



Trust in Social Commerce: Insights from a Bibliometric Review and BERTopic Topic Modelling Analysis

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Received: 05 April 2026

Accepted: 28 July 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32479/irmm.24322>

ABSTRACT

This study integrates bibliometric analysis and BERTopic topic modelling to systematically examine the development and thematic structure of trust research in social commerce. Following the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, this study analyses 1,055 publications retrieved from Web of Science and Scopus from 2005 to May 2026. Bibliometric analysis examines the publication trends, influential contributors, key journals, and institutional concentrations of trust research in social commerce. BERTopic analysis identifies 13 distinct research themes and traces their evolution over two decades. Building on these findings, an integrative framework is proposed that positions three types of trust as the central construct, shaped by five antecedent dimensions (technology, business, social, information, and consumer), leading to three behavioural outcomes (social commerce adoption, impulsive buying behaviour, and technology acceptance), moderated by cultural differences, and contextualized within live streaming commerce and COVID-19. The study offers a structured synthesis of trust research in social commerce and identifies directions for future research.

Keywords: Trust, Social Commerce, Bibliometric Analysis, BERTopic Topic Modelling

JEL Classifications: M31, L81

1. INTRODUCTION

Social commerce has emerged as one of the fastest-growing forms of digital commerce, transforming traditional online transactions into socially embedded and interactive purchasing experiences (Leong et al., 2024). Rather than serving merely as a transaction channel, social commerce provides an environment where consumers can discover products, exchange opinions, seek recommendations, and engage with other users throughout the purchasing process (Abbas et al., 2023; Attar et al., 2022). In contrast to traditional e-commerce, which primarily emphasizes transactional efficiency, social commerce relies heavily on user-generated content, online communities, social interactions, and peer influence to support consumer decision-making (Bugshan and Attar, 2020; Sheikh et al., 2019). Reflecting its growing significance, the global social commerce market was valued at approximately USD 1.63 trillion in 2025 and is projected

to reach USD 7.55 trillion by 2031, representing a compound annual growth rate of 29.12% (Mordor Intelligence, 2026). As commercial activities become increasingly intertwined with social interactions in digital environments, understanding the factors that shape consumer behavior in social commerce has become a critical research priority.

Among the various factors influencing consumer behavior in social commerce, trust has consistently been recognized as one of the most critical determinants of consumer participation and purchasing decisions. The socially mediated nature of social commerce introduces substantial uncertainty regarding product quality, information credibility, seller reliability, transaction security, and privacy protection (Sembada and Koay, 2021; Tseng et al., 2023). Consequently, trust plays a pivotal role in reducing perceived uncertainty and facilitating consumers' willingness to engage in online transactions (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al.,

2002). Despite the continuous evolution of social commerce, trust remains one of the most critical and enduring issues in the field (Ma'ady and Wardhani, 2022; Shao et al., 2026). The literature about trust in social commerce has expanded considerably over time, encompassing a broad range of contexts, research perspectives, and application settings. While this growth has enriched scholarly understanding of trust in social commerce, it has also produced a fragmented knowledge base, making it difficult to form a comprehensive understanding of the field.

Given the expanding and increasingly fragmented body of trust research in social commerce, bibliometric analysis provides a useful approach for systematically understanding the field. As a quantitative literature review method, bibliometric analysis employs objective and reproducible procedures to systematically examine large volumes of scientific publications, enabling the identification of influential contributors, publication trends, and the evolutionary trajectory of a research field (Donthu et al., 2021). Such insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the field and help identify promising avenues for future research.

However, bibliometric analysis has certain limitations, particularly in theme identification. Shao et al. (2026) highlighted two major challenges. First, thematic interpretation based on bibliometric techniques often relies on keyword-based analyses, which may not fully use the rich information in the abstract (Yu and Xiang, 2023). Second, although researchers supplement bibliometric findings with manual reviews to improve theme identification, such procedures can be labor-intensive. To address these limitations, recent studies have increasingly adopted topic modeling techniques to automatically identify latent themes from large document collections. Among topic modelling techniques, BERTopic has attracted growing attention due to its ability to leverage transformer-based language models to capture contextual meanings and semantic relationships (Grootendorst, 2022). By automatically extracting latent themes from large collections of textual data, BERTopic reduces the reliance on labor-intensive manual theme identification while providing more nuanced, semantically coherent, and scalable topic discovery than traditional keyword-based approaches (Egger and Yu, 2022).

By integrating bibliometric analysis with BERTopic-based topic modelling, this study examines both the development and thematic structure of trust research in social commerce. The bibliometric analysis facilitates the identification of influential contributors, publication trends, and key journals and institutions, while BERTopic topic modelling enables the discovery of latent research themes embedded within the literature. Building upon these advantages, the present study aims to systematically examine the development of trust research in social commerce and develop a comprehensive understanding of its thematic evolution and future research directions. Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1: What are the publication trends, influential contributors, publications, journals and institutions of trust research in social commerce?
- RQ2: What are the major research themes in trust research?
- RQ3: What integrative framework and future research frontiers can be identified for trust research in social commerce?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Commerce

Social commerce emerged as a distinct form of digital commerce following its introduction by Yahoo in 2005 (Cui et al., 2018; Esmaeili and Hashemi, 2019), and has since grown into one of the most active and rapidly evolving areas in both industry and academic research. Three defining characteristics distinguish social commerce from traditional e-commerce. First, social commerce is technology-driven, leveraging Web 2.0 technologies and mobile platforms to enable real-time, interactive commercial activities (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013; Shao et al., 2026). Second, social interaction are central to the consumer experience, as purchasing decisions are shaped not only by seller-provided information but increasingly by user-generated content, peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and community discussions (Attar et al., 2022; Sheikh et al., 2019). Within social commerce environments, consumers can build social relationships, communicate, review others' opinions, rate and recommend products, and share experiences (Hajli, 2013; W. Zhao et al., 2023). Third, social commerce offers a more convenient and seamless shopping experience, enabling consumers to complete the entire purchase process within a single platform through purchase button (shopping cart or checkout button), without redirecting to separate e-commerce sites or brand websites (Han, 2023).

2.2. Trust in Social Commerce

Trust is defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998), and has been recognised as a mechanism that reduces decision-making complexity by allowing individuals to act without needing to fully evaluate all available information (Gvili and Levy, 2023). In social commerce contexts, trust takes on particular significance due to the heightened levels of uncertainty consumers face. Many social commerce platforms originated as social media platforms rather than dedicated commerce infrastructure, resulting in comparatively inadequate privacy protection, where personal data including identification details, addresses, and banking information may be exposed to misuse or leakage (Sembada and Koay, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Beyond privacy risks, consumers also contend with other concerns, such as counterfeit and low-quality products (Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2020), and misleading information circulated through user-generated content (Tseng et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2020). These compounding uncertainties amplify the role of trust as a prerequisite for consumer participation, as individuals who choose to rely on others in risky environments necessarily place greater weight on trust as a guide to action (Gefen, 2000). Empirical evidence confirms that when consumer trust toward social commerce diminishes, consumers may postpone or refrain from using and purchasing (Laradi et al., 2024; Tseng, 2023), directly limiting the growth potential of social commerce. Understanding trust in social commerce environments therefore represents a critical research priority for both scholars and practitioners.

Despite growing scholarly attention, the field lacks an up-to-date synthesis of its research landscape, particularly with respect

to thematic structure. Ma'ady and Wardhani (2022) conducted a systematic literature review on trust mechanisms in social commerce based on 31 articles, and large-scale bibliometric reviews of the field remain absent. Ahmad et al. (2025) reviewed the relationships between consumer trust and social commerce engagement. By integrating bibliometric analysis with BERTopic topic modelling, this study provides an up-to-date overview of trust research in social commerce across 1,055 publications, offering a comprehensive foundation for researchers seeking to understand the field.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Protocol

The Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol was adopted to guide the review process, which comprises three main stages: Assembling, arranging, and assessing. SPAR-4-SLR is widely applicable to different types of systematic reviews, including framework-based, bibliometric, and conceptual reviews, and addresses the limitation of the commonly used PRISMA protocol, which has been criticized for insufficient justification of review decisions (Paul et al., 2021). The review protocol is illustrated in Figure 1.

The first stage is assembling. Literature was retrieved from two databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, both of which are widely utilized in business and management research and acknowledged for providing extensive, high-quality academic coverage. The following search string was constructed using Boolean operators: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("social commerce" OR "social shopping" OR "s-commerce" OR "social e-commerce" OR "s commerce" OR "social media commerce" OR "social electronic

commerce" OR "mobile social commerce") AND (trust). A total of 1,466 records were retrieved from the two databases.

The second stage is arranging. All retrieved records were coded for author, title, publication year, journal, volume, issue, and DOI. Retrieved records from both databases were first merged and deduplicated based on digital object identifiers and article titles, removing 381 duplicate entries. Records published prior to 2005 were subsequently excluded, given that 2005 is broadly recognized as the year the term social commerce emerged (Cui et al., 2018; Shao et al., 2026). Non-English publications were then removed, followed by the exclusion of records lacking author information, abstracts, or keywords to ensure data completeness for subsequent analyses. One retracted publication was removed. Following these sequential screening steps, 1,055 studies were retained for analysis. Then the last step is assessing. This stage encompassed bibliometric analysis and topic modelling. Findings are reported through narrative text, tables, and figures.

3.2. Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative literature review method that enables researchers to systematically examine the development, structure, and evolution of a research field through bibliographic data (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021). Owing to its ability to handle large volumes of scientific publications, bibliometric analysis has become increasingly popular in business and management research for identifying influential contributions, uncovering emerging trends, and generating the comprehensive understanding of a field (Donthu et al., 2021). In this study, bibliometric analysis was employed to examine publication trends, influential authors, publications, journals, and institutions. Biblioshiny, the web-based interface of the Bibliometrix package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017), was employed to conduct bibliometric analysis of the retrieved publications. As one of the most widely used bibliometric tools in business and management research (Donthu et al., 2021; Gutiérrez-Salcedo et al., 2018), the platform supports the analysis and visualization of publication trends, citation performance, influential journals, authors, institutions, and countries, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of development of a research field.

3.3. Topic Modelling Analysis

To identify research themes within the collected literature, this study employed BERTopic, a transformer-based topic modelling technique developed by Grootendorst (2022). The analytical process proceeded through four sequential steps. First, the abstracts of all retrieved documents were pre-processed to remove noise, including non-English characters, stopwords, and excessively rare or common terms. Second, document embeddings were generated using the all-MiniLM-L6-v2 sentence transformer model, which encodes each abstract into a high-dimensional vector that captures its semantic content. Third, the dimensionality of these embeddings was reduced using Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection (UMAP) to facilitate clustering. Fourth, the reduced embeddings were grouped into clusters using Hierarchical Density-Based Spatial Clustering of Applications with Noise (HDBSCAN), which does not require a pre-specified number of clusters and is capable of

Figure 1: Review protocol (extraction date: May 05, 2026)

ASSEMBLING	Identification Research domain: Trust in social commerce Source type: English publications Source quality: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus
	Acquisition Search period: 2005–2025 Boolean search (TITLE-ABS-KEY): ("social commerce" OR "social shopping" OR "s-commerce" OR "social e-commerce" OR "s commerce" OR "social media commerce" OR "social electronic commerce" OR "mobile social commerce") AND ("trust") Total records retrieved: n = 1,466
ARRANGING	Organisation Organising codes: Author, title, year of publication, journal, volume, issue, DOI, keywords, abstract After deduplication: n = 1,085
	Purification Exclusion criteria: Non-English (n = 11), published before 2005 (n = 1), no author keywords (n = 8), no abstract (n = 8), no author (n = 1), retracted publications (n = 1) Articles included: n = 1,055
ASSESSING	Evaluation Analysis method: Bibliometric analysis and BERTopic topic modelling Agenda proposal method: Identify directions for future research
	Reporting Reporting conventions: Figures, tables and text Limitations: Only English publications from WoS and Scopus

handling irregular cluster shapes. Topic representations were then derived from each cluster using a class-based TF-IDF procedure, which identifies the keywords most distinctive to each topic relative to the overall corpus (Grootendorst, 2022). Following topic extraction, temporal analysis was conducted to trace the evolution of each theme across the study period, providing insight into how scholarly attention to social commerce trust has shifted over time.

4. RESULTS

Figure 2 illustrates the annual scientific production on social commerce from 2008 to 2026. Publication output remained minimal prior to 2013, reflecting the early and nascent stage of social commerce as a research domain. A steady upward trend emerged from 2013 onwards, with notable acceleration after 2017, when annual output surpassed 90 articles. Growth momentarily plateaued between 2019 and 2021, likely reflecting disruptions to research activities and publication timelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Output resumed its upward trajectory from 2022, reaching its peak in approximately 2025 with nearly 150 articles published. Notably, the figure for 2026 represents only the first half of the year at the time of data retrieval, and the current output already approaches 80 articles, suggesting that full-year production is likely to maintain or exceed the levels observed in preceding years. Overall, the trajectory indicates sustained and growing academic attention toward social commerce research over the past decade.

Table 1 presents the ten most influential documents in the social commerce literature. Local citations refer to citations received from within the reviewed corpus, while global citations reflect total citations across all academic literature. The LC/GC ratios further reveal that several of these foundational works, particularly Kim and Park (2013), Ng (2013), and Yahia et al. (2018), exhibit ratios exceeding 40%, indicating that their influence is concentrated primarily within the social commerce research community rather than diffused across broader disciplines. In contrast, works such as Liang and Turban (2011) and Lu et al. (2016) show comparatively lower ratios, suggesting that their theoretical contributions have resonated beyond the field itself.

These works have collectively shaped the theoretical trajectory of the field by establishing trust as the central mediating mechanism in social commerce, and by identifying the antecedents and outcome constructs. Social support and social presence have been consistently identified as significant antecedents of consumer trust across these highly cited studies (Liang and Turban, 2011; Lu et al., 2016), while trust has been shown to exert substantial influence on purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention (Kim and Park, 2013; Ng, 2013). Hajli (2015) made a particularly influential contribution by introducing social commerce constructs (ratings and reviews, forums and communities, referrals and recommendations), and tested the impact on trust building. Yahia et al. (2018) extended this line of inquiry to vendor characteristics, demonstrating that reputation and price advantage shape consumer trust in social media commerce contexts. Huang and Benyoucef (2013) complemented these empirical works by offering a comprehensive conceptual review and design framework for social commerce platforms. The most locally cited works in this field converge on a common theoretical position that trust functions as a central mediating mechanism connecting its antecedents to behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention and word-of-mouth. This shared focus on trust as a bridge between what precedes and what follows it has exerted a lasting influence on the field, shaping the questions subsequent scholars have asked and the theoretical frameworks they have adopted.

Table 2 presents the most productive authors in the social commerce literature based on the current dataset. Hajli N emerges as the most prolific and influential contributor, having published 15 articles with a total citation count of 2,578 and an h-index of 21, reflecting sustained and wide-reaching scholarly impact on the field since 2014. Notably, three of Hajli's works appear among the ten most locally cited documents, underscoring his central role in shaping the theoretical development of social commerce research. The remaining authors recorded between six and eight publications within the dataset, with Wang YC (TC = 1,151) and Liébana-Cabanillas F (TC = 637) standing out in terms of citation impact among this group. Most of these productive authors began publishing in social commerce between 2014 and 2020, reflecting the relatively recent consolidation of the field as a distinct research domain.

Figure 2: Annual scientific production

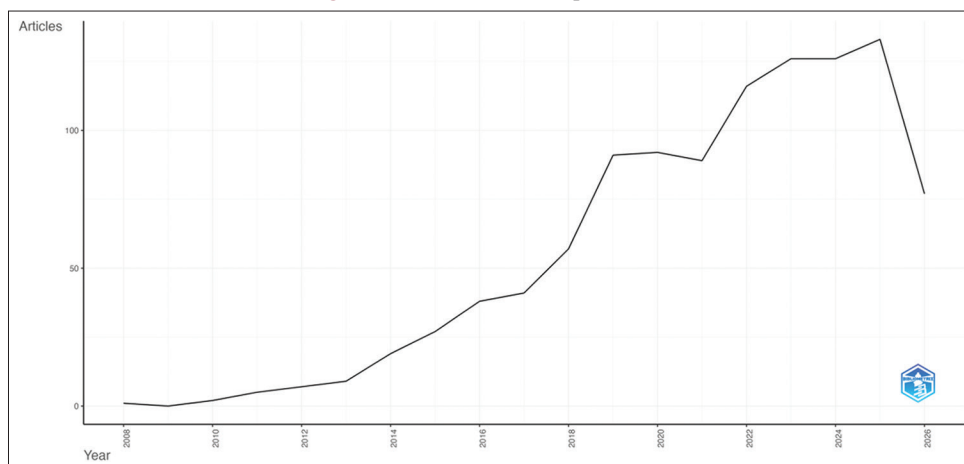


Table 1: Most influential cited documents

Author	Title	Local citations	Global citations	LC/GC ratio (%)
Kim and Park (2013)	Effects of Various Characteristics of Social Commerce on Consumers' Trust and Trust Performance	300	678	44.25
Liang et al. (2011)	What Drives Social Commerce: The Role of Social Support and Relationship Quality	241	877	27.48
Lu et al. (2016)	Social Presence, Trust, and Social Commerce Purchase Intention: An Empirical Research	211	736	28.67
Huang and Benyoucef (2013)	From E-Commerce to Social Commerce: A Close Look at Design Features	204	615	33.17
Hajli (2015)	Social Commerce Constructs and Consumer's Intention to Buy	203	500	40.60
Hajli et al. (2017)	A Social Commerce Investigation of the Role of Trust in a Social Networking Site on Purchase Intentions	178	446	39.91
Chen and Shen (2015)	Consumers' Decisions in Social Commerce Context: An Empirical Investigation	159	374	42.51
Ng (2013)	Intention to Purchase on Social Commerce Websites Across Cultures: A Cross-Regional Study	143	325	44.00
Hajli (2014)	Social Commerce for Innovation	123	370	33.24
Yahia et al. (2018)	Investigating the Drivers for Social Commerce in Social Media Platforms: Importance of Trust, Social Support and the Platform Perceived Usage	111	227	48.90

Table 2: Most productive authors

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
HAJLI N	15	21	1.154	2578	21	2014
DWIVEDI YK	8	11	0.667	256	11	2015
ZHOU T	8	12	0.727	203	12	2016
WANG YC	7	8	0.538	1151	8	2014
AKRAM U	6	6	0.75	360	6	2019
AL-ADWAN AS	6	6	0.667	388	6	2018
LI Y	6	9	0.6	446	9	2017
LIÉBANA-CABANILLAS F	6	7	0.667	637	7	2018
RANA NP	6	7	0.75	173	7	2019
SARKER P	6	7	0.857	106	7	2020

Figures 3 and 4 present the most relevant publication sources and the most locally cited sources in the social commerce literature respectively. In terms of publication output, the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services leads with 36 articles, followed by Sustainability with 28 articles and Electronic Commerce Research and Applications with 23 articles. The International Journal of Information Management appears prominently in both figures, ranking among the top publication venues and recording the highest local citation count of 2,555, establishing it as the most influential journal in the field. The presence of MIS Quarterly among the most locally cited sources, despite its absence from the publication ranking, indicates that foundational information systems theories drawn from this outlet have significantly informed social commerce research without the journal itself serving as a primary outlet for such studies. The presence of both commerce-oriented journals such as Journal of Business Research and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services alongside information systems outlets such as Computers in Human Behavior and Information and Management further underscores the interdisciplinary theoretical foundations upon which social commerce research is built.

Figure 5 illustrates the most relevant institutional affiliations contributing to social commerce research. Bina Nusantara

University leads with 30 articles, followed by Swansea University and Universiti Sains Malaysia, each contributing 26 articles. The distribution reveals a pronounced concentration of research output from Southeast Asian institutions, with five of the ten most productive affiliations located in Malaysia and Indonesia, reflecting the region's growing scholarly engagement with social commerce. The presence of Swansea University is notably associated with the prolific contributions of Hajli N, identified earlier as the most influential author in the dataset. Chinese institutions, represented by Zhejiang Gongshang University and Hangzhou Dianzi University, alongside the Indian Institute of Management, further indicate that social commerce research is largely driven by scholars from Asia, consistent with the rapid growth of social commerce adoption across the region.

Figure 6 presents the corresponding authors' countries contributing to social commerce research. China dominates overwhelmingly with approximately 340 articles, more than four times the output of the second-ranked country, Malaysia, which contributed around 80 articles. The United States, Indonesia, India, Korea, and the United Kingdom follow, each contributing between 40 and 65 articles. The distribution confirms that social commerce research is predominantly driven by scholars based in Asia, with China, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, and Korea collectively accounting for the majority of global output, reflecting the region's position as both a major market and a primary research hub for social commerce. In terms of international collaboration, most countries show a higher proportion of single-country publications relative to multi-country publications, with China in particular exhibiting a notably large SCP share, suggesting that Chinese scholars tend to publish predominantly within domestic research teams. The presence of Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, alongside European contributors including the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany, indicates that social commerce research has achieved a degree of global reach, though the field remains heavily concentrated in Asia.

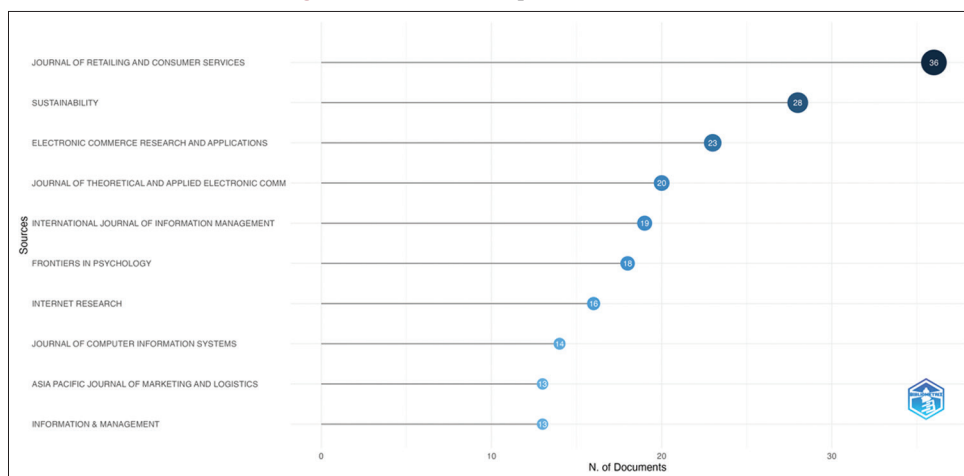
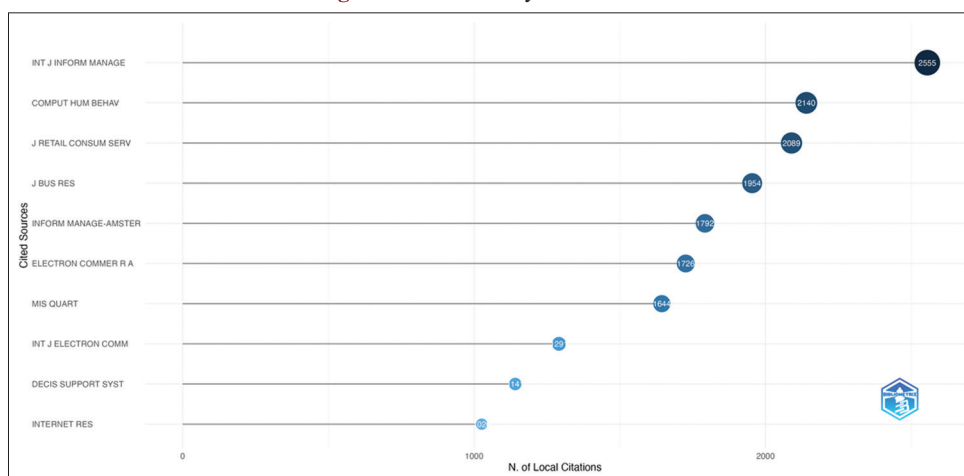
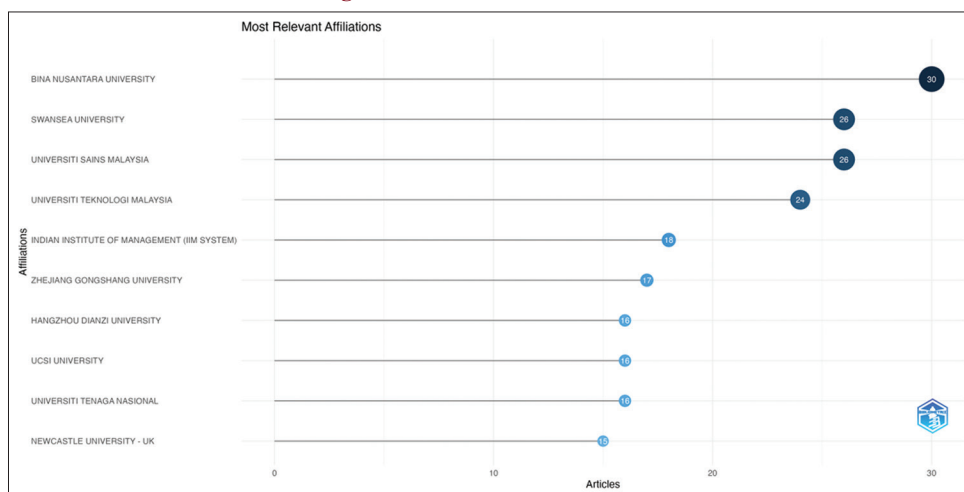
Figure 3: Most relevant publication sources**Figure 4:** Most locally cited sources**Figure 5:** Most relevant institutions

Figure 7 presents a treemap of the most frequently occurring keywords across the social commerce literature. Beyond trust, keywords reflecting its antecedents, such as support and perceived risk, indicate sustained scholarly attention toward identifying the conditions under which consumer trust is formed in social commerce environments. On the outcome side, the prominence

of purchase intention, behavior, and intention confirms that behavioural consequences of trust remain the primary dependent variables of interest across the literature. The presence of methodological terms such as antecedents, framework, and pls-sem signals a field that is not only theoretically active but also increasingly concerned with model development and empirical

Figure 6: Most relevant countries

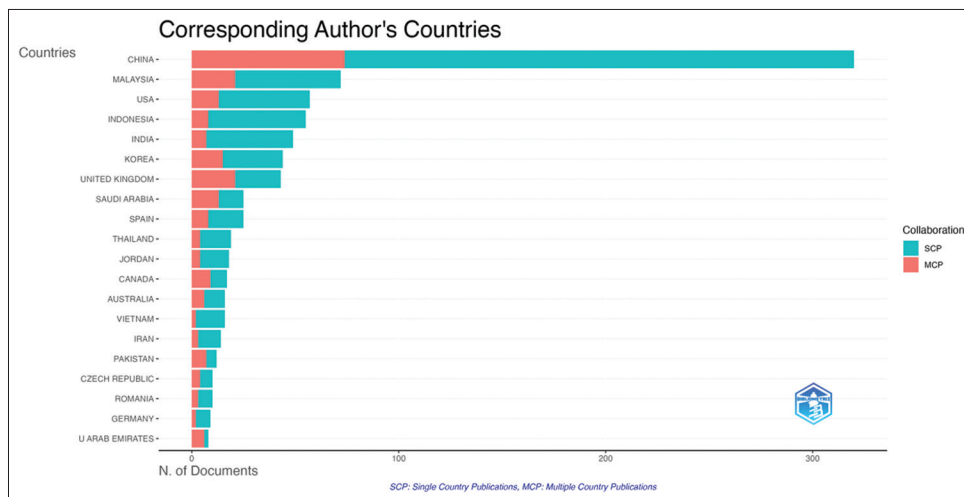
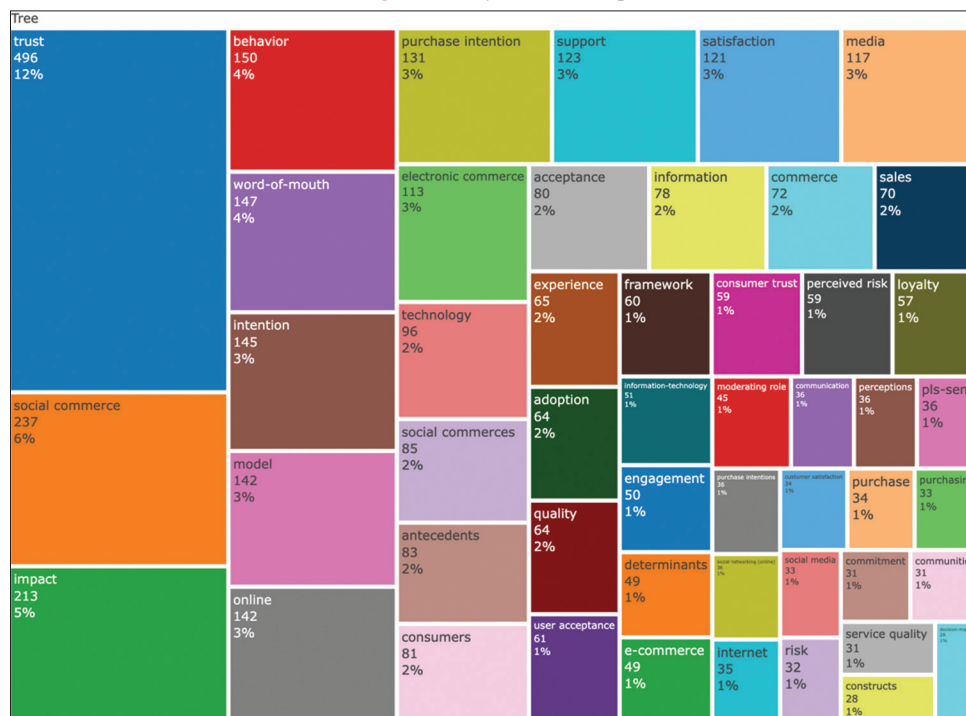


Figure 7: Keyword treemap



validation. Taken together, the keyword distribution reveals that research in this domain has consistently gravitated toward understanding how trust is formed and how it subsequently shapes consumer behavioural outcomes.

BERTopic analysis was applied to the abstracts of all 1,055 retrieved documents, yielding 13 distinct topics. Consistent with recent topic modelling studies, the most relevant keywords associated with each topic were examined to support topic labelling (Crain et al., 2012; Mishra, 2025). Each topic was labelled based on its keywords and documents, as presented in Table 3, topics are numbered from 0 following BERTopic’s default indexing convention.

Topic 0 concentrates on trust in the live streaming context. For example, Cai (2022) found that streamer expertise and interactivity

positively influence consumer trust and purchase intention in live streaming commerce. Topic 1 captures technology acceptance research, where trust consistently mediates the relationship between perceived usefulness and adoption (Gibree et al., 2018), with studies also showing that trust in mobile payments transfers positively to trust in social commerce (Leong et al., 2021). Topic 2 addresses how user-generated content shapes consumer trust, with recommendations and ratings from other users positively influencing trust (Hajli, 2015), and trust built through peer endorsement transferring to trust that drives purchase intention (Cheng et al., 2019). Topic 3 covers social commerce adoption across diverse sectors, with Lucila and Ching (2025) extending adoption research to the agricultural context through a systematic review. Topic 4 centers on impulsive buying behaviour, where interactivity triggers cognitive and emotional trust responses that lead to impulsive social shopping (Wu et al., 2024). Topic 5 covers brand trust and influencer

Table 3: BERTopic research themes

Topic	Theme	Keywords
Topic 0	Live streaming commerce	Live, streaming, streamer, interactivity, video, stream, entertainment, authenticity, attachment, real
Topic 1	Technology acceptance	Mobile, acceptance, payment, tam, adoption, banking, usefulness, ease, neural, artificial
Topic 2	User-generated content	Recommendation, transaction, trust_transfer, rating, prediction, fuzzy, reputation, experimental, supply, issue
Topic 3	Social commerce adoption	Adoption, review, area, agricultural, content, collaboration, systematic, evolution, creator, sector
Topic 4	Impulsive buying behaviour	Impulse, stimulus, organism, response, flow, cognitive, affective, emotional, similarity, utilitarian
Topic 5	Brand trust and influencer marketing	Brand, influencer, authenticity, celebrity, equity, content, attractiveness, credibility, identification, reliance
Topic 6	Social influence	Follower, learning, commercial, professional, educational, scarcity, visit, rank, power, heuristic
Topic 7	Social relationships	Social_support, social_capital, social_presence, loyalty, satisfaction, belief, mooring, emotional, performance, indian
Topic 8	AI in social commerce	AI, algorithmic, personalization, expectancy, impulse, retail, recommendation, driven, governance, recommender
Topic 9	Vendor credibility	Vendor, green, innovative, brand, conversion, reputation, buy, competence, food, individual
Topic 10	COVID-19	COVID19, trusting, strategic, jordan, gender, credible, satisfaction, strategy, crisis, age
Topic 11	Privacy concerns	Privacy, ethical, concern, interface, smart, institutional, disclosure, trustworthiness, security, longer
Topic 12	Cultural differences	Culture, national, cross, adaptation, distance, beauty, intelligence, luxury, identity, meta

marketing in social commerce. For instance, trust in branded posts has been found to be driven by influencer credibility including expertise and message quality (Shamim et al., 2024), while celebrity endorsement and eWOM referrals positively influence brand trust on Instagram (Danniswara et al., 2020).

Topic 6 examines social influence in social commerce, where social influence has been found to shape consumer trust and purchase intention (Karakurt and Bayram, 2021), and social learning from other users further drives purchase decisions (Riaz et al., 2021). Topic 7 addresses social relationship dynamics as antecedents of consumer trust, with social support (Liu et al., 2019), social capital (Cheng et al., 2019), and social presence (Anantharaman et al., 2023) each found to positively influence trust in social commerce. Topic 8 focuses on AI and algorithmic personalisation in social commerce. Farhan et al. (2025) found that perceived personalisation from AI product recommendations significantly enhances consumer trust and purchase intention on social commerce platforms such as TikTok Shop and Instagram Shop, while Hsu et al. (2026) showed that recommendation source shapes consumer trust differently depending on whether it is human or AI-generated. Topic 9 covers vendor credibility across social commerce contexts, where consumers evaluate sellers through their reputation and competence-based signals to form trust (Kubaisi and Shanab, 2022; Stouthuysen et al., 2018). Topic 10 clusters research on social commerce trust and purchase behaviour during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with studies examining how trust drives purchase intention in pandemic contexts (Eldin, 2024; Elshaer et al., 2024; Handarkkho et al., 2024). Topic 11 addresses privacy concerns, where privacy assurance positively influences consumer trust in social commerce (Wang and Herrando, 2019). Topic 12 examines cultural differences in social commerce trust and purchase intention. Cross-cultural variation in interpersonal trust in social commerce has been documented across cultural contexts (Qin, 2020), and the effect of social interaction on trust has been found to vary across cultural backgrounds (Yin et al., 2019).

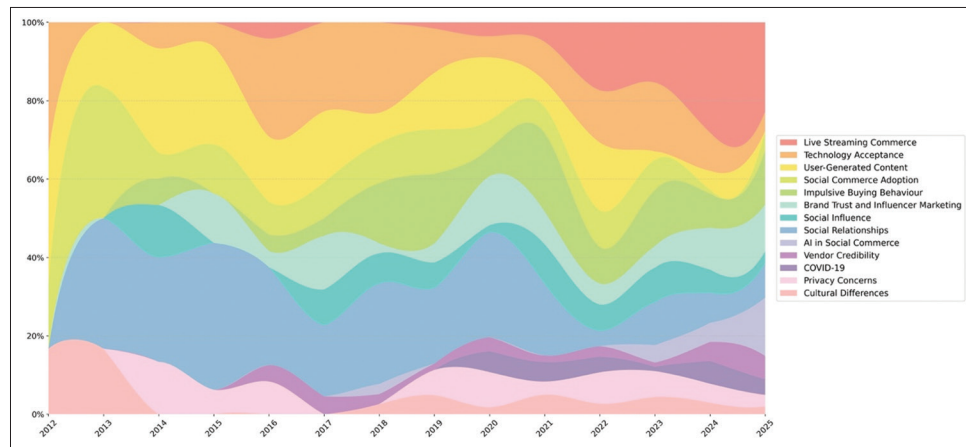
Figure 8 presents the proportional distribution of the 13 topics from 2012 to 2025. In the early period, Topic 7 (Social Relationships),

Topic 1 (Technology Acceptance), Topic 2 (User-Generated Content), and Topic 3 (Social Commerce Adoption) collectively dominated the literature, reflecting the field's foundational interest in social influence mechanisms, platform adoption, and information-based trust. Topic 11 (Privacy Concerns) also held a notable share in the early period before gradually declining, suggesting that privacy issues received relatively more attention in the early stages of the field. As social commerce became more widely adopted, research interest in Topic 3 (Social Commerce Adoption) naturally receded.

From around 2019 onwards, Topic 0 (Live Streaming Commerce) expanded rapidly and emerged as the largest topic by 2025, indicating a significant shift in research attention toward real-time interactive commerce. Topic 10 (COVID-19) showed a brief elevated presence around 2020-2021 before receding, reflecting the pandemic's temporary influence on the research agenda. Topic 8 (AI in Social Commerce), while minimal before 2022, shows a growing presence in recent years, suggesting an emerging research frontier. Topic 5 (Brand Trust and Influencer Marketing) and Topic 4 (Impulsive Buying Behaviour) maintained relatively stable shares throughout the period, reflecting sustained research interest in these areas. Topic 6 (Social Influence), Topic 9 (Vendor Credibility), and Topic 12 (Cultural Differences) similarly maintained stable but modest shares across the entire period.

5. DISCUSSION

This study integrated bibliometric analysis and BERTopic topic modelling to systematically examine the performance and thematic characteristics of trust research in social commerce, drawing on 1,055 publications retrieved from Web of Science and Scopus from 2005 to May 2026. The bibliometric analysis reveals a field that has grown substantially over the past two decades, driven predominantly by Asian scholars and anchored within a concentrated set of influential journals and institutions. Keyword analysis confirms that trust and its antecedents and outcomes have consistently occupied the core of the research agenda, a pattern corroborated by citation analysis showing that a small number of

Figure 8: Evolution of research topics (2012-2025)

highly cited foundational works established trust as the central theoretical bridge in social commerce research. Complementing the bibliometric findings, BERTopic analysis identified 13 research themes and revealed the thematic evolution of the field. The following sections discuss the three types of trust identified across the literature and propose an integrative framework that organises these themes into a unified structure of antecedents, trust types, and behavioural outcomes.

5.1. Trust in Social Commerce Research

Although trust permeates all 13 identified topics, a closer examination of keyword distributions reveals that trust does not manifest in a single form. Keywords such as institutional in Topic 11 point to institutional trust, while streamer and influencer in Topics 0 and 5, alongside social_support and social_capital in Topic 7, implicitly reflect the interpersonal dimensions of trust in social commerce. Topic 8, with keywords such as ai, algorithmic, and recommender, signals technology trust as an emerging dimension. The appearance of trust_transfer in Topic 2 further suggests the existence of migration pathways between different trust objects.

Institutional trust is defined as the public's belief and confidence that formal organizations, such as social commerce platforms, will act with integrity, competence, and fairness, and widely regarded as the foundation of platform-based commerce (Lu and Yi, 2023). This trust is primarily reflected in Topic 11 (privacy concerns), where research has concentrated on how platform-level safeguards, privacy protection mechanisms, and transaction security shape consumers' willingness to use social commerce platforms and make purchases through them. Studies have shown that privacy assurance positively influences institutional trust (Wang and Herrando, 2019), while platform governance mechanisms such as transaction security and seller verification have been found to strengthen consumers' confidence in the platform as a reliable commercial environment (Sembada and Koay, 2021). The persistent prominence of institutional trust across the literature reflects the structural vulnerability inherent in social commerce, where many platforms originated as social networking applications rather than dedicated commerce infrastructure, leaving consumers exposed to risks of data misuse and inadequate payment security (Sembada and Koay, 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

Among the trust objects identified across the literature, interpersonal trust has attracted sustained and growing attention. Earlier literature distinguished interpersonal trust from institutional trust, with interpersonal trust defined as trust between people, specifically a person's perception that other people will not act in ways that harm their interests (Abbas et al., 2023). While early studies focused predominantly on institutional trust, interpersonal trust has become increasingly central as social commerce has evolved into a more social environment. Unlike traditional e-commerce where trust was primarily directed at the platform or seller as a single entity, social commerce introduces a considerably broader range of human actors toward whom consumers may direct interpersonal trust, including influencers, live streamers, and fellow consumers, as reflected across Topic 5 (Brand Trust and Influencer Marketing) and Topic 0 (Live Streaming). Topic 6 (Social Influence) and Topic 7 (Social Relationships) further reveal the relational and normative mechanisms through which interpersonal trust is formed and sustained. For example, user behaviours such as likes, comments, and shares function as social cues that shape consumer trust (George et al., 2023), and social support positively influences trust in fellow consumers through strengthened peer relations (Yang, 2021).

A third trust target emerging from the literature concerns technology itself. Within social commerce, trust has been conceptualised as encompassing both trust in people and companies and trust in the technology that mediates commercial interactions (Sharma et al., 2019). As social commerce platforms increasingly rely on technological features, consumers are required to evaluate not only the human actors they encounter but also the technological systems through which these interactions occur (Califf et al., 2020). This dimension of trust has gained growing scholarly attention, as reflected in Topic 8 (AI in Social Commerce), which captures an emerging body of research on how consumers form trust toward AI-driven tools such as recommendation systems, chatbots, and virtual streamers. Notably, trust in these technological actors might operate through mechanisms that differ from both institutional and interpersonal trust. For example, Hsu et al. (2026), comparing human and machine-generated recommendations in social commerce, found that trust formation follows distinct patterns depending on whether the recommendation source is human or AI. As AI becomes more deeply embedded in social commerce

platforms, understanding how consumers form, maintain, and act upon technology trust represents one of the field's most pressing emerging research priorities.

Trust transfer refers to the process by which trust formed toward a known entity extends to a related but less familiar entity (Stewart, 2003). In the social commerce literature, trust transfer has emerged as one of the most frequently employed theoretical lenses, as reflected in its prominence as a keyword in Topic 2. The transfer from institutional trust to interpersonal trust has been a consistent finding across online commerce research. Foundational e-commerce studies established early on that platform-level structural assurances facilitate buyers' trust in sellers (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004), and this pathway has since been confirmed in social commerce contexts, where institutional trust transfers to trust in sellers and streamers (Chen et al., 2024; Korsakul et al., 2025).

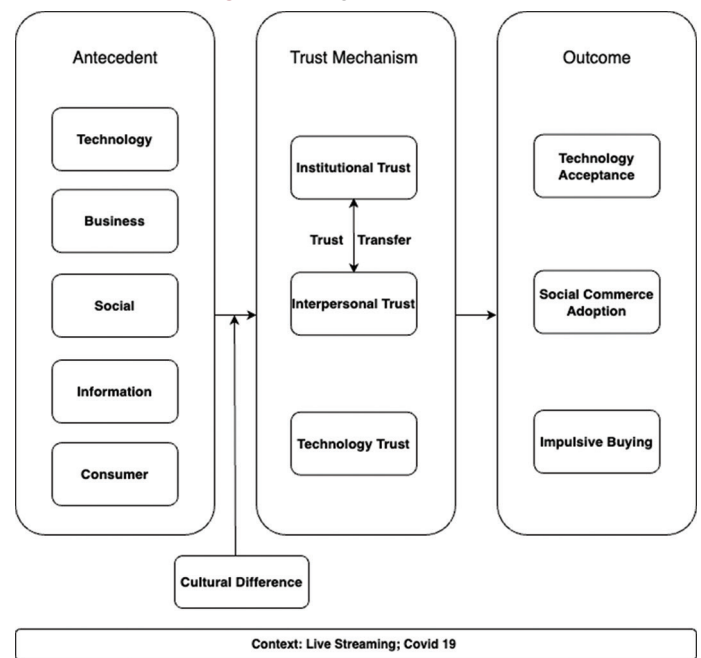
However, in social commerce a reverse transfer pathway, from interpersonal trust to institutional trust, has also been observed, reflecting one of its defining characteristics. Some consumers develop close relationships with sellers (Su et al., 2021) or fellow users (Leong et al., 2020). When such interpersonal trust is already established, it can serve as a functional substitute for institutional trust where platform-level assurances are absent or insufficient (Su et al., 2021). Robust interpersonal relationships have further been shown to diminish individuals' dependency on formal platform mechanisms (Cheng et al., 2026). This interpersonal trust can also transfer upward to the platform itself, as consumers who experience trustworthy interpersonal interactions come to regard the platform as a credible environment (Cheng et al., 2019).

5.2. Integrative Framework

Building on the discussion of trust targets and their transfer relationships, this study proposes an integrative framework to consolidate the findings and provide a coherent foundation for future inquiry. As illustrated in Figure 9, the framework organizes the identified research themes into five antecedent dimensions, namely technology, business, social, information, and consumer, with trust as the central construct, three behavioural outcomes comprising social commerce adoption, impulsive buying behaviour, and technology acceptance, cultural differences as a moderating variable, and live streaming commerce and COVID-19 as contextual layers.

The framework organises the 13 identified topics into a unified structure of antecedents, trust mechanisms, and behavioural outcomes. On the antecedent side, the topics are grouped into five dimensions: Technology (Topics 1 and 8), Business (Topics 5 and 9), Social (Topics 6 and 7), Information (Topic 2), and Consumer (Topic 11), each representing a distinct pathway through which trust is shaped in social commerce contexts. The three trust types at the center of the framework, namely institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and technology trust, are derived from the thematic analysis discussed in the preceding section rather than from any single topic. On the outcome side, the framework captures technology acceptance, social commerce adoption, and impulsive buying behaviour (Topics 1, 3, and 4). Topic 12

Figure 9: Integrated framework



(Cultural Differences) is positioned as a moderator, and Topics 0 and 10 (Live Streaming Commerce and COVID-19) are treated as contextual layers that shape the antecedent-trust relationships without constituting antecedents themselves.

While this framework is consistent with prior social commerce frameworks in retaining technology, social, business, and consumer dimensions as core antecedents (Cui et al., 2018; Leong et al., 2024; Shao et al., 2026), it differs in several ways. First, the framework in this study separates the Business and Information dimensions as distinct antecedent pathways, reflecting differences in how these factors shape consumer trust. For example, information-based factors, such as user-generated content, influence trust through consumers' active evaluation of content quality and credibility (Acikgoz et al., 2023). Business-side factors, including brand credibility, influencer endorsement, and vendor reputation, operate through commercially generated signals that consumers use to assess the trustworthiness of market actors (Shao et al., 2026). Distinguishing these pathways separately allows for a more precise account of how each mechanism shapes consumer trust. Second, the framework incorporates contextual and moderating layers that prior frameworks have not addressed. Live streaming commerce, while recognised as a branch of social commerce (Luo et al., 2025), operates through distinct trust-building mechanisms involving real-time interaction, streamer, and parasocial relationships that differ substantially from general social commerce contexts. COVID-19 is similarly positioned as a contextual layer given its role as an external disruption that temporarily but substantially reshaped trust dynamics in social commerce. Cultural differences are treated as a moderating variable rather than an antecedent, consistent with evidence that culture does not directly shape trust but instead alters the strength of relationships between trust antecedents and their outcomes (Hossain et al., 2021; Qin and De-Juan-Vigaray, 2021).

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The bibliometric analysis reveals a research field that has expanded substantially over the past two decades. Geographic concentration remains pronounced, with Asian institutions dominating output while contributions from Western contexts remain limited. This imbalance is further reflected in Topic 12 (Cultural Differences), which has maintained a consistently small share throughout the study period, suggesting that cross-cultural variations in trust formation remain underexplored relative to the field's overall growth. Scholars have similarly noted that the understanding of cultural factors on trust remains limited, with only a handful of studies examining variations across cultural contexts and have called for more cross-country studies to enhance the generalizability of findings (Hossain et al., 2021; Qin and De-Juan-Vigaray, 2021). Future research should expand beyond the current Asian-dominant focus to include underrepresented regions, with comparative studies across diverse cultural contexts shedding light on how cultural factors moderate the relationships between trust antecedents and outcomes in social commerce.

The thematic evolution identified through BERTopic analysis reveals a gradual narrowing of themes that once dominated the early literature. The declining shares of Topic 1 (Technology Acceptance), Topic 3 (Social Commerce Adoption), and Topic 11 (Privacy Concerns) collectively suggest that social commerce has matured into a mainstream consumer activity, with foundational trust concerns around adoption and privacy becoming less central to the research agenda. Trust research in social commerce is therefore entering a new phase in which sustaining consumer trust over time is more critical than securing initial adoption. Future research should examine how platforms and sellers maintain consumer confidence, manage trust repair after negative experiences, and retain consumers in an increasingly competitive landscape, with trust's role in continuance intention (Acikgoz et al., 2023) and loyalty (Attar et al., 2023; Nadeem et al., 2020; Yeon et al., 2019) representing particularly promising avenues.

Topic 5 (Brand Trust and Influencer Marketing) and Topic 4 (Impulsive Buying Behaviour) have maintained a relatively stable presence throughout the study period, reflecting sustained scholarly interest in how commercial actors shape consumer trust and purchasing behaviour. Much of the existing research on influencer marketing and brand trust has been conducted in social media contexts rather than social commerce settings specifically. The introduction of embedded checkout features and one-click purchasing within social commerce platforms (Han, 2023) compresses the time between trust formation and purchase execution, potentially altering how trust is established. Under these conditions, the role of influencer and brand in triggering impulsive purchases warrants closer examination. For example, future research can further explore the distinction between impulsive and planned buying in social commerce (Gvili and Levy, 2023), with particular attention to the potentially different roles that trust plays in each.

The rapid rise of Topic 0 (Live Streaming Commerce) and the emerging presence of Topic 8 (AI in Social Commerce) signal

that social commerce is entering an increasingly interactive and technologically mediated phase, opening new frontiers for trust research. Within the AI domain alone, existing studies have begun to focus on chatbots (Sindhu and Bharti, 2024) and AI personalization (Emini et al., 2025), presenting opportunities to further investigate how these AI-driven features relate to consumer trust. Beyond these, emerging technologies including AI beings, augmented and virtual reality, and metaverse commerce are beginning to enter the social commerce landscape (Al-Makhmari et al., 2024; Duong, 2025; Xiong et al., 2024), with their implications for consumer trust remaining largely unexplored. Future research should examine how consumers form trust toward these novel technological actors, how such trust transfers to products and sellers, and under what conditions technology-mediated trust breaks down, as understanding these dynamics will be critical for both scholars and practitioners navigating an increasingly AI-driven social commerce environment.

Finally, the thematic analysis points to the need for a more multidimensional conceptualization of trust in social commerce. Scholars have long recognized that trust is a complex construct that operates through multiple bases and toward multiple entities, and have called for research to move beyond treating trust as a single, unidimensional construct (Khamitov et al., 2024). The three types of trust identified in the present study, namely institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and technology trust, offer a multidimensional lens through which future research can advance. As social commerce infrastructure matures, institutional trust may attract comparatively less scholarly attention, while interpersonal trust, as a defining characteristic of social commerce, is likely to sustain continued research interest. Technology trust, however, represents the most consequential emerging frontier, as evidenced by the rapid growth after 2022. As AI-driven tools and immersive technologies become more deeply embedded in social commerce environments, understanding how trust formed toward technology will be essential for both theory development and practice. The trust transfer process involving technology trust remains underexplored, and future research can further investigate the conditions under which trust transfers successfully or fails between them.

7. CONCLUSION

This study integrated bibliometric analysis and BERTopic topic modelling to systematically examine the intellectual landscape of trust research in social commerce, drawing on 1,055 publications retrieved from Web of Science and Scopus spanning from 2005 to May 2026. In response to the three research questions, the study mapped publication trends, identified influential contributors, journals, and institutions, and uncovered 13 distinct research themes through topic modelling. The bibliometric findings reveal a field that has grown substantially over the past two decades, driven predominantly by Asian scholars and concentrated within a small number of influential journals and institutions. The BERTopic analysis demonstrates that the thematic landscape of trust research has undergone considerable evolution, with foundational themes such as technology acceptance and social commerce adoption declining in prominence as the field matures, and newer themes

such as live streaming commerce and AI in social commerce emerging as significant research frontiers. Building on these findings, the study proposed an integrative framework that organizes trust research in social commerce around five antecedent dimensions, a central trust construct, three behavioural outcomes, a moderating variable, and two contextual layers, providing a coherent foundation for future inquiry.

This study makes several contributions to both research and practice. Methodologically, integrating bibliometric analysis with BERTopic topic modelling offers a more comprehensive and semantically nuanced mapping of the field than keyword-based or manual approaches alone. Theoretically, the proposed integrative framework consolidates trust research across five antecedent dimensions in a manner more granular than prior social commerce frameworks, and the identification of institutional, interpersonal, and technology trust as distinct but interrelated trust targets provides a multidimensional lens for future inquiry. For practitioners, the prominence of business-side trust signals suggests that platforms and sellers should invest in transparent credibility mechanisms and verified seller programmes, while the rise of live streaming and AI-driven personalization calls for attention to the distinct trust-building demands these environments introduce. The persistence of privacy concerns further underscores the importance of robust data protection practices as a foundational condition for consumer trust.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the literature corpus was drawn exclusively from Web of Science and Scopus, and non-English publications were excluded, which may have resulted in the omission of relevant studies published in other languages or indexed in other databases. Second, while BERTopic topic modelling provides a scalable and systematic approach to theme identification, the analysis is based on abstracts rather than full-text content, which may result in a partial representation of the conceptual nuances within each theme. For instance, the finer-grained distinctions within trust, such as its dimensionality and the specific types of trust examined across studies, may not be fully captured through abstract-level analysis alone. Future research could complement the present findings by conducting in-depth systematic literature reviews of specific themes, enabling more detailed synthesis of how trust is conceptualized and operationalized across different social commerce contexts.

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