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The Intersection of Social Media and Body Image: A Comprehensive Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

This study describes a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of scholarly publications on the arena of Intersection of social media and body image 2013 to 2024, aiming to describe the global research patterns in this field. Sourcing data from several reputable academic journals from 2013 to 2024, identified key research clusters, prolific sources of data. Interpretations of citation data reveal the impactful works that have shaped understanding and discourse the intersection of social media and body image. Data extracted from Web of science data base and the final number of document results is 627. The analysis also discovers emerging trends, shifts in research methodologies. The mapping process is done by using R tool (Biblioshiny) and VOS Viewer. The search methodology involves focusing on a specific subject area and using titles, keywords, and abstracts of the study materials. The search methodology involves focusing on a specific subject area and using titles, keywords, and abstracts of the study materials.

Keywords: Bibliometrics, Social Media, Body Image, Self-Objectification, Vosviewer

INTRODUCTION

Body image refers to their perception of and feelings, about their body. How they observe and feel about themselves mentally including their reflection in a mirror and is influenced by societal norms and values shaped by culture. Additionally, body image is shaped by the ideals of appearance communicated through channels, like media exposure familial beliefs and social interactions(Jiotsa et al., 2021). In the realm of disordered eating behaviors and body image issues origins and persistence exist a multitude of contributing elements; however cultural ideals prevalent, in society especially as portrayed in the media are frequently identified as influencers. Indicated as an element contributing to the increase, in womens dissatisfaction, with their bodies. Theoretical models examining the particular processes via which sociocultural variables impact eating disorders and body image, which have only lately emerged in the literary works. (Stice, 1994, 1998; Stice, Ziemba, Margolis, & Flick, 1996). Social comparison in conjunction with ideal internalisation is one of the primary processes involved in how one perceives their body image. These two processes play a key role in the development of body dissatisfaction (Jiotsa et al., 2021) . While traditionally, traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) has been the primary means of disseminating body norms, the last several years have seen a surge in the usage of social media. Every website is referred to as "social media." a mobile web app that features content created by users. They make participation possible for its users. participate in online discussions, share original content, and establish virtual communities. They're primarily utilised by young adults and teenagers, and the most popular ones include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Numerous research has indicated that exposure to social media could encourage unhealthy eating habits and body dissatisfaction by publicising thinness (Field et al., 1999).

The intersection of social media and body image is a pressing concern due to its widespread implications for mental health and well-being. Research has consistently shown a correlation between increased social media use and negative body image outcomes, including heightened body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and the development of eating disorders (Fardouly et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). The visual nature of social media platforms amplifies these effects, as users are frequently exposed to images that emphasize physical appearance and conformity to societal beauty standards (Vandenbosch & Eggermont,

2016). This environment not only fosters comparison and competition but also perpetuates unrealistic ideals that are often unattainable, thereby exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction (Holland & Timmerman, 2016). Understanding the mechanisms through which social media influences body image is essential for developing effective interventions and promoting healthier online environments.

Given the extensive body of research exploring the relationship between social media and body image, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis is warranted to map the existing literature, identify emerging trends, and uncover gaps in knowledge. Bibliometric methods offer a systematic approach to analyzing large volumes of scholarly work, enabling researchers to visualize patterns, collaborations, and the evolution of research topics over time (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014). By employing bibliometric techniques, this study aims to provide a holistic overview of the research landscape, highlighting key themes, influential studies, and potential areas for future investigation. Such an analysis not only synthesizes current findings but also informs policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals about the critical dynamics at play, ultimately contributing to the promotion of positive body image in the context of pervasive social media use.

Bibliometric analysis is a useful method for checking and comparing how much academic research is used and how far it spreads. Scholarly tools like citation metrics, co-authorship patterns, and keyword co-occurrence can help researchers find new trends, fill in gaps in knowledge, and highlight important research efforts (Zupic & Čater, 2015). This way of doing things helps us understand the current state of study better and shapes our future academic work. In the social sciences, bibliometric analyses have looked at a lot of different areas, like sociology, psychology, political science, and economics (Small, 1999). This shows how important it is for people from different fields to work together and how study is always changing in order to solve difficult problems in society.

The research paper is to add to the growing amount of bibliometric literature by giving a thorough look at academic works and methods used in the social sciences. By using advanced bibliometric methods, we aim to shed light on the structural and thematic aspects of the study landscape. This will help us understand how knowledge grows and spreads in this constantly changing field.

The research paper adheres to the prescribed format. The initial section presents the project and the domain. The essay subsequently elucidates the process in depth. Additionally, the essay delineates its study findings, thoroughly elucidating the knowledge structure by defining themes. Ultimately, the article expounds upon the relevance, future implications, discourse, and conclusion. The study's limitations are enumerated.

RQ1 What are the global research trends in the study of social media and body image from 2013 to 2024, as revealed by bibliometric analysis?

RQ2 Which themes and topics are most prevalent in the scholarly literature on social media's influence on body image, and how have these themes evolved over time?

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze global research patterns related to the intersection of social media and body image, covering the period from 2013 to 2024, using bibliometric methods.
- To identify key research clusters and thematic areas within the existing literature on social media and body image, including emerging trends and gaps in the research.

METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric approach is considered in this study, concentrating on systematically reviewing the literature and extracting themes from relevant keyword searches. This method involves the mathematical and statistical analysis of existing literature in the domain, which efficiently assists in assessing and evaluating the impact and contribution of pertinent research within a specific area a (Linnenluecke et al., 2019). Researchers have widely utilized various bibliometric indices and techniques to develop a scientific framework for the research. These include metrics like citation counts per paper, as well as analyses based on authors, institutions, and countries (Haustein & Lariviere, 2014; Linnenluecke et al., 2019).

This study analyses and reviews the emerging literature on social media and body image using bibliometric analysis approach.

Data Extracted From Web of Science Data Base (https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/a3a9cecd-ce52-48d9-9be0-63c31195288b-010b45d4a1/relevance/1)

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Social Media" AND "Body Image”)

Total Document Found: 997

Identification:

- **Records identified through database searching (Web of Science):** n = **997**

Screening:

1. **Records after limiting to articles only:** n = **895**
    - **Excluded:** 102 records (not articles)
2. **Records after limiting to English language only:** n = **890**
    - **Excluded:** 5 records (non-English)
3. **Records after limiting to specified subject areas:** n = **627**

    Limits to Areas – Psychology, Psychiatry, Communications, Social Science and Other

    Excluded: 263 records

    (https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/c3479b97-f1a6-4ee6-ba35-8a0f53e58b50-010b4b0f01/relevance/1)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance analysis

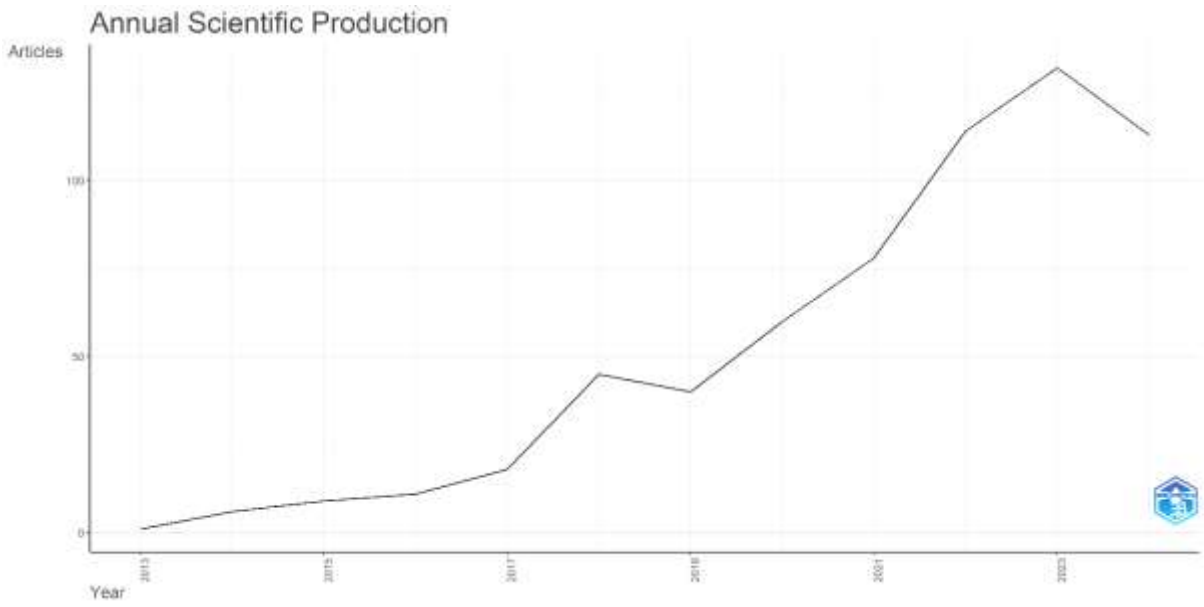
The first analysis reveals a summary of the performance as presented **Table 1**.

Main Information About Data	
Timespan	2013-2024
Sources (Journals, Books etc)	138
Documents	627
Annual Growth Rate %	53.69
Documents Average Age	2.66
Documents Contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	986
Author’s Keywords (DE)	1199
Authors	

Authors	1862
Authors of single-authored docs	48
Authors Collaboration	
Single-authored docs	51
Co-Authors per Doc	3.96
International co-authorship %	24.08
Document Types	
Articles	581
Articles; early access	44
Articles; early access; retracted publication	1
Article; proceedings paper	1

Source: Compiled by Authors (Biblioshiny)

The data describes 627 documents published between 2013 and 2024, sourced from 138 different journals, books, and other publications. Data shows that a remarkable annual growth rate of 53.69%, the collection indicates rapid expansion in its field. The documents have an average age of 2.66 years and have been cited an average of 25.6 times each, underscoring their academic impact and relevance. Collectively, these works reference a total of 19,334 sources. In terms of content, the documents feature 986 Keywords Plus (ID) and 1,199 Author's Keywords (DE), reflecting a diverse range of topics and research areas. The authorship is extensive, involving 1,862 authors, with only 48 contributing to single-authored documents, resulting in 51 single-authored works. This suggests a strong propensity for collaboration, further evidenced by an average of 3.96 co-authors per document and an international co-authorship rate of 24.08%. Regarding document types, the collection predominantly consists of 581 articles, supplemented by 44 early access articles, one article that is both early access and a retracted publication, and one proceedings paper, highlighting the variety of publication formats within the dataset.



(Figure 1 Annual Scientific Production)

Source: Compiled by Authors (Biblioshiny)

The graph depicts the annual scientific production from 2013 to 2023 in terms of the number of articles published. Starting with only 1 article in 2013, there has been a steady increase in the number of publications over the years. From 2013 to 2016, the growth was modest, with the number of articles rising from 1 to 11. A more substantial increase is seen from 2017 onward, where publications jumped from 18 in 2017 to 45 in 2018. Although there was a slight dip in 2019 (40 articles), the trend quickly recovered, reaching 60 articles in 2020, followed by a significant rise to 78 in 2021 and an even greater leap to 114 in 2022. This pattern indicates a general upward trend in scientific output, with particularly strong growth in recent years, although the graph hints at a slight decline toward the end of the period after the peak in 2022. The graph suggests a strong overall increase in scientific productivity, especially in the past few years.

Most Relevant Sources

Table 2

Sources	Articles
BODY IMAGE	162
COMPUTERS IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR	30
FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY	25
JOURNAL OF EATING DISORDERS	21
PSYCHOLOGY OF POPULAR MEDIA	21
CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY	20
EATING BEHAVIORS	20
SEX ROLES	19
NEW MEDIA & SOCIETY	18
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EATING DISORDERS	16

Source: Compiled by Authors (Biblioshiny)

The most relevant sources for research in the field, with *BODY IMAGE* being the leading publication, contributing a significant 162 articles, far surpassing the other sources. This indicates that it is the primary journal for work in this area. *COMPUTERS IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR* follows with 30 articles, suggesting a strong connection between human behavior and technology in the context of the studies. *FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY* contributed 25 articles, underscoring its relevance in psychological aspects of the research. Further down, *JOURNAL OF EATING DISORDERS* and *PSYCHOLOGY OF POPULAR MEDIA* each published 21 articles, showing their importance in topics related to eating disorders and the influence of media. *CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY* and *EATING BEHAVIORS* contributed 20 articles each, indicating their substantial role in the exploration of psychological factors and eating habits. *SEX ROLES* (19 articles), *NEW MEDIA & SOCIETY* (18 articles), and the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EATING DISORDERS* (16 articles) also feature prominently, emphasizing their contribution to gender roles, media influence, and eating disorders in the research. Overall, these journals represent critical sources for understanding the intersection of body image, psychology, media, and eating behaviors.

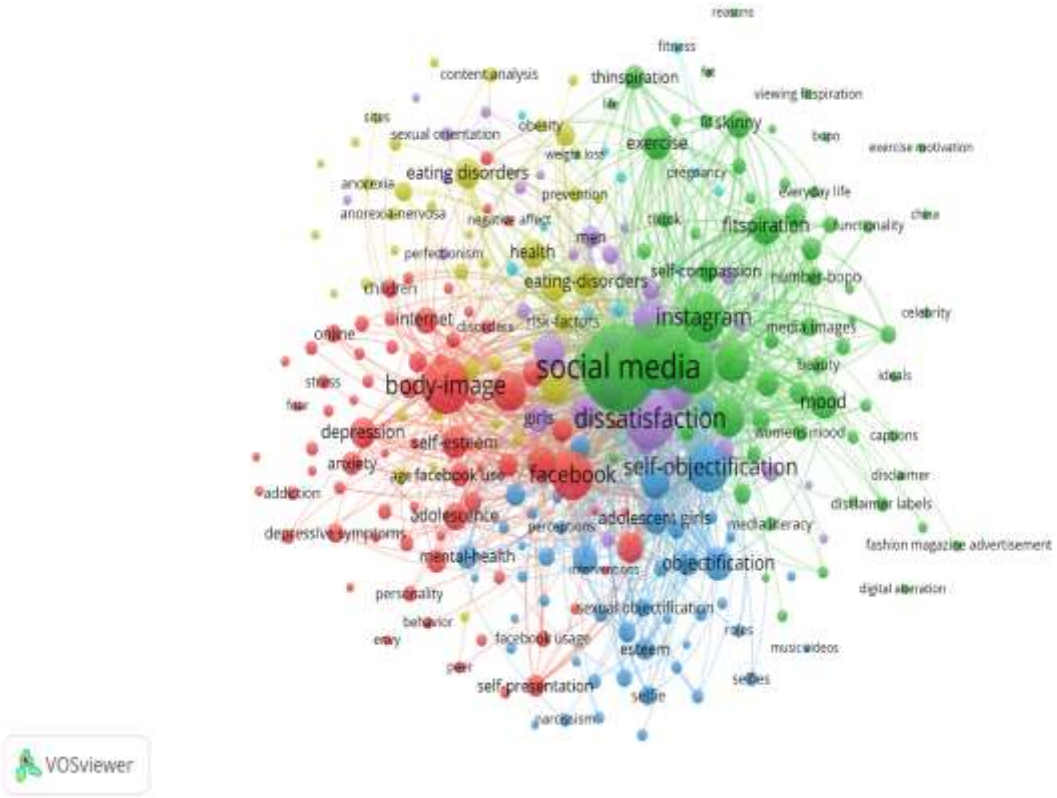


Figure 2 Word Cloud

Source: Compiled by Authors (Biblioshiny)

Figure 3 Network Visualization The keywords co-occurrence network intersection of social media and body image

Source: Compiled by Authors (Vosviewer)

Clusters	Main Themes	Keywords	Context
Cluster 1: Green Cluster (Focus on social media and Fitspiration)	Green Cluster (Focus on social media and Fitspiration)	**Instagram**, **fitspiration**, **exercise**, **body positivity**, and **appreciation** are central. Keywords related to social media as a space for **self-objectification** and **appearance comparison** are also in this group, showing both the positive encouragement (fitness, health) and challenges (objectification) related to appearance in social media platforms.	This cluster shows how social media platforms, especially Instagram, influence users' body image and fitness behavior. **Exercise motivation**, **fitness goals**, and **acceptance** are part of the narrative. It also includes discussions on **disordered eating** and **diet culture** within the context of social media.
Cluster 2: Red Cluster (Body Image and Mental Health)	This cluster covers the **psychological impact** of social media usage on body image, focusing on issues such as **self-esteem**, **depression**, and **anxiety**.	**Body image**, **depression**, **self-esteem**, **adolescence**, **self-presentation**, and **mental health**. Terms related to **depressive symptoms**, **online disorders**, and **anxiety** link mental health concerns with the use of social media platforms, particularly among younger users.	The **red cluster** emphasizes the negative effects of social media, where exposure to idealized body images and peer comparisons can lead to **self-esteem issues** and even **eating disorders** or **depression**. This cluster often addresses younger demographics like **adolescents** and **students**.
Cluster 3: Blue Cluster (Objectification and Social Networking Sites)	This cluster revolves around the **objectification** and **self-presentation** on **social networking sites**.	**Self-presentation**, **objectification**, **esteem**, and **social networking sites**. It examines how social networking leads to **self-objectification**, especially among women, through behaviors like the presentation of curated images.	The blue cluster highlights how **social networking sites** (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) contribute to the **objectification** of users, fostering **self-presentation** behaviors that align with societal beauty standards, and the impact this has on **self-esteem** and **mental health**.
Cluster 4: Yellow Cluster (eating disorders and Perfectionism)	This cluster focuses on the relationship between **eating disorders**, **social media**, and **perfectionism**.	**Eating disorders**, **anorexia**, **perfectionism**, and **symptoms**. Discussions of **disordered eating** are often linked to **social media** exposure, where ideals of perfection contribute to **eating disorders** like anorexia.	The yellow cluster delves into the serious health implications that arise from social media's focus on **body image perfectionism** and how this can lead to unhealthy behaviors like **anorexia** and **disordered eating**. **Weight stigma** and **body dissatisfaction** also play a role.
Cluster 5: Purple Cluster (Mental Health and Adolescence)	This cluster covers the effects of social media on **adolescent mental health**, especially in relation to body image.	**Adolescence**, **mental health**, **self-presentation**, and **communication** stand out. There are also connections to **materialism**, indicating the influence of consumer culture on body image dissatisfaction among teens.	The purple cluster addresses how **mental health** and **communication** patterns are influenced by **social media use** among adolescents, emphasizing the role of **peer pressure** and social comparison in shaping body image and **self-esteem**.
Cluster 6: Light Green Cluster (Behavior and Online Influence)	This smaller cluster relates to **online behavior** and its influence on **body image** and **steroid use**.	**Behavior**, **steroid use**, and **symptoms** are highlighted. This suggests a focus on behaviors adopted online, possibly under the influence of body image-related content.	The light green cluster might indicate how behaviors such as **steroid use** are influenced by **body image ideals** perpetuated through social media platforms, particularly among men.

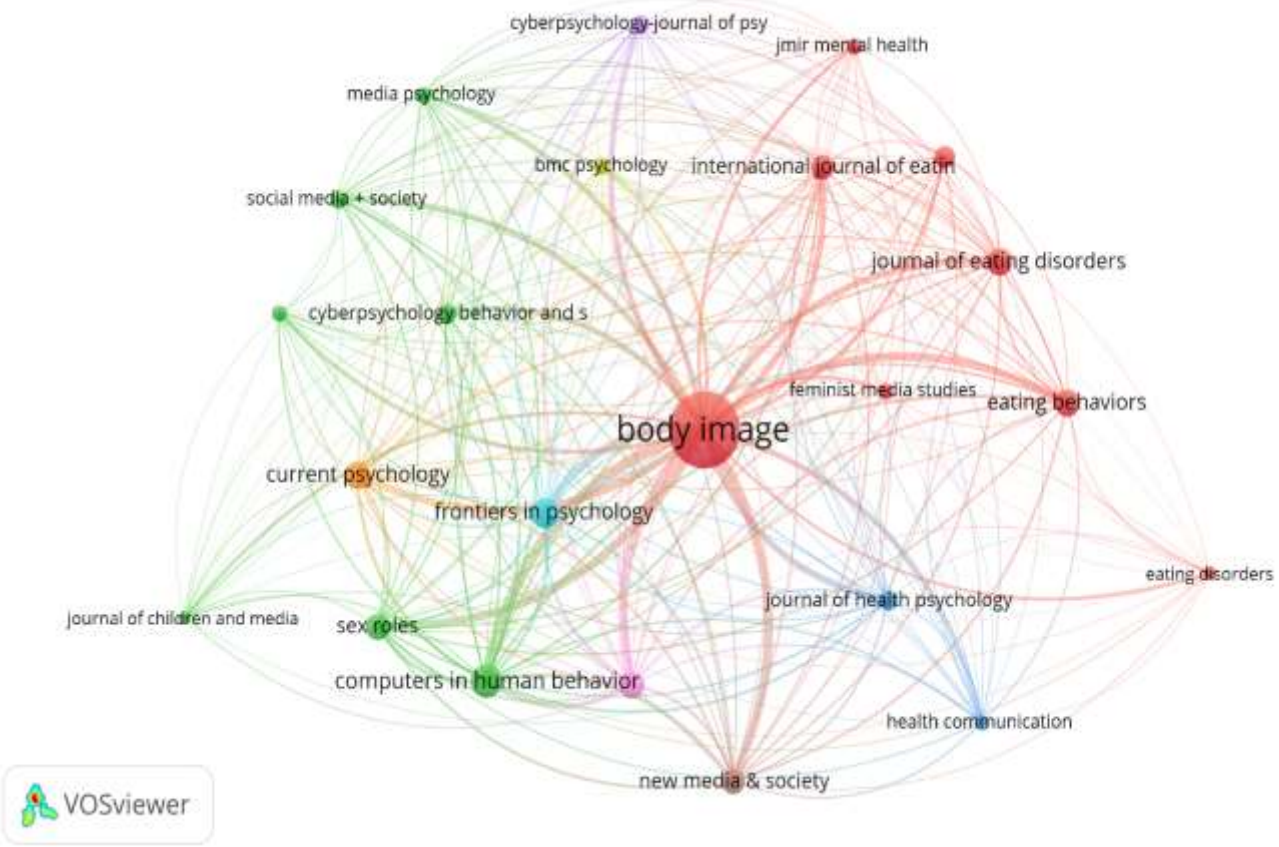


Figure 4 Network Visualization Sources: Bibliographic Coupling

Source: Compiled by Authors (Vosviewer)

Red Cluster (Body Image & Eating Disorders)	• The central node in this cluster is "Body Image," indicating that this is a highly referenced or central topic. Other significant sources in this cluster include journals like *Journal of Eating Disorders* and *Eating Behaviors*. • These sources are likely focused on body image issues, eating disorders, and mental health as they relate to body perception, with a strong connection to psychological and sociological aspects of these topics.
Green Cluster (Media Psychology & Youth Behavior)	• This cluster includes sources like *Media Psychology*, *social media & Society*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*. These sources appear to be connected by research on the effects of media,

	particularly social media, on body image and mental health, especially in younger populations. • The focus seems to be on the interaction between technology, media, and human behavior, especially as it relates to youth and social influences on body image.
Blue Cluster (Health Psychology and Communication)	• This cluster includes sources such as *Journal of Health Psychology* and *Health Communication*, indicating a focus on health psychology and communication studies. • Research in this cluster likely explores how health-related issues, including body image and eating behaviors, are communicated and perceived, particularly through media and health interventions.
Orange Cluster (General Psychology and Human Behavior)	• Sources like *Current Psychology* and *Frontiers in Psychology* are part of this smaller cluster, suggesting a broader focus on psychology, including various factors influencing human behavior, potentially connecting body image and eating behaviors to general psychological theories and studies.
Pink Cluster (Computers and Human Behavior)	• The pink cluster, with sources such as *Computers in Human Behavior*, suggests a focus on the intersection of technology and human psychological responses, possibly investigating how digital technologies influence body image and related behaviors.

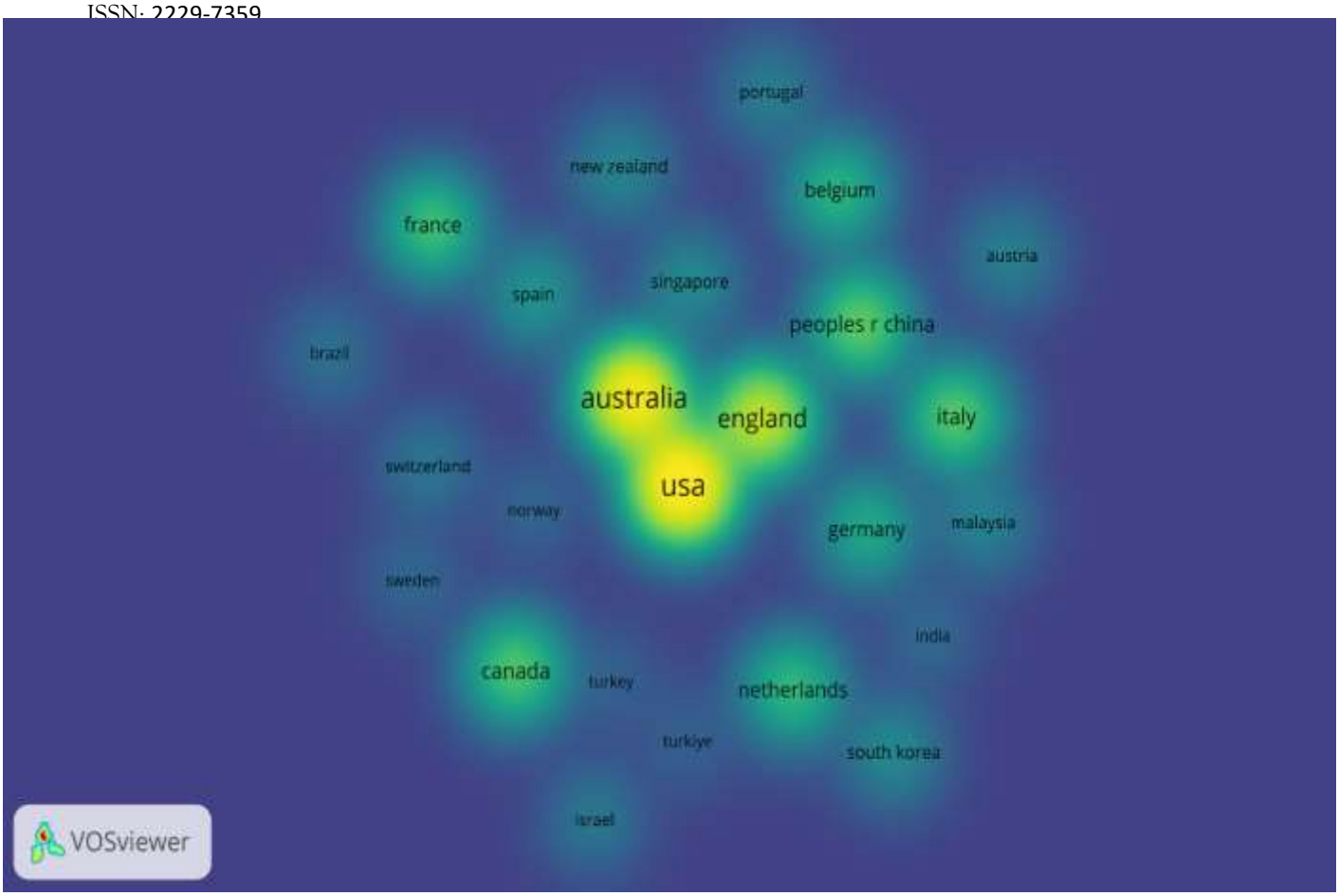


Figure 5 Density Visualization – Bibliographic Coupling Countries

Source: Compiled by Authors (Vosviewer)

The **USA**, **Australia**, and **England** form the core of global research collaborations, with strong bibliographic coupling. **France**, **Germany**, and **China** are also highly active in international research but are slightly less central. Countries like **Canada**, **Netherlands**, and **South Korea** play significant roles in certain specialized areas but are not as central in this particular network. Peripheral countries like **Turkey**, **India**, and **Brazil** may be engaging in more localized or niche areas of research.

Overall, this visualization emphasizes the dominance of the USA and other English-speaking countries in global research, while other regions are either emerging or specializing in distinct research domains.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a thorough overview of the scholarly landscape regarding the intersection of social media and body image from 2013 to 2024. The significant increase in research output underscores the growing importance of this issue, particularly in light of social media's pervasive role in shaping societal beauty standards and its impact on mental health. Key themes identified include the influence of platforms like Instagram on self-objectification and fitness culture, the psychological effects of social media exposure, and the link between body image dissatisfaction and mental health disorders such as depression and eating disorders.

While much progress has been made in understanding these dynamics, the analysis also highlights the need for further research in non-English-speaking contexts, as well as more studies focusing on intervention strategies. Collaborative, interdisciplinary research efforts will continue to be crucial in addressing the complexities of social media's influence on body image and mental health.

LIMITATIONS

This article is constrained to the bibliometric information mended from the database retrieved from Web of Science, so for better and more intensive analysis, other databases like Scopus, PubMed, Lens etc., can be integrate for a more holistic coverage of the research area. In the process of searches using only the "Social Media" AND "Body Image" keyword, the authors have found a limited number of papers, so for a comprehensive study with "Social Media" AND "Body Image" and some other included keywords, may give some new dimensions for the future researcher. This study has included only the "articles" category of documents, but in future research, inclusion of chapters in edited books and conference proceedings, could yield new research insights, for the area of "Social Media" AND "Body Image".

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