering guidance for future research directions and highlighting the strategic role of social media in business performance.

Keywords:

Social Media, Business Tool, Brand, Engaging Customer.

Introduction

In the contemporary business landscape, social media has emerged as a vital tool for brand building and customer engagement. The advent of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their customers, offering unprecedented opportunities for real-time communication, feedback collection, and community building (Mittal et al., 2023; Zou, 2015). This transformation is not limited to large scale enterprises, even small and medium-sized businesses leverage social media to establish their brand presence and compete in the digital marketplace (Mittal et al., 2023). The integration of social media into business strategies has become essential for maintaining relevance and fostering customer loyalty in an increasingly digital world (Lee, 2014; Stone & Woodcock, 2013).

Beyond simply providing a new communication channel, social media has redefined the traditional marketing paradigm. It shifts the emphasis from one-way, firm-controlled messaging to a more participatory and decentralized form of brand interaction. These challenges established theories of consumer behavior and marketing communication, which often assume passive consumption of messages. Now, consumers actively shape brand narratives, engage in peer-to-peer endorsement, and co-create value through likes, shares, and user-generated content (Inês et al., 2019; Zou, 2015). While these developments offer opportunities for increased engagement and personalization, they also raise concerns around consistency, message control, and reputational risk.

Social media platforms provide businesses with innovative ways to market their products and services, significantly impacting brand awareness and reputation (Gowrishankar et al., 2024; Inês et al., 2019). Unlike traditional media, social media allows for bi-directional communication, enabling consumers to actively participate in brand development and advocacy (Zou, 2015). This shift has corrected the traditional imbalance of power between companies and consumers, making it crucial for businesses to develop strategies that harness the interactive nature of social media (Srivastava et al., 2022; Zou, 2015). For instance, companies like Josefinas have successfully built their brand exclusively online, leveraging social media and digital influencers to gain recognition and customer loyalty (Inês et al., 2019).

Engaging customers on social media involves more than just marketing, it encompasses the entire customer management cycle, from initial contact to after sales service (Lee, 2014; Stone & Woodcock, 2013). Social media platforms facilitate the creation of brand communities where customers can interact with each other and the brand, co-creating value and enhancing engagement (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021; Riley, 2020). Effective social media strategies

require businesses to develop capabilities in areas such as content creation, data management, and customer experience management (Stone & Woodcock, 2013). The ability to sustain engagement through interactive and customized content is critical, as it directly influences customer loyalty and brand performance (Cuevas-Molano et al., 2021; Iliopoulou & Vlachvei, 2022).

Despite the clear benefits, many companies face challenges in effectively utilizing social media due to a lack of resources and fear of failure (Manzoor, 2016, 2018). Developing a comprehensive social media strategy involves understanding the unique characteristics of each platform and aligning them with the company's overall marketing goals (Bakhare, 2018). Real-time marketing (RTM) and the integration of social media marketing with customer care activities are emerging as effective strategies to enhance customer engagement and brand loyalty (Carvalho et al., 2023; VAN HESE, 2022). However, these approaches demand agility, cross-functional collaboration, and the ability to interpret consumer data in real time capabilities that many firms still struggle to develop.

Additionally, businesses must continuously monitor and adapt their social media strategies to respond to the evolving digital landscape and consumer behavior (Griffin, 2024; Lee, 2014). The dynamic nature of digital platforms challenges traditional strategic planning, which often assumes stability and predictability. As such, social media management increasingly requires a balance between strategic foresight and tactical responsiveness, drawing from theories of dynamic capability and organizational learning.

In conclusion, social media has become an indispensable tool for businesses aiming to build their brands and engage customers. By leveraging the interactive and community building capabilities of these platforms, companies can enhance their visibility, foster loyalty, and drive performance. However, the successful implementation of social media strategies demands more than enthusiasm for digital tools, it requires a critical understanding of platform dynamics, strategic alignment with firm capabilities, and constant adaptation to the evolving digital ecosystem.

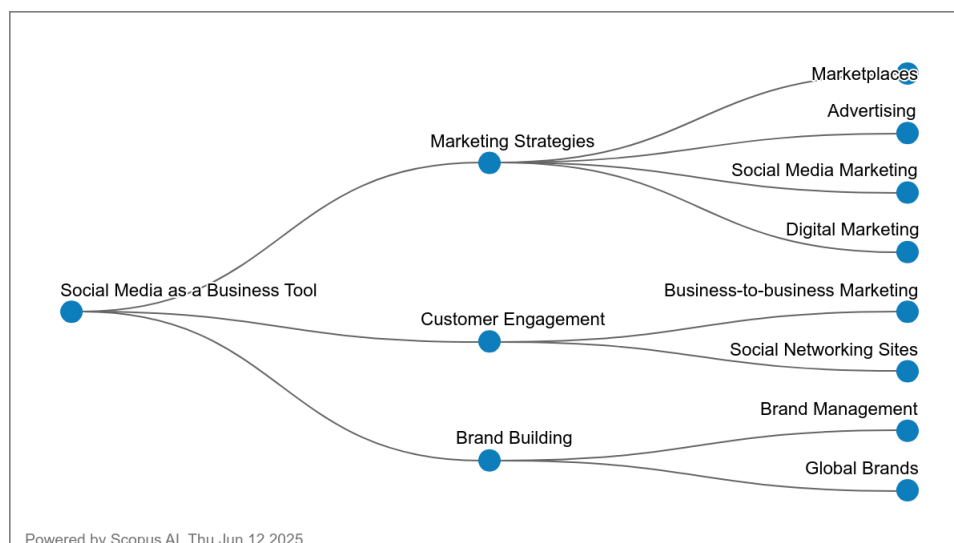


Figure 1: Concept Map

Research Question

1. What is the level of influence and productivity in research related to the topic of social media as a business tool?
2. Which articles are the most frequently cited within this research domain?
3. Which are the top 10 countries in terms of publication output on the topic?
4. What are the most frequently used and popular keywords associated with this field of study?
5. What patterns of international collaboration can be observed through bibliographic analysis by country?

Methodology

Bibliometrics refers to the process of collecting, organizing, and analyzing bibliographic data derived from scientific publications (Alves et al., 2021; Assyakur & Rosa, 2022; Verbeek et al., 2002). It goes beyond basic descriptive statistics such as identifying key journals, publication years, and prominent authors (Wu & Wu, 2017), to include more advanced methods like document co-citation analysis. A comprehensive literature review requires a systematic and iterative approach, involving careful keyword selection, targeted literature searches, and thorough analytical procedures. This methodology enables the construction of an extensive bibliography and supports the generation of robust, reliable insights (Fahimnia et al., 2015).

In this study, emphasis was placed on high impact publications, as its offer valuable contributions to the theoretical underpinnings of the research domain. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data, Scopus was chosen as the primary database due to its extensive indexing of peer reviewed literature (Al-Khoury et al., 2022; di Stefano et al., 2010; Khiste & Paithankar, 2017). To maintain the quality and relevance of the dataset, only journal articles from peer reviewed academic sources were included, while non journal literature such as books and conference proceedings were excluded (Gu et al., 2019). The final dataset, comprising publications from 2007 to December 2023, was extracted from Elsevier's Scopus database for detailed bibliometric analysis.

Data Search Strategy

To ensure the accuracy and relevance of this bibliometric analysis on the use of social media as a business tool, a structured and rigorous data search strategy was employed using the Scopus database. The advanced search string applied was: TITLE ("social media" AND (business OR firm)), further refined by limiting results to documents published in English and sourced specifically from journal articles (SRCTYPE: "j") as refer to Table 1. This focused approach helped capture literature that explicitly addressed the role of social media in business contexts, particularly in branding, customer engagement, and firm level strategies. The time frame for the search was set between 2007 and 2023, capturing a period during which social media evolved rapidly and became deeply embedded in business practices.

In line with established bibliometric standards, a clear inclusion and exclusion criterion was established to filter the data. Only English language journal articles were included to maintain consistency in academic discourse and ensure peer reviewed quality. Non-English publications, as well as literature types such as conference proceedings, book chapters, and review articles, were excluded to avoid duplications and focus on original research contributions. After applying these filters, a total of 643 relevant journal articles were identified. The details of filtering selection are shows in table 2. This final dataset serves as the foundation for analyzing

publication trends, influential works, keyword occurrences, and international collaboration patterns in the field of social media and business integration.

Table 1:

The search strings.

Scopus	TITLE ("social media" AND (business OR firm)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j"))
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Table 2:

The Selection Criterion Is Searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2007 – 2023	< 2007
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review

Data Analysis

VOSviewer is a widely used, intuitive bibliometric analysis tool developed by Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman at Leiden University in the Netherlands (van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2017). It is specifically designed to visualize and analyze scientific literature, offering features such as network visualization, clustering of related terms, and density mapping. The software enables researchers to explore co-authorship networks, co-citation patterns, and keyword co-occurrences, providing a deeper understanding of research trends and academic collaboration. Its interactive design, ongoing updates, and ability to handle large datasets make it accessible for both novice and experienced researchers. Additionally, VOSviewer supports data from various bibliometric databases and allows for the computation of key metrics, making it a versatile and essential tool for literature mapping and analysis.

A key strength of VOSviewer lies in its ability to transform complex bibliometric data into easily interpretable visual networks. It excels at identifying clusters, visualizing keyword co-occurrence, and producing insightful density maps. With its user-friendly interface and advanced functionality, the software allows for efficient navigation of extensive datasets, facilitating the detection of thematic structures and emerging research patterns. Continuous development ensures that VOSviewer remains at the forefront of bibliometric analysis. Moreover, its compatibility with multiple data types, including co-authorship and citation data, further enhances its utility in mapping research landscapes and generating meaningful academic insights.

For this study, bibliographic data including publication year, article title, author names, journal titles, citation counts, and keywords were extracted from the Scopus database in Plain Text format, covering the period from 2007 to 2023. The data was processed using VOSviewer

version 1.6.19, which enabled the creation of bibliometric maps through clustering and visualization techniques. Unlike traditional Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), which relies on metrics such as cosine similarity and Jaccard index, VOSviewer uses a more suitable normalization method for co-occurrence data known as *association strength* (AS_{ij}), calculated as:

$$AS_{ij} = \frac{C_{ij}}{w_i w_j}$$

This formula reflects the ratio between the actual number of co-occurrences of items i and j and the expected number under statistical independence (Van Eck & Waltman, 2007). By positioning related items closer together in a low-dimensional space, VOSviewer effectively illustrates their semantic proximity, enabling a clearer understanding of research interconnections and thematic relevance.

Result and Discussion

RQ 1 What Is The Level Of Influence And Productivity In Research Related To The Topic Of Social Media As A Business Tool?

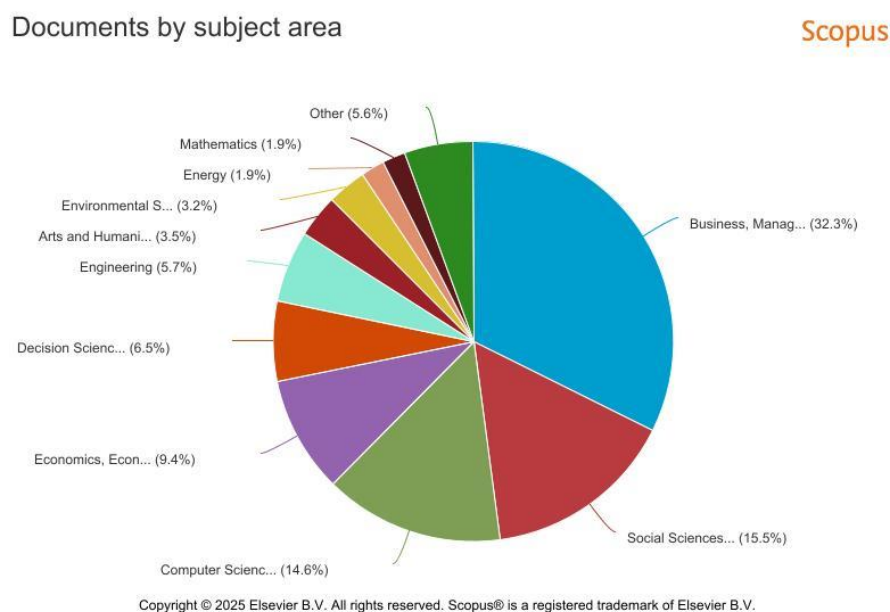


Figure 2: Document by Subject Area

Table 3: Number of Document by Subject Area

Subject Area	Number of Document	Percentages (%)
Business, Management and Accounting	400	32.30%
Social Sciences	192	15.50%
Computer Science	180	14.60%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	116	9.40%

Decision Sciences	80	6.50%
Engineering	71	5.70%
Arts and Humanities	43	3.50%
Environmental Science	39	3.20%
Energy	24	1.90%
Mathematics	23	1.90%

The bibliometric distribution of documents from 2007 to 2023 highlights that research on social media as a Business Tool is predominantly concentrated within the Business, Management and Accounting domain, which accounts for 32.3% of the total publications. This dominance underscores the centrality of social media in contemporary business strategies, particularly in brand building, marketing communication, and customer engagement. Following closely are Social Sciences (15.5%) and Computer Science (14.6%), indicating a growing interdisciplinary interest. While the former emphasizes behavioral, societal, and communicative aspects of social media use, the latter reflects the technological and algorithmic developments that underpin social media platforms, analytics, and digital consumer tracking systems.

The presence of Economics, Econometrics and Finance (9.4%) and Decision Sciences (6.5%) further reinforces the relevance of social media in influencing economic behavior, purchasing decisions, and business forecasting. Interestingly, fields like Engineering (5.7%), Environmental Science (3.2%), and Energy (1.9%) reflect emerging interest in how social media aids in public outreach, education, and technology dissemination in non-traditional domains. The modest representation in Arts and Humanities (3.5%) points to cultural and narrative explorations of brand identity and digital storytelling. Overall, the data illustrates a strong business-technological orientation in the research trend, while also highlighting expanding interest across diverse academic disciplines.

RQ 2 Which Articles Are The Most Frequently Cited Within This Research Domain?

Table 4: Most Cited Author

Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Cited by
Kumar A.et al (Kumar et al., 2016)	From social to sale: The effects of firm-generated content in social media on customer behavior	2016	Journal of Marketing	742
Aral S.; Dellarocas C.; Godes D. (Aral et al., 2013)	Social media and business transformation: A Framework for research	2013	Information Systems Research	712
Culnan M.J.; McHugh P.J.; Zubillaga J.I. (Culnan et al., 2010)	How large U.S. companies can use twitter and other social media to gain business value	2010	MIS Quarterly Executive	686

Luo X.; Zhang J.; Duan W. (Luo et al., 2013)	Social media and firm equity value	2013	Information Systems Research	524
Wang Z.; Kim H.G. (Z. Wang & Kim, 2017)	Can Social Media Marketing Improve Customer Relationship Capabilities and Firm Performance? Dynamic Capability Perspective	2017	Journal of Interactive Marketing	326
Kwok L.; Yu B. (Kwok & Yu, 2013)	Spreading Social Media Messages on Facebook: An Analysis of Restaurant Business-to-Consumer Communications	2013	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	277
Benitez J.; Castillo A.; Llorens J.; Braojos J. (Benitez et al., 2018)	IT-enabled knowledge ambidexterity and innovation performance in small U.S. firms: The moderator role of social media capability	2018	Information and Management	274
Wang W.Y.C.; Pauleen D.J.; Zhang T. (W. Y. C. Wang et al., 2016)	How social media applications affect B2B communication and improve business performance in SMEs	2016	Industrial Marketing Management	238
Rodriguez M.; Peterson R.M.; Krishnan V. (Rodriguez et al., 2012)	Social media's influence on business-to-business sales performance	2012	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	235
Swani K. et al (Swani et al., 2017)	What messages to post? Evaluating the popularity of social media communications in business versus consumer markets	2017	Industrial Marketing Management	230

The citation data of the top 10 most influential articles on social media as a business tool reveals a strong academic focus on the relationship between firm-generated social media content and customer behavior, performance, and value creation. The most cited article by Kumar et al. (2016) with 742 citations, published in the *Journal of Marketing*, highlights the direct impact of social media marketing on customer purchase behavior, underscoring the strategic value of content creation. Similarly, Aral et al. (2013), with 712 citations, present a foundational framework for research on social media-driven business transformation, demonstrating the academic community's interest in conceptualizing social media's broader organizational impact. The article by Culnan et al. (2010) also ranks highly with 686 citations, focusing on how large corporations can derive tangible value from platforms like Twitter, showing early acknowledgment of social media's business potential.

Articles published in top-tier journals like *Information Systems Research*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, and *Industrial Marketing Management* further show the cross-disciplinary nature of this research area bridging marketing, information systems, and management science. The inclusion of articles focusing on B2B communication (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016) and SMEs (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018) indicates an expanding scope that moves beyond large enterprises and into more specialized sectors. Common themes across these top-cited works include the enhancement of customer relationship capabilities, strategic communication, innovation performance, and dynamic capabilities. Collectively, this citation trend demonstrates that scholarly interest is strongly anchored in understanding how social media tools contribute to measurable business outcomes, offering both theoretical frameworks and practical insights.

RQ 3 Which Are The Top 10 Countries In Terms Of Publication Output On The Topic?

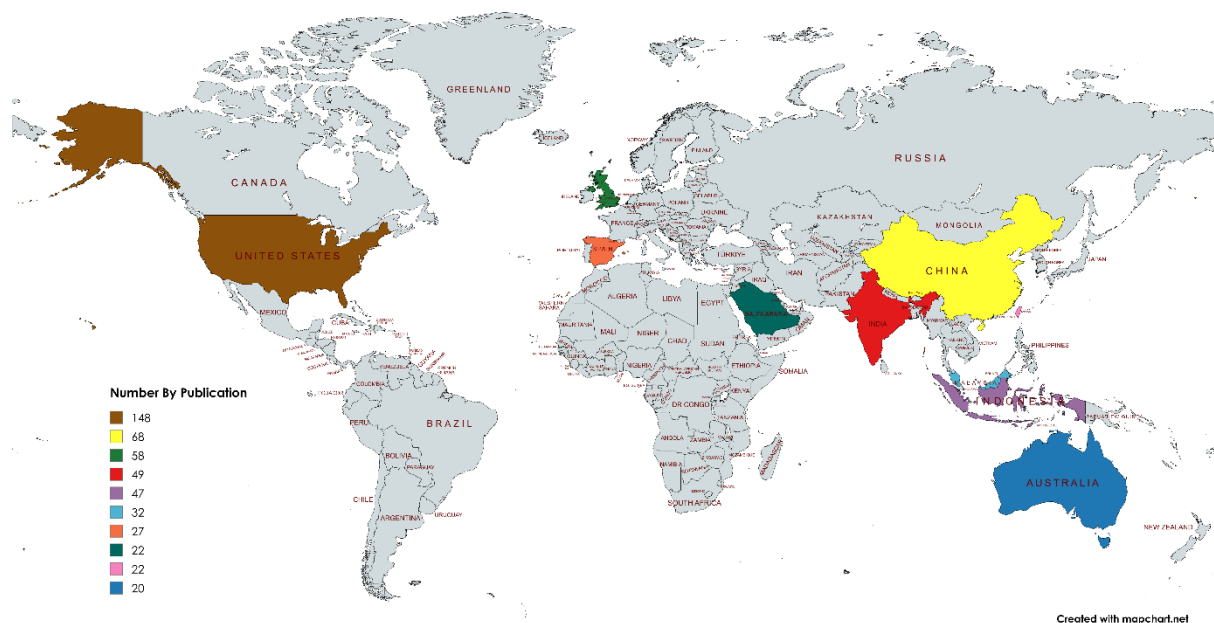


Figure 3: Top 10 Countries in Terms of Publication Output

Table 5: Top 10 Country in Terms Of Publication Output

Country/Territory	No of Document	Percentages (%)
United States	148	16.7
China	68	7.7
United Kingdom	58	6.6
India	49	5.5
Indonesia	47	5.3
Malaysia	32	3.6
Spain	27	3.1
Saudi Arabia	22	2.5
Taiwan	22	2.5
Australia	20	2.3

The distribution of publications by country reveals that the United States leads significantly in research output related to social media as a business tool, contributing 16.7% of total documents. This dominance reflects the country's robust academic infrastructure, early adoption of digital marketing practices, and strong ties between academia and industry, particularly in areas like customer analytics and digital branding. China (7.7%) and the United Kingdom (6.6%) follow, illustrating their growing research interest and investments in digital business and e-commerce strategies, especially as social media becomes integral to consumer behavior and brand engagement globally.

Emerging economies such as India (5.5%), Indonesia (5.3%), and Malaysia (3.6%) show notable contributions, indicating that social media research is gaining momentum in Southeast Asia and other developing regions. These countries often serve as dynamic markets for social media experimentation and adoption, offering rich contexts for studies on consumer engagement and mobile commerce. The presence of Spain, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Australia, each contributing over 2%, reflects a global diffusion of interest across various socio-economic and technological contexts. Overall, the data underscores a globally distributed yet US-led scholarly effort to explore the strategic role of social media in modern business practices.

RQ 4 What Are The Most Frequently Used And Popular Keywords Associated With This Field Of Study?

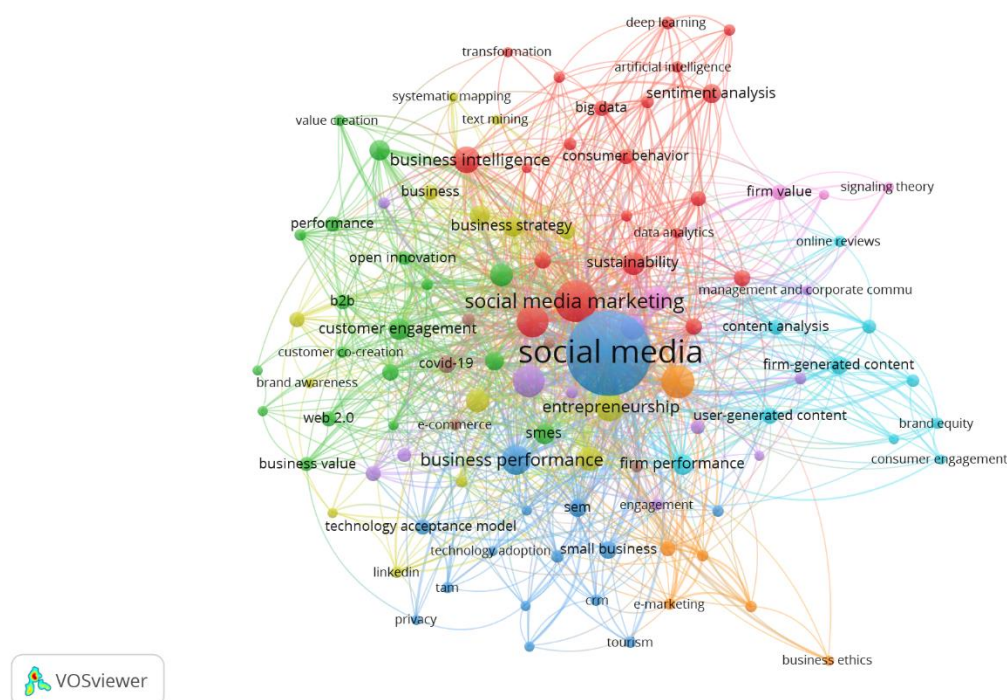


Figure 4: Network Visualization Map of Keywords' Co-Occurrence

The keyword analysis using VOSviewer software reveals that “social media” is the most dominant term, with 340 occurrences and the highest total link strength (693), signifying its centrality in the research landscape on using social media as a business tool. Closely linked are terms like “social media marketing” (82 occurrences) and “marketing” (50 occurrences), which

emphasize the marketing-centric nature of the topic. Keywords such as “social media use,” “social networking,” and “customer engagement” reflect the growing scholarly focus on user behavior, platform interaction, and relationship-building. The presence of platform-specific terms like “Facebook” and “Twitter” also indicates early interest in mainstream social networks as case contexts for empirical studies.

The keyword “business performance” (41) and “firm performance” (19) highlight the consistent attention given to quantifying the business outcomes of social media use. Related concepts such as “entrepreneurship,” “business intelligence,” “knowledge management,” and “business strategy” suggest a broadened scope in which social media is evaluated not only as a marketing tool but also as a strategic resource that contributes to innovation, knowledge flow, and decision-making. Terms like “SMEs,” “small and medium enterprises,” and “small business” show an interest in how resource-constrained organizations utilize digital platforms for branding and market reach, particularly in emerging or less-developed markets.

Emerging and specialized themes also surface through keywords like “sustainability,” “co-creation,” “corporate social responsibility,” and “digital media marketing”, reflecting how businesses are aligning social media strategies with broader societal and ethical objectives. Furthermore, the inclusion of technical and methodological terms such as “sentiment analysis,” “TAM,” “SEM,” “machine learning,” and “deep learning” indicates a significant rise in data-driven approaches and modeling techniques in this field. The growing use of “content analysis,” “big data,” “data analytics,” and “structural equation modelling” also points to the methodological sophistication in evaluating how social media impacts branding, engagement, and customer behavior in a digital ecosystem.

RQ 5 What Patterns Of International Collaboration Can Be Observed Through Bibliographic Analysis By Country?

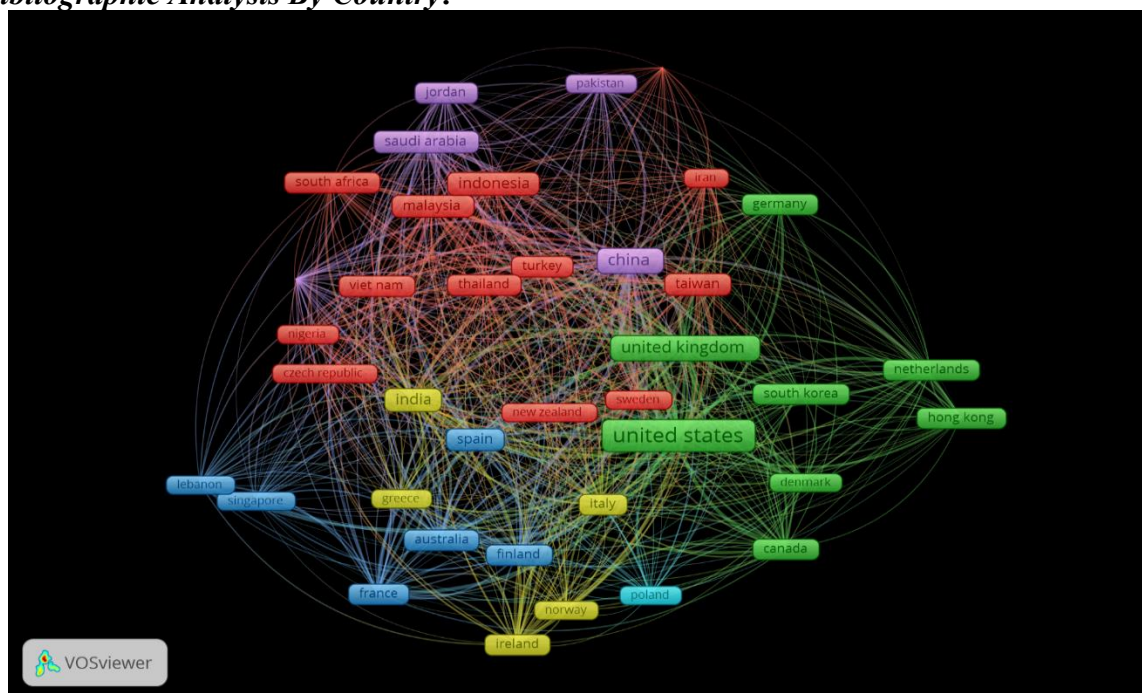


Figure 5: Network Visualization Map of Country Collaboration

The bibliometric analysis based on country collaborations reveals notable disparities in research output and engagement related to social media as a business tool. Australia leads with 20 documents and 369 citations, contributing significantly to the research landscape, likely reflecting its active academic community and interest in digital marketing strategies. Canada and the Czech Republic follow, with 19 and 7 documents respectively, indicating moderate levels of research activity. Countries like Denmark, Finland, and France show smaller outputs but still contribute meaningfully, highlighting regional interest in social media's role in branding and customer engagement. The total link strength metric underscores the intensity of collaboration among countries, with Australia (9404) and Canada (4023) leading, suggesting strong international partnerships that facilitate knowledge exchange and joint research initiatives.

Emerging economies such as India, Indonesia, and Iran demonstrate substantial research activity, with India producing 49 documents and Iran 9, reflecting increasing global recognition of social media's business utility. Notably, India's high citation count (1641) indicates impactful research contributions despite a smaller number of documents compared to some Western countries. Countries like Malaysia, Nigeria, and South Africa exhibit moderate outputs, emphasizing the growing importance of social media in diverse geographical contexts. The collaboration network shows that many developing nations are engaging with established research hubs, which could foster more comprehensive global insights into social media marketing practices. This trend suggests a democratization of research efforts and highlights the universal relevance of social media as a strategic business tool.

The data also points to significant disparities in research productivity and collaboration intensity among countries. For example, the United States leads with 149 documents and 32459 citations, serving as a major global research hub in this domain. Conversely, smaller countries like Lebanon and Lebanon have fewer publications but still participate in the international research network. The variation in total link strength across countries reflects different levels of integration into the global research community, with some nations forming strong collaborative ties and others remaining more isolated. Overall, the bibliometric landscape underscores a dynamic and evolving research environment, with both developed and developing countries increasingly exploring social media's strategic role in branding and customer engagement, fostering a richer, more interconnected global research ecosystem.

Conclusion

This bibliometric study set out to examine the intellectual landscape, research productivity, and thematic evolution of literature focused on the use of social media as a business tool, particularly in the domains of brand building and customer engagement. Through a structured analysis of 643 journal articles indexed in Scopus from 2007 to 2023, the study addressed key research questions related to publication trends, influential articles, keyword patterns, leading countries, and international collaborations.

The analysis revealed a significant concentration of research within the fields of business, management, and marketing, with the United States leading in output and influence. Recurring themes identified through keyword mapping include social media marketing, customer behavior, entrepreneurship, innovation, and firm performance. Citation data highlighted a small number of highly influential studies that have shaped academic discourse, particularly those addressing the strategic use of firm-generated content and customer engagement

practices. Moreover, the visualization of collaboration patterns illustrated the increasing role of both developed and developing countries in shaping this global field.

This study contributes to the academic understanding of how social media is positioned not merely as a communication tool, but as a core component of business strategy. The findings align with resource based and dynamic capability theories, underscoring how social media can be leveraged as a valuable, rare, and inimitable resource that enhances firm competitiveness. The insights offered enrich the discourse around digital branding, strategic marketing, and firm capabilities, especially in dynamic, digitally connected markets. Furthermore, the findings provide a foundation for refining business strategies, supporting informed decision-making by professionals, and encouraging more data-driven marketing practices in both corporate and entrepreneurial contexts.

Importantly, the results matter because they reflect a shift in how firms conceptualize digital platforms from peripheral marketing tools to strategic assets that influence firm performance. Compared to past research, which often emphasized the promotional aspects of social media, the current trends suggest a broader and more integrated role in driving innovation and shaping consumer experience. This evolution highlights an increasing academic consensus on the need for a more holistic view of digital strategy, consistent with recent theoretical advancements in strategic management and digital entrepreneurship.

However, the study is limited by its reliance on a single database and a predefined set of keywords, which may exclude relevant literature outside those parameters. The exclusion of non-English and non-journal articles also narrows the scope. Future investigations could expand by incorporating multiple databases, broader document types, and qualitative assessments to capture a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the topic. Additionally, exploring sector specific or platform specific dynamics could further enhance the practical relevance of the findings. Integrating conceptual frameworks such as the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) model or the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) may also help anchor future research more firmly in theory.

Overall, this research affirms the value of bibliometric analysis in uncovering trends, collaborations, and knowledge gaps in a rapidly evolving area. By engaging more critically with theoretical underpinnings and comparing shifts in scholarly focus over time, this study provides deeper insight into how social media is increasingly viewed as a strategic enabler of business transformation. The insights presented here can serve as a resource for future researchers aiming to explore the strategic integration of social media into business practices, and for practitioners seeking to harness these tools more effectively within their organizational contexts.

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