Research Hotspots and Development Trends in Social Media Marketing-A Visual Analysis Based on CiteSpace

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Abstract: This study employs the CiteSpace visualization tool to conduct a quantitative and visual analysis of social media marketing research literature from 2011 to 2025 within China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). By mapping knowledge networks, it precisely identifies core research hotspots in this field centered on short videos, key opinion leaders (KOLs), and user stickiness. It reveals the collaborative network patterns among core authors and major research institutions, clarifying the distribution of research strength. Furthermore, it predicts future development trends toward AI empowerment, immersive experiences, and deepening ethical governance, thereby providing a systematic reference for grasping academic dynamics and frontiers in this field.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; CiteSpace; Research Hotspots; Knowledge Map; Development Trends

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement and widespread adoption of digital technologies, social media has profoundly reshaped how people access information, engage in social interactions, and make consumption decisions. It has consequently become a strategic battleground for numerous enterprises seeking to achieve precise user reach, enhance brand influence, and build long-term interactive relationships with consumers. Against this backdrop, academic research on social media marketing has deepened across multiple dimensions, including user behavior analysis, content strategy, effectiveness evaluation, and emerging technology applications. This has gradually formed a cross-disciplinary, multi-perspective research landscape, accumulating an exceptionally rich body of literature.

However, with the rapid growth in the volume of relevant literature and the continuous refinement and expansion of research topics, scholars and practitioners face challenges of information overload and knowledge fragmentation. It has become difficult to grasp the overall knowledge structure, evolutionary trajectory, and cutting-edge developments in this field. Therefore, systematically organizing and summarizing existing research findings to identify core issues, research hotspots, and evolving trends has become a critical issue that the academic community urgently needs to address.

Against this backdrop, the knowledge map analysis tool CiteSpace offers an effective approach to address this challenge. By analyzing keyword co-occurrence, author collaboration, and co-citation relationships within vast literature datasets, CiteSpace enables the visualization of research trajectories, academic communities, and emerging trends. This paper aims to employ CiteSpace software to conduct a quantitative analysis of core social media marketing literature sourced from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). It systematically organizes research hotspots and developmental dynamics within this field, revealing its underlying theoretical logic and evolutionary pathways. By constructing knowledge maps, the study precisely identifies and visualizes research focal points and the knowledge foundation of the field, uncovers the collaborative network structures of core authors and institutions, and detects frontier dynamics and future trends in disciplinary development. This study seeks to provide a clear knowledge framework for subsequent theoretical research through systematic analysis, while offering evidence-based foundations and strategic guidance for corporate marketing practices.

2. Research Methods and Data Sources

2.1 Data Sources

All data used in this study were sourced from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) academic journal database. Searches were

conducted using the keywords social media marketing and short video marketing, covering the time span from 2011 to September 2025. To ensure literature quality, the search scope was restricted to CSSCI-sourced journals and Chinese core journals. After excluding non-research documents such as conference proceedings and announcements, 203 valid articles were ultimately obtained. These serve as the raw data for knowledge graph analysis in this study.

2.2 Research Methods

This study primarily employs bibliometric analysis, utilizing CiteSpace v.6.4.R1 software to visualize the aforementioned literature data. By setting appropriate parameters, co-occurrence analysis and clustering analysis are conducted on keywords, authors, and institutions to construct knowledge maps, thereby identifying research hotspots and collaboration networks[1][2][3]. The core research workflow and specific methods are as follows:

2.2.1 Data preprocessing

First, the retrieved literature was exported in RefWorks format,Data conversion and deduplication were performed using CiteSpace's built-in functions. Simultaneously, fields such as keywords and author affiliations underwent normalization (e.g. merging synonyms, standardizing institutional names) to ensure accuracy in subsequent analyzes.

2.2.2 Core analysis dimensions

Keyword Co-occurrence and Clustering Analysis -- Generated keyword co-occurrence networks to identify research hotspots in the field. Further employed CiteSpace's Label Extraction Algorithm (LLR), a commonly used keyword clustering method, to cluster keywords and reveal underlying research theme structures.

Temporal Analysis -- Visualize keyword time zones to intuitively display the emergence, evolution, and interactions of different research hotspots, tracing the evolution paths of research themes.

Collaboration Network Analysis -- Construct author and institution collaboration network maps to analyze the distribution characteristics and collaboration intensity of core research groups, clarifying the landscape of scientific forces within the field.

2.2.3 Parameter settings and visualization

Parameters are configured based on domain literature characteristics:

Time slices are set to 1 year to capture dynamic evolution, generating temporal maps to identify shifts in research frontiers.

The g-index standard is selected to ensure that keywords and literature truly influential and representative of each year's core research trends are filtered for network construction.

Final results are comprehensively interpreted and visualized through the aforementioned knowledge graphs.

3. Analysis of Hot Topics in Social Media Marketing Research

3.1 Keyword Co-occurrence and Clustering Map Interpretation
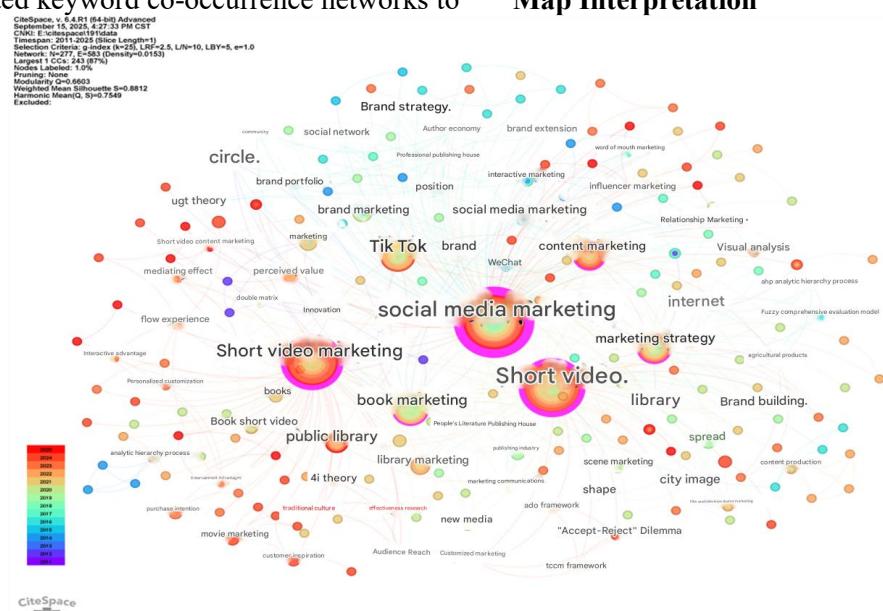
Figure 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Network

3.1.1 Network characteristics

Figure 1 displays the co-occurrence network of keywords in social media marketing research from 2011 to 2025. A macro-level interpretation of this network clearly identifies the core research hotspots and knowledge structure within this field.

First, examining the distribution of core topics reveals that social media marketing, short video marketing, and short videos form the most prominent nodes in the network. This indicates they are not only foundational pillars of research in this field but also core issues that have sustained scholarly attention in recent years. Notably, topics related to short videos have grown to rival the scale of the broader social media marketing theme, visually confirming the dominant role of short-form video formats in both current marketing practices and academic research.

Second, the network exhibits a clear hierarchical structure. Surrounding these core hotspots, a group of intermediate nodes emerge that bridge upper and lower levels, such as Douyin, content marketing, book marketing, and marketing strategy. These themes serve as concrete extensions of core concepts, revealing the primary practical domains and application directions of current research. For instance, Douyin is highlighted as a specific platform, while content marketing and marketing strategy represent core means to achieve marketing objectives.

Finally, these intermediate nodes connect further to more specialized concepts like brand, flow experience, and the internet. This structure indicates that while focusing on core elements, the field is continuously deepening and diversifying. Research has progressed from macro-level strategic discussions to micro-level mechanisms like user psychology (flow experience) and brand building, forming a multidimensional knowledge system spanning macro to micro, theory to practice.

Overall, with social media as the core node, multidimensional clusters form around it. The marketing strategy cluster encompasses emotional marketing and precision marketing, reflecting corporate explorations in optimizing promotions through social media. The book marketing cluster connects to author economies and communities, embodying marketing model innovations in the publishing industry. Clusters like content marketing and brand marketing highlight the extension and evolution of core marketing elements within social media contexts. Collectively, these clusters outline a multifaceted landscape of social media marketing research centered around platform-strategy-industry application.

3.1.2 Research trend identification

Based on the structural characteristics of keyword co-occurrence networks, this study identifies three major research hotspots in the field of social media marketing. These hotspots do not exist in isolation but are collectively revealed by the network's core nodes, key links, and community structures.

The Intersection and Integration of Diverse Marketing Strategies

Network maps reveal that nodes like content marketing and book marketing, though not the largest in volume, exhibit strong co-occurrence links with core hubs such as social media marketing and short-video marketing. This structure indicates they are not independent research directions but rather widely explored strategy combinations. Content marketing leverages platforms' social attributes to convey brand value, while book marketing relies on data analysis for personalized outreach. Their close network association aligns with academic exploration of data-driven precision targeting, collectively forming core methodologies for optimizing marketing effectiveness.

Expansion and Penetration of Cross-Industry Marketing Applications

The network features nodes like book marketing with substantial scale, tightly intertwined with keywords such as content marketing and community operations. This phenomenon signifies that social media marketing research has transcended superficial discussions, entering a phase of profound industry application. As a prime example, book marketing demonstrates strong connections to the core network. This reveals how marketing theory, when applied to specific industries like publishing and e-commerce, sparks innovative models such as author livestreams and community reading groups. It reflects a significant trend where knowledge in this field is shifting from general paradigms toward deepening vertical scenarios.

The Centralization and Reconstruction of New Marketing Communication Forms

Most notably, nodes like short videos and their derivative secondary creations occupy core network positions due to their massive volume

and high centrality. This is no coincidence--it quantitatively confirms short videos have become the dominant force defining contemporary social media marketing communication. The extensive connections between these nodes and concepts like user participation and 'interaction' clearly indicate that research focus has shifted from traditional one-way communication models to the reconstruction of a new communication ecosystem characterized by user co-creation, visual content, and fragmentation.

Further analysis of the keyword co-occurrence network reveals a typical core-hub topological structure. Within this framework, the nodes social media marketing, short video marketing and short videos not only dominate in scale (frequency) but, more critically, are confirmed to possess high intermediary centrality. This discovery transcends mere hotspot identification, unveiling the intrinsic logic and integration mechanisms driving knowledge development within the field.

3.1.3 Research topic clustering
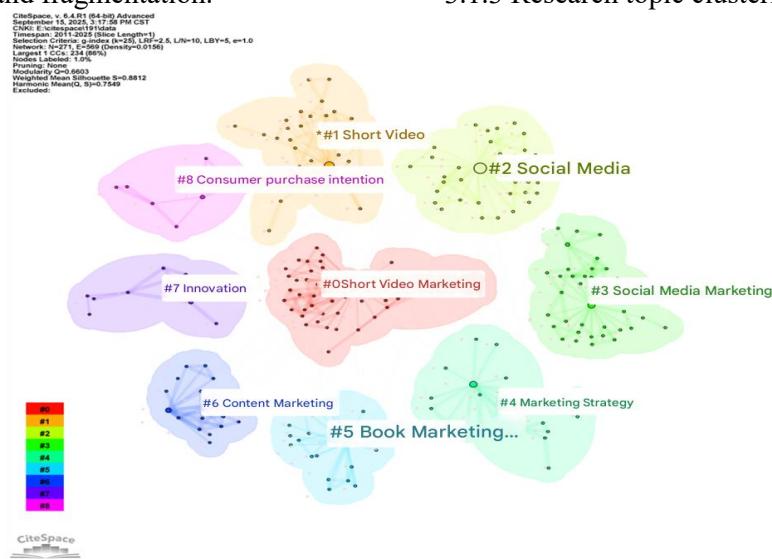
Figure 2. Keyword Clustering Map

To delve into the knowledge structure within the field of social media marketing, this study employs the log-likelihood ratio algorithm to perform cluster analysis on keyword co-occurrence networks. Figure 2 results indicate a network modularity Q value of 0.6603 (>0.3) and a weighted average silhouette coefficient S of 0.8812 (>0.7), demonstrating a robust clustering structure with high internal homogeneity and strong reliability. The table below details the nine primary clusters generated and their core information.

Table 1. Keyword Clustering Table

Clustering ID	Scale	Silhouette value	Average year	Cluster names extracted by the LLR algorithm (labels)	Representative Keywords (LLR Value, p-value)
#0	62	0.986	2019	Social Media Marketing	Social Media Marketing (16.01, 1.0E-4), Social Media (9.81, 0.005), Short Video (7.77, 0.01), Short Video Marketing (6.17, 0.05), Influencer Marketing (6.05, 0.05)
#1	41	0.996	2022	Short-Form Video Marketing	Short-Form Video Marketing (21.54, 1.0E-4), Social Media (7.72, 0.01), Flow Experience (7.33, 0.01), Purchase Intent (7.33, 0.01), Short Video (5.45, 0.05)
#2	30	0.76	2018	Book Marketing	Book Marketing (29.24, 1.0E-4), Douyin (11.69, 0.001), Community-Based (8.13, 0.005), Marketing Communication (4.59, 0.05), Creative Marketing (4.04, 0.05)
#3	29	0.871	2020	Short-Form Video	Short-Form videos (22.57, 1.0E-4), Public libraries (6.74, 0.01), Libraries (6.74, 0.01), New media era (6.74, 0.01), Communication (6.74, 0.01)
#4	26	0.856	2019	Marketing Strategy	Marketing Strategy (16.61, 1.0E-4), Agricultural Products (9.65, 0.005), Archives Department (4.79, 0.05), Enhancement Strategy (4.79, 0.05), Profit Model (4.79, 0.05)

#5	17	0.878	2017	Content Marketing	Content Marketing (15.67, 1.0E-4), Interactive Marketing (10.11, 0.005), Relationship Marketing (10.11, 0.005), Social Media Marketing (5.02, 0.05), Instagram (5.02, 0.05)
#6	10	0.965	2017	Brand Marketing	Brand Marketing (13.78, 0.001), Ethnic Cultural Tourism (6.79, 0.01), Brand Portfolio (6.79, 0.01), Positioning (6.79, 0.01), KOL Marketing (6.79, 0.01)
#7	9	0.879	2016	Innovation	Innovation (15.21, 1.0E-4), Low-Sugar Living (7.47, 0.01), Small and Medium Enterprises (7.47, 0.01), Books (7.47, 0.01), Policy Research (7.47, 0.01)
#8	8	0.979	2023	Consumer Purchase Intent	Consumer Purchase Intent (7.21, 0.01), Baijiu Products (7.21, 0.01), Impulse Purchase Intent (7.21, 0.01), Perceived Value (7.21, 0.01), Short Video Content Marketing (7.21, 0.01)

Based on the clustering results in Table 1, this study provides an in-depth interpretation of the knowledge structure in the field of social media marketing at the community level:

Core Domain -- Short Video-Driven Marketing Paradigm Shift

The two largest and most homogeneous clusters (#0 Social Media Marketing and #1 Short Video Marketing) collectively establish short video's central position. Cluster #0 (clustering value 0.986) incorporates short video and short video marketing into the broader social media marketing category, indicating its evolution from a subtopic to a domain core. Cluster #1 (k-means 0.996, average year 2022) represents the latest research frontier. It clearly demonstrates a complete influence pathway from medium (short video) to psychology (flow experience) to behavior (purchase intent), marking a shift from strategic description to empirical exploration of user psychology and behavioral mechanisms.

Industry Penetration -- Diversified Applications from Education to Agricultural Products

The clustering results vividly reveal the cross-industry breadth of social media marketing applications. #2 Book Marketing (k-means 0.760) and #3 Short Video (k-means 0.871) are both closely tied to the education and culture sector. The former focuses on circle-based community operations on the Douyin platform, while the latter explores the communication transformation of public libraries in the new media era. Particularly noteworthy is the #4 Marketing Strategy cluster, where the coexistence of keywords agricultural products and archival departments powerfully demonstrates that related marketing strategies have permeated beyond commercial domains into diverse societal sectors like agriculture and cultural undertakings, showcasing robust practical extensibility.

Strategic Evolution -- From Classical Theory Integration to Cutting-Edge Effect Measurement

The early #5 Content Marketing and #6 Brand Marketing clusters (average year 2017) reflect deep integration with classical marketing theories (interactive marketing, relationship marketing, KOL marketing), laying the foundational strategies for the field. The latest #8 Consumer Purchase Intent Cluster (average year 2023, contour value 0.979) represents the newest direction in strategy research. It directly links short-video content marketing with consumer psychological indicators such as perceived value and impulse buying, aiming to precisely quantify the ultimate effectiveness of marketing activities at the micro level. This reflects the field's progression toward scientific and refined research methodologies.

Conclusion -- Through cluster analysis, this study not only validates the aforementioned research hotspots but also reveals at the community level that social media marketing has formed a mature and dynamically evolving knowledge system. This system is driven by short videos, operates across diverse industries, builds upon classic strategies, and advances through the measurement of consumer psychology and behavior.

3.1.4 Research trend evolution

To dynamically reveal the evolutionary trajectory of research in social media marketing, this study mapped a keyword timeline, as shown in Figure 3. By analyzing the emergence sequence and continuity of keywords within four major clusters (#0 to #3), this research identified a clear developmental path in the field -- from establishing theoretical foundations, to diversifying application scenarios, and ultimately to deepening the exploration of underlying mechanisms.

#0#1 Cluster collectively charts the diffusion path of social media marketing from theoretical framework development to specific industry

practices.

#0 Cluster originates from brand account marketing and quantitative evaluation models like Fuzzy Integrated Analysis Method and Analytic Hierarchy Process, indicating early research focused on methodological construction. Simultaneously, the starting points of #1

Cluster--mobile social era and marketing models--establish the era's backdrop. Both converged at the core node of short videos and short video marketing, marking a shift in research focus from macro-contextual discourse to specific, dominant media forms.
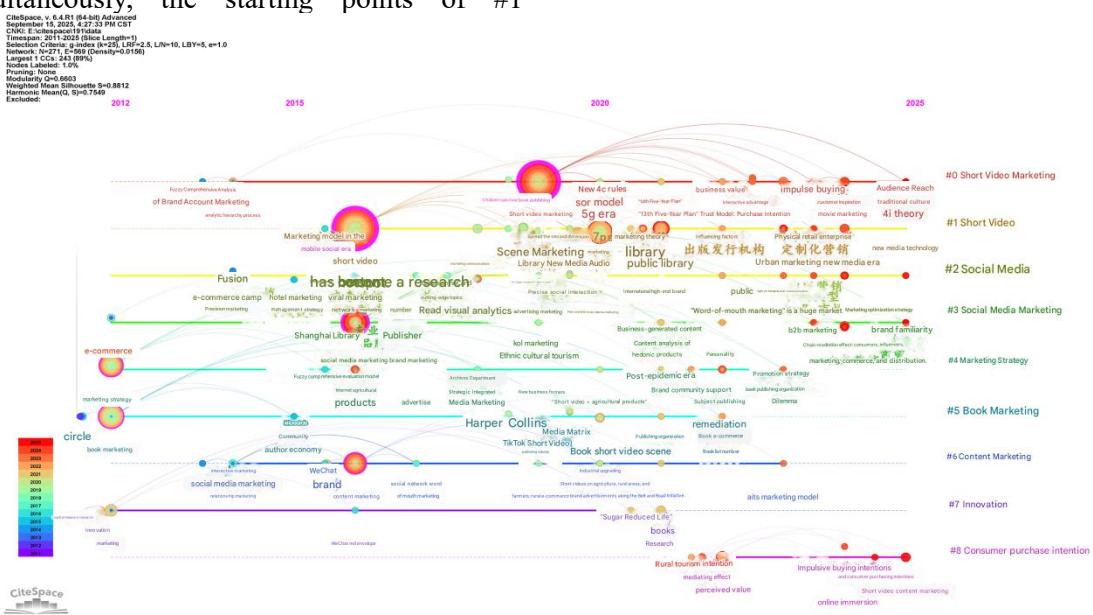
Figure 3. Keyword Timeline

After establishing short videos' centrality, Cluster #0 demonstrated sustained theoretical deepening. It successively introduced modern marketing theories like the New 4Cs and SOR Model, linking them to national strategic contexts (14th Five-Year Plan, 13th Five-Year Plan) as research grew increasingly refined. This trajectory ultimately extends to deeper consumer psychology and behavior, such as impulse buying and customer inspiration, achieving an elevation from channel strategy to psychological engagement. In parallel, Cluster #1 demonstrates persistent scenario expansion -- from the Douyin platform to library marketing, then to public libraries and physical retail enterprises. This clearly charts short video marketing's penetration from commercial domains into public service sectors like culture, education, and urban management.

Clusters #2 and #3 reveal the evolution of core marketing elements within the field and deepen research into their underlying mechanisms.

Cluster #2 begins with integration, e-commerce marketing, and precision marketing, reflecting early explorations of strategy convergence. Subsequently, the trajectory extends to content and dissemination strategies like user-generated content and viral marketing. Recent

developments are particularly pivotal, featuring keywords like quasi-social interaction, word-of-mouth communication, and mass interpersonal communication models. This shift marks a transition in research focus from external marketing strategies to the underlying social psychological mechanisms driving their effectiveness.

#3 Cluster, similar to #2, originates from foundational applications like e-commerce. Its unique value lies in clearly mapping a development path centered on influencer marketing -- evolving from early KOL marketing to exploring its underlying chain intermediary effects, and ultimately focusing on specific consumer cognitive variables like brand familiarity. This trajectory vividly illustrates the deepening process of research--from identifying marketing phenomena, to empirically testing their influence pathways, and finally delineating their operational boundaries.

Reviewing the evolutionary paths of these four clusters, social media marketing research reveals a clear trilogy-like developmental logic:

Foundation and Focus (Early Stage): Establishing methodologies and converging on short videos as the core medium.

Expansion and Application (Mid-Phase):

Theoretical frameworks continuously evolve, with applications extending from commercial to nonprofit sectors.

Deepening and Integration (Recent Phase): Research frontiers shift toward micro-level empirical exploration of user psychology, communication mechanisms, and mediating pathways, exhibiting strong interdisciplinary characteristics and scientific orientation.
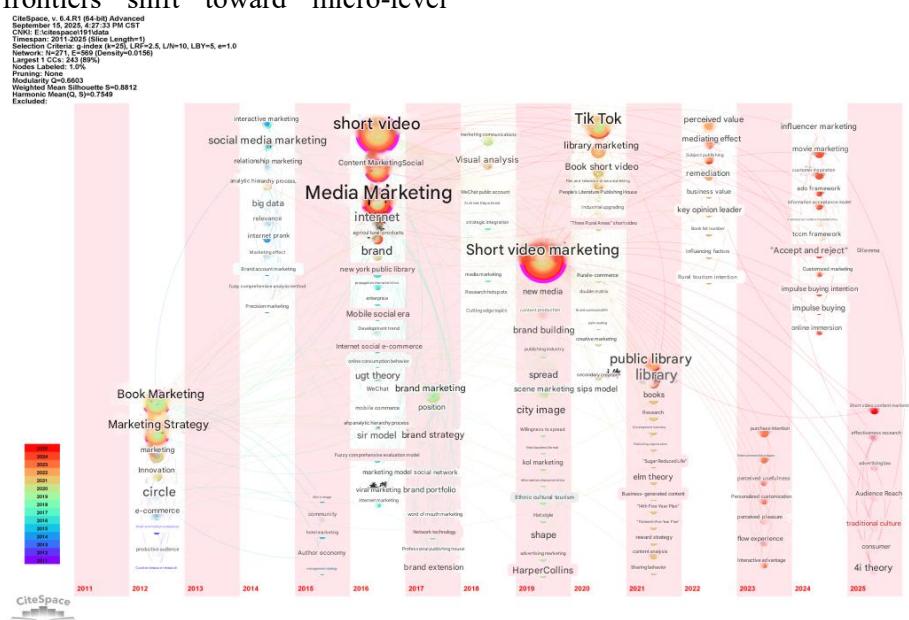
Figure 4. Keyword Time Zone Map

By delving deeper into Figure 4, this analysis will not reiterate the what are the hotspots already identified in the cluster analysis, but instead focus on answering why do these hotspots emerge in this sequence, and what is the underlying driving logic? The keyword time zone map dynamically reveals the complete evolutionary trajectory of the social media marketing field from 2011 to 2025. This analysis aims to transcend mere description of phenomena and explore the intrinsic developmental logic, revealing that the field underwent a deepening paradigm shift -- from external tool-driven approaches to internal psychological mechanism exploration, ultimately advancing toward a reconstruction of meaning and value. This represents a paradigm elevation from instrumental rationality to value rationality. Building upon the trilogy developmental logic derived from the cluster analysis, this analysis will further elaborate:

Foundation Period (2012-2015) -- Methodological Pioneering and Strategic Awakening

The field did not originate from specific phenomena but from the construction of methodologies and foundational strategies. Long before the short video craze, book marketing and marketing strategies had already emerged as major nodes, while quantitative tools such as the Analytic Hierarchy Process and Fuzzy Comprehensive Analysis Method were already in place. This reveals the instrumental rationality orientation of early research -- scholars sought to frame and validate the marketing value of this emerging social media landscape using scientific, quantifiable methodologies, laying a solid analytical foundation for the subsequent explosive growth of applied research.

Focus and Expansion Phase (2016–2020) -- Core Media Establishment and Scenario Explosion

2016 marked a pivotal turning point -- short videos and social media marketing emerged simultaneously as major nodes, converging with content marketing to signify the identification of core research vehicles. Subsequently, studies entered a rapid expansion phase, moving from points to a broader landscape -- Platform Focus -- The emergence of Douyin (2020, major node) signaled a shift from generic media to specific ecosystems. Industry Expansion -- From publishing and libraries to agricultural products and rural tourism, the research map demonstrated nearly limitless industry penetration. Theoretical Advancement -- Key concepts like the SIPS Model and secondary creation indicated the introduction of more suitable theories to explain emerging phenomena. This phase tightly integrated instrumental rationality with practical application.

Methodologically grounded, research vigorously pursued and interpreted cutting-edge practices driven by core technologies and platform innovations.

3.2 Deepening and Sublimation Phase (2021-2025) -- Exploring Intrinsic Mechanisms and Meaningful Value

Research frontiers underwent fundamental shifts, with keywords exhibiting heightened psychological, mechanistic, and value-oriented characteristics. Concepts like perceived value, flow experience, and impulse buying form a complete psychological causal chain from cognition to emotion to behavior, revealing the depth of psychological mechanisms. The emergence of mediation effects signifies a shift from describing what is to empirically proving why, aiming to uncover the internal black box of how marketing activities influence consumer decisions and validate impact pathways. The recent emergence of concepts like traditional culture, customer inspiration, and audience reach signals that marketing objectives no longer focus solely on conversion. Instead, they pursue cultural resonance, inspiration, and co-creation of meaning, reconstructing value through significance. This indicates the field's research paradigm is undergoing a profound elevation toward value rationality. Scholars are moving beyond the extreme pursuit of marketing efficiency (instrumental rationality) to explore its connections with individual well-being,

cultural heritage, and societal value.

3.2.1 Major findings and discussions

Through the structural characteristics of comprehensive cluster analysis and the dynamic sequences of time zone maps, this study derives the following fundamental conclusions:

Over the past decade, Chinese social media marketing research has undergone an evolutionary journey from technique to philosophy. It began with the foundational phase of constructing methodologies as tools, flourished during the focused expansion phase through strategic and contextual growth as channels, and ultimately progressed toward the deepening and sublimation phase, where it seeks psychological resonance and value co-creation as a vehicle of meaning.

This trajectory reveals that the fundamental driving force behind the field's development has shifted from external technological platform innovation to internal humanistic care and cultural value exploration. Future research frontiers will inevitably focus more on rediscovering and anchoring human emotions, meaning, and social value within the world of data and algorithms.

4. Network Analysis of Author-Institution Collaborations

## 4.1 Characteristics of Author Collaboration Networks
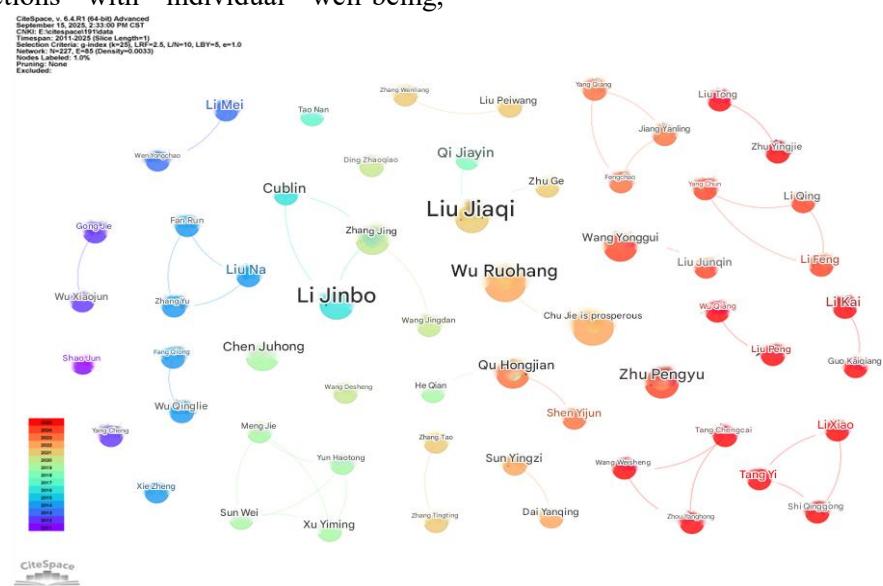
Figure 5. Author Collaboration Network

Through visual analysis of the author collaboration network depicted in Figure 5, this study aims to reveal the patterns of research collaboration and the structure of academic communities within the field of social media marketing. The network map reveals that the

author collaboration network in this field exhibits a typical decentralized cohesion pattern, characterized by the following features:

From a macro perspective, the author collaboration network forms a loosely connected overall network. It comprises 59 authors, forming 20 major collaborative groups and 8 individual contributors. The network exhibits low overall density (approximately 1.1%), indicating that from a global viewpoint, collaborative ties among scholars are relatively sparse. A tightly interwoven, extensively interactive academic community has yet to emerge.

At the micro level, the network points to a multi-core, small-group collaboration model. Despite the loose overall structure, multiple tightly knit collaborative groups exist internally, each centered around highly productive scholars. Among these, the elite team centered around Wu Ruohang and the multi-member teams centered around Qu Hongjian and Zhang Jing constitute the most prominent collaborative islands within the network. Typically comprising 3-5 members, these teams exhibit strong internal cohesion and robust connections, indicating sustained, in-depth collaboration on specific research directions such as social media marketing theory development and empirical studies on short-video marketing. They have established stable research trajectories and play a crucial role in guiding and underpinning the development of the field's knowledge system.

Consequently, the current decentralized cohesion model exhibits limitations in both the breadth and depth of collaboration. Key constraints include--first, the scarcity of cross-team collaboration, with virtually no bridge authors connecting smaller groups, hindering knowledge flow between them, second, the network displays pronounced institutionalized boundaries, with collaboration predominantly occurring within the same institution or academic lineage, leaving cross-institutional and cross-regional cooperation underdeveloped.

Overall, research collaboration in social media marketing currently exhibits a pattern of internal cohesion and external isolation. While this model facilitates deep specialization in specific areas, it also risks fostering rigid research perspectives and diminishing theoretical innovation. Future efforts must urgently encourage cross-team, cross-disciplinary, and cross-institutional collaboration to break down knowledge barriers and catalyze more disruptive and influential academic outcomes.

4.2 Current Status of Institutional Collaboration Networks
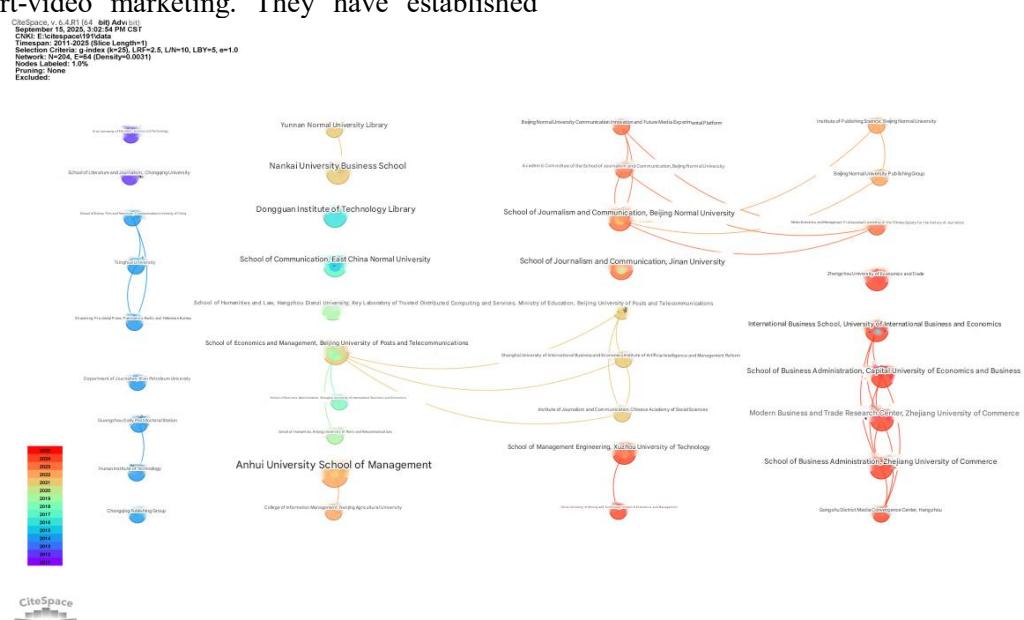

Figure 6. Institutional Collaboration Network

Analysis of institutional collaboration networks reveals the distribution and coordination of scientific productivity at a more macro level. The characteristics of the network shown in Figure 6 closely align with those of author collaboration networks, further highlighting the resource aggregation effect. Analysis of institutional collaboration networks indicates that scientific cooperation in this field exhibits an overall pattern of multiple cores with loose

linkage. This reflects both the collaborative dynamism driven by interdisciplinary integration and the current state of insufficient resource consolidation.

First, the institutional collaboration network exhibits a multipolar structure centered around universities. Institutions like the School of Journalism and Communication at Beijing Normal University and the International Business School at the University of International Business and Economics have become the most important knowledge production and collaboration hubs in the network due to their disciplinary strengths in communication studies and business. These institutions not only have prominent node sizes but also occupy central positions in collaborative relationships, demonstrating strong academic influence. Simultaneously, the emergence of enterprises such as People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. constitutes key nodes for industry-academia-research integration, signifying the two-way permeation between academic research and practical application.

Moreover, the current collaboration model exhibits distinct discipline-driven characteristics. Schools of journalism and communication and business schools approach research from perspectives of content dissemination and commercial strategy respectively, forming distinct research orientations. Collaboration predominantly occurs within the same institution or between institutions with similar disciplinary backgrounds, presenting localized coordination based on disciplinary logic. However, broad cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration remains insufficient, resulting in uneven network density and the absence of a tightly integrated, industry-wide collaborative ecosystem.

Overall, institutional collaboration networks have preliminarily established a basic framework led by top universities, featuring localized industry-academia-research linkages. Nevertheless, the network structure remains relatively loose, with insufficient integration between academic theoretical exploration and industrial practical resources. Moving forward, it is essential to strengthen deep institutional collaboration through establishing interdisciplinary platforms and university-enterprise joint laboratories. This will promote the systematic integration of academic insights and industry practices, enabling

collective responses to the increasingly complex challenges in social media marketing.


Annual	2011	2012	2013	20214	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Publication volume	1	3	1	10	3	12	8	8	14	26	28	23	22	30	10
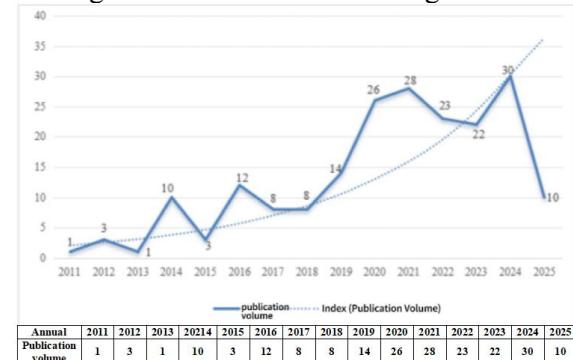
Figure 7. Publication Trend Chart

Incidentally, an analysis of the volume of literature published between 2010 and 2025 (Figure 7) reveals a sustained and steady growth in the number of academic achievements within the field of social media marketing. This trend represents more than a simple accumulation of quantity, it embodies a profound logic of research development and is corroborated by the aforementioned analyzes. The steady rise in publication volume serves as the most direct evidence of this research field's robust vitality and ongoing development. It indicates that an increasing number of scholars are dedicating themselves to this area, continuously producing new research findings that push the boundaries of knowledge. Far from stagnation or decline, this field represents a dynamic academic frontier. This growth trajectory aligns closely with the rapid global expansion of social media and its deep integration into socioeconomic life. Each inflection point in publication volume may correspond to a significant technological innovation (e.g. the rise of short videos), platform iteration (e.g. The explosive growth of Douyin), or business model innovation (e.g. live-streaming e-commerce). This clearly demonstrates the field's strong practice-driven nature, with academia actively responding to and attempting to interpret rapidly evolving marketing practices. Combined with the keyword and cluster analyzes discussed earlier, this growth in publication volume is not merely low-level repetition. Research themes have progressively deepened, refined, and structured themselves--from early conceptual introductions, through mid-stage strategic explorations, to recent investigations into psychological mechanisms and value discussions. Consequently, the rise in publication volume signifies a qualitative advancement in the field's

knowledge system, marking its evolution from an emerging topic into a maturing academic discipline.

5. Research Findings and Outlook

5.1 Research Findings

This study employs CiteSpace to conduct a visualization analysis of 203 core publications in China's social media marketing field from 2011 to 2025. It systematically maps the research hotspots, developmental trajectory, and collaborative networks within this domain, yielding the following core conclusions:

Social media marketing has formed a multidimensional knowledge system with short videos as its absolute core. Keyword co-occurrence and clustering analysis reveal that social media marketing research has developed a clearly layered structure: short videos and short video marketing are not only the most frequently occurring hotspots but also serve as pivotal hubs connecting other research themes, exerting pervasive influence throughout the field. Research expands horizontally around this core into diverse industry applications (e.g. publishing, cultural tourism, agriculture) and vertically into user psychological mechanisms (e.g. flow experiences, purchase intent), constructing a comprehensive theoretical framework spanning macro-level strategies to micro-level impacts.

Social media marketing follows a clear evolutionary path from instrumental rationality to value rationality. Zone diagram analysis reveals profound shifts in the field's research paradigm: the early phase (2012-2015) emphasized methodological development (instrumental rationality), the mid-phase (2016-2020) focused on core media and scenario expansion (practice-driven), while the recent period (2021–2025) has pivoted toward deep exploration of user psychology, communication mechanisms, and social value (value rationality). This marks a shift in the field from pursuing marketing efficiency toward a new phase of exploring humanistic care and social significance.

Social media marketing research exhibits a collaborative landscape characterized by internal cohesion and external isolation. Author-institution collaboration networks display a decentralized cohesion pattern featuring multiple cores and small groups. While tight-knit collaborative clusters exist internally, centered around high-output scholars and leading universities, broad cross-team, cross-institutional, and cross-disciplinary collaboration remains severely inadequate. The overall low density of the collaborative network limits the collision of academic ideas and innovation to some extent.

5.2 Development Trend Outlook

Based on the aforementioned research findings, particularly the analysis of cutting-edge keywords and evolutionary logic, this study projects the following trends for future social media marketing research:

Social media marketing will undergo deepening technological empowerment -- evolving from adopter to reconstructor. Future research will transcend viewing AI and the metaverse as mere tools, instead exploring how they reshape the foundational logic of marketing. Specifically, AI will drive personified marketing -- the research focus will shift from AI-generated content to AI-driven personalized relationship building, exploring how algorithms simulate and sustain long-term, credible quasi-social relationships with users. Moreover, the value of immersive experiences will be quantifiable: Within immersive environments like the metaverse, research will tackle the challenge of measuring novel consumer values such as virtual asset ownership and digital identity recognition, establishing corresponding marketing effectiveness evaluation systems.

The focus of social media marketing ethics and governance will shift from fringe discussions to central issues. As technology deeply integrates into marketing, ethical issues like algorithmic bias, data privacy, and digital addiction will become indispensable core research topics. Future studies will focus on constructing responsible social media marketing frameworks, exploring pathways to balance commercial value and social welfare within compliance frameworks.

Social media marketing research paradigms will converge, bridging the gap from micro-level empiricism to macro-level value, further reinforcing the aforementioned trend toward value rationality. Research will increasingly integrate micro-level consumer psychological data (e.g. neuromarketing) with macro-level cultural and social value narratives (e.g. national trend culture, sustainability), revealing the

interactive mechanisms between individual behavior and collective consciousness within social media spaces. This approach unifies scientific rigor with humanistic insights.

Collaborative models in social media marketing will evolve from intra-disciplinary competition to cross-boundary co-creation. To navigate increasingly complex marketing environments, future research collaborations must dismantle existing barriers. We anticipate the emergence of more triangular convergence research teams--cross-disciplinary communities comprising data scientists proficient in algorithms, psychologists or sociologists versed in human nature, and marketing scholars familiar with commercial practices -- to tackle complex problems beyond the scope of any single discipline.

In summary, Chinese social media marketing research stands at a pivotal turning point, shifting from incremental growth to quality enhancement. Future development will no longer be driven solely by technological iteration but shaped by the deep dialog and co-evolution among technology, human-centered values, and societal impact. Through systematic analysis, this study provides a clear knowledge map and directional guidance for subsequent research in this field.

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