



## Social Media and Gender Identity: Bibliometric Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Social media has increasingly become an important source for expressing and exploring one's gender identity, influencing how they perceive and construct their identities. Given the growing interest in this area, a bibliometric analysis is essential to map the research landscape and identify key trends and gaps in the study of social media's role in gender identity formation. The present study explores the intersection of social media and gender identity through a bibliometric analysis, utilizing data from the SCOPUS database. A comprehensive search yielded 590 initial results, which were subsequently refined through filters focused on publication year and language, reducing the dataset to 269 relevant documents. The refined dataset was analyzed using VOSviewer. These metrics were employed to identify emerging research areas that are both innovative and gaining focus, as indicated by an increase in citations. The analysis covered publications from the past decade (i.e. from the year 2015-2024), providing insights into the research landscape within this field. VOSviewer was utilized to identify keyword clusters that revealed significant focus areas such as "Transgender," "Adolescent," "Young Adult," "Sexual Behavior," "Sexual Orientation," and "Sexuality".



Terms like “dating violence”, “body image”, “homosexuality” and “aggression” are present but less central, suggesting that these are discussed but they may not be as focal as the larger themes. This likely indicates a need for a shift towards more inclusivity of broader categories of research in recent discussions. The findings have several implications in the array of research such as advocacy, policy making and community support initiatives in the field of gender identity and social media.

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### **Social Media and Gender Identity: Bibliometric Analysis**

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, profoundly influencing how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. With billions of users worldwide, platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter serve not only as communication tools but also as spaces where identities are shaped, expressed, and negotiated. Among the various aspects of identity that social media impacts, gender identity stands out as a particularly complex and multifaceted construct.

Gender identity concerns about an individual's internal interpretation of their gender, while gender expression is the external manifestation of one's gender through behavior, clothing, and other forms of presentation to the world” (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.). The fluidity of gender identity is increasingly evident on social media, where individuals can display identities that deviate from prevailing public stereotypes (Anindya, 2016).

According to Erikson's (1968) theoretical framework, identity is understood as being molded by the interaction between a person’s personality, their self-concept, interpersonal relationships, and contextual factors such as social and historical environment. In the current era, social media and online activities constitute a significant context for adolescent identity exploration and development (Raiziene et al., 2022). Teenagers are the most frequent consumers of social media, mostly on mobile devices. They use these sites to express themselves, connect with their friends, and interact with online influencers and content producers. Recent research indicates that social media serves as a crucial setting for identity formation, where adolescents engage in socialization (Lajnef, 2023; Meier & Johnson, 2022; Shankleman et al., 2021; Valkenburg, 2022). These digital environments allow adolescents to interact,



showcase themselves, and receive immediate feedback, which plays a vital role in shaping their self-concept and exploring their identities (Cingel et al., 2022; Shankleman et al., 2021).

Gender identity moderates both the strength and the direction of correlation between social media practices and mental health (Coyne et al., 2023). A growing corpus of sociological research suggests that digital platforms play a bigger role in our interactions with our sexual and gendered lives (Adams-Santos, 2020; Das & Farber, 2020). Furthermore, studies reveal the significance of social media platforms for gender and sexual minorities' identity work (Colosi & Lister, 2019; Craig et al., 2021; Das & Farber, 2020; Miller, 2017; Wignall, 2017, 2022); these platforms provide marginalized people with a space to create identities as a part of a process of self-discovery and affirmation (McInroy et al., 2019).

Colossi et al. (2023) conducted focus groups with 17 LGBTQ+ individuals, exploring their experiences with online harms. Participants included individuals identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, non-binary, pansexual, polyamorous, and kink. The study found that, while sexual and gender minorities encounter various challenges on social media, these platforms also serve as crucial spaces for fostering understanding and acceptance.

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

In academic research, the relationship between social media use and mental health has been extensively studied. Numerous studies have shown both the advantages and disadvantages of social media use for mental health. Despite its increasing significance in today's digitally connected world, the relationship between gender identity and social media is still largely unexplored. A closer look is required to comprehend how gender identity is developed, articulated, and negotiated in the context of social media in light of this gap in the literature. A bibliometric analysis might be useful in identifying areas that require further research, as the field of study on the interaction of gender identity and social media is still in its infancy. This is essential for directing subsequent research to fill in these gaps and guarantee a more comprehensive understanding.

### **Data Collection**

To acquire data for the following bibliometric analysis, SCOPUS database was used which yielded 590 results. To ensure relevance and focus, a series of filters were applied, primarily based on publication year and language, which significantly narrowed down the results to 269 documents.

### **Methodology and Tools**



The first part of this topic presents the bibliometric analysis, and the second part introduces the VOS viewer tool.

Bibliometric analysis uses statistics to measure current trends and developments in a certain field of study. Locating well-known authors, nations, and keywords relevant to their field of study is made easier. It is also advisable to look up the quantity of publications and citations made in the relevant field of study (Small, 1999). One of the widely used tools for analyzing and visualizing bibliometric data is VOSviewer. The finders were Nees Janvan Eck and Ludo Waltman (Eck & Waltman, 2010). This tool's interface is quite straightforward and user-friendly. Regarding the study of published data, it provides a variety of visualization and customization options (Yasmin et al., 2021).

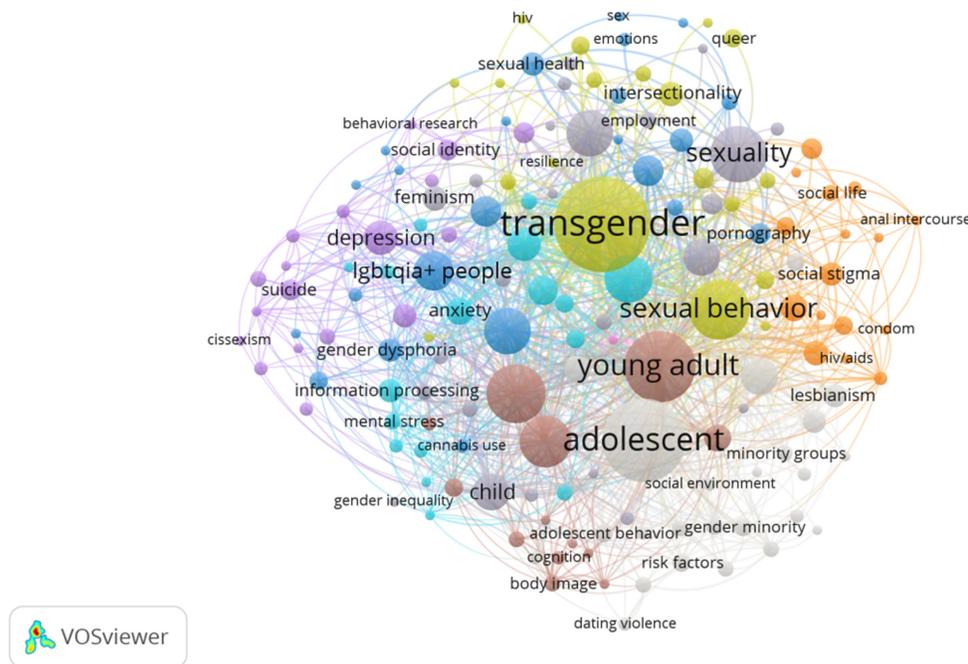
### **Result and Discussion**

After downloading the publication data from SCOPUS, a file containing bibliometric data is imported into a tool called VOSviewer. This tool generates various visualizations and introduces the concepts of "novelty" and "attention" within the data. These metrics are used to identify research topics that are both new and gaining traction, as indicated by an increase in citations. The novelty of a topic is determined by analyzing its co-citation links with other topics in the network. Specifically, VOSviewer calculates the average publication year of the documents citing the topic of interest. If this average publication year is notably more recent than the overall dataset's average, the topic is classified as novel. A range of visualizations has been created after retrieving Scopus data from the past 10 years (2015-2024) to evaluate the research strength in this specific field.

The figure below illustrates the keywords used across various articles. According to the different keyword clusters, the terms "Transgender," "Adolescent," "Young Adult," "Sexual Behavior," "Sexual Orientation," and "Sexuality" are the most frequently utilized.

**Figure 1**

*The visualization of keywords used in the various publications.*



## Central Themes

**Transgender.** This term is at the center of the visualization and is the most prominent, suggesting it is a highly interconnected term within this network. It likely represents a major area of focus in the dataset.

**Adolescent and Young Adult.** These terms are also quite prominent and closely linked, indicating significant discussion or study around these age groups in relation to the other terms.

**Sexual Behavior, Sexual Orientation, Sexuality.** These related terms are central as well, showing that discussions of sexual identity and behaviors are interconnected with other topics.

The visualization further shows a highly interconnected network, indicating that the topics are often discussed in relation to one another. This may reflect the complexity of issues faced by the



LGBTQIA+ community, where identity, health, behavior, and social factors are deeply interwoven. The presence of terms like “social stigma” and “social networking” highlights the role of societal attitudes and the influence of social media in shaping experiences and discussions within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Terms like “dating violence”, “body image”, and “aggression” are present but less central, suggesting these are discussed but may not be as focal as the larger themes. Terms such as “lesbianism” and “homosexuality”, “female” appear less central compared to the broader categories of “sexuality” and “sexual orientation”, indicating a possible shift towards more inclusive and diverse language or broader categories in recent discussions.

### **Analysis**

This network visualization likely represents research or discourse patterns within LGBTQIA+ studies, health research, or social science. The central position of terms like "transgender" and "sexual behavior" suggests that these are major areas of focus, with a significant emphasis on how these issues intersect with mental health, social identity, and sexual health. The connections between "adolescent" and "young adult" with these terms may indicate a particular concern with these age groups in research or discussions.

### **Conclusion**

The bibliometric analysis conducted using data from the SCOPUS database, filtered to ensure relevance and quality, offers a comprehensive overview of the key research trends and emerging areas of focus within LGBTQIA+ studies over the past decade. Utilizing VOSviewer to visualize this data has provided valuable insights into the interconnectedness of various themes, particularly around transgender issues, adolescent and young adult populations, sexual behavior, and mental health.

The centrality of terms like "transgender," "adolescent," and "young adult" in the visualization underscores the prominence of these topics in current research. The strong links between these terms and others like "sexual behavior," "sexual orientation," and "sexuality" highlight the complexity and intersectionality inherent in LGBTQIA+ studies. Moreover, the clusters of related terms emphasize the importance of mental health, social identity, intersectionality, and sexual health as areas of significant concern and ongoing discussion within the field.



These findings carry important implications for future research, policy development, and community support. Researchers and advocates can use this analysis to identify key areas where further investigation is needed, particularly at the intersections of mental health and transgender issues, as well as the unique challenges faced by adolescents and young adults. For policymakers, understanding these interconnections is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the diverse and complex needs of the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, the visualization highlights critical areas where community support services should be prioritized, such as mental health, sexual health, and efforts to combat social stigma.

In conclusion, this analysis not only provides a snapshot of the current state of research in LGBTQIA+ studies but also points the way forward for continued exploration and advocacy in this vital field. The insights gained from this bibliometric analysis can serve as a foundation for more informed, inclusive, and effective approaches to supporting the LGBTQIA+ community across various domains.

## Implications

**Research and Advocacy.** This visualization could guide researchers and advocates in identifying key areas of focus, such as the intersection of mental health and transgender issues, or the particular challenges faced by adolescents and young adults.

**Policy Development.** Understanding these interconnections can help policymakers create more targeted and effective interventions that address the complex needs of the LGBTQIA+ community.

**Community Support.** The visualization highlights areas where support services might be most needed, such as mental health, sexual health, and combating social stigma.

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