Literature Review

Digital Media Influencers: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of social media influencers (SMIs) has been growing exponentially in recent years, making influencer marketing (IM) a predominant business strategy. Even though there is growing interest from researchers and practitioners, most academic work continues to be divergent, partial, and fragmented. In light of the pivotal role SMIs play in consumer decisions and the fact that this field of research is still in its developmental stages, a comprehensive and critical view of existing research on this topic is greatly needed. This paper is a response to this and is the first to consolidate the current state of IM research within social media settings. More precisely, this paper presents a systematic literature review of relevant studies published in academic journals and magazines in order to identify key themes and dominant concepts in the field. Our analysis of 31 articles from 14 different journals helped give a broader understanding of this phenomenon. Through our analysis we identified a number of research gaps. We then proposed directions for future research to reflect on important emerging areas and unexplored domains with reference to theory, context, and methodology. Lastly, we discuss the implications of this study in theory and practice. The main limitations of the study come from the fact that it only considers articles written in the English language, it is only published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and it is limited to just three online platforms. This study is a first in that it provides a systematic overview of existing literature on digital media influencers.

Keywords: Influencer marketing; social media; digital media influencers; consumer behavior; systematic literature

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the new trends in marketing is called "influencer marketing". The number of studies which used the term "influencer marketing" increased by more than 300% on Google from 2016 to 2017. The number of Digital Influencers (DIs) has grown significantly over the last five years (since 2017), making influencer marketing (IM) a fundamental strategy for many companies. Studies conducted by a group of digital marketing agencies in 2021 concluded that seventy-two percent (72%) of the female audience show a higher level of interest in a subject if said subject is published by a digital influencer.

Yet despite the growing interest in this area, the results from academic studies tend to be varied and fragmented. Given that this field of research is still in its infancy, a critical and comprehensive analysis of studies on this topic would be immensely important. To address this idea, this paper corroborates current studies on the international action of Digital Influencers (DIs) on social networks and in marketing. More specifically, this paper presents a systematic review of relevant studies published in academic journals and magazines (see Table I) which have been reviewed by peers from the three main databases: the Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect.

We analyzed 31 articles in order to get a better idea of this phenomenon and shed light on the mechanisms that Digital Influencers (DIs) use and their impact on consumer behavior.

This review contributes to marketing research and marketing as a practice on a few levels. Firstly, we present an overview of relevant studies and highlight the main topics they address for higher education. Secondly, we analyze the results of existing studies, group them into a set of conceptual models within an integrated framework, thus providing a structural analysis of the social phenomenon of social media influencers (SMIs) and their impact on consumer behavior. This framework can serve as a more productive theoretical guideline for future academic works, and can also help professionals develop a marketing strategy with media influencers.

This article begins by introducing the methodology, which is followed by a general, descriptive and thematic view, including graph results. The findings from existing works are then summarized

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into an integrated structure of the SMI phenomenon. We then present possible lines of research for future studies and, lastly, discuss the implications this study may have on research and practical application.

2. METHODOLOGY

We believe a systematic review of existing literature to be more suitable for this study as it summarizes and helps organize the literature on SMIs (Wang & Chugh, 2014). It also provides experts and practitioners with integrated views and existing knowledge, in addition to identifying *Gaps* and opportunities for further research.

2.1 Data Selection

We consulted relevant literature from three major platforms ("Web of Science", "Scopus" and "ScienceDirect"). These platforms provide integrated access to reference databases, contain abstracts and citations from peer-reviewed literature, and contain publications and *e-books* from various fields of science, including the social sciences, in addition to being frequently used in systematic reviews.

In an effort to be consistent with previous reviews conducted in the fields of marketing (Christofi et al., 2017) and consumer behavior (Rimkute et al., 2016), we limited this study to peer-reviewed articles from English publications as peer reviews are regarded as valid knowledge and leaders in terms of influence (Ordanini et al., 2008). The reason for choosing English publications is based on the fact that the most highly regarded academic articles are written in the English language. We did not include books, chapters, publications of conference results, editorials, or any other unreferenced publications.

We were unable to identify any similar attempts to summarize this specific literature on the three aforementioned platforms for articles published over the last five years in English. We also looked for a pattern of keywords in the study on SMIs in the set of articles directly related to the topic presented in this paper. This was done in order to select the most appropriate search terms.

Our first step involved conducting a search using the terms "influence marketing" OR "media influencer" in order to obtain an overall scope of the topic.
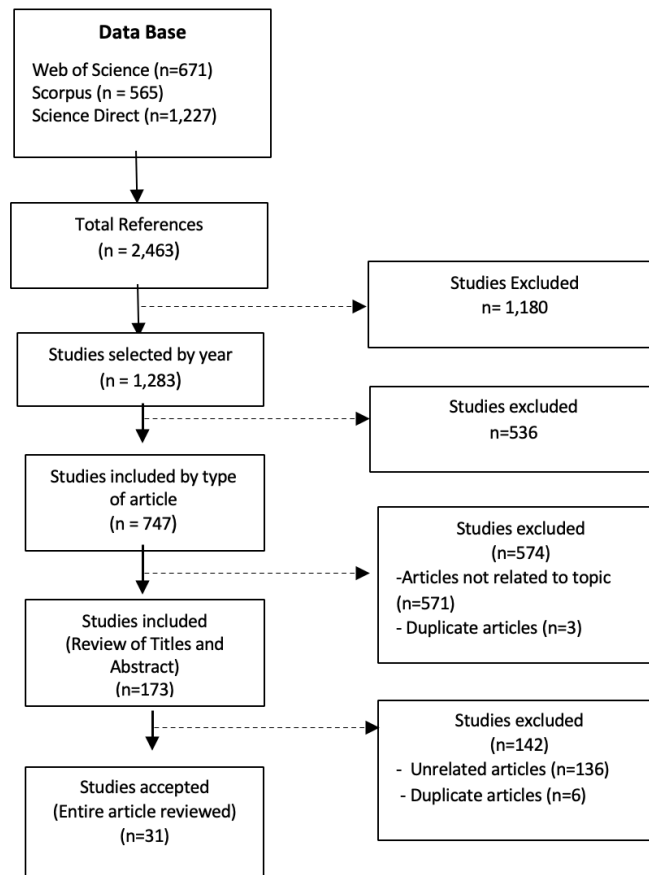
We then looked at titles, keywords provided by the authors, and summaries of potentially relevant articles. We did this because the words or phrases the authors use in these materials are representative of what their articles are essentially about. Each time a relevant keyword was found, we created a database from a new "string" of search queries and then used that database for subsequent searches. The formula for the keyword was interactive in that it added search terms to the formula, acting as a kind of refining and enriching process. Based on this search, a set of relevant and frequently used keywords was identified and then used to create a model. The word "OR" was used in our search formula, for example, "marketing influencer" OR "social media influencer marketing" OR "social media influencer" OR "digital influencer" OR "online influencer" OR "online opinion leader" OR "blogger" OR "influencer support". We believe this string helped us find the most relevant articles.

As is often the case in systematic literature reviews (e.g., Macpherson & Holt, 2007; Pisani et al., 2017), we searched titles, keywords/subject terms, and abstracts. Our initial search was not limited to any specific dates. This initial search generated a total of 2,463 occurrences: 671 from "Web of Science"; 565 articles from the "Scopus" platform; and 1,227 from "ScienceDirect". However, since our main objective is based on more recent literature, the second phase of our research was limited to the last 5 years, between 2017 and 2021. This phase generated 1,283 occurrences: 257 from "Web of Science"; 388 from "Scopus"; and 264 from "Science Direct". Once this selection process was complete, we selected 747 articles pertaining to the area of interest of this study. We analyzed the titles and abstracts, and excluded any duplicate or unrelated articles. This left us with a total of 173 published articles. If we were unable to perceive the relevance or readability from the title or abstract, we would then proceed to analyze the entire article. We excluded 136 studies through this screening process and then conducted a review of the reference lists of the selected articles. In all, a total of 31 articles were identified as belonging to SMI literature.

2.2 Data Coding

Once the articles had been selected, we proceeded to read each one in its entirety and retrieve all the relevant information toward developing the topic (Danese et al., 2018). We created a data collection form to record and summarize the main data from each article. This helped eliminate human error and is also a transparent and valid way for documenting the process (Tranfield et al., 2003). Each article was coded according to the following indications: (1) author; (2) citations; (3)

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year of publication; (4) title of publication (newspaper or magazine); (5) field of research; (6) type of article (theoretical, empirical or review); (7) method (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods); (8) sample characteristics; (9) media platform; (10) unit of analysis; (11) main conclusions; and (12) future studies by author(s).

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         Data Base           │
│ Web of Science (n=671)      │
│ Scorpus (n = 565)           │
│ Science Direct (n=1,227)    │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────┐
│     Total References        │ ------→  │    Studies Excluded      │
│       (n = 2,463)           │         │      n= 1,180            │
└─────────────────────────────┘         └─────────────────────────┘
              │
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┌─────────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Studies selected by year   │ ------→  │    Studies excluded      │
│       (n = 1,283)           │         │       n=536             │
└─────────────────────────────┘         └─────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│  Studies included by type   │ ------→  │    Studies excluded          │
│       of article            │         │       (n=574)               │
│       (n = 747)             │         │ -Articles not related to     │
└─────────────────────────────┘         │  topic (n=571)              │
              │                          │ - Duplicate articles (n=3)   │
              ▼                          └─────────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Studies included        │ ------→  │    Studies excluded          │
│  (Review of Titles and      │         │       (n=142)               │
│       Abstract)             │         │ - Unrelated articles (n=136) │
│       (n=173)              │         │ - Duplicate articles (n=6)   │
└─────────────────────────────┘         └─────────────────────────────┘
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              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Studies accepted        │
│  (Entire article reviewed)  │
│       (n=31)               │
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Figure 1. Research Strategy

The data collection form allowed us to carry out a descriptive and thematic analysis of the field. The overall strategy of the review methodology is illustrated in Figure 1.

3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Using a graph and descriptive analysis to present the literature on SMIs is key toward understanding trends and strengths and weaknesses of the work. We present our observations on the technical characteristics of the reviewed studies (research platform, year of publication, type of article, applied methods, and publication outlets) as well as contextual characteristics (network platforms studied and the location of the study). This is an important preliminary step toward understanding the nature of the study and identifying any possible gaps that might require further attention.

3.1 Research Platform

There are a total of 173 published articles, 38% (n=66) of which come from the "Web of Science" platform, 33% (n=57) from the "ScienceDirect" platform, and 29% (n=50) from the "Scopus" platform, as seen in Figure 2.
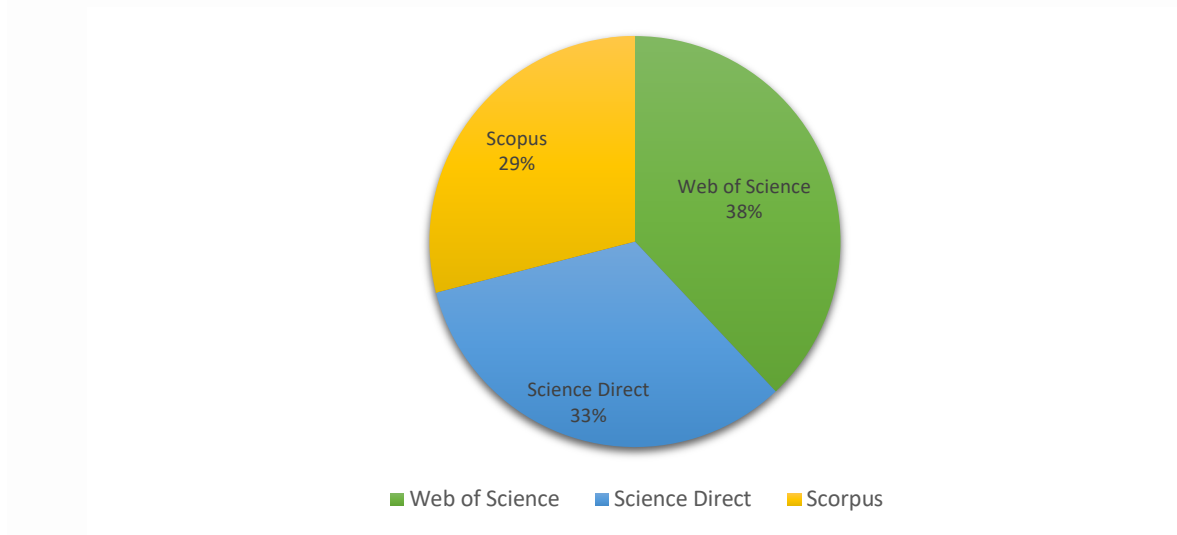
Figure 2. Articles by research platform

3.2 Year of Publication

There were a total of 173 articles used for this paper, all of which were published over a five-year period (between 2017 and 2021). The number of publications used to develop the theme of this

study increased successively over the years. Only 6.9% of articles from 2017 were included in our review. The number of SMI-based themes increased over the last 2 years, as illustrated in Figure 3 (12 articles were published in 2017, 19 articles in 2018, 28 articles in 2019, 40 articles in 2020, and 74 in 2021). This recent explosion of academic interest is representative of the number of practicing MI professionals as well as the increased media attention.
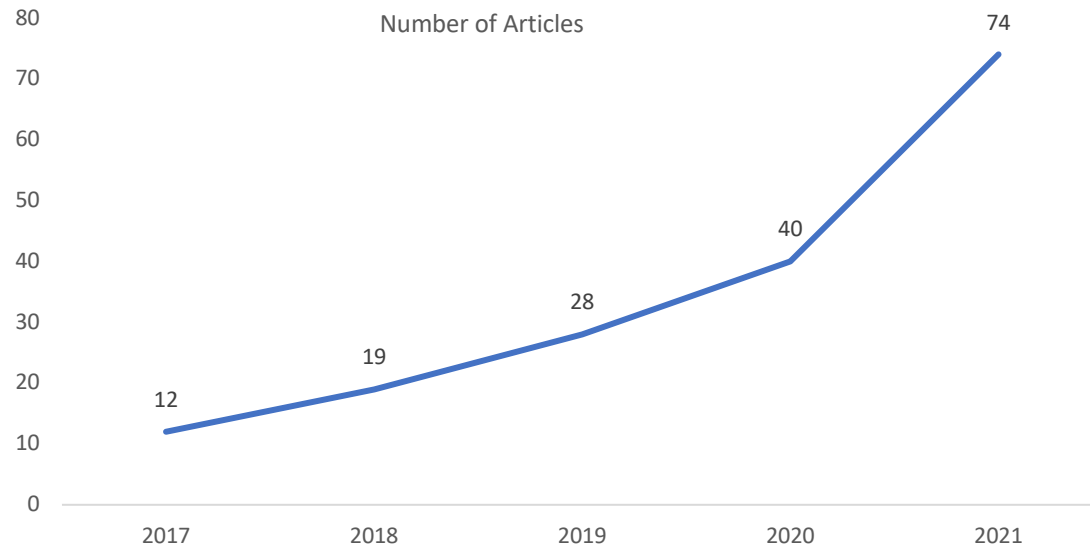
Figure 3. Year of publication

3.3 Types of articles and methods applied

Most of the 31 articles we reviewed were based on empirical studies (93%; n = 29), while the remaining 7% (n = 3) were based on theoretical articles. These findings show that the current state of research on SMI lacks conceptual contributions, which are fundamental to the development of knowledge (MacInnis, 2011). Consequently, future research should focus on expanding the theoretical limits of this field of research.
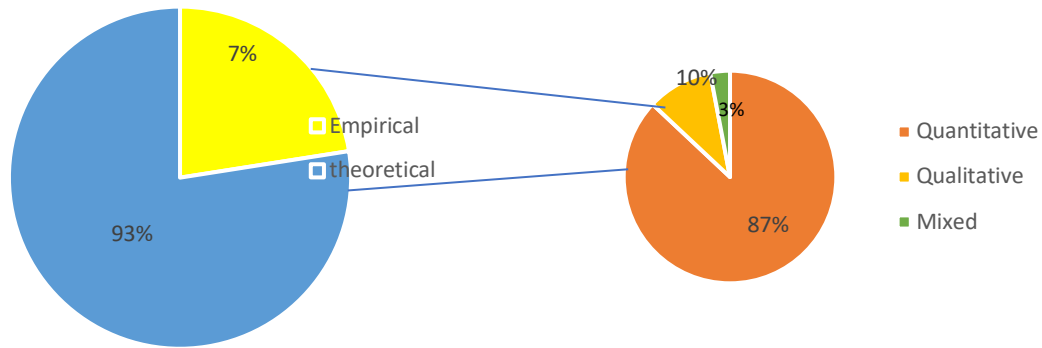
Figure 4. Type / Methodology

As Figure 3 illustrates, 87% of the experimental studies employed quantitative research methods (n = 27), 10% used purely qualitative research methods (n = 3), and the remaining 3% used a mixed method approach (n=1). This demonstrates that researchers give greater importance to theoretical tests (quantitative studies) than they do theoretical construction (qualitative studies).

3.4 Fields of Research

Most of the works belong to the fields of marketing (n = 18; 58%) and advertising (n = 7; 22.5%). The remaining 19.46% are publications from service and retail (n = 2; 6.45%), business (n=2; 6.45%), consumer services (n = 1; 3.22 %), and psychology (n = 1; 3.22%). This research is clearly interdisciplinary in nature. The studies also showed there are a number of publications from a wide variety of journals, as seen in Table 1. The "Journal of Marketing Management" contained the largest number of articles relevant to developing the theme for this paper (n=6), followed by the "International Journal of Advertising" (n=5), the "Journal of Research Interactive Marketing" (n=3), the "Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services" (n=3), the "Journal of Product and Brand Management" (n=2), the "Journal of Advertising" (n=2), and the "International Journal of Research in Marketing" (n=2). A total of eight articles were collected from the following journals: "Marketing Intelligence & Planning", "Psychology & Marketing", the "International Journal of Business Communication", the "Journal of Media Business Studies", the "Journal of Marketing",

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"Journal Advertising", the "Journal of Strategic Marketing", and the "Journal of International Consumer Marketing".

Table 1. Fields of Research

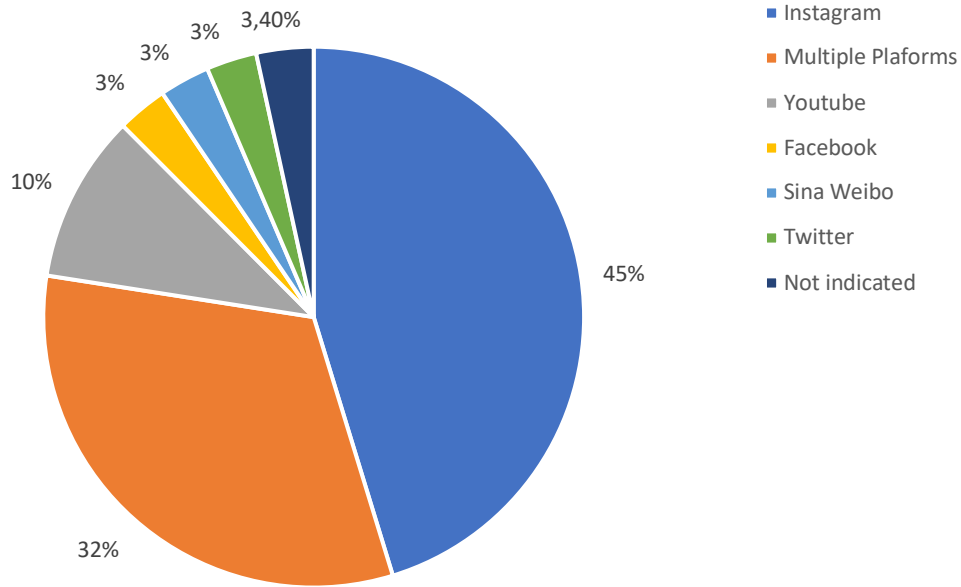| Field of Research	Journal	No. of articles
Marketing	Journal of Marketing Management	6
Advertising	International Journal of Advertising	5
Marketing	Journal of Research Interactive Marketing	3
Retailing and Services	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	3
Marketing	International Journal of Research in Marketing	2
Marketing	Journal of Product and Brand Management	2
Advertising	Journal of Advertising	2
Marketing	Marketing Intelligence \& Planning	1
Business	International Journal of Business Communication	1
Business	Journal of Media Business Studies	1
Marketing	Journal of Marketing	1
Marketing	Journal of Strategic Marketing	1
Consumer Services	Journal of International Consumer Service	1
Psychology	Psychology & Marketing	1

3.5 Citation Analyses

In order to analyze the influence of the selected works, we classified the articles in terms of total number of citations. Table 2 presents the 13 most complete articles in terms of total number of citations. The 7 most cited articles represent 83% of the total citations from all 31 articles. They are (in descending order): Sokolova and Kefi (2020), Hughes and Swaminathan (2019), Voorveld et al. (2019), Ge and Gretzel (2018), Ladhari and Massa (2020), Reinikainen and Munnukka (2019), Schouten and Janssen (2020), Torres and Augusto (2019), Aleti et al. (2019), Taillon and Mueller (2020), Tafesse and Wood (2021), Jin and Muqaddam (2019), and Pezzuti et al.(2021). All these aforementioned studies were conducted from several research areas in a systematic integration of different disciplines.

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Table 2. Number of Citations

Authors	Citations	Journal
Sokolova and Kefi (2020)	211	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
Hughes and Swaminathan (2019)	87	Journal of Marketing
Voorveld et al. (2019)	57	Journal of Marketing Management
Ge and Gretzel (2018)	47	Journal of Marketing Management
Ladhari and Massa (2020)	47	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
Reinikainen and Munnukka (2019)	35	Journal of Marketing Management
Schouten and Janssen (2020)	30	International Journal of Advertising
Torres and Augusto (2019)	28	Psychology & Marketing
Aleti et al. (2019)	23	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing
Taillon and Mueller (2020)	14	Journal of Product and Brand Management
Tafesse and Wood (2021)	10	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
Jin and Muqaddam (2019)	7	Marketing Intelligence & Planning
Pezzuti et al.(2021)	7	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing

3.6 Social Platforms

The results show that Instagram is the most explored social network (45%; n = 14). This comes as no surprise as Instagram is the most popular and important social network for marketing influencers (Breves et al., 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020). As shown in Figure 5, multiple platforms is the second most used social network (32%; n=10), while the third most studied platform is YouTube (10%, n = 3). Facebook, Sina Weibo, and Twitter present smaller percentages and represent a smaller number of the remaining articles used in this paper (one article from each). About 4% of platforms were either not mentioned or identified.

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Figure 5. Social Platforms studied

There were two studies that took a more general approach and did not provide information about the social networks studied. While Instagram is the most important channel for influencer marketing campaigns, more research needs to be done in order to examine other social networks as consumer behavior and/or influencer actions may vary from platform to platform.

3.7 Countries Studied

In terms of geographic coverage, most studies focused on the United States (n = 13). We found three studies from the Netherlands and China, and two studies from Spain, the UK and Australia. We found only one study from a further 7 countries (see Figure 5). Additionally, there was one (1) study that collected samples from several countries and another study (1) that presented no information. As the results show, the excessive dependence on the US and individual countries are the main shortcomings of these studies as they could produce false generalizations about other countries. As a result, with regard to future research, it could be useful to expand to new geographic

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areas in order to better understand multicultural differences and their effects on consumer behavior.
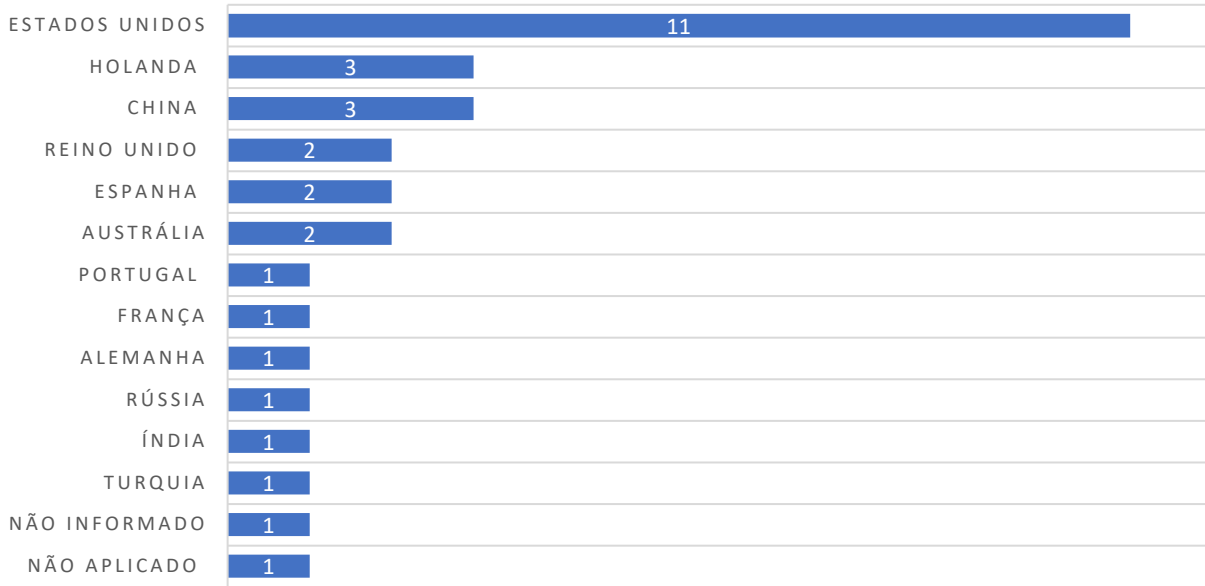
Figure 6. Countries Studied

4. THEMATIC ANALYSES

The thematic analysis gave us an integrated view of academic research on SMIs. Our goal was to identify the main focus of the selected studies so we could then organize them by research themes. First we analyzed the content of the 31 articles, taking into consideration their proposed objectives, research questions/hypotheses, key arguments, and essential models, which helped us determine the main development of each article. The articles were then subsequently ordered and compared in order to classify them by thematic areas. After the analysis was complete, the themes were reviewed, when necessary.The articles were classified into the following five research fields: (1) Source characteristics and effects on buyer intent; (2) Psychological factors and the effects on buyer intent (3); Content attributes and their effects on buyer intent; (4) Strategic evaluation of SMIs as a marketing tool; (4) Influence of psychological factors and their effects on buyer intent; and (5) Sponsorship disclosure and the effects on buyer intent.

Table 3 presents the articles by research topic and their respective relevance. Lastly, we analyzed the main articles from the authors according to their respective fields of research.The first and most common research topic in existing literature addresses the relationship between the characteristics of SMIs and their influence on buyer intent. For example, some researchers argue that the success of MI in social media is due to the perceived verified high credibility (Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim, 2021).

Some researchers such as Schouten and Janssen (2020) and Graeve and Bartsch (2021) claim that influencer credibility is often related to reliability, attractiveness and experience. Authors such as Torres and Augusto (2019) show that both suitability and attractiveness are fundamental for approval. In fact, they influence attitudes towards a particular brand and have an indirect effect on buyer intent.

Scholars argue that while celebrity linking as a marketing communication tool has been extensively examined, the findings and theories are not exactly generalizable to SMIs (Ladhari et al, 2020). This is because there are different types of SMIs based on the number of followers. These are referred to as influencer celebrity, mega influencer, macro influencer, micro influencer and nano influencer (Campbell and Farrell, 2020).

In addition to these five different influencer categories, we have seen the recent emergence of virtual influencers, that is, non-human influencers who are gaining a large number of followers. Lil Miquela is one of the most popular virtual influencers with 2.5 million followers.

Figure 7. Lil Miquela, non-human influencer

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Table 3. Research Themes

Themes	References	Percentage
Characteristics of source / Buyer intent	Zhu and Kim (2021) Graeve and Bartsch (2021); Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2021); Dinh and Lee (2021); Riadh and Massa (2020); Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2021); Schouten and Janssen (2020); Ouvrein and Pabian (2021); Torres and Augusto (2019);	29%
Content / Buyer intent	Tafesse and Wood (2021); Aleti et al. (2019); Pezzuti et al. (2021); Hughes and Swaminathan (2019); Karagar et al (2021); Martinez and Anaya-Sanchez (2020); Ki and Kim (2019).	22%
Psychological factors / Buyer intent	Sokolova and Kefi (2020); Reinikainen and Munnukka (2019); Piehler and Schade (2020); Ladhari et al. (2020); Jin and Muqaddam (2019); Jin and Ryu (2020); Ladhari et al. (2020).	20%
SMI strategies/marketing	Park and Lee (2021); Voorveld, H. A. (2019); Do Nascimento and Campos (2020); Taillon and Mueller (2020); Ge and Gretzel (2018);	16%
Sponsor disclosure/ Buyer intent	Woodroof and Howie (2020); Gerrath et al. (2021); Breves and Amrehn (2021); Cheng and Hung (2021); Hu and Yao (2021).	13%

In fact, an analysis of non-human virtual influencers is relevant in order to understand their appeal and the likely reasons for their success. Further research is needed to clarify whether the histories and consequences of SMI apply to both human and non-human influencers.

The second theme described in the studies relates to the quality and appearance of the content published by the influencer, as well as its effects on buyer intent. In addition to the overall content quality created by the influencer, a growing number of studies also address the specific technical

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characteristics of online publications, which contribute to an influencer's effectiveness. For example, Jin & Muqaddam (2019) called attention to the negative consumer reaction toward online publications that only contain products from influencers, they are seen as purely financially motivated (on the part of the influencer) and are considered inappropriate and intrusive.

However, photos of the influencer with the product tend to generate corporate credibility with PSI and mediate this relationship (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019).

In a similar attempt to identify effective methods of presenting a brand's content, (in the context of influencer-based social commerce) Jin & Ryu (2020) found that the positive relationship between envy and buyer intent for products that SMIs use is stronger when consumers see individual photos of the influencers, particularly men exposed to same-sex influencers, than when they see group photos.

An online publication with large self-indulgent content that also offers campaign giveaways increases media engagement (i.e., comments), but these relationships end up becoming more moderate due to the intent of the campaign ad (awareness vs. test) and platform type (blog vs. Facebook) (Hughes et al., 2019). In a self-indulgent, high-value blog environment, awareness campaigns and campaign giveaways are key for promoting consumer engagement. Conversely, Facebook posts with high self-indulgent content are more beneficial when combined with test campaigns, and campaign giveaways have a negative impact due to the potential destructive effect one platform can have on another (Hughes et al., 2019).

The third research theme, resulting from the systematic review, analyzes the psychological variables of SMIs and their impact on buyer intent. Ladhari et al. (2020) studied beauty vloggers, specifically what makes them popular and how they influence buyer intent. Their study examines vlogger homophily (attitude, appearance and values) and emotional relationships as an explanation for the popularity of vloggers.

There are other researchers who have highlighted positive relationships between homophily, parasocial interaction (PSI), and buyer intent as it pertains to upscale fashion and its influence. Their findings show a strong, positive parasocial interaction (PSI) determined by the homophilic attitude in the perception of upscale brands (i.e., the value of the upscale brand, upscale brand user image adjustment) and, ultimately, on buyer intent (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

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Scholars have examined the role of likeability, attraction and similarity, including the effects of proximity, on attitudes (WOM) and buyer intent. Here, proximity plays an important role in an individual's attitude towards the influencer, as well as buyer intent, and should therefore be carefully considered by digital influencers (DIs). Further research is needed to assess the impact that proximity can have on other known precursors for attitudes and behaviors, thus helping DIs more effectively manage their human brands (Taillon & Mueller, 2020).

Other researchers have analyzed which type of SMI is most effective for social media users by comparing levels of self-esteem ("high" versus "low"). According to this study, social network users with high self-esteem make up part of the dominant form of identification, similarity (Piehler & Schade, 2021). Its objects of identification are SMIs who are similar to reality. In turn, original SMIs which have not gained the same status tend to be more similar than non-original SMIs (close to these real people) and thus have more positive effects on the buyer intent of social network users with high self-esteem. However, optimistic identification with non-original SMIs is more common for social media users with low self-esteem. Compared to original SMIs, non-original SMIs have a more positive effect on purchasing behaviors. In general, the effectiveness of non-original and original SMIs depends on the level of influence of the social media user and their self-esteem levels (Piehler & Schade, 2021).

The fourth theme of this research assesses the effects of sponsors on SMI advertising campaigns and the impact on consumer responses. Scholars have examined the impact of the type of publication used by social media influencers on consumer assessments of influencer transparency, product performance expectations, and how these factors ultimately influence buyer intent.

The results show that when consumers notice that an influencer's brand promotion may have an underlying financial purpose, they tend to rate the influencer as significantly less transparent than if that influencer used a more ambiguous promotion (Woodroof and Howie, 2020).

According to Hu & Yao (2021), current indications on social networks can influence people's interpretations and behaviors in relation to the influencer's messages. The results of the study showed that positive reviews on a YouTube video page (compared to negative reviews) increased consumers' attitudes towards the products. The effect of assessing merit was realized through the manipulative intent of the messages received and interpreted by consumers, and moderated by the nature of the influencer's message.

Studies claim that the status of followers is of great importance when assessing SMIs, their promotional message, and the advertised brand. According to the study, participants who were selected to choose an influencer to follow described higher levels of parasocial relationships (PSR) and subsequently source credibility. These followers had more positive assessments of the promotional post than non-followers did (Breves & Amrehn, 2021).

The fifth and final research topic focuses on the strategic assessment of SMIs as a marketing tool. Some researchers have examined the marketing techniques implemented by DIs. For example, Ge & Gretzel (2018) examined the use of "emojis" by SMIs to increase engagement.

Their results indicate that media influencers make use of different types of "emojis" not only to express opinions and emotions, but also to convey factual information and start factual communication or "small talk". The "emojis" can be used as forms of speech or to play a supporting role. What's more important is that they add to and help strengthen or modify appeals to increase engagement. Essentially, they use "emojis" to express disappointment, frustration, and anger in relation to a variety of issues, probably because these negative emotions have a resonating effect and further distance themselves from media audiences (Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

There are studies that show how using "micro influencers" in marketing campaigns is more effective than using "mega influencers" when advertising self-indulgent products. The findings highlight the potential "trade-off" between increasing reach and maximizing the effectiveness of social media advertising (Park & Lee, 2021). These studies show that when the main goal is brand recognition, working with "mega influencers" is more effective. On the other hand, when the main goal is to improve brand image or increase sales, working with "micro influencers" is likely to be more effective. Lastly, due to the fact that the type of SMI and the effect it has on advertising effectiveness is driven by perceived brand authenticity, the findings suggest that understanding how "mega influencers" can increase the perceived authenticity of their products is an important factor to consider (Park & Lee, 2021).

The underlying process behind purchase decisions, when influenced by influencers, is considered an effective marketing tool. Social media influencers can help change consumer-brand relationships in a positive way (Dinh & Lee, 2020). Interaction between media influencers and their followers in content sharing communities can transfer brand-related messages and persuade followers to buy products and services.

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This study suggests that marketers can choose which media influencers to use for successful advertising campaigns and marketing communication.

Lastly, marketing professionals have to choose the types of influencers based on their marketing strategies as different brands may have different strategies, and choosing the type of influencer is critical at this point.
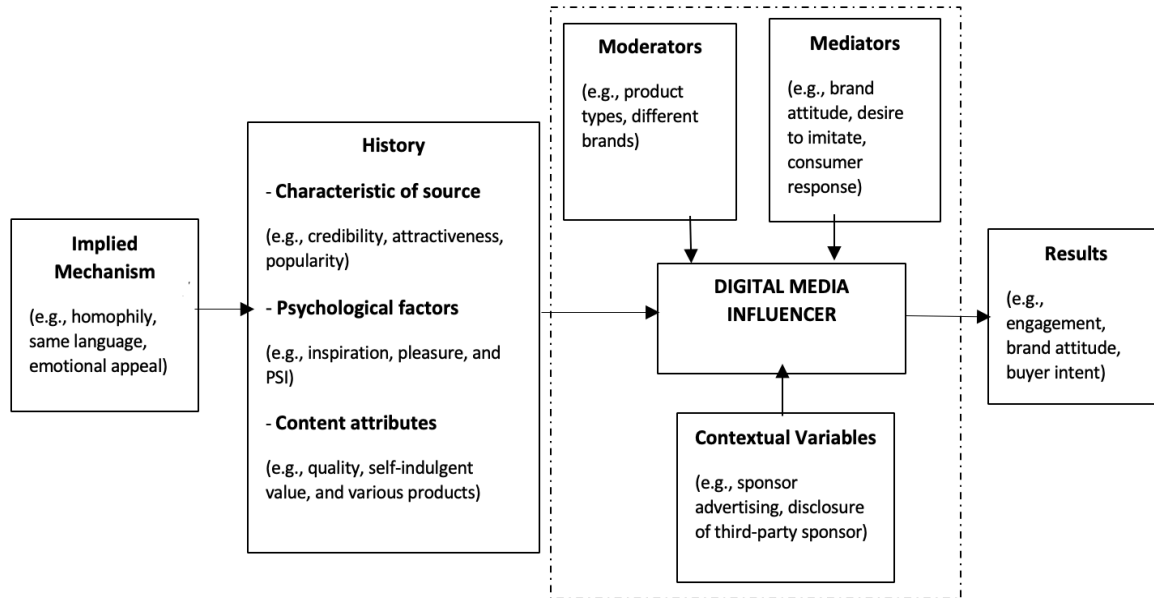
Figure 8. Thematic analysis of literature model

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

This study is an analysis, using a systematic literature review, of digital influencers in marketing. The literature was taken from scientific articles published on the platforms "Web of Science", "Scopus" and "ScienceDirect" between 2017 and 2021.

Our study found a significant increase in publications on Digital Influencers, as illustrated in Figure 3. The year 2021 had the highest number of publications; however, the most significant and impactful year was 2020, which had the highest number of citations.

Most of the 31 articles we reviewed were empirical studies, with only three articles being theoretical in nature. According to our literature review, most of the studies employed the

quantitative method. Three studies used the qualitative method and only one used both quantitative and qualitative methods, as shown in Figure 4.

The results of the analysis of the citations in Table II showed that the work by Sokolova and Kefi in 2020 is the most cited among the studies used in this paper. The authors analyzed the relationship between number of followers and negative impact. Hughes and Swaminathan's work in 2019 is the second most cited. They examined the successful proponents of marketing campaigns that use digital influencers. Voorveld's study in 2019 is the third most cited. In this study, the researchers review the communication of brands in social networks. The two main and most cited publications were the "Journal of Marketing Management" and the "International Journal of Advertising", as per Table II.

The largest number of publications came from the United States, as shown in Figure 8.

Our analysis of the 31 articles showed that the most studied research theme in current literature is the relationship between the characteristics of SMIs and their influence on buyer intent. The second most studied theme is the influencer's credibility and the effects on reliability, attraction and experience.

These findings provide academics and practitioners with useful information for further research in the area of negative emotions and their relationship with brands. It can also help marketing researchers stay up-to-date on key research topics in this area.

Lastly, it helps to further understanding of the theoretical foundations and increase the range of knowledge in the area of negative emotions and brands, which could be useful for future research. This study is not without its limitations. Similar to other systematic reviews in the field of marketing research, this paper was compiled on the basis of articles written in the English language, published in academic peer-reviewed journals and publications included in the journal quality guide. As a result, works that may be relevant such as book chapters, conference proceedings, dissertations, and other literature were excluded. For the purposes of future research, other publication outlets should be considered.

Three platforms were used: "Web of Science"; "Scopus"; and "ScienceDirect". Even though these platforms are the most recognized and contain the most complete scientific databases, they may be missing articles that could be relevant to the topic in this paper. Other platforms should be examined in order to increase the range of knowledge for future studies.

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As mentioned earlier, most of the articles we analyzed are empirical in nature, using mainly quantitative methods. Considering the relative newness of MIs as a research topic and the complex interrelationships between the variables within this field of study, a more qualitative investigation would be ideal in order to obtain an understanding of emerging phenomena and advanced knowledge of development through theory extension or theory formulation. Lastly, this paper can act as an incentive for future studies to use mixed methods (there are few of these) and take into account the need for more relevant insights and generalizations.

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