



Bibliometric Analysis of Social Media Marketing and Hospital Brand Credibility: A Systematic Mapping Review

Guntur Adi Wibowo^{1,*}, Aflit Nuryulia Praswati², Yusuf Alam Romadhon³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS), Indonesia

Email korespondensi: gunturadiwibowo7@gmail.com

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ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Perkembangan media sosial telah mendorong transformasi dalam strategi pemasaran layanan kesehatan di rumah sakit sehingga pembentukan *brand credibility* melalui *platform* digital menjadi isu yang penting. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memetakan dan menganalisis secara sistematis perkembangan riset mengenai *social media marketing* dan hubungannya dengan pembentukan *brand credibility* rumah sakit dengan pendekatan pada peran *brand awareness*, *brand trust*, dan *parasocial relationship*. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan *systematic mapping review* yang dipandu oleh tahapan PRISMA pada proses identifikasi dan seleksi literatur. Data diperoleh dari database Scopus pada 26 Juni 2025. Sebanyak 26 artikel ilmiah terpilih melalui tahapan identifikasi, penyaringan judul dan abstrak, dan evaluasi kelayakan berdasarkan kriteria inklusi. Studi yang direview didominasi oleh penelitian kuantitatif berbasis survei dan *structural equation modeling*, dengan sebagian kecil menggunakan pendekatan *mixed methods*. Analisis data dilakukan melalui pendekatan bibliometrik menggunakan perangkat lunak VOSviewer untuk memetakan tren publikasi dan hubungan konseptual antar variabel. **Hasil:** Hasil analisis menunjukkan peningkatan jumlah publikasi sejak tahun 2021 dengan dominasi tema *digital branding*, kepercayaan konsumen, dan interaksi emosional melalui media sosial. Pemetaan kata kunci menunjukkan *brand awareness* dan *brand trust* merupakan simpul konseptual utama yang terhubung dengan *parasocial interaction* dan *brand credibility*. Hasil studi-studi yang direview menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif antara aktivitas *social media marketing*, peningkatan *brand awareness* dan *brand trust*, dan pembentukan *brand credibility*, meskipun kekuatan pengaruhnya bervariasi antar penelitian. **Kesimpulan:** *Social media marketing* berperan dalam memperkuat *brand credibility* rumah sakit melalui peningkatan kesadaran merek, pembentukan kepercayaan, dan penguatan hubungan psikologis dengan audiens. Hasil ini bersifat sintesis berbasis pemetaan literatur dan belum merepresentasikan pengukuran kausalitas langsung sehingga penelitian empiris lanjutan masih diperlukan.

ABSTRACT

Background: The development of social media has driven a transformation in hospital healthcare marketing strategies, making the

formation of brand credibility through digital platforms an important issue. **Objective:** This study aims to systematically map and analyze the development of research on social media marketing and its relationship with the formation of hospital brand credibility, with a focus on the roles of brand awareness, brand trust, and parasocial relationships. **Methods:** This study employed a systematic mapping review approach guided by PRISMA stages in the processes of literature identification and selection. Data were obtained from the Scopus database on June 26, 2025. A total of 26 scientific articles were selected through identification, title and abstract screening, and eligibility assessment based on inclusion criteria. The reviewed studies were predominantly quantitative, employing survey-based methods and structural equation modeling, with a smaller proportion using mixed-method approaches. Data analysis was conducted using a bibliometric approach with VOSviewer software to map publication trends and conceptual relationships among variables. **Results:** The analysis indicates an increase in the number of publications since 2021, with dominant themes related to digital branding, consumer trust, and emotional interaction through social media. Keyword mapping shows that brand awareness and brand trust are key conceptual nodes closely connected to parasocial interaction and brand credibility. The reviewed studies indicate positive relationships between social media marketing activities, increased brand awareness and brand trust, and the formation of brand credibility, although the strength of these relationships varies across studies. **Conclusion:** Social media marketing plays a role in strengthening hospital brand credibility through enhanced brand awareness, trust formation, and the reinforcement of psychological relationships with audiences. These findings represent a synthesis based on literature mapping and do not yet reflect direct causal measurement; therefore, further empirical research is still required.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology and the widespread use of social media have significantly transformed how people learn, communicate, and make purchasing decisions in the contemporary era (Fernando *et al.*, 2024; Sesar *et al.*, 2022). Advances in digital technology have positioned online platforms as some of the most effective and attractive marketing channels, as organizations to disseminate information about products and services through various digital intermediaries (Fernando *et al.*, 2024; Praswati *et al.*, 2024). In the business, social media marketing has become an essential component of modern marketing strategies due to its ability to reach broad audiences efficiently. This digital transformation has also profoundly impacted the healthcare sector, particularly hospitals. Amid increasingly intense competition among healthcare providers, traditional marketing approaches are gradually being replaced by technology-driven strategies such as social media marketing. Social media platforms allow hospitals not only to share information but also to build emotional connections with their audiences, which is crucial for fostering patient engagement and establishing a positive institutional image (Bushara *et al.*, 2023).

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia in 2020 placed immense pressure on the healthcare industry, as the crisis negatively affected the global economy, industries, and organizations, including marketing strategies and expenditures. The pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital marketing practices within the healthcare sector, as restrictions on physical interactions limited conventional communication channels. Hospitals were compelled to optimize social

media platforms as primary tools for information dissemination and public engagement. During this period, digital communication became essential for maintaining trust and transparency between healthcare providers and the public. Social media channels enabled hospitals to rapidly share updates, health guidelines, and service information. Consequently, the pandemic served as a catalyst for the deeper integration of social media marketing into healthcare communication strategies.

Social media marketing strategies have since become integral to hospitals and medical practices for building service images, interacting with patients, and strengthening reputations in competitive healthcare markets. Compared to traditional marketing approaches, digital marketing is widely regarded as more effective in reaching internet users and engaging diverse audiences. Hospital marketing fundamentally aims to understand the needs and expectations of prospective patients to ensure that healthcare services align with those expectations (Mustikasari *et al.*, 2024). Through social media platforms, hospitals can gain valuable insights into patient preferences and feedback. This interactive nature of social media allows healthcare institutions to respond more dynamically to patient concerns.

Empirical studies show that internet-based and social media marketing strategies are more cost-efficient than direct marketing while offering opportunities to reach virtual customers, overcome geographical barriers, and increase service awareness at any time and place (Jayawardena *et al.*, 2024). In high-involvement service sectors such as healthcare, brand credibility plays a critical role in reducing perceived risk among consumers (Park *et al.*, 2022). Social media utilization not only enhances visibility but also facilitates long-term relationships through social support, value co-creation, and parasocial interactions that strengthen patients' emotional attachment to healthcare institutions (Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2023; de Assis & Vilela, 2025). These interactions enable patients to perceive healthcare brands as more trustworthy and reliable. Moreover, digital engagement fosters continuous communication beyond clinical encounters.

The synergy between digital communicator credibility and positive consumer attitudes has been shown to enhance trust and patient well-being within modern healthcare ecosystems (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024; Vilas Chavare *et al.*, 2025). Effective social media communication allows hospitals to humanize their brands and convey expertise, empathy, and transparency. These elements are particularly important in healthcare, where trust significantly influences patient decision-making. Through consistent and credible digital messaging, hospitals can mitigate uncertainty and anxiety among patients. As healthcare consumers increasingly rely on online information, the credibility of hospital brands becomes closely tied to their digital presence.

However, despite the growing body of literature on social media marketing, existing studies have not systematically examined how brand awareness, brand trust, and parasocial relationships interact simultaneously in shaping brand credibility specifically within hospital settings. Much of the empirical evidence addressing these constructs originates from non-healthcare sectors such as cosmetics, beauty influencers, and lifestyle branding (Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2023; Liu & Zheng, 2024; Sesar *et al.*, 2022), which differ substantially from healthcare services in terms of perceived risk, ethical considerations, and decision-making complexity. While findings from these sectors provide valuable theoretical insights into emotional engagement, credibility perception, and parasocial interaction, their direct generalization to hospital contexts remains limited, as healthcare services involve higher trust dependency and

information asymmetry (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Park *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the absence of an integrated and healthcare-focused synthesis that systematically maps research trends, dominant themes, and conceptual linkages among social media marketing, brand awareness, brand trust, parasocial relationships, and brand credibility highlights a critical research gap that this study seeks to address.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of social media marketing activities within healthcare services using a systematic literature review approach. Specifically, it evaluates the development of research over the past decade, identifies the most frequently cited articles, and analyzes commonly occurring keywords within the relevant literature. Furthermore, this research critically explores how elements such as brand awareness, parasocial relationships, and brand trust influence perceptions of brand credibility in healthcare facilities. By concerning explicitly on hospital-related, this study seeks to bridge the gap between general digital marketing research and healthcare branding literature. The study seeks to identify and address existing knowledge gaps, particularly regarding the interactions among these variables. By synthesizing prior research, this paper provides a robust theoretical foundation for future studies in healthcare marketing.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA framework to explore how brand awareness, parasocial relationships, and brand trust influence brand credibility within healthcare facilities. The SLR method was selected to provide a structured, transparent, and reproducible process for synthesizing existing research and establishing a strong theoretical foundation regarding the interrelationships among these variables in healthcare marketing. The PRISMA approach was applied specifically to the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies to ensure methodological transparency and replicability. This approach is particularly suitable for addressing the dynamic nature of brand promotion and communication in the healthcare industry, where digital engagement and trust play an important role (Praswati & Biruwintari, 2025). By systematically reviewing prior studies, this research aims to capture comprehensive insights into branding mechanisms relevant to healthcare services. The review focuses on peer-reviewed scholarly articles to ensure academic rigor and reliability.

The initial stage of the review process involved selecting Scopus as the primary literature database, with the search conducted on 26 June 2025. Scopus was chosen due to:

1. Its extensive coverage of high-quality;
2. Peer-reviewed journals;
3. Strong reputation in indexing scholarly publications across healthcare, management, and marketing disciplines.

The database provides access to up-to-date and reputable scientific articles, making it highly suitable for interdisciplinary research that bridges healthcare services and marketing studies. The search strategy was designed to capture literature relevant to branding constructs within healthcare facilities. Keywords were systematically developed to reflect the core variables of the study, including brand awareness, parasocial relationships, brand trust, and brand credibility, specifically within healthcare service contexts.

Following the database selection, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to guide the screening process. The inclusion criteria comprised articles that explicitly examined at least one of the main variables:

1. Brand Awareness;
2. Parasocial Relationships
3. Brand Trust,
4. Brand Credibility

and applied them within healthcare facilities. Only articles published in peer-reviewed journals were considered to maintain methodological quality. Articles that were irrelevant to healthcare branding, lacked conceptual or empirical rigor, or fell outside the scope of the research focus were excluded. To further ensure the robustness of the review, a quality appraisal process was conducted. Quantitative studies were assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist, while qualitative components were evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. Articles that did not meet minimum quality thresholds were excluded from the final synthesis:

1. During the identification stage, the literature search conducted on 26 June 2025 initially yielded 109 articles relevant to the research topic.
2. To ensure the timeliness and relevance of the review, a publication year filter was applied, limiting the articles to those published between 2016 and 2025, which reduced the number to 69 articles.
3. Subsequently, an additional filter based on subject areas Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Medicine, and Health Professions was applied to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of healthcare marketing research, resulting in 65 articles.
4. Further screening verified that each article explicitly addressed one or more of the core variables within a healthcare facility.
5. After the PRISMA-guided screening and quality appraisal stages, 26 articles were identified as meeting all inclusion criteria and were deemed most relevant for the final analysis.

These 26 selected articles formed the basis for the subsequent stages of literature analysis and synthesis. A thematic synthesis was conducted to systematically categorize and integrate findings across studies, focusing on recurring themes related to

1. Brand Awareness;
2. Parasocial Relationships;
3. Brand Trust;
4. Brand Credibility In Healthcare.

Rather than estimating causal effect sizes, this synthesis aimed to identify patterns of relationships, conceptual mechanisms, and contextual differences reported across empirical studies. The article screening and selection procedure is shown in Figure 1, which presents the step-by-step PRISMA flow of the filtering and appraisal process used in this study.

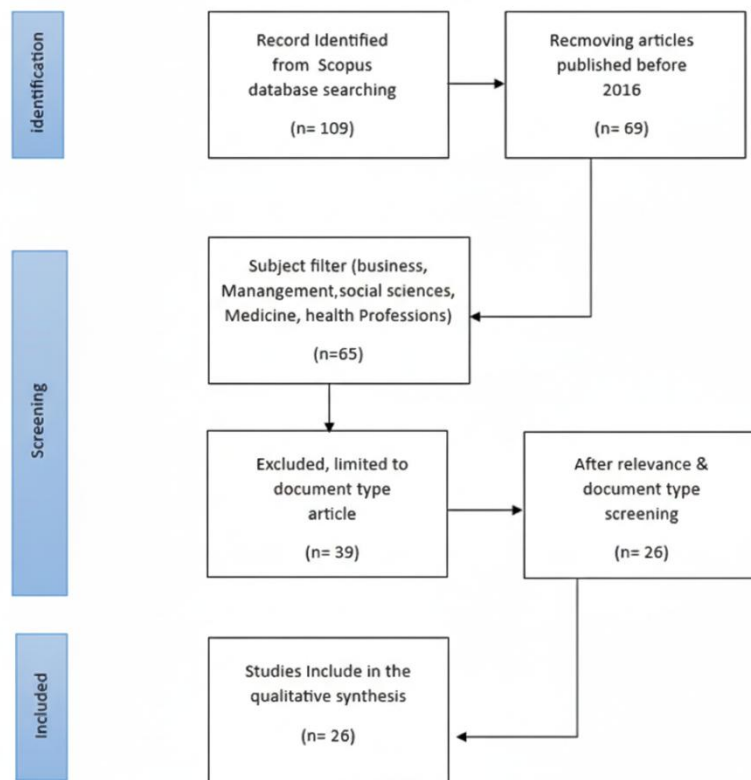


Figure 1. Research Article Screening Procedure

RESULTS

The descriptive analysis based on data retrieved from the Scopus database reveals a clear upward trend in publications related to social media marketing in healthcare services, particularly those concerning on the keywords “social media marketing” AND “brand awareness” OR “brand trust” OR “parasocial” AND “credibility” AND “hospital” OR “healthcare”. As showed in Figure 2, research activity in this field began to emerge in 2016, although the number of publications during the early years remained very limited and relatively stagnant until 2018. A gradual increase in publications became evident starting in 2019, followed by a substantial and sustained growth that peaked in 2023 with more than 40 published documents. Although a slight decline is observed in 2024 and publication levels appear relatively stable in 2025, the overall number of studies remains significantly higher than in the pre-2019 period.

It is important to emphasize that this growth shows an expansion of scholarly attention rather than a consolidation of empirical evidence regarding causal effects or effect sizes of social media marketing on hospital brand credibility. The sharp increase in publications from 2021 onward is likely influenced by the digital transformation of hospital marketing strategies following the COVID-19 pandemic (Andriani *et al.*, 2021; Fasda *et al.*, 2021; Romadhon *et al.*, 2022). During this period, healthcare institutions were compelled to intensify their use of social media platforms for communication, promotion, and reputation management. However, most studies published during this surge rely on cross-sectional designs and self-reported perceptions, limiting their capacity to establish robust empirical magnitudes of influence.

This surge also suggests that social media is no longer perceived merely as a promotional tool, but rather as a strategic platform for enhancing brand awareness, building trust, and fostering emotional connections between healthcare providers and the public. Nevertheless, the existing literature predominantly documents thematic associations and publication trends rather than systematically comparing empirical outcomes across studies. Consequently, while the topic has evolved into a significant area of inquiry within healthcare marketing literature, its empirical conclusions regarding brand credibility remain fragmented.

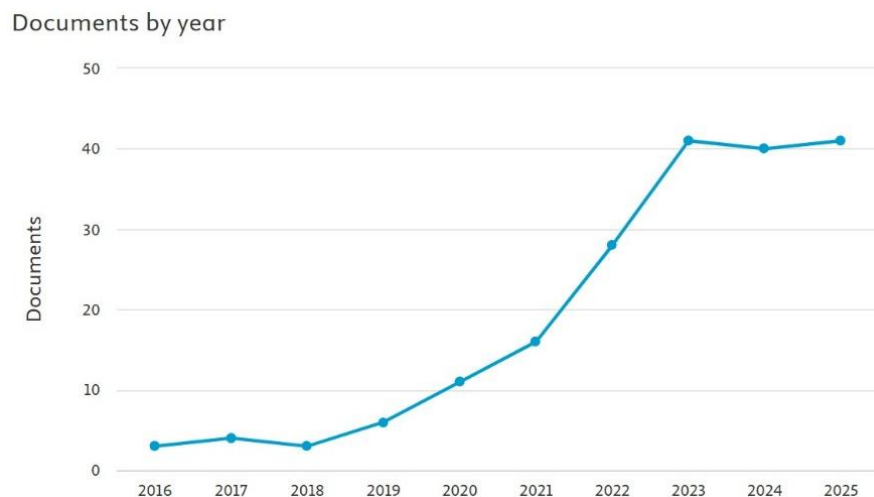


Figure 2. Number of Publications From 2016 to 2025

In addition to publication trends over time, Figure 3 presents the distribution of documents by country or region of origin. The results show that the United States dominates the number of publications in this research area, followed by China, Taiwan, and several Asian countries such as Malaysia, India, and South Korea. The dominance of the United States can be attributed to the high level of digital adoption in its healthcare sector and the strong emphasis on social media-based marketing strategies to build trust and institutional reputation. Several Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia, have begun to contribute to this body of literature, although their publication numbers remain relatively modest.

This geographical distribution further indicates that empirical findings are highly dependent and often shaped by differences in healthcare systems, digital literacy, and regulatory environments. This finding suggests that research on social media marketing in healthcare particularly studies addressing brand awareness, trust, and parasocial relationships remains underdeveloped at the local and regional levels. Accordingly, direct generalization of findings across countries or sectors should be approached with caution. It is important to note that this distribution analysis is quantitative in nature and reflects only publication counts, showing the need for future studies to incorporate contextual and methodological comparisons beyond bibliometric indicators.

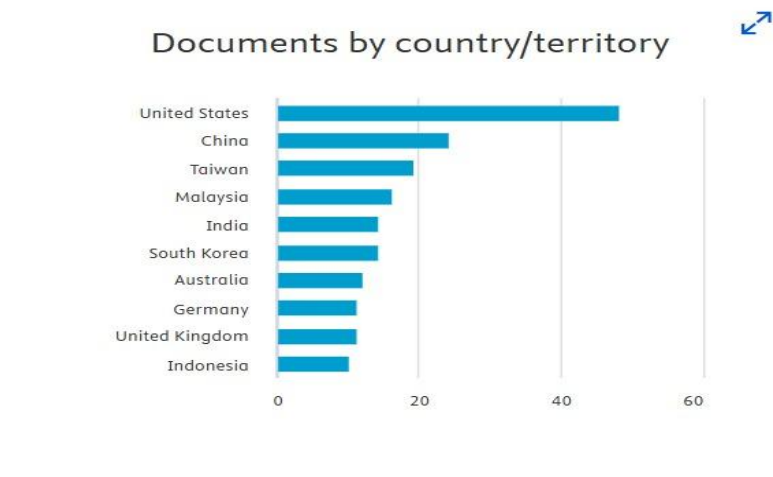


Figure 3. Geographical Distribution of Research.

DISCUSSION

A bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer version 1.6.20 to map the relationships among keywords appearing in the 26 selected Scopus-indexed articles. The data were downloaded on 26 June 2025 and analyzed using a co-occurrence analysis method, with author keywords as the unit of analysis and binary counting as the counting method. A minimum threshold of four keyword occurrences was applied to ensure analytical relevance. Out of a total of 780 identified terms, 80 keywords met the threshold and were included in the visualization. While this method effectively captures thematic structures and research trends, it does not provide quantitative estimates of effect size, directionality, or comparative strength of relationships between variables. The network visualization shown in Figure 4 reveals several major thematic clusters formed based on keyword proximity and co-occurrence relationships.

The network visualization showed in Figure 4 reveals several major thematic clusters formed based on keyword proximity and co-occurrence relationships. The red cluster is dominated by terms such as social medium, brand awareness, interaction, trendiness, and brand knowledge. The yellow cluster centers on keywords such as parasocial interaction, brand trust, and brand identification, reflecting the emotional and psychological dimensions of audience interaction with institutions or influencers. This cluster aligns closely with the parasocial relationship variable examined in this study. Meanwhile, the blue cluster includes terms such as influencer credibility, consumer trust, COVID, primary data, and consumer intention, highlighting the centrality of credibility and trust-related issues in post-pandemic research. The green cluster, which includes keywords such as marketing, trust, attitude, and credibility, reinforces the notion that trust and perceived credibility serve as core connectors across multiple research themes.

Notably, the presence of keywords related to beauty, cosmetics, influencers, and luxury brands shows that a substantial portion of the empirical foundation originates outside the healthcare sector. These studies are included not as direct evidence of hospital outcomes, but as conceptual references that show transferable mechanisms such as credibility formation, trust-building, and parasocial interaction that may operate similarly in healthcare settings under specific conditions. However,

the absence of explicit justification or contextual adaptation in several studies represents a methodological limitation within the current body of literature.

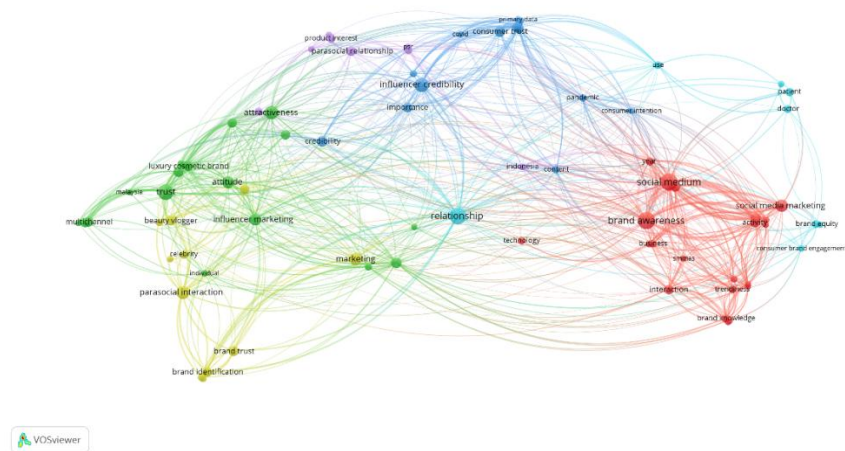


Figure 4. Network Visualization of Keyword Co-Occurrence

The overlay visualization shown in Figure 5 provides insights into the temporal evolution of research themes. Keywords such as social media marketing, interaction, brand knowledge, and trendiness appear predominantly in blue to greenish-blue tones, indicating that these topics were extensively discussed in studies published between 2021 and 2022. This shows that early research primarily focused on social media as a promotional tool and its role in shaping initial brand perceptions. In contrast, keywords such as parasocial interaction, brand trust, consumer trust, influencer credibility, and credibility appear in bright yellow tones, signifying their prominence in more recent publications from 2023 to 2024.

This temporal shift shows a growing conceptual emphasis on emotional and relational dimensions, yet the empirical findings across studies remain inconsistent in terms of measurement approaches, variable operationalization, and outcome indicators. Some studies report direct effects of social media marketing on trust or credibility, while others identify indirect or mediated relationships, particularly through brand awareness or parasocial interaction. Such inconsistencies limit the comparability of results and hinder the synthesis of cumulative empirical conclusions.

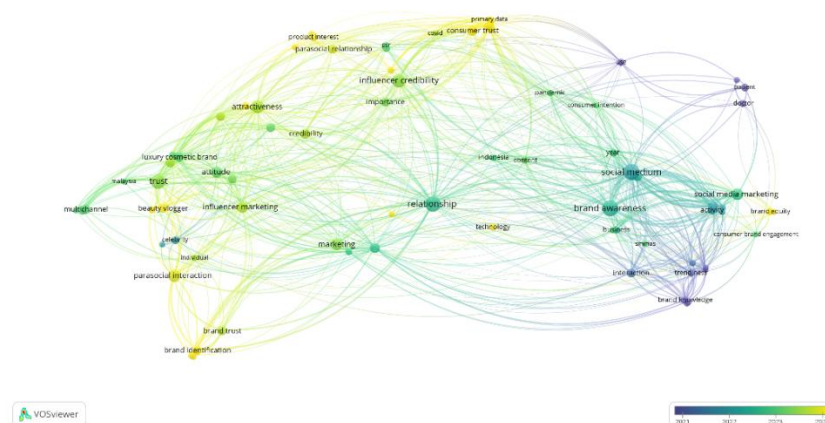


Figure 5. Overlay Visualization of Keyword Trends

Brand awareness represents the extent to which consumers recognize and recall a brand, and in the digital era, it is strongly influenced by social media marketing activities that deliver both informative and entertaining content. Such strategies not only enhance visibility but also foster parasocial relationships, defined as one-sided psychological connections in which consumers perceive a sense of personal closeness with a brand (Cheung *et al.*, 2020; Dwiphala & Astuti, 2024). This pattern is evident in the VOSviewer visualization, where brand awareness, interaction, and social medium emerge as central nodes within the red cluster, representing the cognitive dimension of brand communication. Strong linkages between parasocial interaction, influencer credibility, and trust are also observed in the yellow and green clusters, reinforcing the notion that credible and engaging content facilitates emotional bonding between consumers and brands (Bushara *et al.*, 2023). In the overlay visualization, parasocial interaction and brand trust appear more prominently in publications from 2023-2024, that these themes represent relatively recent yet rapidly developing research areas. However, the magnitude and consistency of this influence vary substantially across sectors and study designs.

High levels of brand awareness are frequently associated with enhanced perceptions of credibility, yet few studies provide standardized effect measures or comparative statistical evidence to substantiate the strength of this relationship specifically within hospital settings. Hien and Nhu (2022) argue that brand awareness functions as a moderating variable in the relationship between digital marketing and brand credibility (Hien & Nhu, 2022). This perspective is consistent with the findings of Faisal and Ekawanto (2022), who demonstrate a positive influence of brand awareness on both brand image and brand credibility (Faisal *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, brand trust has been shown to strengthen brand identification and enhance perceptions of credibility (Kim *et al.*, 2024). Strong parasocial relationships encourage positive brand perceptions, reinforcing trust and shaping consumers' behavioral intentions but most supporting evidence is derived from non-healthcare contexts, such as beauty, fitness, and lifestyle industries (Dewi & Praswati, 2024; Jamal *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2023; Liu & Zheng, 2024). Um (2022) emphasizes that the combination of parasocial interaction strength, message authenticity, and congruence between the brand figure and the brand itself plays role in establishing robust brand credibility in the minds of audiences (Um, 2022).

Table 1. Ten Articles with the Highest Relevance

No.	Author(s)	Research Content
1	(Liu & Zheng, 2024)	This study examines the influence of social media influencers on brand credibility and purchase intention. The findings indicate that influencer credibility significantly enhances perceptions of brand credibility, which in turn increases consumers' purchase intentions.
2	(Hariyanti <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	This study analyzes the effect of social media marketing on patients' visit intentions, with brand awareness acting as a mediating variable. The results show that consistent and informative social media campaigns increase public awareness, which subsequently encourages intentions to visit healthcare facilities. Brand awareness is proven to be a crucial link between digital promotion and hospital service credibility.

3	(Hien & Nhu, 2022)	This research examines digital marketing transformation trends and their impact on purchase intention in B2B businesses, with brand awareness as a moderating variable. The findings reveal that brand awareness strengthens the relationship between digital marketing strategies and both purchase intention and consumer brand credibility. This study analyzes the role of social media marketing in shaping brand awareness, brand image, and purchase intention. The results show that social media is effective in building strong brand awareness, which indirectly enhances brand image perception. High brand awareness contributes to increased consumer purchase intention toward the services offered. Consequently, hospitals that actively use social media with consistent and relevant messaging can strengthen their brand positioning in patients' minds.
4	(Faisal <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	This study analyzes the effects of social support and influencer credibility on emotional brand attachment, with trust as a mediating variable. The results indicate that trust in influencers strengthens consumers' emotional bonds with a brand. In the healthcare context, this strategy can enhance patient loyalty and trust through more human-centered social media engagement.
5	(Abdul Aziz <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	This study highlights the influence of influencer credibility on beauty product purchasing behavior in Vietnam. The findings show that influencer trustworthiness and expertise directly affect brand credibility and purchase intention. This context can be applied to hospital strategies by leveraging trusted public figures to enhance service credibility.
6	(An <i>et al.</i> , 2024)	This study explores the influence of vlogger attributes on followers' purchase intention, with parasocial interaction as a moderating variable. The results indicate that attractiveness, expertise, and authenticity of vloggers increase purchase intention, particularly when parasocial relationships are strong. These findings imply that hospitals can build credibility through relatable and approachable figures on social media.
7	(Atta <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	This study investigates the impact of fitness influencers on social media on exercise intention during the COVID-19 pandemic, with parasocial relationships as a mediating variable. The results show that strong parasocial relationships enhance trust and the intention to follow influencer-promoted behaviors. These findings are relevant for building patient engagement through social media-based healthcare services.
8	(Liu & Zheng, 2024)	This study examines the effect of advertising disclosure on perceptions of influencer credibility and purchase intention. The results indicate that transparency in paid content increases trust in influencers, which subsequently has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention. In the hospital context, transparent promotional communication can strengthen institutional credibility.
9	(Sesar <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	This study focuses on the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention for luxury cosmetic products among urban women in Malaysia. The findings reveal that influencer credibility and attractiveness
10	(Abdullah <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	

significantly affect trust and purchase intention. This supports the notion that visual appeal and emotional relationships on social media play an important role in shaping brand perceptions.

Table 1 summarizes the ten most relevant scholarly articles that support the development of the theoretical framework and research direction in the study of social media marketing for healthcare services. Collectively, these journals not only illustrate how hospitals or healthcare institutions utilize social media, but also highlight the strategic roles of brand awareness, trust, and parasocial relationships in shaping brand credibility. For instance, Hariyanti *et al.* (2023) specifically discuss how social media marketing increases patients' visit intentions, with brand awareness serving as a mediating variable. Their findings show that informative and consistent social media content significantly enhances public awareness of hospital services, which subsequently strengthens perceptions of service quality. These results are consistent with Faisal and Ekawanto (2022), who explain that social media marketing positively influences brand awareness and brand image, which ultimately drive purchase intention a concept comparable to the intention to choose healthcare services in a hospital. Hien and Nhu (2022) further emphasize the role of brand awareness as a moderating variable that strengthens the impact of digital marketing on brand credibility and purchase intention. This suggests that brand awareness not only has a direct effect but also amplifies the influence of other digital variables on consumer perceptions (Faisal *et al.*, 2021; Hariyanti *et al.*, 2023; Hien & Nhu, 2022).

On the other hand, Liu and Zheng (2024), Norzalita Abdul Aziz (2023), and Abdullah *et al.* (2023) discuss how influencer credibility and emotional relationships (parasocial relationships) enhance trust and brand loyalty. Their studies find that consumers' emotional engagement arising from symbolic closeness with social media figures has a tangible impact on perceptions of brand trust and credibility. In the healthcare context, such relationships may occur when hospitals present doctors, nurses, or health educators who are consistent, informative, and relatable. An *et al.* (2024) and Sesar *et al.* (2022) also emphasize the importance of credibility and transparency in digital marketing communication. Disclosure and honesty in information delivery directly contribute to the formation of trust and audience behavioral intentions, including service selection decisions. Furthermore, Li *et al.* (2023) and Atta *et al.* (2025) confirm that parasocial interaction plays a significant mediating role in the influence of social media messages on consumer behavior. They find that the stronger the one-sided symbolic relationship formed between audiences and figures or institutions presented on social media, the greater the likelihood that the brand will be perceived as credible and trustworthy (Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2023; Abdullah *et al.*, 2023; An *et al.*, 2024; Atta *et al.*, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2023; Liu & Zheng, 2024; Sesar *et al.*, 2022). Current findings should be interpreted as indicative patterns of association rather than definitive empirical proof of causal influence. While existing studies collectively suggest that social media marketing can contribute to hospital brand credibility through mechanisms of awareness, trust, and emotional engagement, the literature lacks systematic comparisons of effect sizes, longitudinal validation, and sector-specific methodological rigor.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Social media marketing influences hospital brand credibility through the reinforcement of brand awareness, brand trust, and parasocial relationships. Increasing digitalization in healthcare services, social media functions not only as a communication and promotional channel but also as a powerful mechanism for shaping perceptions, trust, and emotional attachment between hospitals and the public. The systematic literature review shows that informative and entertaining content enhances brand awareness, which subsequently strengthens brand trust and fosters one-sided psychological connections (parasocial relationships) with audiences, all of which collectively contribute to the formation of brand credibility an essential determinant of patient preference and loyalty. These findings show the strategic role of social media marketing in strengthening hospital brand positioning in the digital era. However, this study is subject to several limitations, including its reliance on published literature within a specific time frame (2016-2025), its focus on only three key variables, and its exclusive emphasis on the hospital sector, which may limit generalizability. Moreover, the predominance of quantitative and cross-sectional designs in the reviewed studies constrains insights into long-term and qualitative emotional dynamics. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches, incorporate additional variables such as electronic word-of-mouth, service quality, and patient experience, and explore longitudinal perspectives to develop more comprehensive and effective social media marketing strategies for enhancing hospital brand credibility in the evolving digital landscape.

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