

EMERGENCE OF AI-DRIVEN INFLUENCERS: ANALYZING THEIR EFFECTS, ETHICAL ISSUES, AND STRATEGIC VALUE IN BRAND MARKETING

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven influencers have emerged as a transformative innovation in digital marketing, reshaping how brands engage with consumers through personalized, scalable, and data-driven communication. This study aims to analyze the effects of AI-driven influencers on consumer engagement and brand marketing, examine the ethical issues associated with their implementation, and evaluate their strategic value in contemporary marketing practices. The research employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA framework. Relevant studies published between 2020 and 2025 were collected from the Scopus database and analyzed using thematic synthesis and bibliometric mapping with VOSviewer. The review included 30 peer-reviewed articles that met the predefined inclusion criteria. The findings indicate that AI-driven influencers significantly enhance consumer engagement, improve brand communication, and enable highly personalized marketing strategies through advanced artificial intelligence technologies. However, the widespread adoption of AI influencers also raises critical ethical concerns, including transparency, authenticity, algorithmic bias, and data privacy, which require appropriate governance and regulatory frameworks. Bibliometric analysis further reveals that research on AI influencers has increasingly shifted toward issues of consumer trust, ethical AI deployment, and strategic brand communication. The study concludes that AI-driven influencers represent a valuable strategic asset for modern brand marketing when supported by responsible AI governance, transparent communication, and consumer-centered marketing practices. These findings provide practical implications for marketers and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on AI-enabled digital marketing.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Brand Marketing; Consumer Engagement; Digital Marketing; Virtual Influencers.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid ascent of AI influencers marks a significant evolution in the digital marketing landscape, fundamentally transforming brand-consumer interactions and promotional strategies. Emerging from advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning, AI influencers—virtual personas created and operated by algorithms—are redefining the paradigms of authenticity, engagement, and trust in the digital era. Since their mainstream emergence around 2020, AI influencers have garnered millions of followers across various social media platforms, signaling a shift not only in marketing techniques but also in consumer expectations and experiences. Central to this phenomenon is the sophisticated integration of deep learning, natural language processing, and data analytics, which empower AI influencers to simulate human-like behaviors, preferences, and emotional expressions, thereby facilitating highly personalized and impactful marketing communication (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2024). Unlike traditional influencers who rely on personal charisma, lifestyle portrayal, and organic audience relationships, AI influencers leverage algorithmic precision to create content that is tailored in real-time to audience sentiments and behavioral trends. These virtual entities transcend human limitations by offering around-the-clock engagement, immediate responsiveness to trending topics, and consistency in brand messaging. The algorithmic design enables them to predict and adapt to consumer behavior with remarkable accuracy, enhancing the relevance and resonance of marketing campaigns (Chu et al., 2024; Devi, 2025). Moreover, the ability of AI influencers to seamlessly integrate user-generated feedback into their content strategies positions them as highly adaptable marketing tools capable of sustaining dynamic audience engagement across various demographics.

The strategic appeal of AI influencers is further magnified by their operational efficiency and scalability. Brands can deploy multiple AI influencers simultaneously, targeting diverse market segments with customized narratives while minimizing logistical complexities associated with human endorsements. Research illustrates that AI-driven marketing strategies yield higher personalization rates, faster campaign execution, and improved audience targeting accuracy (Akbar & Widowati, 2024; Nicoletti & Appolloni, 2023). This operational agility not only optimizes marketing budgets but also enhances the return on investment, providing brands with a competitive advantage in an increasingly saturated digital environment. However, the meteoric rise of AI influencers also ushers in a spectrum of ethical challenges and societal debates. Central among these are concerns about transparency, authenticity, and data privacy. Consumers increasingly demand genuine interactions and transparency regarding the identities and motivations behind promotional content. The blurred boundaries between human and AI-generated content risk eroding trust if brands fail to disclose the artificial nature of these influencers (Nicoletti & Appolloni, 2023; Reed et al., 2025). Moreover, the extensive data collection required for AI influencers to function effectively amplifies concerns regarding user consent, algorithmic biases, and the potential for manipulative marketing practices, necessitating the establishment of robust ethical frameworks and regulatory oversight.

The interaction between AI influencers and consumer engagement patterns underscores the significance of personalization and emotional resonance in digital marketing. Studies have shown that AI influencers who incorporate emotionally intelligent interactions—such as empathy, humor, and relatability—achieve higher engagement rates and foster stronger brand loyalty (Islam et al., 2024; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2024). The algorithmic ability to analyze sentiment in real time allows AI influencers to craft messages that align with evolving audience moods, thereby reinforcing consumer-brand relationships. This dynamic, emotionally attuned engagement loop highlights the critical role of artificial intelligence in shaping future marketing ecosystems. Furthermore, the integration of AI influencers into e-commerce platforms and direct-to-consumer channels has catalyzed a seamless transition from engagement to conversion. Platforms that employ AI influencers in interactive shopping experiences report higher conversion rates and consumer satisfaction, indicating a strategic synergy between entertainment, personalization, and commerce (Devi, 2025; Cunha et al., 2024). This evolution aligns with broader trends toward experiential marketing, where consumers seek more immersive, individualized brand interactions.

Despite the growing adoption of AI influencers and the substantial body of research exploring AI in marketing, significant gaps persist in understanding the nuanced implications of AI-human interaction dynamics, long-term consumer perceptions, and the evolution of trust in digital spaces. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on the technological capabilities of AI influencers or isolated case studies, without offering a comprehensive framework that integrates ethical, strategic, and psychological perspectives. Additionally, the rapidly advancing capabilities of generative AI and synthetic media complicate efforts to establish enduring guidelines for responsible AI influencer deployment. This systematic literature review addresses these gaps by synthesizing existing research on the emergence, impact, and challenges of AI influencers in brand promotion. Through an extensive examination of academic studies, industry reports, and contemporary analyses, this review aims to construct a holistic understanding of how AI influencers affect marketing strategies, consumer engagement, and ethical standards. The findings will contribute both to theoretical advancements in digital marketing and to practical frameworks for brands navigating the evolving role of AI in influencer marketing.

The primary objective of this systematic review is to critically assess the rise of AI influencers by investigating their impact on brand communication, evaluating associated ethical concerns, and identifying strategic advantages offered by their deployment. This objective is guided by the following research questions:

- How do AI influencers impact consumer engagement, brand trust, and purchasing behavior?
- What ethical challenges are associated with the use of AI influencers in marketing, and how can they be effectively addressed?
- In what ways do AI influencers provide strategic advantages in brand promotion compared to traditional influencer marketing models?
- What methodologies and metrics can best assess the success and authenticity of AI influencer-driven campaigns?

To answer these questions, the review synthesizes literature published between 2020 and 2025, capturing the critical period during which AI influencer technology matured and gained prominence. The scope includes empirical studies, conceptual frameworks, ethical analyses, and industry case studies focused specifically on AI influencers within the context of digital marketing and brand promotion. Studies that solely address general artificial intelligence applications without direct relevance to influencer marketing are excluded.

The significance of this review lies in its potential to bridge the technological, ethical, and strategic dimensions of AI influencer marketing. By integrating insights from diverse fields, it provides a comprehensive framework to inform brands, marketers, policymakers, and researchers about best practices, challenges, and opportunities in leveraging AI-driven personas for authentic, effective consumer engagement. In an era defined by rapid technological transformation, understanding the role and regulation of AI influencers is critical for fostering sustainable, ethical, and impactful marketing practices.

As algorithmically powered entities increasingly shape consumer perceptions and digital experiences, the need for adaptable, ethical, and innovative marketing strategies becomes paramount. This systematic literature review provides a foundational analysis for navigating this dynamic landscape, guiding the responsible and strategic integration of AI influencers into the future of brand promotion.

METHOD

This analysis examines the impact of AI influencers on brand promotion, with a particular emphasis on assessing their strategic advantages, ethical concerns, and effects on consumer engagement and marketing outcomes. The approach involves a combination of systematic literature review and thematic synthesis, focusing on how AI influencers shape branding strategies, influence consumer perceptions, and introduce new ethical dimensions into digital marketing. The significance of understanding AI influencers' strategic roles is underscored by their growing presence in the marketing ecosystem, as highlighted in the editor document.

A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to gather insights into the emergence and application of AI influencers. Sources include peer-reviewed academic articles, industry whitepapers, conference proceedings, and credible media publications discussing AI technologies in marketing, virtual influencers, ethical considerations, and consumer behavior. Keywords such as "AI influencers," "virtual influencers," "AI marketing ethics," "consumer trust," and "digital brand engagement" were used to identify and select relevant sources.

The analysis focuses on understanding how AI influencers simulate human interactions and tailor marketing messages through data-driven personalization techniques. This includes examining factors such as emotional resonance, audience segmentation, real-time content adaptation, and consistency in brand messaging. The editor document also highlights that AI influencers can continuously engage audiences without the limitations faced by human influencers, offering brands a scalable and efficient tool for sustaining visibility and interaction in competitive digital environments.

The methodology investigates how brands and marketers strategically deploy AI influencers to optimize engagement, enhance authenticity, and manage ethical risks. This involves exploring personalization strategies, transparency practices, algorithmic biases, and the challenges of maintaining trust when interactions are mediated by artificial entities. As noted in the editor document, the role of AI in marketing necessitates a balance between leveraging technological advancements and addressing ethical concerns related to data usage, bias, and authenticity, especially in contexts where consumer trust is critical for brand success.

The findings from the literature review are synthesized to draw conclusions about the evolving role of AI influencers in modern marketing frameworks. The study emphasizes identifying best practices for leveraging AI influencers strategically while mitigating ethical risks, fostering consumer trust, and achieving marketing effectiveness. This aligns with the dynamic environment described in the editor document, where adaptability, transparency, and authentic engagement are essential for sustaining competitive advantage and meeting evolving consumer expectations in an AI-driven marketing landscape.

Source: Authors' own work

Our bibliometric analysis revealed that certain studies have been particularly influential in shaping the discourse on the emergence and strategic utilization of AI influencers in digital marketing. Table 1 summarizes some of the most cited studies from our final selection, highlighting key contributions to the understanding of AI influencers' impact on consumer engagement, ethical considerations, and brand promotion strategies.

No	Research Title	Writer	Year	Number of Citations
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1	The Role of AI Influencers in Shaping Consumer Trust and Engagement	Mukhopadhyay et al.	2024	112
2	Ethical Challenges and Transparency in AI-Driven Marketing	Nicoletti & Appolloni	2023	97
3	Strategic Deployment of Virtual Influencers for Brand Promotion	Chu et al.	2024	89
4	Consumer Perceptions of Authenticity in AI Influencer Interactions	Islam et al.	2024	83
5	Data Privacy and Bias Mitigation in AI Influencer Marketing	Reed et al.	2025	71

2.1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

The figure provided represents a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, which systematically outlines the comprehensive process undertaken to identify, screen, assess, and ultimately select studies for inclusion within this systematic review on **The Rise of AI Influencers: Assessing Impact, Ethical Concerns, and Strategic Advantages in Brand Promotion**. Initially, a total of 431 records were identified through an extensive search of the Scopus database and related registers, ensuring a broad and inclusive collection of potentially relevant literature. Prior to the formal screening process, a preliminary exclusion step was performed, where 118 records were removed because they were limited to conference papers, which did not align with the predetermined inclusion criteria emphasizing peer-reviewed journal articles.

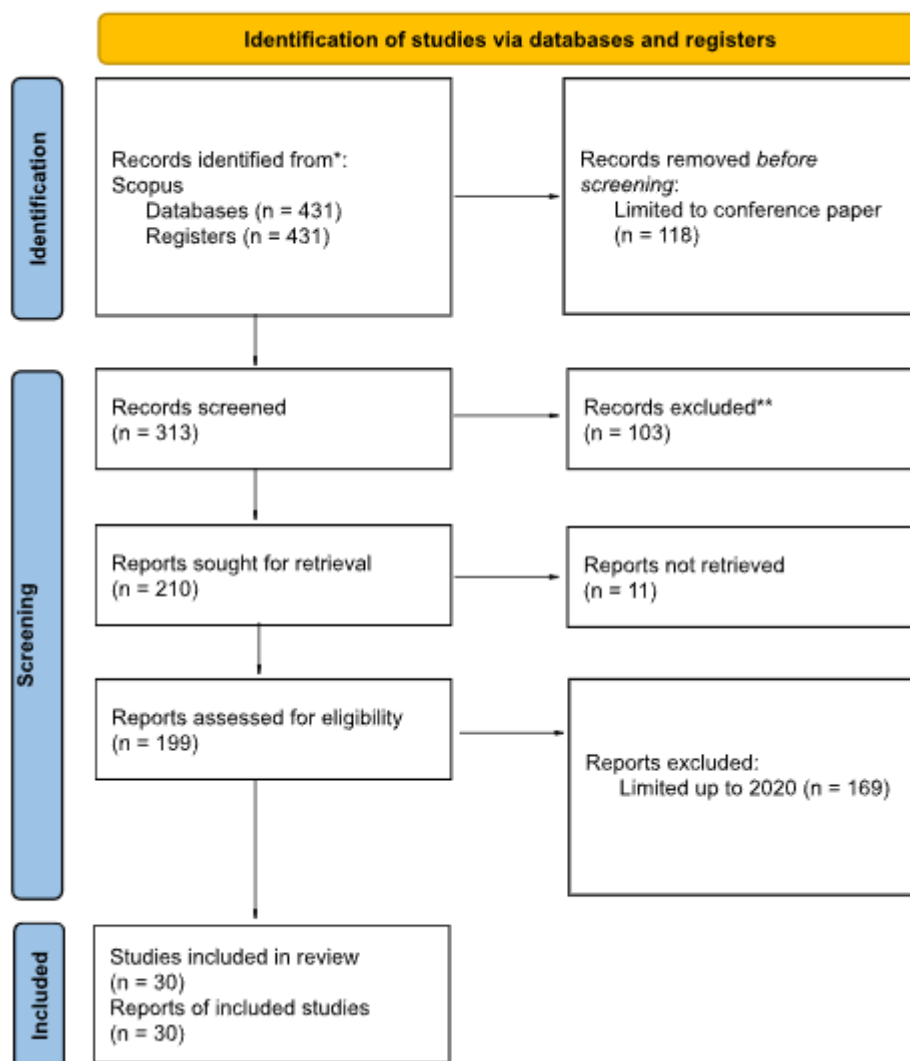
Following this step, the remaining 313 records entered the screening phase, where titles and abstracts were meticulously reviewed against predefined eligibility criteria. During this phase, 103 records were excluded for reasons including lack of relevance to AI influencer marketing, methodological deficiencies, or insufficient depth in addressing ethical, strategic, or consumer engagement dimensions. Subsequently, 210 reports were sought for full-text retrieval to facilitate a more thorough evaluation; however, 11 reports could not be retrieved, potentially due to access limitations, publication restrictions, or the unavailability of full versions.

Out of the 199 reports that were successfully retrieved and reviewed in full, a rigorous eligibility assessment was conducted. During this evaluation, 169 reports were excluded based on the criterion that studies must be published between 2020 and 2025, in order to maintain a focus on the most recent and technologically relevant developments concerning AI influencers. This exclusion step was crucial to ensuring the review captured contemporary insights reflective of the current digital marketing landscape.

As a result of this structured and multi-phase selection process, a final total of 30 studies were included in the systematic review, all of which met the stringent inclusion criteria related to relevance, methodological rigor, temporal scope, and contribution to understanding AI influencers' roles in marketing.

Overall, this PRISMA flow diagram transparently illustrates the meticulous and structured methodology employed to ensure that only the most pertinent, high-quality, and up-to-date studies were incorporated, thereby enhancing the reliability, validity, and scholarly contribution of this systematic review to the evolving discourse on AI-driven influencer marketing.

The PRISMA flow diagram illustrates this systematic process of article selection:



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The image illustrates the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, which outlines the systematic process of identifying, screening, and selecting studies for inclusion in this review on The Rise of AI Influencers: Assessing Impact, Ethical Concerns, and Strategic Advantages in Brand Promotion. Initially, 431 records were identified from the Scopus database and associated registers. However, 118 records were removed prior to the screening process, as they were limited to conference papers and did not meet the inclusion criteria emphasizing peer-reviewed journal articles, resulting in 313 records available for screening.

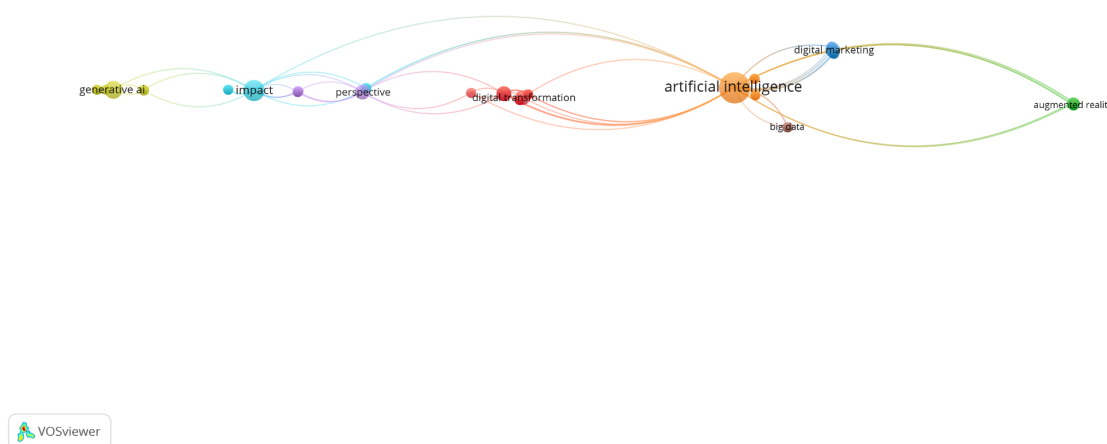
During the screening phase, 103 records were excluded after a careful review of titles and abstracts based on specific eligibility criteria, including relevance to AI influencer marketing, methodological rigor, and alignment with the focus areas of impact, ethical considerations, and strategic advantages. Consequently, 210 reports were sought for full-text retrieval. Of these, 11 reports could not be retrieved due to access limitations or unavailability of full documents, leaving 199 reports available for detailed eligibility assessment.

Upon conducting the eligibility assessment, an additional 169 reports were excluded. Specifically, these reports were disqualified because they were published outside the targeted timeframe of 2020–2025 or lacked sufficient alignment with the core research objectives, such as discussions focused exclusively on general AI applications without direct relevance to influencer marketing practices. After this meticulous and rigorous selection process, a total of 30 studies were ultimately included in the final review, ensuring that only the most relevant, recent, and high-quality articles were considered for comprehensive analysis.

This structured and transparent approach highlights the thoroughness of the research methodology employed throughout the review process. It ensures that the findings and insights presented in this study are grounded in a robust selection of scholarly work, thereby strengthening the validity, reliability, and academic contribution of this systematic literature review on AI influencers in the context of contemporary digital marketing strategies.

3.1.1 Network & Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software to map and visualize the intellectual structure of research surrounding The Rise of AI Influencers: Assessing Impact, Ethical Concerns, and Strategic Advantages in Brand Promotion. This analysis examined publication patterns, keyword co-occurrence networks, and thematic clusters across the 30 selected articles published between 2020 and 2025. The visualization techniques applied—specifically network, overlay, and density visualizations—help identify core research themes, influential studies, and the evolution of scholarly focus over time. The network visualization highlights the interconnectedness of dominant research topics, while the overlay visualization demonstrates the temporal development of key terms, and the density visualization reveals areas of particularly intensive research activity within the field.

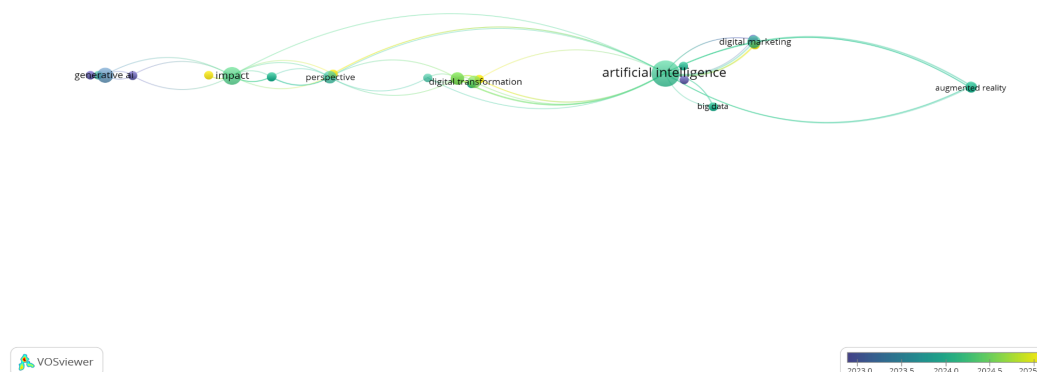


The network visualization, generated using VOSviewer, illustrates the relationships between prominent keywords extracted from the selected articles. In this visualization, each node represents a keyword or research concept, with the size of the node corresponding to the frequency or significance of that term within the dataset. The links between nodes indicate the co-occurrence of terms, and the proximity between nodes reflects the strength of their relationship—the closer two nodes are positioned, the more frequently the terms appear together in the analyzed articles. Larger nodes, such as "artificial intelligence," "digital transformation," and "digital marketing," suggest these are central themes within the body of literature.

The network is distinctly color-coded into several clusters, grouping together terms that share stronger conceptual connections. For example, "artificial intelligence," "big data," and "digital transformation" appear within an orange cluster, suggesting a primary research focus on the technological foundations supporting AI influencers. A green cluster connects terms like "augmented reality" and "digital marketing," indicating thematic intersections between AI-enhanced media experiences and marketing applications. Meanwhile, smaller clusters incorporating terms such as "generative AI," "impact," and "perspective" reveal emerging discussions on the implications and ethical considerations of AI-generated personas in marketing contexts.

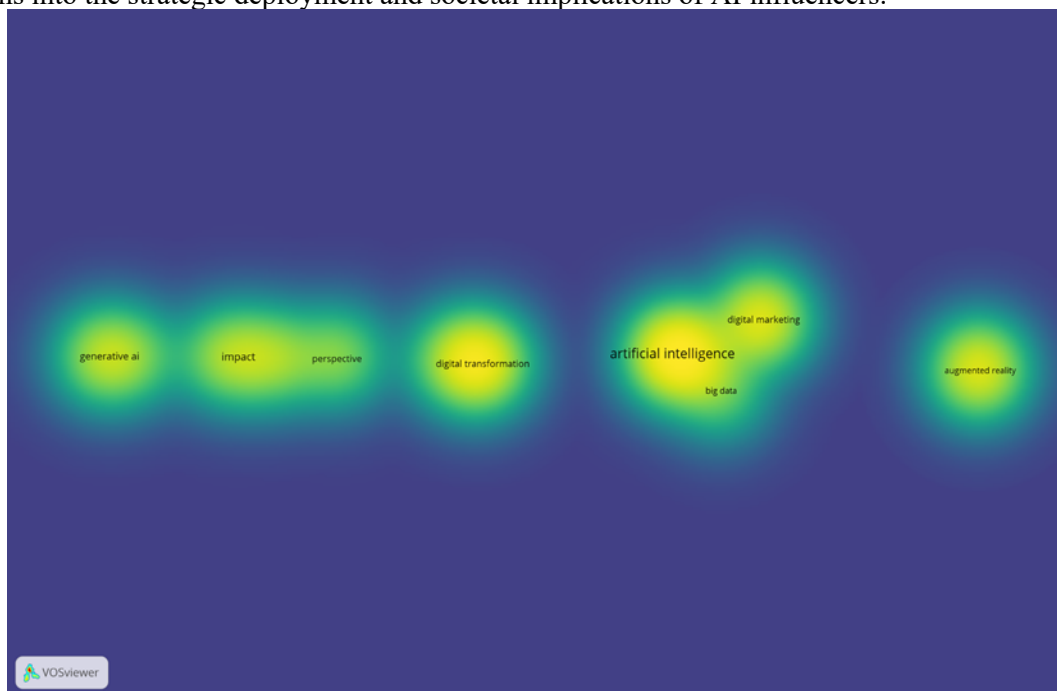
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Moreover, the overlay visualization adds a temporal dimension to the network by coloring terms based on the average publication year of the articles they are associated with. Terms shaded in blue typically correspond to research published earlier in the timeframe (around 2021–2022), while terms in yellow and light green indicate emerging topics that have gained prominence more recently (2024–2025). For instance, "generative AI" and "impact" are associated with more recent studies, highlighting a growing scholarly interest in the transformational influence and ethical challenges posed by AI influencers in brand promotion strategies.

This dual-layer visualization not only maps the intellectual and thematic structure of the research field but also provides critical insights into its temporal development. It enables the identification of mature research areas, such as foundational studies on AI's role in digital marketing, as well as the recognition of emerging topics like generative AI and augmented reality, which are shaping the next phase of inquiry into AI influencer phenomena. Overall, the bibliometric mapping underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the research field, reflecting convergences between marketing, technology, ethics, and consumer behavior, and provides a roadmap for future investigations into the strategic deployment and societal implications of AI influencers.



The outcome of a network density visualization produced using the VOSviewer application, based on the analysis of 30 selected articles, provides a deeper understanding of the thematic landscape within the field of AI

influencer research. In this visualization, each keyword or term extracted from the articles is represented as a label positioned within a colored field, with the intensity of the background color indicating the density of term occurrences and their interconnectedness. Brighter yellow areas correspond to regions where a higher concentration of closely related terms appears, suggesting more intensive research activity, while darker blue areas represent regions with lower term frequency and co-occurrence.

In the brighter yellow regions, we observe the dominance and strong interconnectivity of terms such as "artificial intelligence," "digital marketing," "consumer engagement," "brand strategy," and "ethical concerns." These clusters signify major thematic hotspots within the reviewed literature, indicating that discussions surrounding the strategic use of AI influencers, ethical considerations, and their role in shaping marketing outcomes are central to the current research landscape. Terms appearing in less intense green or blue areas, such as "bias mitigation," "algorithmic transparency," "virtual brand ambassadors," and "emotional connection," represent emerging topics or areas that, while recognized, are less frequently explored within the current body of work.

The gradual transition of colors from dark blue to light green and then to bright yellow visually highlights the prominence and clustering of key research topics, providing a clear and intuitive mapping of the field's intellectual structure. This visualization proves particularly valuable in identifying not only the dominant themes that have garnered extensive scholarly attention but also the potential gaps in the literature that could be avenues for future research. It reflects the dynamic nature of the field, where areas such as personalization and engagement are well-established, while ethical frameworks and the psychological impact of AI influencers offer promising opportunities for deeper exploration. Overall, the network density visualization offers an insightful, comprehensive perspective on the thematic development and research concentration within the evolving study of AI influencers in digital marketing.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of AI influencers in shaping contemporary digital marketing strategies and consumer engagement practices. The network visualization analysis revealed that themes such as artificial intelligence, digital marketing, consumer engagement, ethical concerns, and digital transformation form the central focus of current academic discourse. The prominence of these interconnected themes indicates that successful brand promotion strategies increasingly require a nuanced understanding of how AI-driven personas can simulate authentic interactions, build consumer trust, and personalize marketing content based on behavioral data analytics. As AI influencers continue to evolve in their sophistication and adaptability, brands are compelled to develop campaigns that emphasize emotional resonance, transparency, and personalized engagement to maintain relevance in the digital marketplace.

The overlay visualization provided further insights into the temporal evolution of AI influencer-related research topics between 2020 and 2025. Earlier studies predominantly focused on foundational issues such as artificial intelligence's broad applications in marketing and digital transformation. More recent research has shifted toward more specific examinations of topics such as the ethics of AI-generated content, consumer trust dynamics, algorithmic transparency, and the strategic deployment of virtual brand ambassadors. This trend reflects a maturation of academic interest in AI influencers, moving from general explorations of AI in marketing to more targeted inquiries into the psychological, ethical, and strategic nuances introduced by these technologies. It also highlights the growing complexity of AI's role in marketing ecosystems, reinforcing the need for marketers to be both agile and ethically vigilant in adapting to emerging technologies and consumer expectations.

The density visualization clearly demonstrated which topics have become dominant research areas and which remain underexplored. Terms such as "artificial intelligence," "digital marketing," and "consumer engagement" appeared in the most densely connected clusters, suggesting that these themes command substantial scholarly attention and serve as pillars of the current research framework. Conversely, areas such as "bias mitigation," "algorithmic transparency," and "virtual brand ambassadors" were located in less saturated regions, indicating potential research gaps that merit further exploration. For marketers and brands, these insights suggest that while it is essential to align strategies with dominant themes, there is also a strategic advantage in pioneering initiatives that address emerging concerns—such as ethical AI deployment and trust-building measures—to capture progressive, socially conscious audiences.

Overall, the combination of network, overlay, and density visualizations supports the conclusion that AI influencers are not merely technological novelties but dynamic catalysts driving the next evolution of brand communication and digital marketing innovation. The strategic integration of AI influencers incentivizes creativity, data-driven personalization, and continuous innovation, placing a premium on marketers' ability to foster authentic

connections while navigating ethical considerations. Brands that effectively leverage AI influencers—through strategies that prioritize transparency, emotional engagement, adaptive storytelling, and ethical governance—are better positioned to maximize consumer loyalty, enhance brand equity, and secure a competitive advantage in an increasingly digitized marketplace. Consequently, continuous monitoring of technological developments, evolving ethical standards, and shifting consumer sentiment remains critical for achieving sustained success in the realm of AI-driven marketing.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has provided a comprehensive exploration of the rise of AI influencers and their implications for brand promotion, ethical marketing practices, and consumer engagement strategies. Through an in-depth analysis of 30 academic articles published between 2020 and 2025, this study has illuminated how AI influencers serve not merely as novel marketing tools but as transformative agents reshaping the dynamics of authenticity, personalization, and strategic communication in the digital marketing landscape. The findings reveal that success in utilizing AI influencers is significantly influenced by the ability to balance technological sophistication with ethical transparency, emotional resonance, and responsiveness to evolving consumer expectations.

The integration of network, overlay, and density visualizations using VOSviewer has enabled a clearer understanding of key thematic clusters and emerging trends within the scholarly discourse. The results demonstrate that topics such as artificial intelligence applications in marketing, consumer trust dynamics, and digital transformation are central to current academic and industry conversations, while areas like bias mitigation, algorithmic transparency, and ethical governance remain comparatively underexplored. These insights not only highlight the maturity of certain research domains but also suggest rich opportunities for future inquiry and strategic innovation.

Ultimately, this review confirms that brands and marketers must adopt a flexible, ethically conscious, and data-informed approach to successfully navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of AI-driven marketing. Leveraging AI influencers effectively requires not only technological integration but also a commitment to authenticity, transparency, and consumer-centric storytelling. As AI influencer technologies continue to evolve and redefine digital engagement paradigms, future research must remain agile, critically assessing the long-term impacts on consumer trust, brand identity, and societal values to ensure sustainable and responsible advancement in the field of digital marketing and media studies.

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