A Cluster Analysis of Parasocial Interaction with Social Media Influencers in the Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates Social Media Influencers in the hospitality business. This study utilized Covidence software integrated with the PRISMA framework to screen 1250 appropriate publications from WoS and Scopus. These papers were then subjected to bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer tools, which included co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, and citation approaches. This study focused on social media influencer review, particularly from cluster Parasocial Interaction, which contributes to literature and practice by presenting the topic trends, and future of influencer marketing research. The study might aid hotel marketing managers in planning effective strategies for campaigns utilizing Social Media Influencers. By leveraging insights into influencer credibility and parasocial relationships, managers can enhance engagement, and interaction and increase the success of their marketing efforts.

Keywords: Parasocial Interaction, Social Media Influencers, Hospitality Industry, PSI, SMIs.

1. Introduction

The global digital marketing trend has experienced significant growth in recent years, exerting a growing impact on general enterprises and hotel operations. Social media marketing has gained considerable traction as a modern marketing communication channel due to its widespread appeal across various age groups [1]–[4]. Social media platforms provide customers with a digital environment where corporations may quickly and extensively promote and implement various marketing activities, without being constrained by limits of place and time [3], [5]. The social media landscape has altered the nature of interactions between businesses and consumers, as well as among consumers. One of the changes involves the emergence of influencers, who are social media

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celebrities with a limited number of followers but possess the ability to alter the behaviors of others through their content and personal stories [2], [6]. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok frequently employ Social Media Influencers to communicate personal information, generate significant influence, and provide options for engaging society to draw consumer engagement [7], [8]. As the increasing dependence of consumers on social media platform features, particularly for product reviews, firms have started utilizing "Social Media Influencers" as novel marketing communication channels in a digitalized setting [4], [9]. Social Media Influencers (SMIs), who possess specialized knowledge in a particular domain, are generally more favored by social media platforms (SMPs) as well as users due to their perceived authenticity and persuasive abilities, in contrast to celebrities who endorse products or services in both traditional advertising [5], [10], [11]. Indeed, the hospitality industry is greatly impacted by the electronic word of mouth on social media platforms [12] due to comments, and feedback experienced by guests. Consequently, this sector has been acknowledged as being highly susceptible to marketing efforts through SMIs. Hence, comprehending the influence of influencers on social networks would assist firms in efficiently marketing their products and services and enhancing their interactions. Secondly, there is a substantial amount of literature on social media influencers in the realm of influence marketing [13]–[16], but there is still a shortage of research regarding the impact of SMIs on the level of engagement from customers in the hospitality field or consumers' informational and normative social influence [17]–[19] or enhancing user engagement in the tourism and hospitality sectors [20]. This highlights a substantial gap in understanding this topic, particularly within the various contexts of digital technologies.

This study aims to fill the significant research gaps in the field of literature and provide valuable insights for future research on influencer marketing and its impact on consumer parasocial interaction. The purpose of this article is threefold:

• First, analyze the most recent scholarly studies on SMIs and PSI, published in WoS and Scopus publications from 2014 to 2024.

• Secondly, identify the prominent study topics, materials and methodologies, theories, variables, factors preceding an event, and outcomes that are pertinent to the literature on SMIs.

• Finally, identify significant areas of research that have not been well addressed in papers, to guide future research efforts for researchers.

2. Social Media Influencers in the Hospitality Industry

Social networks, or social media, are interconnected digital platforms that enable connection through technology, allowing for the sharing and exchanging of information and news [21]. The concept of "influencer" originates from the term "personal influence" coined by Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955. According to Gretzel & Yoo [22], influencers in social media are recognized by their level and manner of engagement with a company, as well as their capacity to sway others. Subsequently, firms remunerate these folks either in monetary form or through non-monetary means, such as complimentary goods, services, travel opportunities, or distinctive encounters. Campbell & Grimm [23] defined an influencer as a person who is remunerated for producing and disseminating information on social media platforms [24]. Companies utilize SMIs as a novel marketing communication channel in a digitized setting [4], [9]. SMIs are well-known individuals with

expertise in a specific field, such as music, health, travel, or fashion. They produce and distribute digital content, consolidating their information for other users on social networks [1], [10]. Influencers possess a significant level of distinctiveness, characterized by distinct personality traits, public image, knowledge, and background [15]. Hospitality brands can deliberately cooperate with individuals to accomplish specific performance goals due to their significant level of follower engagement.

Influencer marketing (IM) is crucial for hospitality businesses to boost brand awareness, engage with social media users, and foster customer relationships [25]. Further, influencers' digital proximity to social media users has made them an invaluable resource for hospitality marketers. As a result, an increasing number of hotel companies are spending extensively on SMIs because of their potential to influence trends and sway followers. Influencers are commonly associated with Millennials (Generation Y) [26] in areas, such as fashion, beauty, and luxury travel [24]. However, influencers are increasingly becoming prominent across many age groups, especially Generation Z, and across multiple product sectors due to their cost-effectiveness and ability to exert a more substantial influence than traditional marketing strategies [27].

In summary, IM in the hospitality industry seeks to establish or alter the brand or destination image, enhance visibility, draw targeted market segments, and maintain or increase visitor numbers [26]. The IM literature in this field highlights that SMIs are highly popular and influential individuals who interact with tourist audiences, sharing insights, experiences, and recommendations, thereby shaping their followers' travel choices.

3. Parasocial interaction concept and categories based on social media interaction

Parasocial interaction (PSI), a concept introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956, remains popular among those who study media and media effects. It describes a media user's reaction to a performer, perceiving them as an intimate conversational partner. This sense of conversational exchange is most pronounced when the performer directly addresses the viewer through the camera. Horton and Wohl also introduced the related idea of a parasocial relationship, which is a more enduring connection formed by the media user with the performer. Rasmussen [28] stated that PSI refers to the immediate psychological response that occurs when individuals are exposed to media personalities. These interactions can lead to the development of pseudo-intimate relationships between the audience and the media personalities [29]. With the emergence of internet-related technologies, parasocial interaction was observed in online consumer behavior [30] and within online communities. The contemporary of social media, with its interactive and reciprocal nature, gave PSI a new dimension, particularly in the context of social media influencers [30]–[32]. As platforms like Facebook and Twitter became popular, PSI was also evident between celebrities and their fans [32]. In contrast to traditional marketing methods, social media marketing demands a more active role from consumers in generating and sharing marketing messages to create influence. SMIs, who act as both consumers and marketers, play a crucial role because their shared content is seen as more credible and effective compared to company-generated content in influencing consumer purchasing decisions [33]. This encourages and requires customer participation.

The influence of social media personalities largely comes from their extensive follower base. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers are viewed as "ordinary" individuals who have risen to fame through their social media personas [10]. The interactions between influencers and followers on social media transcend traditional word-of-mouth communication since followers create a one-sided "friendship" through parasocial interactions (PSIs) [32]. Hospitality and tourism research has explored various aspects such as the concept and measurement of participation [34], antecedents and outcomes [35], and social media engagement [36]. Interactive behavior on social networks is categorized into three levels [37]: usage (reading content, watching videos), participating (commenting and interacting with content and other users), and creating (producing and sharing content on various topics, which represents the highest level of interactive behavior). Kaur et al [38] suggested that interaction levels on Facebook range from simple actions "like" liking to more complex activities such as "commenting, sharing", and "creating" content. While liking a post requires minimal effort, activities like commenting, sharing, and content creation demand significant cognitive engagement from users.

4. Methodology

The study aims to perform a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using a domain-focused hybrid-review technique, with a specific focus on studies related to Parasocial Interaction and Social Media Influencers (SMIs) published in the hospitality area. To address the shortcomings identified in prior systematic literature reviews [39], the researchers utilized keyword co-occurrence, citation, and co-authorship analysis, which are prominent scientific mapping methodologies, as part of their comprehensive bibliometric methodology [40]. Figure 1 illustrates the methods employed in this investigation. The study employs Covidence software, which is integrated with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

The research process consists of two major phases:

Phase 1: Bibliometric Approach, a preliminary search is conducted to determine the most suitable keywords. The Boolean search method is utilized in the commands and consolidated into a single command through the advanced search function.

Keywords 1: "Social media influencers" OR "Parasocial Interaction" AND "Online hotel booking".

Keywords 2: ("Social media influencers" OR "Social media influencer" OR "Influencer Marketing" OR "Influencer" OR "Influencers" OR "Parasocial Relationship" OR "Parasocial Interaction" OR "Social Media Influencer Marketing" OR "Influencer Endorsement" OR "Social Media Influencers SMIs") AND "Online hotel booking" OR "hospitality industry".

Keywords 3: "Social media influencers" OR "Parasocial Interaction" OR "Online hotel booking".

The research publications were gathered from two academic databases: Clarivate's Web of Science (WoS) and Elsevier's Scopus. These two bibliographic databases, commonly used for bibliometric analysis, contain very influential and pertinent scientific papers in the field of tourism research [41]. This is a determinant of the quality of research data sources. The search results are restricted by the following factors: Time from 2014 to 2024 (including early access); Research areas include Business Management Accounting, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (for Scopus data)...

WoS's Document types include: Article, Proceeding paper, and Early access; language in English. 1,250 published documents, including 345 research articles closest to the research topic, after implementing phases (2), (3) (4), and (5) of Fig. 1. This result will be the data for bibliometric analysis in the second step.

Phase 2: Bibliometric analysis

The authors employ the bibliometric analysis method with the supporting tool, VOS Viewer, developed by Leiden University. The substance of bibliometric analysis will focus on three issues: (1) Identifying authors and countries with strong effects on SMIs; (2) Investigating author-group-country collaboration relationships for SMIs; (3) Identifying significant research topics and emerging issues
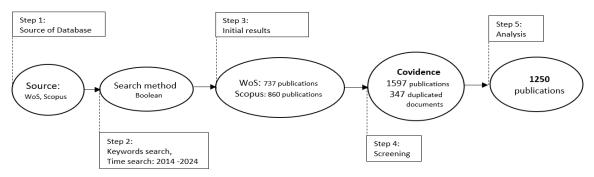

Fig. 1. Bibliometric Approach

Source: The authors

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Significant countries, research studies, and groups of authors with a strong influence

Years of Publications: The quantity of publications is a significant indicator that mirrors the trends of the topic's advancement. The authors utilized figures from 2014 to 2024 to analyze the articles, as there has been significant growth in SMIs over the past decade, particularly in the last five years. The frequency of articles about this research subject also indicates that. Between 2014 and 2019, there were a total of 65 articles. However, starting from 2019, the number of articles experienced a significant and rapid increase. In the year 2020, there will be a total of 71 articles. This number will increase to 132 pieces in 2021 and reach 154 articles in 2022. In 2023, the number of publications reached 209. Notably, starting from 2024, the number of articles is expected to reach 106, although this data is not yet finalized.

Regarding countries, there are a total of 59 countries mentioned in 1,250 publications. When examining 21 articles within a single country, 10 countries appear in the greatest number (see Table 1). These countries are America, China, Korea, Australia, England, Malaysia, Germany, India, Taiwan, and Canada. Two countries, China and the US, have a high level of interconnectivity, which has connections with all other countries. In contrast, the remaining countries have a lower degree of interconnectedness.

Table 1. Top 10 countries with the most influence on SMI research.

No.	Country	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
Top 1	USA	270	5742	97
Top 2	China	155	2894	94

Top 3	South Korea	67	1875	48
Top 4	Germany	54	1111	24
Top 5	Taiwan	47	1155	21
Top 6	England	41	779	37
Top 7	Australia	39	1146	45
Top 8	Malaysia	37	515	36
Top 9	India	30	591	21
Top 10	Canada	21	252	17

Source: The authors from analyzing VoS Viewer, 2024

Groups of authors with a strong influence: Overall, the publications of the 10 author groups assessed in Table 2 have a consistently high citation index, ranging from 172 to 371 citations. This demonstrates that the research conducted by 10 groups of authors has a significant influence on the study of SMIs and PSI.

Table 2. Statistics on indicators about publications are relevant to the research subject.

No.	Authors, Year of Publications	Title	Citations	Link	Journal	Q according to SCImago
1	Jin S. Venus, Aziz Muqaddam, Ehri Ryu (2019)	Instafamous and social media influencer marketing	371	50	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	Q2
2	Audrezet Alice, Gwarlann de Kerviler, Julie Guidry Moulard (2020)	Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation	371	33	Journal of Business Research	Q1
3	Arora Anuja, Shivam Bansal, Chandrashekhar Kandpal, Reema Aswani, Yogesh Dwivedi (2019)	Measuring social media influencer index- insights from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram	311	38	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Q1
4	Christian Hughes Vanitha Swaminathan, Gillian Brooks (2019)	Driving Brand Engagement Through Online Social Influencers: An Empirical Investigation of Sponsored Blogging Campaigns	306	36	Journal of Marketing	Q1

5	Campbell Colin, Farrell Justine Rapp (2020)	More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing	304	38	Business Horizons	Q1
6	Jayson L. Dibble, Tilo Hartmann, Sarah F. Rosaen (2015)	Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures	287	13	Human Communication Research	Q1
7	Ki Chung-Wha 'Chloe', Youn-Kyung Kim (2019)	The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic	261	42	Psychology & Marketing	Q1
8	Kay Samantha, Rory Mulcahy, Joy Parkinson (2019)	When less is more: the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure	210	34	Journal of Marketing Management	Q1
9	Reinikainen Hanna, Juha Munnukka, DevDeep Maity, Vilma Luoma-aho (2019)	You really are a great big sister' – parasocial relationships, credibility, and the moderating role of audience comments in influencer marketing	214	26	Journal of Marketing Management	Q1
10	Kim Do Yuon, Kim Hye-Young (2021)	Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media	172	15	Journal of Business Research	Q1

Source: The authors from analyzing VoS Viewer, 2024

5.2. Topics Analysis

5.2.1. Keyword analysis

The authors utilized VOS analysis to identify significant patterns related to SMIs and PSI. Analyzing keyword co-occurrence helps researchers better understand research trends and topics. The more keywords in a topic will show the close and essential relationship between them (Raffaghelli et al., 2016). Regarding keywords, there are a total of 3145 keywords, setting the threshold condition for 10 occurrences of each keyword, 136 keywords appearing, as shown in Fig. 2. The keyword "Social Media Influencer" (SMI) appears 132 times, linked to the keywords: parasocial interaction, credibility, customer engagement, sponsorship disclosure, …. These are topics that scholars are presently focused on and are aspects that should be further explored in the future.
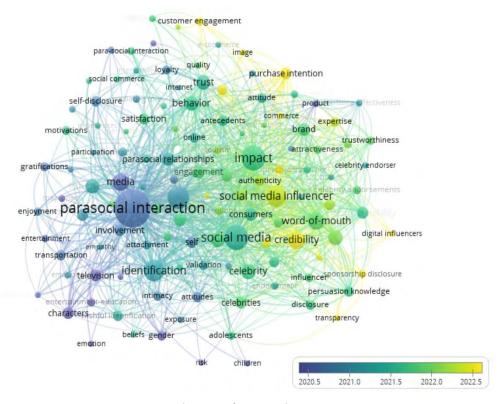

Fig. 2. Visual map of research topics

Source: Analysis authors from VOS Viewer, 2024.

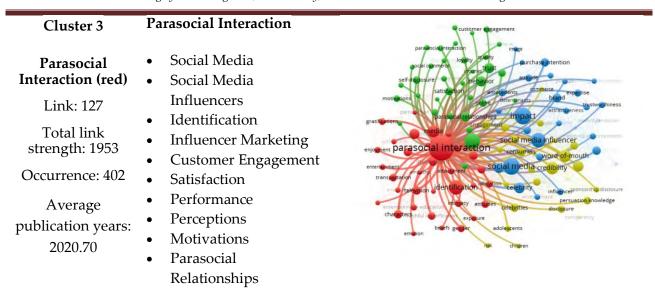#### 5.2.2. Analysis of topics, and matrix map

Cluster 1 (blue) and Cluster 3 (red) (see Table 3), are named "Parasocial Interaction with Social Media Influencers". The relationship between PSI and social media influencers is notably robust owing to social media platforms' personal and frequently intimate characteristics. Indeed, SMIs reveal details about their everyday lives, personal ideas, and true experiences, creating a sense of closeness and relatability among their followers. This imagined intimacy generates a high PSI, making followers believe they genuinely know the influencer [42], and trust influencers more than superstars because influencers are regarded to be more honest and relatable [43]. Furthermore, Shan et al [44] found that PSI is a strong predictor of the success of influencer endorsements. Followers who closely identify with an influencer are more likely to act on their suggestions, resulting in increased engagement, better views about the business, and higher buy intentions.

Cluster 2 (yellow) is labeled "Credibility of Social Media Influencers", a concept that illuminates the fascinating dynamics between social media influencers and their followers. A source's credibility plays a crucial role in increasing the effectiveness of persuasion and gaining support from listeners [45]. When followers perceive an influencer as credible, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes towards them and be receptive to their messages [3]. The ability, expertise, and competence of an influencer are crucial factors in establishing and sustaining trust with their followers [3], [43], [46]. These elements combined create a powerful trust-building mechanism. Followers feel confident in the influencer's recommendations and insights because they see them as knowledgeable, experienced, and capable. For SMIs, mastering this blend of expertise and authenticity is key to establishing relational trust, and creating a profound impact, transforming their digital presence into a trusted voice that guides and inspires their followers.

Table 3: Analysis of topics, and matrix map

Cluster	Topics	Matrix map from VOS
Cluster 1 **SMI (blue)** Link: 108 Total link strength: 623 Occurrence: 132 Average publication years: 2022.30	**Social Media Influencer** • Parasocial Interaction • Customer engagement • Purchase intention • Authenticity • Credibility • Sponsorship disclosure • Transparency • Digital influencers •	
Cluster 2 **Credibility (Yellow)** Link: 106 Total link strength: 637 Occurrence: 92 Average publication years: 2022.53	**Credibility** • Social Media Influencer • Word-of-mouth • Influencer Marketing • Behavior • Engagement • Parasocial Interaction • Persuasion knowledge	

Cluster 3	**Parasocial Interaction**	
Parasocial Interaction (red) Link: 127 Total link strength: 1953 Occurrence: 402 Average publication years: 2020.70	• Social Media • Social Media Influencers • Identification • Influencer Marketing • Customer Engagement • Satisfaction • Performance • Perceptions • Motivations • Parasocial Relationships	

Source: Analysis authors from VOS Viewer, 2024.

6. Implications for Theory and Practice

6.1. Theoretical Implications

Social media influencer marketing is a rapidly evolving field with numerous theoretical views. PSI, a crucial notion in this domain, was first articulated by Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956. PSI refers to the interaction that users have with mediated performances, such as social media influencers. These relationships give the illusion of intimacy, making followers believe they have a genuine interpersonal connection with the influencers [47]. This shows that influencers' perceived intimacy and connection with their followers can be a valuable tool for brands to use in their marketing initiatives. This study has synthesized the scattered material through a thorough assessment, enabling us to acquire a deeper and wider understanding of the influencer marketing phenomena from the aspect of PSI.

Furthermore, the authors made a significant theoretical contribution by objectively identifying and analyzing the primary research topics of SMIs in the hotel industry literature. This was achieved by co-authorship analysis, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and citation analysis. These approaches expedite the evaluation of SMI research, facilitate the identification of significant subjects, and offer novel insights into influencer marketing. Thus, our contribution advances theoretical progress in this field and shows the gap trends.

6.2. Practical Implications

Firstly, Parasocial interaction is a crucial factor for marketers when choosing the appropriate social media influencer for brand endorsement. The findings of this study may offer insights to social media influencers on how to effectively implement content marketing tactics and increase the probability of brand endorsement.

Secondly, through Clusters, the hotel managers can enhance the credibility of social media influencers through parasocial relationships significantly boosting their perceived trustworthiness and reliability among followers, positively impacting purchase intentions. Consumers tend to trust influencers more than celebrities due to perceived similarities and identification [43]. Building strong parasocial relationships increases perceived credibility, which in turn affects brand trust and

purchase intentions [7], [48]. Parasocial identification is a significant predictor of successful influencer endorsements [44]. Brands should leverage these insights to enhance influencer marketing effectiveness.

Finally, Social Media Influencers can be a successful approach to capturing the attention of potential consumers, as they are frequently perceived as more reliable when customers lack sufficient information. To optimize engagement and establish more profound relationships with their target audience, administrators should implement initiatives that cultivate deeper relationships between influencers and consumers and employ influencers who are pertinent to their target market.

7. Future research directions

This study has highlighted potential topics for future research through the CIMO (Context-Intervention-Mechanism-Outcome) approach [49]:

Context: The research context is essential for comprehending the aspects that impact the phenomenon. It enhances the inclusiveness of results and enables a more precise comprehension of themes connected to SMI in various settings. Contextual elements such as the Hospitality industry, types of PSI, and country of study provide deeper insights when analyzing SMIs. The influence of PSI and the credibility of SMIs may vary across different cultural contexts. Comparative studies examining these dynamics in various countries could reveal cultural nuances that affect how followers perceive and interact with influencers. Furthermore, due to the diversity of the hospitality sector and existing SMPs, another potential research could be to examine the effectiveness of context-specific factors. These factors might include specific types of SMIs and sub-disciplines within the hospitality industry, such as hotel management, cuisine, or travel businesses, in strengthening the relationship with followers on specific SMPs like TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook (each has unique features that may differentially affect PSI and SMIs).

Intervention: Based on the clusters identified in the bibliometric analysis, several gaps have emerged. Clusters 1 and 3 focused on the relationship between PSI and SMIs. Further research could explore the specific types of PSI (emotional, cognitive, or behavioral) that most significantly enhance influencer effectiveness. While Cluster 2 centered on the credibility of SMIs, future studies could investigate how credibility elements (ability, expertise, and authenticity) influence customer engagement and loyalty in these settings, compared to more traditional hospitality sectors like travel or restaurant management.

Mechanism: The current study focused on PSI theory, but future research could explore the impact of SMIs on consumers through other well-established theoretical frameworks such as Source Credibility Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, Social Learning Theory, the S-O-R Model, Attribution Theory, and Self-congruence Theory [27], [50]. Theoretical models are tailored to reflect contemporary practices, consumer interactions, and influencer strategies relevant to the current hospitality landscape.

Outcome: This study analyzed a cluster of SMIs with PSI in the hospitality field through a systematic review, the studies in the future should discover different clusters such as how SMIs influence perceptions and behaviors related to green hotels or green practices (affecting consumer attitudes and behaviors towards eco-friendly products and brands).

8. Limitations

This study has certain limitations published in English, and we excluded gray literature and articles in other languages. Scholars in the future should take into account a variety of publications that have been published in different languages. In addition, the bibliometric approach still has certain limitations, despite the significant reduction in subjectivity in the review process. The assessment of knowledge clusters derived through bibliometric analysis may result in a degree of subjectivity. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize the subjective character of our review.

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