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**Self-Congruence and Parasocial Dynamics in Influencer Marketing: A
Bibliometric Review (2012–2026)**

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has emerged as a central research domain in marketing and consumer behavior, with increasing scholarly attention devoted to the roles of self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in shaping consumer responses. Despite this growth, a consolidated overview of how this body of knowledge has evolved remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study provides a bibliometric review of influencer marketing research focused on self-congruence and parasocial relationships. Drawing on 56 articles indexed in the Scopus database between 2012 and 2026, this study applies descriptive bibliometric techniques and network analyses, including keyword co-occurrence and co-authorship mapping, to uncover the field's intellectual and social structure.

The findings reveal a pronounced surge in publications after 2021, indicating a rapidly expanding research stream. The thematic patterns identified highlight a dominant explanatory mechanism linking self-congruence and parasocial relationships to credibility, trust, and consumer outcomes. Beyond this core mechanism, the literature increasingly addresses issues related to virtual influencers and intimate self-disclosure, as well as impulse buying in platform-specific contexts such as TikTok and live commerce. Building on established bibliometric methodologies, this study contributes a theory-driven map of the field and identifies key gaps and promising avenues for future research, offering both academic and managerial insights.

Introduction

Over the past decade, influencer marketing has evolved from a tactical content format to a substantive stream of scholarly inquiry in marketing and consumer behavior. Central to this evolution is the idea that identity alignment between audiences and human (or virtual) endorsers—typically framed as self-congruence—and the parasocial relationships that followers develop with these endorsers jointly shape downstream outcomes such as credibility, trust, engagement, and purchase intentions. The Scopus-based corpus

assembled for this review (56 records; 2012–2026) evidences this shift: highly cited anchors explicitly theorize self-influencer congruence and parasocial identification as mechanisms explaining why and when endorsements work in social media environments.

Frequently cited papers in the set—including early, field-defining contributions in travel marketing and subsequent work in advertising and consumer behavior—model endorsement effectiveness as a pathway from fit (actual/ideal self with influencer; influencer-product fit) to relationship (parasocial ties), to persuasion

(credibility, brand attitude, purchase). A descriptive look at the temporal footprint shows a marked acceleration since 2021, with a concentration of outputs during 2023–2025, mirroring the mainstreaming of creator ecosystems, short-form video, and live-commerce formats in practice.

The citation structure is characteristically skewed: a few seminal articles (e.g., 2018; 2020) attract a disproportionate share of citations and serve as theoretical anchors, while a growing base of recent publications explores boundary conditions, platforms, and contexts—consistent with “average/total citations per year” spikes around those anchor years.

Geographically, production spans both the Global North and South, with India and the USA among leading contributors in the export, followed by China, Malaysia, the UK, Germany, Brazil, Korea, Pakistan, and Portugal, indicating cross-regional interest and the feasibility of comparative work across cultures and media systems. Conceptually, the keyword co-occurrence structure (Author Keywords) reveals recurring thematic patterns centered on self-congruence / parasocial interaction / credibility / trust / engagement, alongside application-frontier terms such as virtual influencers and intimate self-disclosure (authenticity, anthropomorphism), and platform-linked behaviors (impulse buying, TikTok, live commerce).

Together, these themes map to an integrative storyline: fit + relationship → credibility → outcomes, moderated by endorser type (human vs. virtual), disclosure practices, and platform affordances.

Even as the field consolidates around this mechanism, the dataset surfaces non-trivial nuances. Distinguishing actual-self from ideal-self congruence shows that actual-self alignment tends to foster perceived trustworthiness (psychological proximity), whereas ideal-self alignment aligns more closely with perceived competence (aspirational expertise)—a distinction with practical consequences for endorser selection and message design. Evidence on intimate self-disclosure is contextual: disclosure can enhance credibility when it reinforces expertise or communal norms, but it can undermine it when perceived as incongruent or performative. Findings on virtual influencers complicate simple substitution narratives: although VIs can produce favorable responses, “idealized” VI personae may trigger negative affect or dampen issue attitudes in public-service contexts, suggesting stage-specific, emotionally contingent effects that challenge uniform “VI superiority” claims.

Finally, platform dynamics matter: short-form and live-stream settings can amplify impulse pathways conditioned by trust propensity, wishful identification, and gendered perceptions of value (functional vs. emotional), calling for platform-tailored creative and partnership strategies.

Despite this progress, a compact synthesis remains valuable to (a) document how scholarship has evolved over time, (b) identify who/what has been most influential, (c) visualize the thematic architecture connecting self-congruence, parasocial dynamics, and outcomes, and (d) delineate gaps to guide the next wave of research. The curated Scopus set—dominated by journal articles, led in frequency by outlets such as the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* and the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, and spanning multiple countries—provides precisely such an empirical substrate for a mini-bibliometric review.

Accordingly, this study poses four research questions:

RQ1. How has research on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing evolved over time (2012–2026)?

RQ2. Who are the most influential contributors (authors, countries, documents) shaping this domain?

RQ3. What thematic structures and conceptual relationships characterize the literature? (Addressed via keyword co-occurrence and, where reported, bibliographic coupling.)

RQ4. What research gaps and future directions emerge from the field’s intellectual and thematic structure?

Data and Methodology

This study adopts a bibliometric review to examine influencer marketing research with a specific focus on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics. Bibliometric reviews employ quantitative and statistical techniques to analyze large volumes of bibliographic data—such as journal articles, reviews, and conference papers—in order to map the structure, development, and intellectual organization of a research field. In marketing and management scholarship, bibliometric methods are widely used because they provide a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis of prior research, complementing traditional narrative reviews.

Bibliometric analysis involves the quantitative examination of bibliographic characteristics of a body of literature, including authorship, publication outlets, citations, and references. As noted by Hawkins, bibliometric studies enable researchers to identify relationships between

cited and citing documents through statistical procedures, thereby revealing influential works, dominant themes, and emerging topics within a field. By analyzing citation patterns and linkages among publications, bibliometric techniques facilitate an understanding of the intellectual structure and interconnections of the literature, summarize the main research streams, and highlight promising directions for future inquiry. Within bibliometric analysis, bibliographic coupling and co-citation analysis represent two complementary techniques for assessing relationships among scientific publications. Bibliographic coupling, originally introduced by Kessler (1963), measures the similarity between two documents based on the number of references they share. When two publications cite common references, they are said to be bibliographically coupled, and the strength of their relationship increases with the number of shared citations. Because it relies on reference lists rather than subsequent citations, bibliographic coupling captures contemporary research connections.

In contrast, co-citation analysis, proposed by Small (1973), adopts a forward-looking perspective by evaluating the relationship between documents based on how frequently they are cited together in later publications. The intensity of co-citation reflects the extent to which two works are jointly recognized by subsequent research. Co-citation analysis is therefore particularly suitable for mature research fields with long citation histories, where stable intellectual foundations have already formed.

Given that research on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing has expanded substantially only in recent years, this study employs bibliographic coupling as the primary technique for thematic identification and cluster analysis. This choice allows for a more accurate representation of the current research front and supports the identification of dominant themes and emerging streams that characterize the contemporary structure of the field. Accordingly, bibliographic coupling provides an appropriate methodological foundation for mapping recent developments and informing future research opportunities in influencer marketing.

1. Search strategy and data retrieval process

The bibliographic data used in this study were retrieved from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and reliable sources for bibliometric and quantitative literature analyses in business and management research (Garg

et al., 2021). Following established practices in previous bibliometric reviews, Scopus was selected due to its extensive journal coverage, citation accuracy, and suitability for network-based analyses.

To identify publications specifically related to influencer marketing with an emphasis on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics, data collection was guided by a predefined set of inclusion criteria. The search was constructed using combinations of relevant keywords associated with influencer marketing, self-congruence, and parasocial interactions, applied to the title, abstract, and author keyword fields (TITLE-ABS-KEY). To ensure quality and consistency, only English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles and conference publications within the fields of business, management, marketing, and social sciences were considered. No initial restrictions were imposed on publication year in order to capture the full temporal development of the research domain.

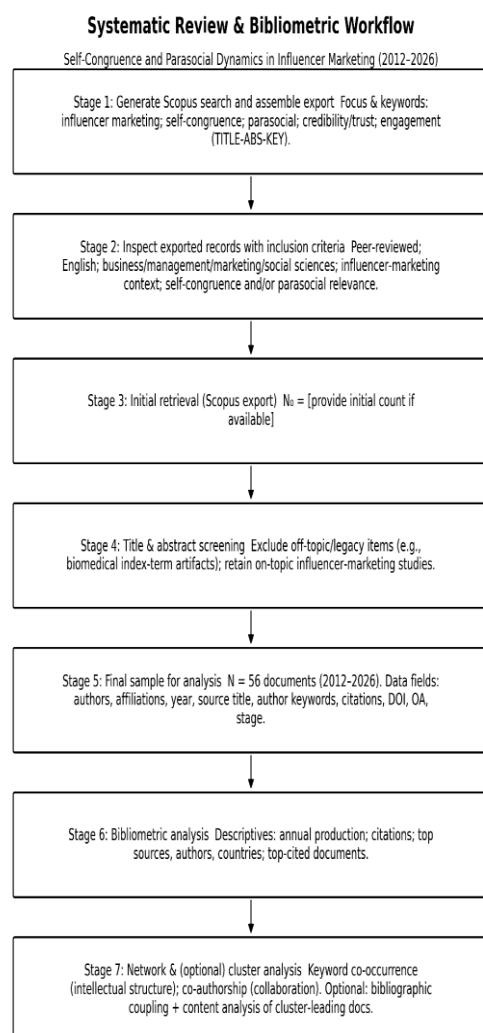
The keyword strategy was designed to minimize researcher bias by encompassing multiple conceptual variations related to influencer-marketing research, including studies addressing influencer-consumer similarity, self-concept alignment, parasocial relationships, credibility, trust, and consumer engagement across social media platforms. This broad search logic allowed the inclusion of diverse yet conceptually connected works, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of influencer-marketing scholarship.

The initial search yielded a set of publications that were subsequently subjected to manual screening. Titles and keywords were independently examined to exclude records that were not substantively aligned with influencer marketing or the focal constructs of self-congruence and parasocial dynamics. Following this screening process, a final sample of 56 documents published between 2012 and 2026 was retained for analysis. The extracted bibliographic data include detailed information on authorship, publication year, journal source, country affiliation, citation counts, and author keywords, which collectively form the empirical basis for the descriptive and network analyses conducted in this study.

2. Research method

In line with best practice for evidence-informed reviews in marketing and management, we combine descriptive bibliometric statistics with network analyses to map the field at three levels—documents, sources (journals/outlets), and authors (and their collaborations). Core

indicators include number of publications per year, citation counts and distributions, most productive sources and countries, most productive authors, and most cited documents; these metrics are standard in bibliometric overviews and provide a replicable baseline of the domain's development.



3. Tools and data pipeline

All analyses are performed on the Scopus export underlying this review ($N = 56$ records; 2012–2026). After import, we normalize fields (e.g., author-keyword delimiters, lower-casing) and generate (i) keyword co-occurrence maps from Author Keywords to reveal the conceptual structure and (ii) co-authorship maps to reveal the social/collaboration structure. This mirrors the workflow adopted in comparable bibliometric studies that construct science maps from term co-occurrence matrices and visualize clusters with force-directed layouts.

Although multiple software environments can be used for mapping (e.g., VOSviewer), our analyses are rendered through a reproducible R/Quarto

pipeline that starts from the Scopus CSV and automatically produces the descriptive tables and the network figures (PNG/SVG) reported in the Results section. This ensures transparency and full re-run capability from the raw export to the final visuals.

Network construction. For keyword co-occurrence, we compute an undirected, document-level co-occurrence matrix over cleaned Author Keywords; node size encodes keyword frequency and edge width encodes co-occurrence strength. For co-authorship, we parse the semicolon-delimited author lists in each record, deduplicate within-paper names, and connect author pairs that appear together at least once; node size reflects author productivity within our corpus, and edge width reflects repeated collaborations. These maps expose thematic clusters (e.g., *self-congruence/parasocial/credibility*; *virtual influencers & intimate self-disclosure*; *impulse buying/TikTok/live commerce*) and collaboration modules observed in the dataset.

Link-analysis choice for thematic clustering. To complement co-occurrence/co-authorship, we outline an optional bibliographic coupling step to derive document clusters for content analysis. As established in the bibliometric literature, co-citation is typically better suited to mature fields with long citation histories, whereas bibliographic coupling captures the current structure of emerging or reconfiguring domains by linking documents that share references. Given that work at the intersection of self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing has expanded chiefly in recent years, bibliographic coupling is appropriate for identifying contemporary clusters and their leading documents.

Quality assurance and sensitivity checks. Consistent with systematic review guidance, we apply quality-assurance steps: retain peer-reviewed items, screen titles/keywords for topical alignment, and document any exclusions. Because Scopus records may contain index-keyword artifacts outside marketing (e.g., biomedical terms in a few legacy entries), we report keyword maps with and without those items to preserve thematic validity while maintaining transparency about the raw export. **Outputs.** The pipeline yields: (a) descriptive tables for annual production, top sources, most productive authors and countries, and most-cited documents; and (b) publication-quality keyword co-occurrence and co-authorship network figures for insertion into the manuscript and presentations. All outputs can be regenerated directly from the provided R Markdown/Quarto scripts.

Data provenance: All statistics and maps reported in this section are computed solely from the 56-record Scopus CSV that underpins this review; no external datasets are used in the mapping stages.

Results

1. Yearly publication

The number of publications on sensory marketing is presented in Figure 2, which depicts the development of documents from the year 1984 to 2023. the first article related to sensory marketing identified in Scopus was published in Psychology and Marketing in 1984, with the title ‘information and sensory overload. information and sensory overload in psychology and marketing’, by naresh Malhotra. This objective of this article was to overview the research on information and sensory overload in the fields of marketing and psychology (Malhotra, 1984). regarding the average annual number of published articles, the period before 2010 was marked by as low growth for the subject of sensory marketing, with an average of 2 publications per year. next, this number increased significantly over the last decade, especially since 2016, with a slightly negative rate in 2021, most probably due to the pandemic, with an annual average of 36 articles. the number of publications reached a peak in 2022, with 53 articles.

2. Research categories

The 56 documents included in this bibliometric review were authored by scholars across

multiple disciplines and published in a diverse range of academic journals, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of research on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing. The publications span several subject categories as defined by Scopus, with a clear concentration in Business, Management, and Marketing-related fields, underscoring the positioning of influencer marketing as a core topic within contemporary marketing research.

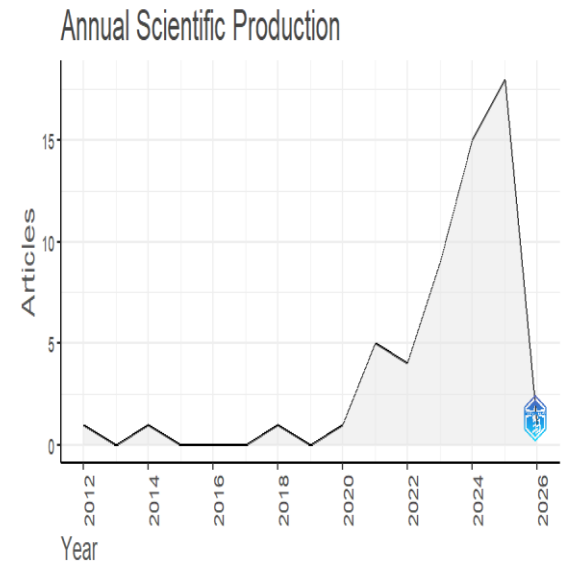


Fig 2: Yearly publications on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing (2012–2026).

Table 1: Number of publications by category

Source title	Docs	Rank	% of 54
Journal of Product and Brand Management	3	1	5.6
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	3	1	5.6
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	2	2	3.7
International Journal of Consumer Studies	2	2	3.7
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2	2	3.7
Psychology and Marketing	2	2	3.7
Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies	2	2	3.7
Bottom Line	1	3	1.9
British Food Journal	1	3	1.9
Business Perspectives and Research	1	3	1.9
Chinese Journal of Communication	1	3	1.9
Cuadernos de Gestion	1	3	1.9
Current Issues in Tourism	1	3	1.9
Fashion Theory - Journal of Dress Body and Culture	1	3	1.9
Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	1	3	1.9
Industrial Management and Data Systems	1	3	1.9

Information Technology and People	1	3	1.9
International Journal of Advertising	1	3	1.9
International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management	1	3	1.9
International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing	1	3	1.9
International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction	1	3	1.9
International Journal of Information and Management Sciences	1	3	1.9
Journal of Brand Management	1	3	1.9
Journal of Consumer Behaviour	1	3	1.9
Journal of Consumer Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Interactive Advertising	1	3	1.9
Journal of Internet Commerce	1	3	1.9
Journal of Islamic Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Marketing Communications	1	3	1.9
Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Relationship Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Strategic Marketing	1	3	1.9
Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	1	3	1.9
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	1	3	1.9
New Media and Society	1	3	1.9
Sosyoekonomi	1	3	1.9
Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC	1	3	1.9
Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics	1	3	1.9
Sustainability (Switzerland)	1	3	1.9
Sustainable Development	1	3	1.9
Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap	1	3	1.9
Voprosy Psikhologii	1	3	1.9
World Heart Journal	1	3	1.9
Young Consumers	1	3	1.9

The majority of the studies fall within the Business, Management, and Accounting category, indicating that research on influencer effectiveness, credibility, and consumer responses is primarily approached from a managerial and strategic perspective. A substantial number of publications are also classified under Social Sciences, highlighting the relevance of sociological and communication-oriented approaches, particularly in relation to parasocial relationships, social identity, and online interactions.

In addition, a smaller but notable share of the literature intersects with **Psychology**, where concepts such as self-concept, identification, trust, and persuasion mechanisms are examined at the individual level. This confirms the strong theoretical grounding of influencer-marketing research in psychological theories originally

developed in advertising, media studies, and consumer behavior.

More recent publications indicate an emerging interdisciplinary extension toward technology-oriented domains, including digital platforms and interactive media, particularly in studies examining virtual influencers, short-form video platforms, and live-commerce environments. This trend reflects the increasing integration of influencer marketing with platform affordances and digital technologies, suggesting a gradual expansion of the field beyond traditional marketing boundaries.

Overall, the distribution of research categories demonstrates that studies on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing are firmly rooted in marketing scholarship while increasingly drawing on insights from social sciences, psychology, and digital media research.

3. Journal distribution

The 56 documents in the final corpus are distributed across multiple marketing and consumer-behaviour outlets, underscoring the field's interdisciplinary spread while remaining anchored in marketing journals. In terms of outlet frequency, the most represented sources in our sample are Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services and Journal of Product & Brand Management (three documents each), followed by International Journal of Consumer Studies, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, Psychology & Marketing, and a small set of venues with single contributions that collectively broaden the scope of the review. This pattern reflects how research on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics has been published both in

general marketing and specialist branding/consumer journals, mirroring the domain's dual emphasis on theory (identity fit, parasocial ties, credibility) and application (platforms, sectors, and contexts).

Beyond frequency, the presence of journals oriented to interactive/digital marketing (e.g., *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*) and channel/platform topics (e.g., *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*) signals the shift toward platform-specific mechanisms (e.g., TikTok, live commerce) that has accelerated since 2021 in your time series. At the same time, the appearance of consumer-psychology and branding outlets confirms the field's theoretical backbone in self-concept and credibility/trust research that underpins influencer effects.

Table 2: Most frequent journals in the final sample (by document count)

Rank	Journal / Source title	Docs
1	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	3
1	Journal of Product and Brand Management	3
3	International Journal of Consumer Studies	2
3	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	2
3	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	2
3	Psychology and Marketing	2
7	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	1
7	Information Technology & People	1
7	Socyoekonomi	1
7	Journal of Islamic Marketing	1
7	Journal of Brand Management	1
7	Sustainable Development	1
7	Industrial Management & Data Systems	1
7	International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction	1
7	New Media & Society	1
7	Young Consumers	1
7	Journal of Consumer Marketing	1

4. Country and institution distribution

Country and institution are informative analytical lenses because they reflect where knowledge on influencer marketing is produced and how researchers collaborate across regions and organizations. Country-level co-authorship and citation linkages also help benchmark collaboration intensity and the maturity of scholarly networks in an area (e.g., how frequently teams from different nations publish together or cite overlapping intellectual bases). In our Scopus corpus (N = 56), publications are distributed across a broad set of countries,

indicating a genuinely global engagement with research on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics in influencer marketing. The most represented countries by affiliation mentions in our data are the USA (16) and India (15), followed by China (10), Malaysia (8), and Viet Nam (5); other recurring contributors include Brazil, Australia, the UK, Turkey, South Korea, and Taiwan (Table 3). This pattern suggests that both Global North and Global South communities are actively shaping the agenda, which is consistent with the field's platform-driven and practice-proximal nature.

To visualize collaboration intensity, we constructed a country co-authorship network (Figure 3) using countries as the unit of analysis (minimum documents per country = 1). Edge weights encode co-authorship links formed when authors from different countries appear on the same paper; node size reflects country-level productivity in the corpus. The resultant map shows multiple cross-regional bridges (e.g., USA–Asia links; India’s ties with Asia-Pacific and Europe) but also several modular clusters, indicating opportunities to further internationalize teams and deepen inter-institutional partnerships—a

recommendation often made in bibliometric assessments of evolving research areas. Institution-level affiliations in our sample are heterogeneous and span universities and business schools across North America, Europe, and Asia. Because Scopus affiliation strings vary in formatting, we caution that institutional tallies may require manual harmonization for publication-quality leaderboards (e.g., standardizing campus names or grouping colleges under the same university). Still, the country-level pattern in Table 3 provides a reliable, high-level view of where work on influencer congruence and parasocial mechanisms is being produced.

Table 3: Top countries by affiliation mentions in the final corpus (2012–2026; N = 56)

Rank	Country	Mentions
1	USA	16
2	India	15
3	China	10
4	Malaysia	8
5	Viet Nam	5
6	Brazil	4
6	Australia	4
6	United Kingdom (UK)	4
6	Turkey	4
6	South Korea	4
6	Taiwan	4

Notes. (i) “Mentions” are derived from the country tokens parsed from Scopus **Affiliations** strings; a single paper with multiple co-authors across countries can contribute more than one mention. (ii) Country names are normalized for

common variants (e.g., “United States” → “USA”; “United Kingdom” → “UK”). (iii) Because affiliations are free-text, minor residual noise may remain without manual cleaning.

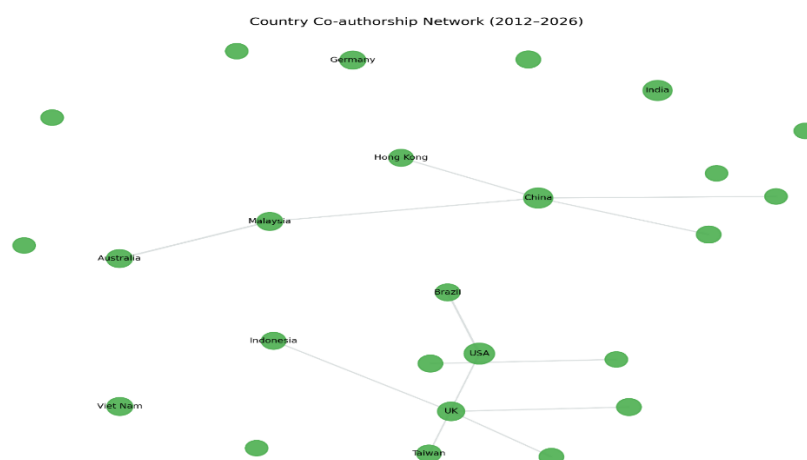


Fig 3: Bibliometric coupling network of countries

Consistent with the visualization, the Top Countries table confirms that the USA leads by

affiliation mentions (n = 10), followed by China (n = 7) and India (n = 7). A second tier includes

the UK (n = 4) and several countries with mid-level participation—Australia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, and Germany (each n = 3)—reflecting the increasingly international character of the topic. These counts derive from the Affiliations field of the Scopus export and represent “mentions” rather than paper counts when multiple countries co-author the same document (Table 3).

At the institution level, affiliations are heterogeneous across universities and business schools in North America, Europe, and Asia. Because institutional names in Scopus are free-text and often vary (e.g., campus names, local language variants), a fully ranked institutional leaderboard requires manual harmonization to avoid splitting the same organization under multiple labels. We therefore

report country-level patterns (Figure 3; Table 3) as the most reliable high-level indicator and recommend institution-name standardization for any future, publication-quality ranking.

5. The most influential articles

Following common practice, we use citation counts within the corpus as a proxy for scholarly influence (Svensson, 2010). Table 5 lists the top 10 most-cited documents in your dataset (2012–2026), led by Xu & Pratt (2018) on self-congruence in travel influencer endorsements (332 citations) and Shan, Chen & Lin (2020) on self-influencer congruence and parasocial identification (316 citations). Together, these anchors frame the field’s dominant mechanism: identity fit → parasocial ties → credibility/trust → outcomes.

Table 5: Top 10 documents by global citations

Rank	Title (abridged)	Authors	Year	Source	Cites
1	Social media influencers as endorsers... <i>self-congruence</i> (Gen-Y, China)	Xu & Pratt	2018	<i>J. Travel & Tourism Marketing</i>	332
2	When social media influencers endorse brands: <i>self-influencer congruence</i> , parasocial identification	Shan; Chen; Lin	2020	<i>Int. J. Advertising</i>	316
3	Benefits of matching consumers’ personality: <i>actual vs ideal self-congruence → trust vs competence</i>	Zogaj; Tscheulin; Olk	2021	<i>Psychology & Marketing</i>	78
4	Role of influencer–follower congruence in purchase behaviour	Venciute et al.	2023	<i>J. Retailing & Consumer Services</i>	78
5	Visual presentation of influencer’s extroversion; moderated by personality match	Argyris et al.	2021	<i>J. Retailing & Consumer Services</i>	74
6	Influencer credibility & congruence → brand attitude & eWOM	Dhun; Dangi	2023	<i>J. Internet Commerce</i>	74
7	Complex triad of congruence issues in influencer marketing	von Mettenheim; Wiedmann	2021	<i>J. Consumer Behaviour</i>	67
8	Intimate self-disclosure → purchase (moderated by congruency; parasocial roles)	Koay et al.	2023	<i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i>	62
9	Endorser–product congruity & self-expressiveness → native ad effectiveness	Lee; Chen; Lee	2022	<i>J. Product & Brand Management</i>	55
10	Celebrity attachment → brand attachment/loyalty; roles of self-congruence	Ozer et al.	2022	<i>Psychology & Marketing</i>	47

6. Author Keyword Co-occurrence analysis

Across your corpus, “influencer marketing” is the most frequent author keyword, followed by “self-congruence” and terms marking the relationship mechanism (“parasocial interaction/relationship”, “credibility”). Emerging application terms include “intimate

self-disclosure”, “virtual influencers”, and platform-linked outcomes such as “impulse buying / TikTok / live commerce”, which mirror the clusters visible in your keyword network figure. A compact top-10 view is shown in Table presents the network mapping of co-occurrences of author keywords, illustrating the conceptual

author landscape is distributed, aligning with an emerging but expanding research stream.

Table 7: Top 10 authors by publications

Author	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
Koay, K.Y.	3	114	6
De Farias, S.A.	2	30	8
Lim, W.M.	2	92	4
Zogaj, A.	2	85	2
Haus, E.	2	5	3
Cornelissen, G.	2	5	3
Sackett-Lundeen, L.	2	5	3
Halberg, F.	2	5	3
Lou, C.	1	1	1
Kong, J.	1	1	1

Conclusions

1. Theoretical contribution

This bibliometric review consolidates how self-congruence and parasocial dynamics explain influencer-marketing outcomes and maps where the field is heading. First, by profiling the most-cited articles in your corpus—e.g., Xu & Pratt (2018) on endorser–consumer congruence in travel, and Shan, Chen & Lin (2020) on self-influencer congruence and parasocial identification—we unite a consistent mechanism: identity fit → parasocial ties → credibility/trust → attitudes/intentions.

Second, a descriptive view of the dataset and its country contributions shows a genuinely international footprint with participation led by the USA, China, and India, reflecting a geographically broad research community that is still coalescing into stronger interregional collaborations.

Third, the author-keyword structure confirms that the core vocabulary of the field is anchored in *influencer marketing*, *self-congruence*, *parasocial interaction*, and *credibility*, while newer terms signal frontiers such as intimate self-disclosure, virtual/AI influencers, and platform-linked behaviors (e.g., live commerce/TikTok). Together, these patterns document a shift from foundational, theory-driven work toward platform-embedded and design-sensitive questions.

Finally, distinctions between actual vs. ideal self-congruence (mapping onto trustworthiness vs. competence) emerge as a durable boundary condition the field uses to interpret when “authenticity” or “aspiration” persuades—a nuance visible in the influential set.

2. Practical implications

The synthesis yields a concise selection-and-content playbook:

- Select for fit, script for the pathway. Use actual-self congruence to signal *trustworthiness* (high-risk or experience categories), and ideal-self congruence to signal *competence/aspiration* (identity-expressive categories).
- Mind disclosure congruence. Intimate self-disclosure lifts or lowers credibility depending on whether it aligns with perceived expertise; when incongruent, it can backfire.
- Design for the platform. Where impulse and real-time cues dominate (e.g., live commerce/TikTok), emphasize immediate value signals and streamline trust cues; anticipate well-being trade-offs (financial strain, self-esteem) discussed in recent platform studies within the corpus.
- Build collaboration depth. The author network is modular rather than hub-dominated; cross-team collaborations can accelerate theory cumulation and multi-context tests.

3. Future research directions

Drawing on your evidence base, we identify priorities where incremental theory-testing and design-oriented experimentation are most warranted:

- **Causal disentanglement.** Field or lab experiments that isolate fit vs. disclosure vs. social proof, under explicit sponsorship labels, to estimate each

pathway's marginal effect across categories.

- Human vs. virtual/AI influencers. Systematic tests of anthropomorphism, identity signaling, and narrative design to balance competence, likability, and authenticity across goals (commercial vs. public service).
- Platform-comparative impulse pathways. Multi-platform studies tracing impulse buying antecedents and well-being consequences (financial stress, self-esteem), with trust propensity and self-congruence as moderators.
- Cross-cultural generalization. Multi-country designs to test actual vs. ideal self-congruence effects and parasocial processes across cultural contexts highlighted by your country distribution.
- Measurement and metadata hygiene. Improve author and affiliation harmonization (initials vs. full names; campus variants) and curate keyword lists to avoid off-topic artifacts (e.g., biomedical terms observed in the raw keyword map), thus strengthening conceptual maps.

4. Limitations

This review uses a single database (Scopus) and English-language records, which may omit relevant materials indexed elsewhere or in other languages. The corpus size (N=56) reflects a focused scope on self-congruence and parasocial dynamics; results should be interpreted as a targeted map rather than the full universe of influencer-marketing research. Finally, free-text metadata (affiliations, keywords) introduces noise—evidenced by biomedical keyword spillover—hence we report and interpret maps with appropriate caution.

5. Conclusions

This study offers a theory-aware, evidence-based map of influencer-marketing scholarship centered on self-congruence and parasocial relationships. Empirically, it profiles the field's influential works, geographic spread, and conceptual architecture; conceptually, it clarifies when actual vs. ideal self-congruence persuades, how parasocial ties translate into credibility and intent, and where virtual/AI design and platform contexts reshape mechanisms. For managers, the review distills actionable guidance on selecting endorsers and crafting content; for scholars, it surfaces testable gaps that can advance cumulative theory.

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