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(JISTM)**www.gaexcellence.com/jistm**SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND USER BEHAVIOR IN THE
DIGITAL INFORMATION AGE: A PERFORMANCE
ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL RESEARCH PRODUCTION**

Zuraidah Arif¹, Zati Atiqah Mohamad Tanuri^{2*}, Abd Latif Abdul Rahman³, Noryana Ahmad Khusaini⁴

¹ Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Malaysia

✉ zuraidah_arif@uitm.edu.my

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3357-1649>

² Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Malaysia

✉ zatiatiqah@uitm.edu.my

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0862-5999>

³ Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Malaysia

✉ ablatif@uitm.edu.my

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7970-2520>

⁴ Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Malaysia

✉ noryana@uitm.edu.my

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4551-4238>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

Source credibility has become increasingly important in digital information environments, where users encounter information through social media, online platforms, and other digitally mediated channels to fulfil their information needs. This study provides a bibliometric performance analysis of global research on source credibility and user behaviour. The analysis included 1,046 publications published between 2015 and 2025. The findings demonstrate substantial growth in research output, with 59.27% of publications appearing between 2023 and 2025. The corpus accumulated 36,895 citations, averaging 35.27 citations per publication, with an h-index of 89 and a g-index of 167, indicating strong scholarly visibility and citation concentration. The findings establish a performance-based baseline for understanding the growth, scholarly impact, publication structure, and multidisciplinary development of source credibility research in the digital information age.

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Introduction

In the contemporary digital information environment, people are exposed to a large amount of information from social media, online communities, digital marketplaces, recommendation systems, and, more recently, generative artificial intelligence. With so much information available, the credibility of the source has become an important factor in determining how people evaluate, trust, and respond to what they see online. Source credibility is often a function of various properties such as competence, reliability, attractiveness or a combination of these and it has potential to be one of the drivers behind information acceptance, purchase intention, trust, engagement, and decision-making process (Hovland & Janis, 1953; Ohanian, 1990). Understanding how people make evaluations regarding the credibility of different information sources is particularly a major focus as professional, commercial, institutional, and user-based forms of information increasingly merge and the distinction becomes blurry.

Traditionally, source credibility has been analyzed in communication and persuasion, and initially, researchers focused on how certain communicators' characteristics may affect audience's attitude (Hovland et al., 1953). With the passage of time, this theory has been extended to many digital environments in which people evaluate the credibility of information coming from online reviewers, social media influencers, celebrities, bloggers, and various other digital sources (Shan, 2016; Gong & Li, 2017; Yuan & Lou, 2020; Ren et al., 2026). Modern scholars have also confirmed that this phenomenon plays an important role in many aspects, such as influencer marketing, social commerce, online consumer behaviour, and digital communication in particular, as far as consumer behaviour is concerned (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As a result, the analysis of source credibility has become a truly interdisciplinary topic gaining great popularity not only in communication but also in business, social sciences, psychology, computer science, health, and many other applied areas.

Although there have been extensive studies related to source credibility in particular areas, the bibliometric analysis of the general performance and evolution of the area of study is limited. It is very important that a systematic understanding of the performance trend of global publication growth, citation performance, sources of publications, highly cited literature, and discipline distribution is not yet available. The analysis of these bibliometric indicators is vital in order to set an empirical benchmark for the current state of the field and its evolution.

Therefore, the main goals of this study can be stated as follows:

- (1) To analyze publication growth and research development trends in the area of source credibility and user behaviour;
- (2) To evaluate citation performance and scholarly influence in the area; and
- (3) To determine core publication sources and highly cited publications in the area.

The present study brings together global information about publication growth, citation performance, core publication sources, highly cited publications, and disciplinary distribution into a unified global database; in this way, it sets up a performance-based benchmark for analyzing the development and scholarly structure of source credibility research.

Literature Review

Credibility of sources has been extensively studied in the field of communication and persuasion. It was Hovland et al. who first recognized the fact that the response of the audience to a message would not just depend on the content of the message but also on the attributes of the source. Later, Ohanian (1990) used three dimensions to operationalize the concept of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Credibility as a source has been an area of research interest in social media influencer environments. Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that the message value and source credibility play roles in creating consumer trust in branded social media messages, and Schouten et al. (2020) have shown that the factors that determine successful endorsements include source credibility, identification, and product-influencer fit. In more recent studies, source credibility and trust have been analyzed within the framework of social media influencer communications (Han et al., 2024).

At the same time, credibility assessment has been explored within the wider context of digital communication. There have been studies conducted on the issue of credibility in the context of virtual influencers and health information shared via social media platforms. For instance, Khalfallah and Keller (2025) conducted research concerning the credibility perceptions towards virtual influencers, whereas Lawal and Stvilia (2025) identified the factors influencing the credibility assessments of young adults regarding health information shared through social media influencers.

Even though there are more research articles that have been produced about this subject, the majority of them have a strong representation in the fields of marketing, consumer behaviour, and social media. There is not much evidence regarding the overall growth and development of the field of research into the credibility of sources through publication growth, citations, publication sources, highly cited publications, and disciplinary distribution. Especially when it comes to the growth of the field in terms of new emerging digital and technology fields.

Methodology

This study employs bibliometric performance analysis to examine publication volume, citation impact, publication sources, highly cited publications, and disciplinary distribution (Donthu et al., 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2022). Data were retrieved from Scopus, a curated bibliographic database with extensive global and multidisciplinary coverage (Baas et al., 2020). Data collection and screening followed the PRISMA diagram (Figure 1) using the Scopus database on September 15, 2026. The search covered all publication years and languages and was conducted within the Title, Abstract, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY) fields, combining credibility dimensions ("source credibility", "expertise", "trustworthiness", or "attractiveness"), user behavioural metrics ("user behav*", "attitude*", or "intention*"), and platform contexts ("social media" or "online information"). The primary retrieval query identified an initial pool of $n = 1,337$ records; after screening 291 records were removed, resulting in a final corpus of 1046 Scopus-indexed publications that met the inclusion criteria.

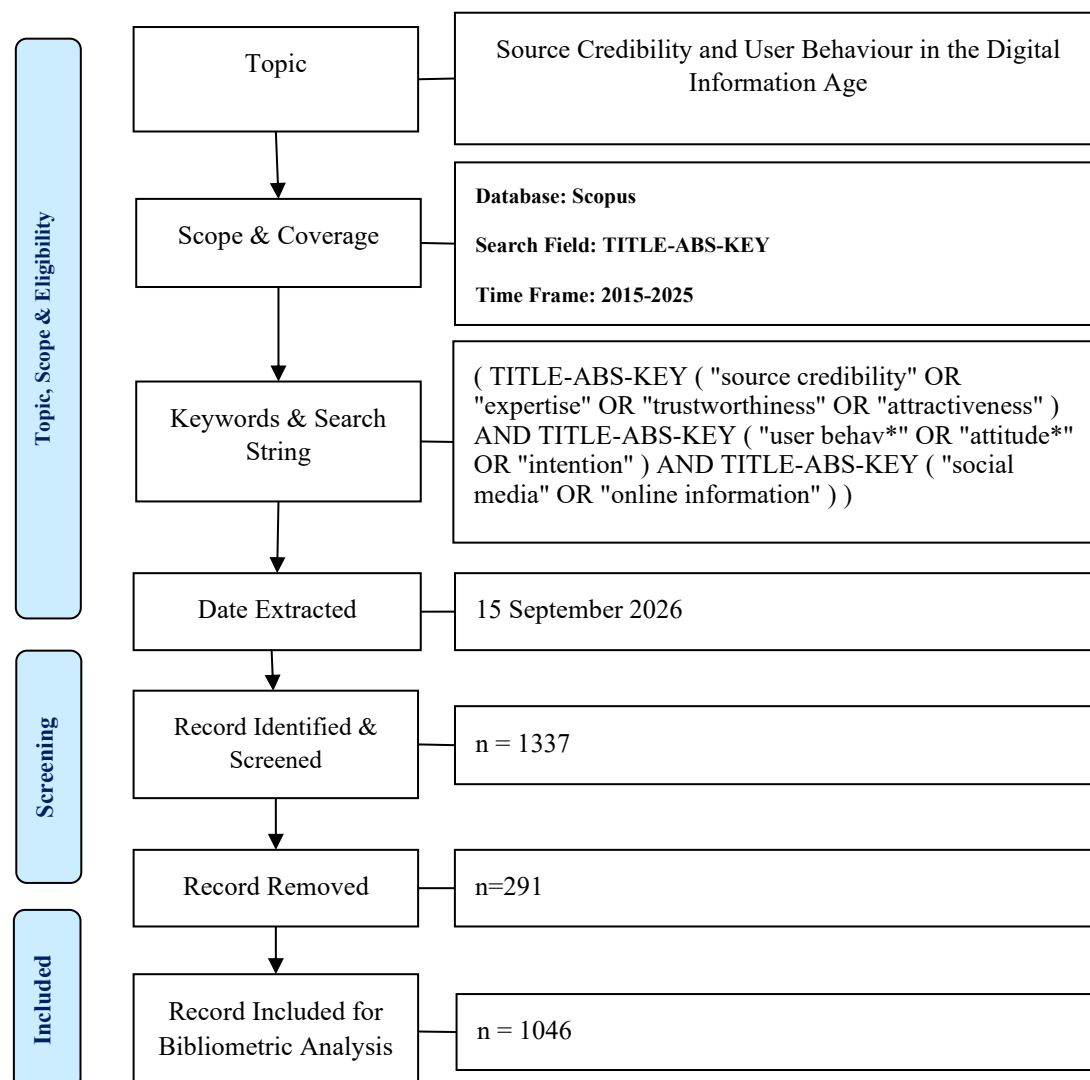


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Result And Discussion

The literature review was analyzed from five main perspectives: the pace and dynamics of publication, citation and impact of publications within the area, publishing venues for core literature and its scattering, highly cited articles, and subject distribution of publications.

Publication Velocity and Growth Dynamics

Analysis of the 1,046 publications that have been stabilized shows that there is an increase in the production of research output globally from 2015 to 2025. The number of publications grew from 23 publications in 2015 to 286 publications in 2025, showing that there was growth in the body of literature in this field. Analysis of the 1,046 publications that have been stabilized from 2015 to 2025 indicates that there is continued growth in research output over the 11 years of observation. The number of publications started from a small base with 23 publications (2.20%) in 2015 and 2016 and 25 publications (2.39%) in 2017, a total of 6.79% (n=71). The number of research publications increased gradually from 2018 through 2022, from 40 articles (3.82%) to 93 articles (8.89%), which altogether resulted in 355 articles (33.94% of the entire dataset). The peak number of publications was achieved during the last three years, from 143 articles (13.67%) in 2023, to 191 articles (18.26%) in 2024, and the maximum of 286 articles (27.34%) in 2025. Altogether, the publications from 2023 through 2025 represented 59.27% (n = 620).

Table 1 : Annual Publication Growth and Growth Indicators, 2015–2025

Year	Annual Publications (TP)	Relative Output (%)	Cumulative Publications (N)	Cumulative Share (%)
2015	23	2.20%	23	2.20%
2016	23	2.20%	46	4.40%
2017	25	2.39%	71	6.79%
2018	40	3.82%	111	10.61%
2019	55	5.26%	166	15.87%
2020	78	7.46%	244	23.33%
2021	89	8.51%	333	31.84%
2022	93	8.89%	426	40.73%
2023	143	13.67%	569	54.40%
2024	191	18.26%	760	72.66%
2025	286	27.34%	1,046	100.00%
Total	1,046	100.00%	—	—

Citation Performance and Domain Impact Analysis

Harzing's Publish or Perish evaluated the citation performance of the 1,046 articles that comprised the 11-year body of research on source credibility (2015-2025). Citation count, citation impact, and citation concentration were among the parameters analyzed. The data is presented in Table 2 below. The articles received 36,895 citations, receiving an average of 35.27 citations per article and 3,354.09 citations per year.

Table 2: Citation Impact And Research Performance Indicators

Metric	Value
Analyzed papers (<i>f</i>)	1,046
Total citations (ΣC)	36,895
Citation velocity (citations/year)	3,354.09
Citation impact (citations/paper)	35.27
<i>h</i> -index	89
<i>g</i> -index	167

The citation metrics at the field level further highlight the scholarly significance of the corpus. The value of 89 for the *h*-index implies that 89 papers have been cited at least 89 times, whereas 167 represents the *g*-index and shows a significant clustering of citations around highly cited papers. Together, these metrics imply that source credibility studies have achieved some scholarly significance and have attracted considerable scholarly attention.

These patterns of citations also show that the impact of the discipline is not evenly distributed across all publications. Given the relatively high *g*-index relative to the *h*-index, it can be said that a certain number of publications make an important contribution to the total citation rate. Such patterns of citations are typical for a scientific discipline in which some significant works have been cited quite a lot. Generally, the cited indicators offer some quantitative proof of the scholarly recognition and development of source credibility research, which supplements the discussion of publication increase, publication sources, and discipline distribution in the next sections.

Analysis of Core Publishing Sources and Literature Scattering

A clear indication of the high level of multidisciplinary work in global source credibility studies is demonstrated by the analysis of key sources of publishing. As can be seen from Table 3 below, all the main publishers contribute to a total of 140 articles, which represent 13.38% of the dataset.

Table 3: Core Sources of Publications in Source Credibility Research

Rank	Source Title	Document Count (TP)	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Sustainability (Switzerland)</i>	18	1.72%
2	<i>Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	14	1.34%
3	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	13	1.24%
4	<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	11	1.05%
5	<i>Cogent Business & Management</i>	9	0.86%
6	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	9	0.86%
7	<i>Journal of Promotion Management</i>	9	0.86%
8	<i>Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems</i>	9	0.86%
9	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	8	0.76%
10	<i>Innovative Marketing</i>	8	0.76%
11	<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	8	0.76%

12	<i>Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing</i>	8	0.76%
13	<i>PLOS ONE</i>	8	0.76%
14	<i>Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics</i>	8	0.76%

The publication pattern demonstrates that the literature is predominantly concerned with the marketing of corporations, interactive e-commerce, and behavioural science. The most prolific publications are *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *Developments in Marketing Science*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. The emphasis indicates that there are many empirical studies of source credibility in applied areas of digital marketing, mostly focusing on the impact of trust on consumer behaviour. While at the same time, the emergence of small channels such as *Current Issues in Tourism*, as well as a technology platform like *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, illustrates an interdisciplinary approach because credibility is considered as a basic component regardless of the industry or automation level of the system. The prominence of *Sustainability* indicates that studies on source credibility have also made their way into interdisciplinary sources, indicating its applicability in various contexts. From the scientometric point of view, it indicates a very high level of literature dispersion through publication media (Drott & Griffith, 1978; Nash-Stewart et al., 2012). Instead of being concentrated in just a handful of traditional communications journals, the credibility of the source functions as a cross-boundary construct assessed through varied social, business, and computer-mediated publication media.

Highly Cited Publications and Citation Concentration

For the identification of influential sources in source credibility, the citation patterns of the selected literature were analyzed. The selection of the 20 most cited sources tells us about the studies that have been receiving considerable attention from scholars in the body of literature. This citation analysis reveals that there have been a few studies that have made considerable impact on the research of source credibility. The most cited study is Lou and Yuan (2019), with 2,181 citations, followed by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) with 1,250 citations, and Schouten et al. (2020) with 1,226 citations. These highly cited studies mainly examine influencer marketing, consumer trust, credibility, and the relationship between social media users and online personalities.

Table 4: Most Highly Cited Publications in Source Credibility Research

Rank	First Author & Year	Document Title	Publication Venue	Total Citations (C)	Citations / Year
1	Lou & Yuan (2019)	Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media	<i>Journal of Interactive Advertising</i>	2,181	311.57
2	Sokolova & Kefi (2020)	Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it; why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions	<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	1,250	208.33

3	Schouten et al. (2020)	Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit	<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	1,226	204.33
4	Jin et al. (2019)	Instafamous and social media influencer marketing	<i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i>	789	112.71
5	Nadarzynski et al. (2019)	Acceptability of artificial intelligence (AI)-led chatbot services in healthcare: A mixed-methods study	<i>Digital Health</i>	699	99.86
6	Chung & Cho (2017)	Fostering parasocial relationships with celebrities on social media: Implications for celebrity endorsement	<i>Psychology & Marketing</i>	669	74.33
7	Park & Lin (2020)	The effects of match-ups on the consumer attitudes toward internet celebrities and their live streaming contents in the context of product endorsement	<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	638	106.33
8	Kim & Kim (2021)	Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	590	118.00
9	Ladhari et al. (2020)	YouTube vloggers' popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise	<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	491	81.83
10	Masuda et al. (2022)	Impacts of influencer attributes on purchase intentions in social media influencer marketing: Mediating roles of characterizations	<i>Technological Forecasting and Social Change</i>	467	116.75
11	Lăzăroiu et al. (2020)	Consumers' Decision-Making Process on Social Commerce Platforms: Online Trust, Perceived Risk, and Purchase Intentions	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	440	73.33
12	Xiao et al. (2018)	Factors affecting YouTube influencer marketing credibility: a heuristic-systematic model	<i>Journal of Media Business Studies</i>	434	54.25

13	Weismueller et al. (2020)	Influencer endorsements: How advertising disclosure and source credibility affect consumer purchase intention on social media	<i>Australasian Marketing Journal</i>	422	70.33
14	Jin & Ryu (2020)	"I'll buy what she's #wearing": The roles of envy toward and parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand endorsement and social commerce	<i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	342	57.00
15	Zhao et al. (2015)	The influence of online reviews to online hotel booking intentions	<i>Int. Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	341	31.00
16	De Veirman & Hudders (2020)	Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: the role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising	<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	337	56.17
17	Lou & Kim (2019)	Fancying the New Rich and Famous? Explicating the Roles of Influencer Content, Credibility, and Parental Mediation in Adolescents' Parasocial Relationship, Materialism, and Purchase Intentions	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	326	46.57
18	Chetioui et al. (2020)	How fashion influencers contribute to consumers' purchase intention	<i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i>	316	52.67
19	Onofrei et al. (2022)	Social media interactions, purchase intention, and behavioral engagement: The mediating role of source and content factors	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	308	77.00
20	Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020)	Attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise – social influencers' winning formula?	<i>Journal of Product & Brand Management</i>	307	51.17

Table 4 shows that social media and influencer marketing are prominent research areas within the field, with several highly cited studies focusing on Instagram, YouTube, online influencers, celebrity endorsements, and consumer purchase intentions. Source credibility research has also

expanded into areas such as artificial intelligence, online reviews, social commerce, healthcare chatbots, and tourism. For example, Nadarzynski et al. (2019) examined the acceptance of AI-based healthcare chatbots, while Zhao et al. (2015) investigated the influence of online reviews on hotel booking decisions. Collectively, the 20 highly cited studies demonstrate the expansion of source credibility research beyond traditional communication settings, particularly in understanding how individuals evaluate the trustworthiness of information, recommendations, online reviews, influencers, and AI-based services. The variety of journals and topics covered illustrates the importance of source credibility in areas like marketing, consumer behaviour, information technology, health care, tourism, and social media research.

Distribution of Publications by Subject Area

The distribution of the subject areas represents the primary fields of academia involved in the research on credibility of sources. It can be observed from Table 5 that the research is mostly carried out within the Business, Management and Accounting and Social Sciences fields, as well as other fields, including technology, psychology, medicine, engineering, etc. The results show the most popular subject area for studying the topic of source credibility is Business, Management and Accounting, which accounts for 412 publications (39.39%), while Social Sciences account for 346 publications (33.08%). This is explained by a high interest in how people perceive, believe, use, and react to information.

Table 5: Distribution of Publications by Subject Area (TOP 10)

Rank	Subject Area	Total Publications (TP)	Percentage (%)
1	Business, Management and Accounting	412	39.39%
2	Social Sciences	346	33.08%
3	Computer Science	237	22.66%
4	Medicine	188	17.97%
5	Economics, Econometrics and Finance	97	9.27%
6	Psychology	90	8.60%
7	Engineering	84	8.03%
8	Arts and Humanities	76	7.27%
9	Decision Sciences	72	6.88%
10	Environmental Science	51	4.88%

Despite the latest trends in the rise of generative AI, deepfakes, algorithms, and automatic generation of content, Computer Science became the third most productive subject with 237 documents (22.66%) published. This distribution suggests that existing research has placed greater emphasis on individuals' behavioural responses to information than on the technologies that create, filter, and distribute it. Nevertheless, emerging studies demonstrate that AI-generated content, algorithms, and recommendation systems can shape users' perceptions of credibility and trust (Dong et al., 2022; Ou et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025). Further research from computing and technology perspectives is therefore needed to better understand how these technologies influence credibility judgments in digital information environments.

Other fields also make valuable contributions to the study of source credibility. Medicine (188 publications; 17.97%), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (97 publications; 9.27%), Research in Psychology (90 publications; 8.60%) and Engineering (84 publications; 8.03%)

demonstrate that source credibility is evaluated as a critical variable in high-stakes contexts, ranging from public health compliance during online health searches to cognitive decision-making and human-technology interactions.

Discussion

These results can be regarded as a descriptive evaluation of the evolution of scientific research into the problem of source credibility and user behaviour. The analysis demonstrates the high level of growth in the number of publications, increased activity in citations, clustering of publications in established outlets, and contributions from different academic fields. It proves that the problem of source credibility has turned into a mature field of scientific study.

Growth and Development

Trend analysis of publications shows a consistent growth rate from 2015 to 2025, wherein 59.27% of the database was published from 2023 to 2025. This is due to the rising importance of source credibility as more information flows via social media and the like. As users come across information from organizations, business organizations, influencer organizations, peer groups, and machine-based organizations, evaluating the source credibility of information has become highly significant. In general, an increase in publications has been an outcome of consistent scholarly interest in source credibility in changing digital environments (Donthu et al., 2021).

Citation Performance and Scholarly Impact

The citation statistics are indicative of a high level of visibility within academic literature. These 1,046 papers have received 36,895 citations, with an average of 35.27 citations per document. The fact that the h-index is 89 and the g-index is 167 suggests that there is a cluster of papers with a large number of citations. However, the citation numbers can be considered as indicators of visibility and not as measures of quality, since the number of citations may be influenced by factors such as the age of the publication, journal visibility, discipline, and topic of research.

Publication Sources and Highly Cited Literature

The allocation of publication sources indicates that source credibility studies have been conducted in many journals and conferences related to business, marketing, information, communication, behavioural sciences, and technologies. There was no particular source that took up a significant portion of the literature, meaning that the production of source credibility studies is distributed among different scholarly sources. Highly cited articles also reflect the scholarly interest in social media, influencer marketing, consumer trust, online reviews, and behavioural responses. On the other hand, high-cited research also involves domains such as artificial intelligence and healthcare, suggesting that the use of source credibility goes far beyond the traditional field of communication and marketing. Nevertheless, citation importance cannot be viewed as an indicator of theme domination without additional intellectual analysis (Mukherjee et al., 2022).

Disciplinary Distribution and Research Opportunities

Business, Management and Accounting represents the largest subject area, with 412 publications (39.39%), followed by Social Sciences with 346 (33.08%) and Computer Science with 237 (22.66%). Business, Management and Accounting is featured because of the considerable amount of literature available on consumer behavior, influencer marketing, advertising, e-commerce, and purchase decisions, while Social Sciences contributes due to the significant role of communication, information assessment, and user behaviour in studies of source credibility.

Despite that, the rising application of artificial intelligence, algorithmic and recommendation systems, and automated content provides avenues for further integration between computation and behaviour approaches. Research in the future may focus on interactions between technological processes and users' judgment of credibility in technologically mediated environments. Overall, the results provide a performance benchmark to help comprehend the growth, scholarly visibility, publication architecture, and discipline of the source credibility research. The following work can be based on this descriptive benchmark to investigate further the structural features of the field of study.

Conclusion

This paper examines the performance of global scientific research in source credibility and user behaviour via a bibliometric assessment, using 1,046 Scopus-indexed papers published between 2015 and 2025. The results reveal notable increases in research productivity, significant citations, and wide dissemination through various sources of publication and disciplines. The findings from citations show that the research area on source credibility has gained academic recognition. Highly cited research has demonstrated certain interests in social media, influencer marketing, consumer trust, online reviews, and other related behavior outcomes. The disciplinary distribution, furthermore, shows the multidisciplinary nature of this research area, with Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, and Computer Science being the top three disciplines.

The results offer a performance-driven framework in which the development and academic framework behind studies on source credibility can be understood. The role played by Computer Science in such a contribution also offers the chance for a deeper integration of behavioural, communicative, and computational approaches in the context of an increasingly intelligent digital world. Additional work can be done by building upon this foundation through further analysis in themes, concepts, and intellect within this field. Other research can even expand the study of source credibility into new areas such as AI-generated information, online news, public health, education, libraries, and governmental communication. More focus can also be placed on different nations, cultures, age ranges, and digital literacy to have an accurate understanding of the credibility assessment process. Moreover, future studies may analyze whether the traditional dimensions of credibility, which include expertise and trustworthiness, suffice for assessing credibility in modern-day digital spaces or if other dimensions such as transparency, validation, information sources, and disclosure of AI-based content must be considered.

The field of source credibility could also benefit from increased interdisciplinary cooperation between researchers in the realms of information sciences, communications, computer science,

psychology, business, and education. The integration of perspectives related to both human behaviour and the technology involved in information exposure could increase our understanding of source credibility. Such research might have useful implications for information literacy campaigns and library outreach efforts.

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Pengisytiharan Penggunaan Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) “The author(s) declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The following tool(s) were used: Gemini, Quill Bot and Grammarly. The tool(s) were used for language editing, grammar improvement, translation and data analysis. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and verified by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.”

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