

Language Learning through Social Media: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: Social media's rapid expansion greatly impacted language learning, and researchers are intrigued to discover what educational opportunities it can bring. Past studies highlight how social media improves language proficiency, motivation, and intercultural competency, highlighting drawbacks such as misinformation and distraction. To better comprehend language learning through social media, this study conducted a bibliometric analysis of research articles from 2009 to 2024, looking at research trends, significant contributors, and thematic focus areas. According to the data, there has been a consistently gradual rise in scholarly interest in social media as a language learning medium, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings include a list of the most frequently mentioned authors, a summary of popular research topics, and an analysis of international cooperation networks. This collaborative research environment portrays the vital role that multiple authors have played in deepening the understanding of how social media is leveraged for language learning.

Keywords: Bibliometric, countries' collaboration, language learning, research trends, social media

Introduction

In the past decade, the rapid growth of social media has drawn the attention of second language researchers to explore the potential of these platforms for language learning (Muniasamy et al., 2015; Joyce, 2017; Santos et al., 2022; Arti et al., 2023). As the use of social media has become ubiquitous, particularly among younger generations, researchers have been motivated to explore how social media served as practical educational tools, examining their impacts on language learning, including communication and skill development, and provide innovative activities in approaches to language teaching and learning (Zahirrah, 2020; Zhou, 2022).

In recent years, we have seen a shift in language learning methods, primarily due to the advancement of technology. The emergence and popularity of video-based social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram have resulted in the adoption of these platforms as classroom teaching tools. Some text-based platforms, such as WhatsApp, also serve the same purpose. A study by Li (2017) confirms that YouTube was the top English learning tool at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, while a more recent study by Haque (2023) shows that Instagram is the most preferred English learning tool, followed by YouTube. These findings prove that language learning using social media platforms in classrooms has become more popular with the arrival of more sophisticated social media platforms.

Moreover, Al Arif (2019) also found that students use Instagram and Facebook to learn languages. It was discovered that students used social media more for general purposes than for learning English. However, they showed positive attitudes towards social media integration in language learning. Another study by Malik (2019) found that students generally always use smartphones and social media in their activities.

Students use social media to explore vocabulary, increase vocabulary mastery, and learn by building networks for native speakers. The most popular social media platform is YouTube, which contains positive content for learning foreign languages. The interactive social platform also features videos, songs, and comments that students can use to learn foreign languages. Thus, this study investigates the research trends, the most cited authors, research themes and co-occurrence of countries' collaboration in language learning through social media.

Literature Review

Language Learning and Social Media

Integrating social media into language instruction has significantly enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram facilitate authentic communication and collaborative learning, which is essential for developing critical language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Alkamel, 2024). This growing body of research highlights the effectiveness of social media in enriching language instruction.

Recent research also has highlighted the increasing significance of social media in language learning studies. A growing number of publications on this topic reflect the rising interest in the role of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in language instruction (Barrot, 2021; Sun et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of digital platforms, reinforcing the role of social media in remote language learning (Fuad et al., 2022).

Social media provides access to diverse multimedia resources and facilitates exposure to native speakers, which enhances the learning experience and fosters intercultural competence (Singer, 2024). Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn offer diverse tools that support multi-literacy development and enhance instructional skills (Mishra et al., 2019). These platforms engage learners by providing features that promote informal language use, motivating students to practice through collaboration and authentic interaction with native speakers (Sukri et al., 2018). Thus, this enhances students' enthusiasm to learn and fosters cooperative, multimodal learning environments (Wardani, 2023).

In addition to fostering engagement, social media creates less stressful practice environments and provides natural input, allowing students to develop linguistic abilities in a supportive setting (Zhou, 2022). Specifically, these platforms have been found to improve grammar and writing skills, with language learning frequently occurring on popular sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube (Prihatini et al., 2023). Social media applications have also improved oral communication skills and increased students' willingness to communicate (Alazemi et al., 2023).

The use of social media for social networking is a crucial tool for English language learners, offering valuable resources to broaden knowledge and improve language proficiency. Research shows that social media platforms support the development of essential linguistic skills, such as vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Ismail et al., 2019; Abdul Khaliq et al., 2022). Integrating social media and modern technology into teaching strategies has transformed the classroom environment, making learning more interactive and efficient (Rezaul Karim et al., 2022). These reforms have particularly benefited e-learning environments, where social media plays a promising role (Abdul Khaliq et al., 2022).

The benefits of using social media as a teaching tool are substantial. Studies have shown that social media can help students feel more connected, enhance collaboration, and improve academic performance (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Through adaptable and flexible knowledge-sharing opportunities, social media offers a novel learning experience that can be integrated into various course types (Purvis et al., 2020). Dragseth (2020) also notes the importance of intentional social media integration in enhancing classroom teaching and learning.

Furthermore, platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been frequently used for English language learning, positively affecting vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and motivation (Ariantini, 2021). Studies by Babikir (2020) indicate that social media enables learners

to communicate freely with native speakers, allowing them to control their learning process. This level of cultural immersion enhances learners' understanding of language use and improves pronunciation, leading to a more effective learning experience.

As digital tools evolve, social media remains a critical resource in language education. However, although social media offers many advantages, some drawbacks, such as distraction and contradicting information, have been noted (Zhou, 2022). Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of social media on language learning across multiple languages (Abdelhamid et al., 2022).

Challenges in language learning via social media

Using social media as a language learning and teaching platform presents challenges and risks. Challenges such as technical issues and privacy concerns must be addressed to maximise effectiveness (Alkamel, 2024; Singer, 2024). Technical issues and resistance from both students and teachers may complicate the integration of social media into educational settings (Alkamel, 2024). Additionally, privacy issues and the potential for information overload can complicate the learning experience, making it difficult for learners to focus and engage effectively (Singer, 2024).

Another significant concern is the quality of language, as informal communication styles on social media can hinder proper language development, particularly in grammar and vocabulary acquisition (Malik & Qureshi, 2024). Although informal communication on social media is effective for casual interactions, it may not support the development of more formal language skills that are important for academic and professional success. While social media can enhance motivation and provide authentic communication opportunities, it requires careful management to ensure inclusivity and equitable access to technology (Singer, 2024; Nasution, 2022). Thus, conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on language learning through social media is crucial to synthesising existing research, identifying key trends, and uncovering promising avenues for future investigation.

Research Questions

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the research trends in language learning through social media according to the year of publication?
- ii. Who are the most cited authors in language learning through social media?
- iii. What are the research themes in language learning through social media?
- iv. What is the co-occurrence of countries' collaboration in language learning through social media?

Methodology

Bibliometrics combines, organises, and analyses bibliographic data from publications with a scientific focus (Verbeek et al., 2002). It includes comprehensive approaches such as document co-citation analysis, sequence of suitable keywords, literature search and analysis (Fahimnia et al., 2015) and general descriptive statistics, such as publishing journals, publication year and main author classification (Wu & Wu, 2017). In scientific research, getting a broader perspective of existing research concerning a relevant subject matter (Bojović et al., 2013) and a bibliometric analysis profile on the research trajectory and dynamics of the research activities across the globe is vital (Liu, 2014). Hence, this bibliometric study systematically analyses the literature using top-tier publications and articles indexed in Elsevier's Scopus (Scopus) databases.

Those international journal papers are expected to assist in understanding the theoretical perspective regarding the evolution of the research domain while providing valuable references for future research. Furthermore, to guarantee the inclusion of top-tier publications, only articles published

in carefully peer-reviewed and high-quality academic journals were considered to exclude books and conference proceedings (Liu et al., 2015). Elsevier's Scopus includes many journals (Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013); hence, the indexed articles from 2009 to August 2024 were explored for analysis.

Data search strategy

The study employed a screening sequence to determine the search terms for article retrieval. Study was initiated by querying Scopus database with KEY (language AND learning AND through AND social AND media) AND PUBYEAR > 2018 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Social Media") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Social Networking (online)")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOC")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "cp")) thereby assembling 9939 articles. The query string was recorded to ensure that the search terms "online learning" OR "social media" should be focused on the subject areas of social sciences and arts and humanities. The filtered results yielded 517 documents, which were additionally scrutinised to include only research articles in English, whereby article reviews, books and chapters in a book, editorial, conference reviews and conference proceedings were excluded. In addition, the refined search for keywords is restricted and limited to social media and social networking (online). The final search string refinement resulted in 485 articles for this bibliometric analysis. As of August 2024, all articles from Scopus databases relating to language learning through social media were incorporated into the study.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the proposed research questions and methodology, this bibliometric study sets out to investigate four research questions, namely the relationship between the research trends and language learning through social media according to the year of publication, the most cited authors, the research themes as well as the co-occurrence of countries' collaboration in language learning through social media.

Research Question 1:

What are the research trends in language learning through social media according to the year of publication?

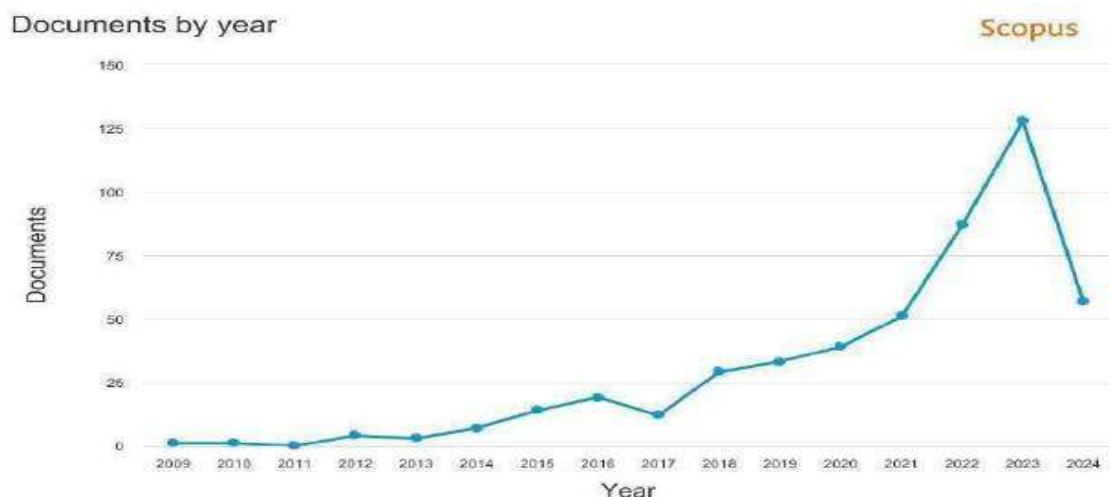


Fig. 1 Trend in Language Learning in Social Media

Table 1. Number of Documents for each year

Year	No of Documents
2024	57
2023	128
2022	87
2021	51
2020	39
2019	33
2018	29
2017	12
2016	19
2015	14
2014	7
2013	3
2012	4
2011	0
2010	1
2009	1

Figure 1 and Table 1 show the number of published articles on language learning using social media between 2009 and 2024 (485 documents). Figure 1 shows that research on language learning using social media is significant and relatively steady, from 1 (2009) to 57 (2024). There was 1 article published in 2009, representing 0.21% of publications; 14 publications in 2015, representing 2.886%; 33 publications in 2019, representing 6.804%; 39 publications in 2020, representing 8.041%; 51 publications in 2021, representing 10.515% of publications, and 87 publications in 2022, representing 17.938% of publications. 2021 saw a sharp increase from 51 to 128 published articles in 2023. Nevertheless, in 2024, there were only 57 publications, as the year has continued.

At most, 20 published articles on language learning using social media accumulated from 2009-2014. This finding is likely because social media usage in the classroom or teaching and learning sessions is not popular among educators and learners, as social media is viewed as a place to socialise rather than learn. However, the rapid development of social media can benefit learners by allowing them to interact with their peers while learning to communicate and write their posts on social media (Haque, 2023).

The overall finding on the trends of published articles on language learning using social media reflects the increased social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The global COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technology-enhanced language instruction and significantly grown digital platforms for distance education methods that contribute to the growing publication trends in language learning using social media (Fuad et al., 2022). Additionally, more platforms and applications became available for educators and learners, allowing better use of social media platforms in learning languages (Chaudhuri & Sarkar, 2020). This phenomenon is further enhanced by the emerging availability of technologies and affordable devices that allow majorities to acquire a device, hence strengthening the rise of social media usage among educators and learners (Nasution, 2022; Chaudhuri & Sarkar, 2020). Thus, many studies were conducted, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, to identify the effectiveness of utilising social media in teaching and language learning processes.

Research Question2:

Who are the most cited authors in language learning through social media?

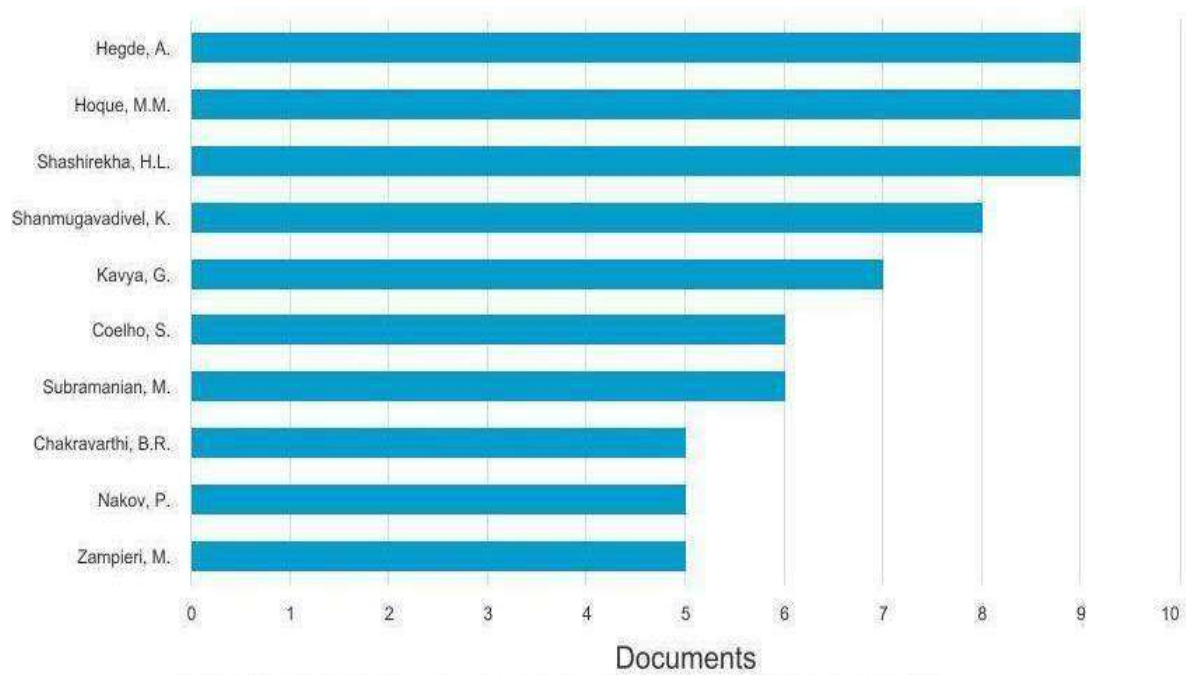


Fig. 2 Trend of the most cited author

Table 2. Name of Authors with number of documents

Authors	Documents
Hegde, A.	9
Hoque, M.M.	9
Shashirekha, H.L.	9
Shanmugavadivel, K.	8
Kavya, G.	7
Coelho, S.	6
Subramanian, M.	6
Chakravarthi, B.R.	5
Nakov, P.	5
Zampieri, M.	5

Figure 2 and Table 2 show the data on the most cited authors in the field of language learning through social media, which reveal that Hegde, Hoque, and Shashirekha are the leading contributors, with nine published documents each (13%). The findings suggest that these authors have significantly influenced the research interest in exploring language learning and social media. Their contributions undoubtedly reflect the growing number of recently published articles on integrating technology into educational practices, which are ubiquitous among learners, such as Barrot (2021), Santos et al. (2022), and Arti et al. (2023).

Shanmugavadivel follows the citation record closely, with eight documents (11%) and Kavya with seven documents (10%). These authors have also made notable contributions, indicating that academic researchers widely recognise and cite their research on language learning and social media. The slightly lower number of documents compared to the top three shows a competitive but diverse research environment, with several authors enhancing their understanding of language learning aided by social media platforms.

Other authors like Coelho and Subramanian, with six documents each (8.7%), and Chakravarthi, Nakov, and Zampieri, with five documents each (7.3%), also play a crucial role in this field. Though slightly less prolific, their work still significantly impacts the discourse around language learning through social media. This distribution of contributions highlights the nature of collaborative research in this area, where many researchers work together to understand how social media affects language learning.

Hence, familiarity with the most cited authors enhances the understanding of the prominent authors in language learning through social media. This finding is crucial in setting research direction and standards, referencing the latest theories, and identifying gaps and areas for future research (Osborne & Holland, 2019). Additionally, it aids researchers in citing foundational studies and developing influential works for effective literature review. Finally, it also facilitates the identification of potential collaborators and mentors for professional growth and research opportunities, particularly among young researchers (Li et al., 2019).

Research Question 3:

What are the research themes in language learning through social media?

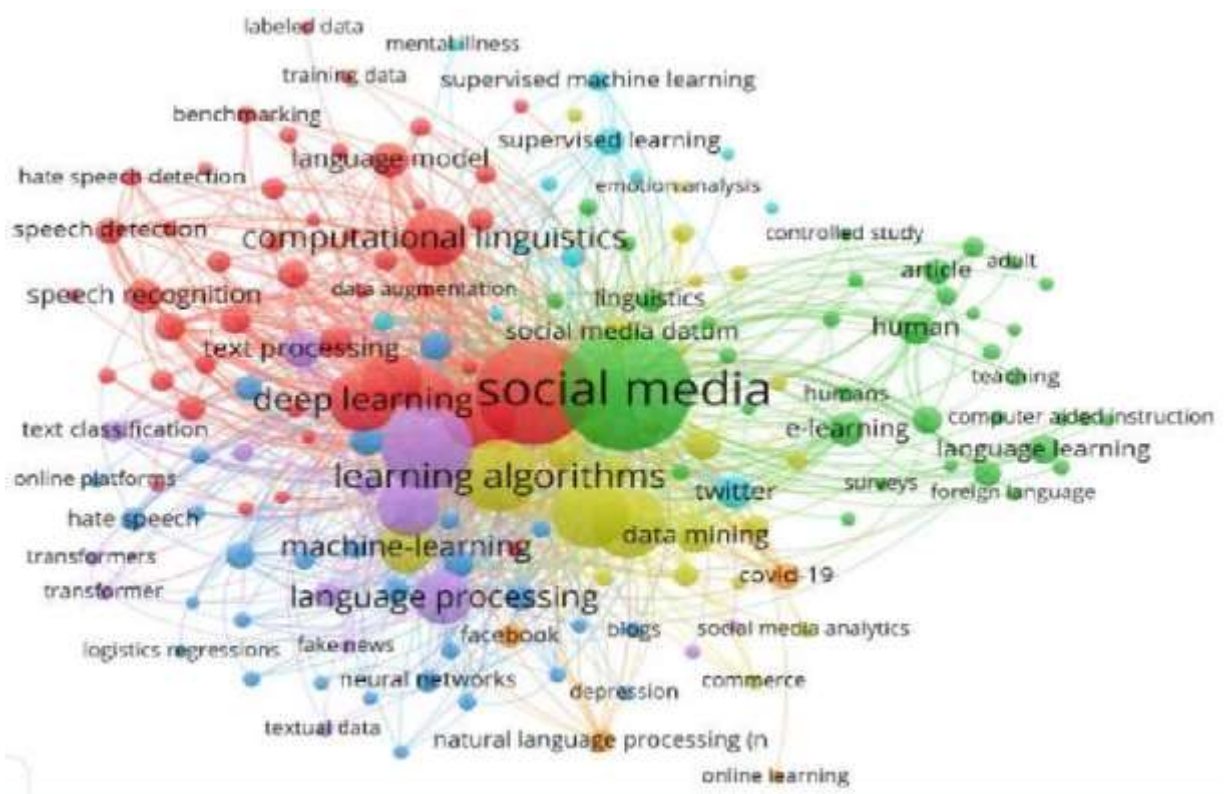


Fig. 3 Network Visualisation of Keywords

Figure 3 shows the network visualisation of keywords. The largest cluster is the red cluster, with 47 keywords. Words like benchmarking, classification (of information), codes (symbols), computational linguistics and contrastive learning are highlighted. The green cluster is the second one with 37 keywords. These include adults, algorithms, Arabic languages, articles, and computer-aided instruction, which are predominant. In the third cluster, the blue cluster, with 29 keywords, blogs, classifiers, convolutional, neural network, decision trees and depression were the most used keywords. The fourth-largest cluster is yellow, with 26 keywords: artificial intelligence, behavioural research, big data, case studies and classification.

The fifth cluster is in purple, with 14 keywords. Some keywords include fake detection, fake news, language processing, large dataset and multi-model. Following this is the sixth cluster in light blue with keywords consisting of 12 items such as data set, deep neural networks, mental illness, modelling languages and named entity recognition. Lastly, the seventh cluster is in orange, with four popular keywords: COVID-19, Facebook, natural language process, and online learning.

These findings highlight the prominent keywords in social media-assisted language learning. Keywords such as e-learning, linguistics, human, teaching, language learning, foreign language and computer-aided-instruction supported a study conducted by Ismail et al. (2019) that these social media platforms provide valuable and relevant resources for expanding one's knowledge base and enhancing language skills. The researchers use these keywords to show the frequency and relationships between their research and others'. Using the same keywords eases the readers' understanding of the writing and helps them search for relevant and related topics.

Undeniably, the keywords found in these clusters relate to integrating social media platforms in language learning. Words such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube teaching, linguistics, and learning were among the most frequently used in this area, showing strong connections between them. Thus, these findings further support the argument that social media has a significant role in current educational practices (Abdul Khaliq et al., 2022).

Research Question 4:

What is the co-occurrence of countries' collaboration in language learning through social media?

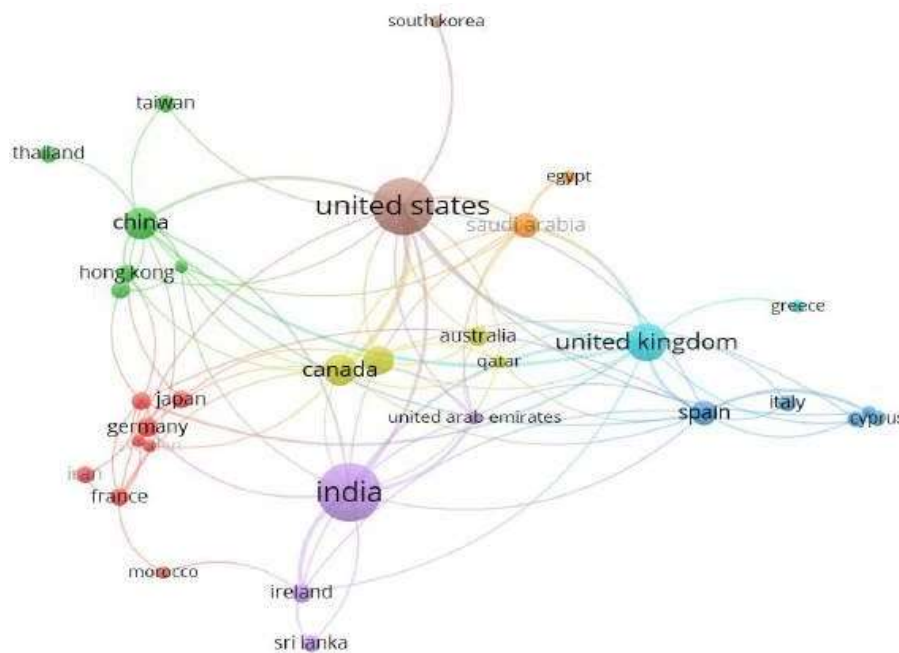


Fig. 4 Countries' Collaboration on Language Learning through Social Media

Figure 4 shows authors from different countries collaborating in research on language learning through social media. The clusters show the countries where similar authors' origins collaborate the most, indicating that they work together on language learning research through social media. The most prominent and central nodes are "The United States," "India," "China," and "The United Kingdom," showing that authors from these countries are well-connected and play essential roles in the network, most likely due to extensive research collaborations or high publication output. The increase in research in this area can be associated with the growing interest towards the issues and the relatedness between language learning and social media networks like Instagram and Twitter (Barrot, 2021; Sun et al., 2021).

The nodes are organised into clusters based on their connections and represented by different colours for each cluster. The green cluster represents a regional group focusing on East and Southeast Asia: China, Taiwan, Thailand and Hong Kong. India dominated the purple cluster with connections to countries like Ireland and Sri Lanka, indicating significant research collaboration with India. This finding further proves the heightened interest in language learning and social media research, as both clusters showed significant collaborations between researchers from diverse backgrounds (Barrot, 2021; Sun et al., 2021). Furthermore, the lines between the nodes represent collaborative relationships or co-authorship links between the countries. Thicker lines suggest stronger or more frequent collaborations.

As seen in Fig. 4, the key players in this field of research are the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom in the West; China in the East; Germany and Spain in Eastern Europe; India in the East; and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. These countries also further web their connection to other countries. The red cluster highlights transatlantic and Asia-Pacific collaborations, which include the United States, Japan, Germany and France. A European-centered collaboration falls under blue clusters like the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus. The orange cluster includes countries like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia, potentially indicating collaboration between Middle Eastern and Oceanic countries. The web of connections between these continents proves the relevance of this research, as language learning through social media has been adopted worldwide. These countries are the central hub for online learning using social media.

Future research can delve further into integrating social media into language learning by investigating how these countries collaborate, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which transformed the landscape of language learning. There is a significant rise in social media usage due to the pandemic, reestablishing social media utilisation in language learning (Fuad et al., 2022). Due to this, these countries' collaborations in researching this topic have likely increased dramatically ever since the outbreak of COVID-19. Hence, such collaborations between the countries foreground social media's relevant and important role over these years as it has become vital in aiding language learning through challenging times.

Conclusion

The number of articles concerning language learning using social media published between 2009 and 2024 is 485 documents. Research on language learning using social media is significant and relatively steady, from 1 (2009) to 57 (2024). The data on the most cited authors in language learning through social media indicates a strong interest among researchers in this field. This research found that ten prominent worldwide authors have contributed significantly to the subject matter. There are 7 clusters altogether, with the most being 47 and the least being 4.

Regarding countries' collaborations, there are four leading countries: the United States, India, China and the United Kingdom. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought numerous challenges, it opened new opportunities, such as exploring language learning through social media. This collaborative research environment highlights the essential role that multiple authors play in deepening our understanding of how social media can be leveraged for language learning.

Co-Author Contribution

All authors provide critical feedback and help shape the research, analysis and manuscript. The authors confirm that this article has not been published. The authors confirmed that there are no conflicts of interest in this article.

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