A Bibliometric Analysis of Social Media Marketing and Customer Engagement in Retail (2016–2024)

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Abstract

In recent years, both academia and industry have shown growing interest in social media marketing (SMM) due to its transformative role in enhancing customer engagement. Despite this rising importance, academic literature on SMM remains relatively underdeveloped. This study aims to present a bibliometric overview of research trends and thematic evolution in the domain of SMM and customer engagement. A total of 124 publications from 2016 to 2024 were retrieved from the Scopus database, with selection limited to English-language journal articles in the subject area of business, management and accounting. Utilizing the R-based Biblioshiny package and VOSviewer for bibliometric mapping and network analysis, the study explores key authors, journals, keywords and collaborative patterns in the field. The results indicate a significant growth in scholarly interest over the past decade, identifying clusters around customer engagement strategies, digital platforms, content marketing and influencer dynamics. However, several critical aspects—including regulatory concerns, integration of artificial intelligence and platform-specific practices—remain underexplored. The findings provide a foundational understanding of the intellectual landscape of SMM research and can guide future academic and practical endeavours by highlighting gaps and emerging opportunities. This study contributes to digital marketing literature by offering a structured roadmap for researchers and practitioners interested in leveraging SMM more effectively.

Keywords

Social media marketing, digital marketing, bibliometric analysis, Biblioshiny

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Introduction

Social media has influenced marketing practices significantly by altering the ways organizations interact with consumers. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, offer services for direct communication, making social media marketing (SMM) an important tool in developing customer relationships (Lee et al., 2018). Moreover, social media has become an important digital marketing tool for businesses to promote their products and services and provide personalized communication with customers (Farook & Abeysekara, 2016). Various social media platforms, including social networking websites, microblogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, are widely used by firms to promote their products.

Role of Social Media in Businesses

Unlike traditional marketing tools such as television, SMM enables firms to track and gather information related to sales and customer reactions, including preferences and levels of satisfaction. By analysing these data, businesses can refine their marketing strategies and improve resource efficiency (Liu et al., 2021). Another relevant aspect is customer relationship management. However, social media companies can interact directly with their customers, identify target segments and foster interaction. Use of SMM can contribute to building customer trust and customer loyalty (Hollebeek, 2019). In addition, motivating consumers is a crucial part of the purchasing process. Despite consumers being aware of the product and willing to purchase it, the final purchase may not always occur. Thus, business organizations need to implement targeted social media strategies, such as influencer marketing and live-streaming, to strengthen the purchase intentions of consumers (Clement et al., 2021).

Customer Engagement and Social Media

Customer engagement refers to the emotional, behavioural and psychological connection between a customer and a brand, shaped through various interactions across touchpoints such as social media, websites, customer service and in-store experiences (Brodie et al., 2011). Loyalty refers to when a consumer purchases a particular product again and again; however, engagement goes beyond it and includes interactive behaviours such as likes, shares and comments. Robust social media strategies are pivotal for fostering brand awareness, cultivating customer trust and encouraging advocacy—all of which are crucial for the sustained creation of value. Nevertheless, engagement initiatives are complicated by factors such as shifting consumer preferences, alterations in platform algorithms and difficulties in accurately assessing returns on investment.

The present study investigates how the utilization of SMM can enhance customer engagement by focusing on identifying marketing strategies and their outcomes that contribute to long-term relationships in the digital environment. Utilizing social media platforms enables organizations to interact with potential customers in

real-time and run personalized advertising campaigns. According to Karjaluoto et al. (2023), these digital platforms provide businesses with a unique opportunity to communicate on a personal level with customers, which enhances both brand recognition and consumer trust. Likewise, Filieri et al. (2023) also highlighted that the contribution of social media allows businesses to gather meaningful insights into the preferences of their consumers, ultimately leading to increased satisfaction and customer loyalty. While several bibliometric studies have addressed customer engagement (So et al., 2021; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022) and in digital marketing (Faruk et al., 2021; Figueiredo et al., 2025; Krishen et al., 2021). However, fewer have focused explicitly on digital marketing and online customer engagement (Kaur et al., 2023). There is limited comprehensive research addressing this intersection. Although bibliometric studies in marketing have previously explored broader research trends (e.g., Donthu et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019), there is limited focus on how SMM and customer engagement have evolved within specific sectors such as retail (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022). This study builds upon these benchmark bibliometric analyses by narrowing the scope to explore the convergence of SMM and customer engagement in the digital retail context. This study aims to explore these gaps through a bibliometric analysis.

The retail sector has been selected as the focus of this study, because it is highly dependent on social media for consumer engagement, loyalty-building and sales generation. This choice is supported by existing literature. For example, Anjorin et al. (2024) present a detailed review of the influence of SMM on retail consumer behaviour; Bianchi and Andrews (2018) demonstrate that engagement through social media platforms can directly affect purchase intentions; and Ahmed (2022) explores how emotional connections, such as 'store love', can be developed through SMM in the grocery retail sector.

Research Questions

1. What is the trajectory of scholarly work in the domain of digital marketing?
2. Which countries and institutions are emerging leaders in SMM research?
3. To identify dominant research themes within high-impact journals in the field of SMM and customer engagement.

Research Methodology

Search Strategy Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Database: Scopus	Documents
Search keywords: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ['Social media marketing' OR 'influencer marketing' OR 'Digital marketing'] AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ['customer engagement'])	401
Year: 2016–2024	323
Subject area: Business, management and accounting	203
Document type: Article	124
Language: English	124

The procedure for conducting this study is as follows. Phase 1 involves extracting papers from Scopus on 'Digital marketing and customer engagement' over a 10-year period, from 2016 to 2024. Phase 2 focuses on the data cleaning procedure adopted to remove duplicate and incomplete data. In Phase 3, bibliometric analysis will be performed. In Phase 1, keywords were used to obtain appropriate results from the database, with Boolean operations applied to retrieve the data. The authors shortlisted journal articles, with the scope of the study limited to the subject area of business, management and accounting. The language of the selected articles was limited to English only. This process resulted in the extraction of 124 papers for final analysis.

The research methodology for this research comprises three distinct phases. Phase 1 involves the extraction of relevant research articles from the Scopus database, focusing on the topic 'Digital marketing and customer engagement' over 10 years, from 2016 to 2024. In Phase 2, a systematic data cleaning process is undertaken to eliminate duplicate and incomplete records. Phase 3 entails conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis.

During Phase 1, a combination of relevant keywords and Boolean operators was employed to ensure the retrieval of appropriate results from the database. The selection was restricted to journal articles within the subject areas of business, management and accounting. Furthermore, only articles published in the English language were considered. This process yielded a final dataset of 124 articles for analysis.

Figure 1 demonstrates a steady and consistent increase in publications from 2016 to 2024, indicating growing academic and research interest in the field of SMM. The total number of publications has increased from 2 in 2016 to a peak of 47 in 2024, showing an approximately 8-fold growth over the period.

In Figure 2, the horizontal bar graph illustrates the number of documents published by various authors. With nearly three published documents, N. M. Sang is identified as the leading author. The remaining researchers, each contributing two documents, include S. Z. Ahmad, M. S. Balaji, J. Eelen, A. W. Eigenraam, Á. Garrido-Morgado, Ó. González-Benito, L. D. Hollebeek, T. Islam and F. Jashari-Mani.

In terms of distribution, apart from N. M. Sang, who stands out with a comparatively higher number of publications, there is no significant variation among the other authors.

The documents by country/territory shown in Figure 3 depict the distribution of documents published by researchers from different nations or territories using a horizontal bar graph. Leading countries include the United States, with 25 published documents, followed by India in second place, with a slightly lower number of documents. The United States and India emerged as the most productive countries in terms of contribution to research on SMM and customer engagement in retail between 2016 and 2024, likely due to their well-funded academic institutions and strong industry–academia linkages (Dwivedi et al., 2023). India's rapid rise reflects its expanding digital infrastructure and emphasis on research output in global journals (Dwivedi et al., 2023). A holistic review of consumer engagement in social media brand communities highlights how researchers have explored
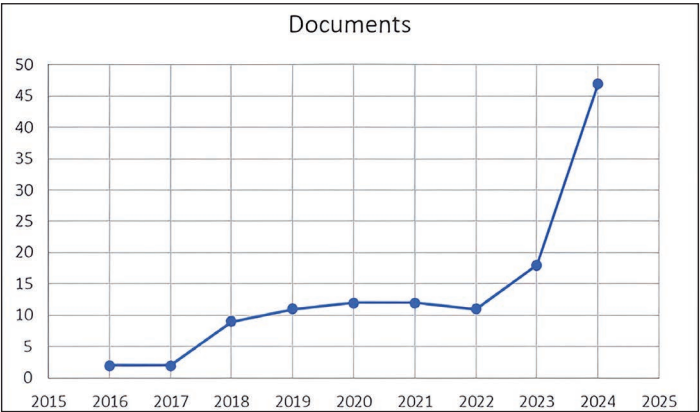
Documents

Figure 1. Annual Scientific Production on SMM and Customer Engagement in Retail (2016–2024).

Source: Author's creation based on data retrieved from Scopus.

Notes: The figure shows a notable increase in annual scientific production related to SMM and customer engagement in the retail sector between 2016 and 2024. After a period of gradual growth from 2017 to 2022, the number of publications nearly doubled in 2023 and surged significantly in 2024. This sharp rise suggests a growing academic interest and relevance of the topic in recent years, possibly driven by the digital transformation of retail and post-pandemic shifts in consumer behaviour.
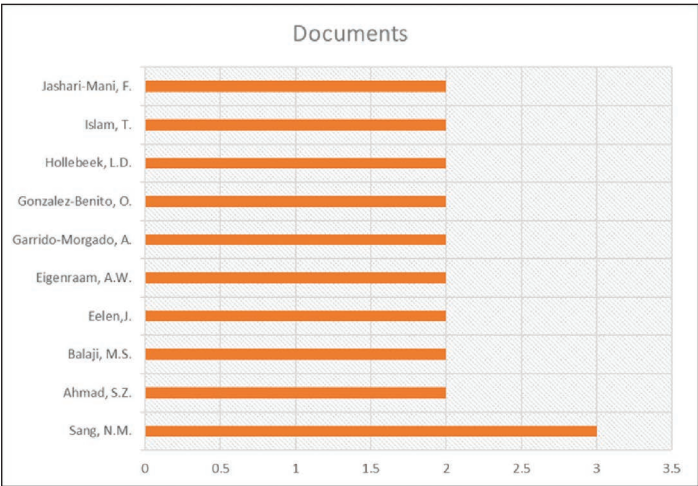

Figure 2. Top Contributing Authors in SMM and Customer Engagement Research (2016–2024).

Notes: The figure displays the top authors based on the number of publications related to SMM and customer engagement in the retail sector. Among the leading contributors, N. M. Sang stands out with the highest number of publications (over 3). In contrast, others, such as S. Z. Ahmad, M. S. Balaji, and L. D. Hollebeek, have made notable contributions with two publications each. This indicates a relatively distributed authorship landscape, with a small number of scholars emerging as key influencers in this research area.
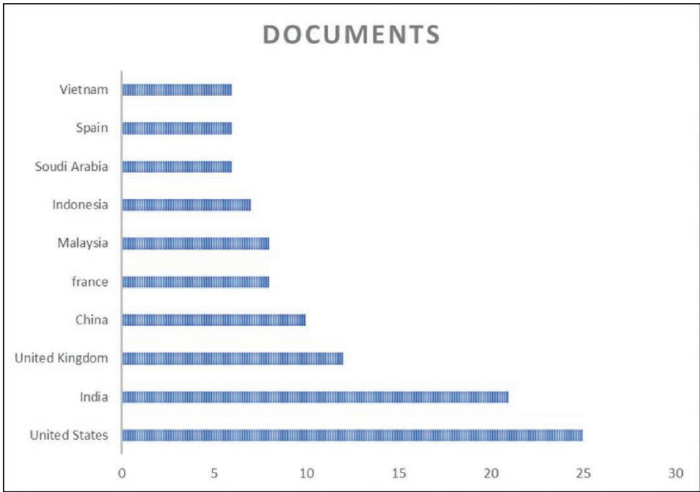
Figure 3. Top Contributing Countries in SMM and Customer Engagement Publications (2016–2024).

Source: Author's compilation based on bibliometric data.

Notes: The figure illustrates the geographic distribution of scholarly output on SMM and customer engagement in retail. The United States leads the field with the highest number of publications (approximately 25), followed by India and the United Kingdom. Emerging contributions are also evident from China, Malaysia and France, indicating growing global interest. The presence of countries from Asia, the Middle East and Europe suggests that this research area is gaining traction across both developed and developing economies, reflecting the global relevance of digital retail strategies.

attitudinal, behavioural and motivational dimensions across 134 empirical studies (Santos et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that nations with well-developed digital ecosystems and supportive research frameworks, such as the United States and India, tend to dominate publication output in this domain. Third place goes to the United Kingdom, which contributed over 12 documents. Contributors in the moderate range—Malaysia, France and China—each submitted between eight and ten documents. Low contributors, with slightly fewer documents, were Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Spain.

As shown in Table 1, the *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* (TC: 1,771 | TP: 30 | H-index: 59) has the highest number of publications (30) among the listed journals, showing its significant contribution to research output. Its H-index (59) and high TC (1,771) indicate that the journal balances both quality and quantity, contributing substantially to the field of interactive marketing. The next source name is *Cogent Business and Management* (TC: 276 | TP: 27 | H-index: 44). This journal also demonstrates steady research output with 27 publications, though its citation impact is moderate. The H-index of 44 suggests it plays a key role in disseminating business management research, particularly for emerging and applied studies.

Table 1. Top Journals Publishing Research on SMM and Customer Engagement (2016–2024).

TC	Source	TP	H-index
1,771	*Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*	30	59
1,749	*Journal of Business Research*	17	265
1,206	*Journal of Interactive Marketing*	7	126
581	*Psychology and Marketing*	8	143
347	*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*	9	143
276	*Cogent Business and Management*	27	44
205	*Marketing Intelligence and Planning*	6	84
39	*Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics*	19	20
32	*International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*	7	25
21	*Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing*	13	6

Source: Author's compilation based on bibliometric data.

Notes: The table highlights the leading journals in terms of total publications (TP), total citations (TC), and H-index on the topic of SMM and customer engagement. The *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* ranks highest with 30 publications and 1,771 citations, indicating its central role in this research domain. *Journal of Business Research* follows in terms of citation impact and H-index, suggesting a strong academic influence despite fewer publications. Specialized journals like *Cogent Business and Management* and *Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing* show notable contributions, reflecting a diverse publication base that spans both high-impact and niche outlets.

Dominant Themes in High-impact Journals

We conducted a co-occurrence analysis of author keywords using VOSviewer. Both network and overlay visualizations were generated to enhance thematic interpretation. To ensure the focus remained on high-impact research, only journals ranked in Q1 and Q2 were included in the analysis (Figure 4).

The network visualization revealed the following five distinct thematic clusters:

- Cluster 1: Artificial intelligence, loyalty, content marketing, Facebook and social media marketing, indicating a focus on technology-driven engagement strategies.
- Cluster 2: Digital marketing, engagement and social media, reflecting core strategic areas in the field.
- Cluster 3: Purchase satisfaction and purchase intention, emphasizing post-engagement behavioural outcomes.
- Cluster 4: Loyalty and trust, suggesting relational dimensions of customer engagement.
- Cluster 5: Customer engagement and value creation, representing central concepts in SMM retail research.
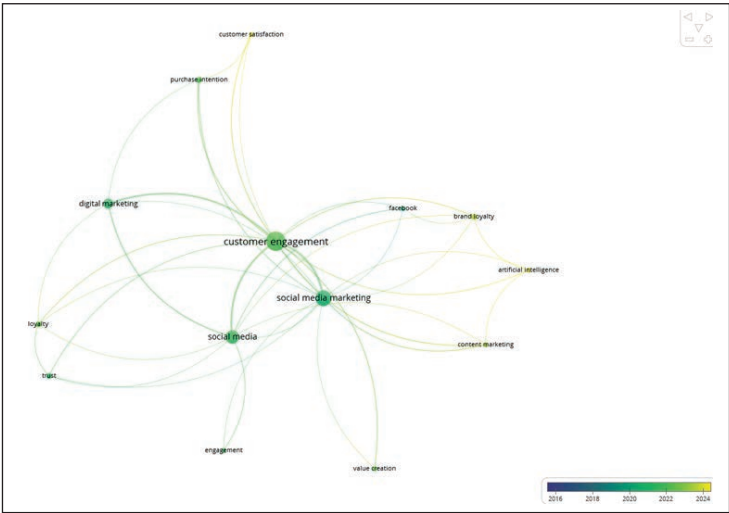
Figure 4. Keyword Co-occurrence Network in SMM and Customer Engagement Research (2016–2024).

Source: Created using VOSviewer.

Notes: This network visualization illustrates the co-occurrence patterns of keywords used in publications related to SMM and customer engagement from 2016 to 2024. The most prominent clusters revolve around customer engagement, SMM and social media, indicating their centrality to the research theme. Emerging terms such as artificial intelligence, brand loyalty and content marketing—highlighted towards the yellow spectrum of the timeline—suggest growing recent interest. Connections with concepts such as trust, loyalty, digital marketing and purchase intention reflect recurring themes in user-brand interaction studies. The timeline colour gradient shows how research priorities have evolved, with newer themes gaining traction in recent years.

The overlay visualization further revealed that recent years (2022–2024) have seen growing emphasis on themes such as artificial intelligence, content marketing and value creation, signalling a shift towards data-driven personalization and customer-centric strategies in SMM.

Table 2 shows that Lee et al.'s paper (2018) is the most cited paper with 674 citations and 112 CPY, followed by Li's paper (2021), which has quickly gained influence with 369 citations and the highest CPY of 123. Other notable works include Liu et al. (2021) and Wang and KIm (2017), both showing a strong academic impact through their focus on luxury branding, big data and firm performance. Papers by Behera et al. (2020), Clement et al. (2021) and Hollebeek (2019) indicate growing interest in personalized marketing, live-streaming platforms and engagement frameworks. The studies collectively explore diverse themes such as advertising content, customer engagement, B2B versus B2C models, and user-generated content. High CPY values in recent works suggest an increasing scholarly focus on data-driven strategies and platform-based Engagement, reflecting current trends in digital marketing research.

Table 2. Highly Cited Publications on SMM and Customer Engagement.

Authors	Documents	TC	CPY
Li (2021)	Social media marketing strategy: Definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation and future agenda	369	123
Behera et al. (2020)	Personalized digital marketing recommender engine	121	30
Liu et al. (2021)	Examining the impact of luxury brands' social media marketing on customer engagement: Using big data analytics and natural language processing	322	107
Clement et al. (2021)	Customer engagement and purchase intention in live-streaming digital marketing platforms	127	42
Hollebeek (2019)	Developing business customer engagement through social media engagement platforms: An integrative S-D logic/RBV-informed model	156	31
Wang and Kim (2017)	Can social media marketing improve customer relationship capabilities and firm performance? Dynamic capability perspective	326	47
Eigenraam (2018)	A consumer-based taxonomy of digital customer engagement practices	149	25
Lee et al. (2018)	Advertising content and consumer engagement on social media: Evidence from Facebook	674	112
Yang et al. (2019)	Understanding user-generated content and customer engagement on Facebook business pages	164	33
Iankova et al. (2019)	A comparison of social media marketing between B2B, B2C and mixed business models	228	46

Source: Author's compilation based on bibliometric data.

Notes: The most cited work is by Lee et al. (2018), emphasizing Facebook-based engagement strategies, followed by Li (2021), which offers a strategic framework for SMM. High citation per year rates for recent publications such as Liu et al. (2021) and Clement et al. (2021) highlight increasing scholarly interest in AI, personalization and live-streaming platforms. These publications reflect the thematic and methodological evolution of the field.

TC: Total citation; CPY: citations per year, highlighting influential contributions to the field based on bibliometric indicators.

Conclusion

This study highlights the evolving landscape of SMM and its vital role in shaping customer engagement. In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis clearly shows that scholarly interest in SMM and customer engagement within the retail sector has accelerated from 2016 to 2024, with substantial growth post-2022. This increase

likely stems from widespread digital transformation driven by the pandemic, alongside greater adoption of AI and analytics in marketing strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019). The United States and India lead in research output, reflecting their large digital markets, robust infrastructure and strategic focus on digitalization (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2020). Prestigious outlets such as the *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* and *Journal of Business Research* further underscore the depth and influence of this research domain. Thematic keyword analysis reveals a shift from traditional engagement themes like trust and satisfaction towards emerging topics such as personalization, AI-driven value co-creation and content marketing—indicating a move towards more customer-centric and technologically informed practices (Liu et al., 2021). Foundational frameworks and platform-specific engagement models by Lee et al. (2018) and Li (2021) highlight the growing practical relevance of research in this area. Together, these trends show a globally expanding field with increasing conceptual sophistication, pointing to opportunities in AI ethics, cultural adaptation and personalized digital engagement strategies for future studies.

Theoretical Contribution

While bibliometric analyses are inherently quantitative, interpreting the results through conceptual lenses provides a richer understanding of how knowledge in the field has evolved. For instance, the identified clusters on influencer engagement and brand trust align with the behavioural and emotional dimensions described in customer engagement model. Similarly, the presence of terms like 'co-creation' and 'advocacy' supports Brodie et al.'s (2011) view of engagement as a value-creating, relational process. By linking these patterns back to theory, the study not only maps the structure of SMM research but also illustrates how the field conceptually engages with consumer behaviour over time.

Practical Implication

- *Influencer strategies are dominant*: Brands must prioritize partnerships with micro and macro-influencers to foster trust and expand reach.
- *Encouraging community interaction*: Investing in branded online communities can drive co-creation and long-term engagement.
- *Tech-driven engagement is emerging*: Marketing teams should explore AI-based tools to monitor customer sentiment and personalize interactions.

Future Recommendations

Future research can explore emerging areas such as the integration of artificial intelligence in SMM, influencer analytics and the growing relevance of social commerce, aligning with the rapid evolution of digital engagement practices. Additionally, examining platform-specific strategies, for instance, the use of

TikTok for short-form content, LinkedIn for professional branding or Instagram for visual storytelling, can yield more nuanced perspectives on channel-based engagement effectiveness. Scholars should also consider positioning their work in high-impact journals focused on digital and interactive marketing to maximize visibility and academic contribution. Methodologically, longitudinal research designs and bibliometric analyses may be considered in future investigations to track how themes in SMM and customer engagement evolve. Co-word analysis can further be employed to uncover hidden or emerging topic clusters, providing a forward-looking map of research directions and helping scholars identify novel intersections in this growing, shifting domain.

Limitations

The study relies solely on the Scopus database, and the paper lacks inclusion of key studies relevant to the topic indexed elsewhere, like Web of Science. Also, the paper does not incorporate any relevant conference proceedings and grey literature. The search was limited to English-language publications and the business, management and accounting subject area, potentially introducing language and disciplinary bias.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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