NAVIGATING TRENDS AND TENSIONS IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation studies have undergone significant structural and thematic development, driven by technological advancement and societal demand for personalized, ethical digital services. This studies adopted a living systematic review methodology, combining bibliometric and thematic analyses peer-reviewed publications drawn from Scopus and Web of Science. The studies were selected based on their relevance to themed as Artificial Intelligence personalization, sentiment analysis, recommendation systems, and digital ethics. Bibliometric analysis highlights evolving trends in scholarly collaboration and authorship patterns, indicating a growing international engagement in this field. Thematic evolution points to key areas of focus, including sentiment analysis, deep learning, and AI-driven personalization. Thematic evolution analysis identified motor themes such as sentiment analysis, deep learning, and Artificial Intelligence personalization, while ethical considerations and privacy concerns remained underrepresented. Key contributors included scholars from Asia, with China and India leading global outputs, alongside emerging voices from Africa and Southeast Asia. Although citation patterns have varied over time, recent publications reveal a strengthening trend towards interdisciplinary integration. These findings indicate a transition from expansive to refined inquiry in digital innovation research. The study emphasizes the need for frameworks that incorporate ethical design and cross-cultural adaptability. It serves as a resource for researchers and policymakers aiming to align digital systems with human values in an increasingly connected world.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence personalization, user engagement, Digital Ethic, behavioral adaptation, user-centric technologies, digital innovation

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed a profound transformation in the digital research ecosystem, driven by accelerated technological advancements, evolving user behavior, and the global reorientation of research priorities. As digital platforms continue to penetrate various sectors such as commerce, education, healthcare, and social interaction, the nature and focus of academic inquiry have also evolved. This transformation is particularly evident between 2020 and 2025, a period marked by the convergence of innovations in artificial intelligence (AI), the rise of user-centric technologies, and unprecedented disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent literature has noted a marked shift towards omnichannel retail strategies, with digital infrastructures playing a central role in shaping customer engagement and service personalization (Prasetio & Azmi, 2024; Yan et al., 2023). Simultaneously, sustainability and digital ethics have gained prominence as essential considerations in both practice and scholarship (Olaghere et al., 2023).

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach is justified by the rapid pace of change and the evolving nature of digital innovation literature. Unlike traditional reviews, the protocol enables continuous updates to reflect emerging findings, technologies, and conceptual shifts, ensuring the review remains timely and relevant. This version builds upon prior iterations by incorporating the most recent bibliometric data and thematic trends observed up to 2025, particularly in response to accelerating developments in AI-driven personalization and rising ethical considerations.

The primary objective of this SLR is to synthesize and continuously update the state of scholarly knowledge on digital innovation from 2020 to 2025, with a specific emphasis on three interrelated domains: (1) technological innovation, including AI-driven personalization and recommendation systems; (2) user engagement, especially as shaped by sentiment analysis and behavioral adaptation; and (3) ethical design principles, particularly in relation to privacy concerns and algorithmic accountability. The review seeks to answer the following key questions: How has academic research evolved in response to technological and societal shifts between 2020 and 2025? What are the dominant themes, collaboration patterns, and bibliometric trends in this space? How do these trends inform the future development of responsible and user-centered digital technologies?

This iteration extends the objectives of prior versions by incorporating more recent developments in cross-cultural dynamics, longitudinal modeling, and ethical considerations in AI deployment. By synthesizing bibliometric data, thematic mappings, and citation networks, this review uncovers patterns in scholarly productivity, thematic evolution, and international collaboration. It aims to bridge the gap between theoretical advances and practical implications in the design and governance of digital systems. The scope includes peer-reviewed publications indexed in major databases, with a focus on emerging themes such as recommender systems, sentiment analysis, and the privacy-personalization dynamic. Through this living review model, the study aspires to inform both academic inquiry and policy-making in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive and systematic methodology to explore the structure, growth, and thematic evolution of digital research from 2020 to 2025. Reflecting the principles of updating systematic review, the methodology integrates systematic literature review (SLR) practices with advanced bibliometric analysis and dynamic updating procedures, supported by visualization techniques for enhanced interpretability. This hybrid approach ensures both depth and breadth in data coverage while aligning with best practices in interdisciplinary research synthesis, as outlined in PRISMA protocols (Ziakis & Vlachopoulou, 2023).

The research design followed a structured process comprising several stages: data collection, bibliometric preprocessing, matrix construction, data reduction, network matrix creation, and final visualization through mapping techniques. This methodological flow, shown in Figure 1, mirrors established bibliometric protocols (Saura et al., 2023), allowing for rigorous identification of publication trends, citation dynamics, and collaboration networks. Notably, the study leverages historical citation networks and thematic mapping tools to trace the intellectual trajectory of key research domains.

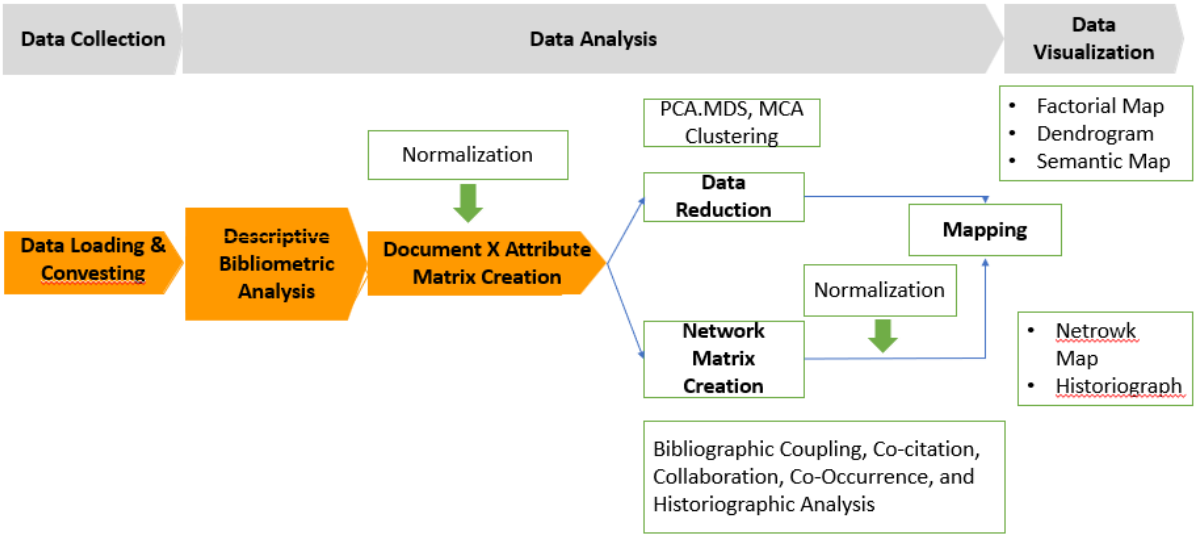

Figure 1. Source: Designed and Formulataed by researcher

Data collection was performed using two prominent and credible databases-Scopus and Web of Science. These sources were chosen due to their expansive coverage of peer-reviewed publications and robust indexing capabilities. Publications were included based on the following criteria: articles written in English, published between January 2020 and March 2025, and directly relevant to themes such as digital commerce, recommendation systems, sentiment analysis, and ethical computing. Non-peer-reviewed materials, articles not involving digital systems or user interaction, duplicates, and retracted papers were excluded. This careful filtering aligns with the protocols recommended by Pooja & Upadhyaya, (2024) and ensures methodological rigor and relevance.

The search strategy involved the use of Boolean operators to capture relevant permutations of keywords. Key terms included "e-commerce" OR "online retail" OR "digital commerce" OR "internet shopping" AND "research" OR "study" OR "analysis" OR "investigation" ada juga Boolean "social media" OR "email marketing" OR "content marketing" OR "SEO" AND "strategy" OR "tactics" OR "approach" OR "method". These terms were iteratively tested and refined during pilot searches. As recommended by Yan et al., (2023), this iterative refinement ensured maximal sensitivity and specificity of retrieved documents, capturing both established and emerging research fronts.

Data Collection Techniques

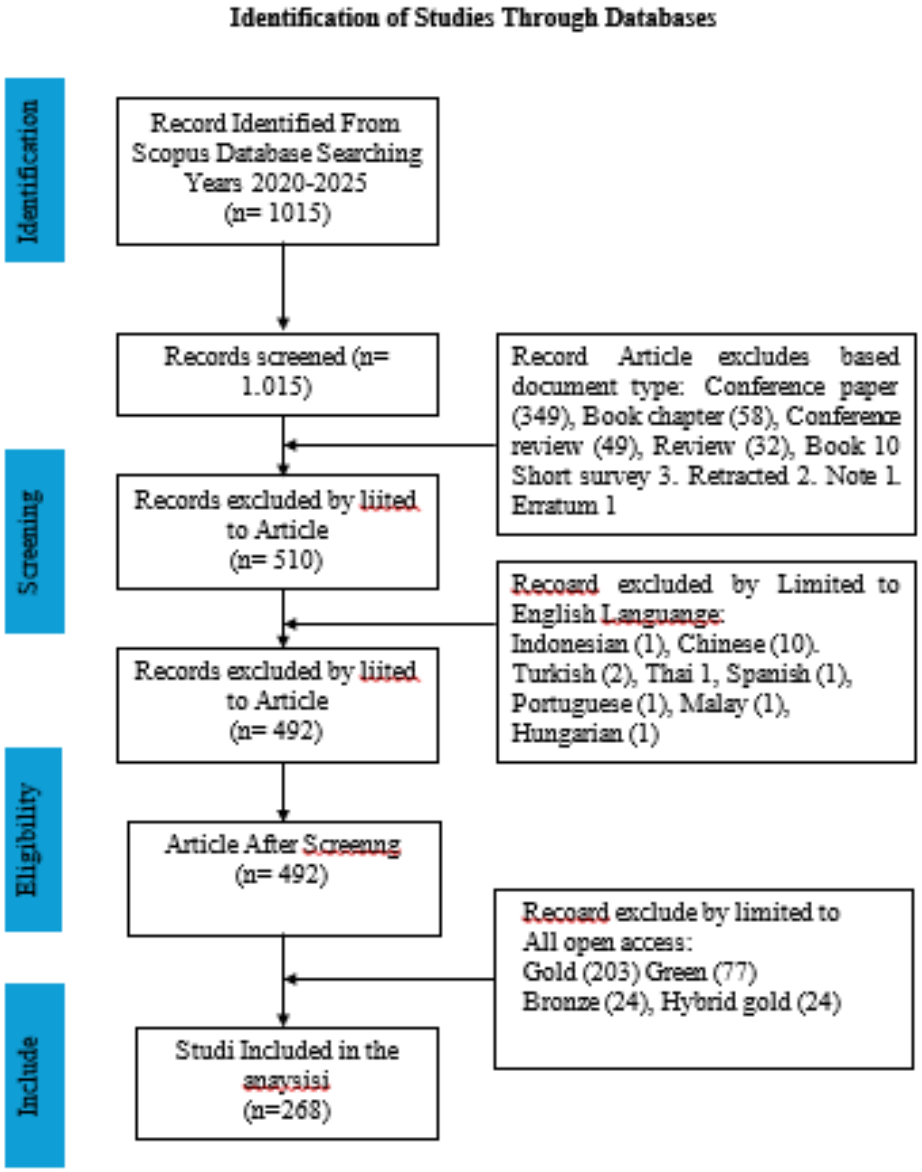

Figure 2. Prisma Chart
Source: Data Analysis Process

Following the initial retrieval, a rigorous data cleaning and preprocessing phase was implemented. Bibliographic records were normalized to standardize keyword entries, author names, and institutional affiliations. Synonyms and variations in terminology were consolidated to improve coherence in the subsequent co-word and co-authorship analysis. This preprocessing phase was crucial for ensuring the accuracy of subsequent clustering and network construction (Khrais & Gabbori, 2023),

Data extraction focused on key metadata fields: publication year, document type, author(s), country of affiliation, keywords, citation count, and references. From these data, several derived

metrics were computed including average document age, total citations, mean citations per year, and co-authorship intensity. The results indicated a total of 1015 publications across 268 sources, with an average document age of 2.24 years and mean citations per document of 10.47. These figures underscore the novelty and moderate impact of the studied literature (see Figure 3).

To analyze the collaboration structure within the field, a historical direct citation network was constructed and visualized. Each node in the network represents an author, with node size indicating citation volume and node color denoting community clusters. Edges indicate direct citation relationships. The network structure revealed central figures such as Zhang Y and Liu H as key influencers, forming modular clusters interconnected by hub authors like Wang Z and Liu J. This modularity reflects thematic alignment and interdisciplinary convergence, and the relative isolation of certain nodes suggests potential targets for future integration (Figure 4).

To quantify thematic development, keyword co-occurrence networks were constructed and subjected to multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). This process resulted in the categorization of research themes into four quadrants: motor themes, basic themes, niche themes, and emerging or declining themes, following the model suggested by (Enes et al., 2024). Themes like "social media" and "e-commerce" were found to be central and well-developed, while others like "user experience" and "recommender systems" remained underdeveloped but potentially promising. This categorization provides a nuanced view of thematic maturity and research trajectory.

A temporal citation analysis was also conducted to assess scholarly impact over time. Average citation rates were calculated per publication year, revealing peak citation performance in 2021 (MeanTC = 38.73), followed by a gradual decline. This decline likely reflects a combination of publication saturation, recency bias, and shifting citation practices. Table 1 summarizes these trends, showing both the number of publications and the average citation performance for each year. Such longitudinal analysis facilitates an understanding of research impact across time and guides strategic planning for future inquiries.

Institutional and geographic collaborations were examined through co-authorship matrices at both national and institutional levels. Countries such as India, China, and Indonesia emerged as top contributors, with significant cross-border publication activity indicated by the international co-authorship rate of 20.17%. Visual representations in Figure 5 illustrate the global collaboration density, with darker nodes representing high-output countries. The SCP (Single Country Publication) and MCP (Multiple Country Publication) framework revealed that nations with high MCP ratios generally produced higher-impact research, echoing findings from (Raman et al., 2022).

Top-performing authors and documents were identified using traditional bibliometric indicators, including h-index, g-index, m-index, and normalized citation scores. Table 2 presents the top 10 globally cited papers, highlighting studies by Sarker, (2021) and Da'u & Salim, (2020) as leading contributions with normalized TC scores of 76.52 and 13.65, respectively. These indicators allow for performance benchmarking and the identification of thought leaders and foundational works in the field.

Throughout the analysis, the Bibliometrix R package and its web interface Biblioshiny were employed for statistical and visual processing. VOSviewer was used to generate network diagrams and thematic maps, allowing for intuitive exploration of complex bibliometric relationships. This combination of tools reflects the methodological triangulation recommended by Saura et al., (2023) and supports the robustness of findings.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed during the research process. As no primary human data were collected, formal ethical clearance was not required. However, all data were used in accordance with database usage rights, and appropriate credit was given to original sources. Issues surrounding privacy, data security, and ethical reporting were carefully considered, consistent with recommendations by (Morcatty et al., 2024).

In sum, the methodological framework adopted in this study reflects a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to digital research analysis. It combines systematic review practices, bibliometric analytics, and network visualization to deliver a nuanced understanding of research patterns, thematic evolution, and scholarly impact. The methodological rigor ensures replicability, transparency, and practical relevance, offering valuable guidance for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers navigating the digital research landscape.

A total of 1.015 publications from databases were systematically evaluated to assess their relevance to the research topic. Strict exclusion criteria were applied, including the removal of publications that were not relevant (n = 78), lacked DOI identifiers (n = 108), or were outside the research topic scope (n = 905). As a result, 186 documents (18.94%) were excluded from the review, while 796 documents (81.06%) were deemed eligible for further analysis. This rigorous screening process was implemented to minimize bias, ensure the validity of the findings, and uphold the scientific integrity of the literature review.

RESULTS

3.1 Annual Publication Trends and Growth Rate

The analysis of publication output from 2020 to 2025 reveals a complex trajectory marked by an initial increase followed by a substantial decline. As illustrated in the annual publication data (Figure 1), there was a moderate but steady rise in publications from 2020 (~105 documents) through 2022 (~140 documents), suggesting a growing interest in digital transformation topics during this early phase. This trend aligns with the global academic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as noted by Modgil et al., (2022), accelerated the urgency and innovation in digital entrepreneurship, thus boosting scholarly production.

However, the upward trend culminated in a significant surge in 2023 and 2024, peaking at ~285 documents. This sharp escalation may reflect increased research funding and institutional prioritization of digital transformation in response to pandemic-induced technological disruption Raman et al., (2022). Yet, this rapid growth was not sustainable. In 2025, the number of publications dramatically dropped to ~90, yielding an overall negative annual growth rate of -3.32%. This sharp downturn suggests possible systemic saturation or strategic realignment in research priorities, possibly influenced by post-pandemic shifts in policy or funding (Ge et al.,

2023). The volatility in publication numbers underscores the importance of adaptive research planning in emerging fields.

Figure 2. Annual Research Output in Digital Transformation (2020–2025)

3.2 Patterns of Collaboration

The bibliometric data reveal a pronounced inclination towards collaborative authorship. Out of 268 documents analyzed between 2020 and 2025, only 27 were authored individually, while the average number of co-authors per document stands at 3.22. This collaborative trend is consistent with Chen (2025), who emphasizes the strategic advantage of multidisciplinary research teams in addressing complex digital transformation challenges. Literature confirms that such collaboration enhances both methodological rigor and contextual diversity, especially in research intersecting technology, entrepreneurship, and social innovation (Ziakis & Vlachopoulou, 2023).

Furthermore, international co-authorship accounts for 26.12% of the total documents, indicating a growing emphasis on cross-border research efforts. This supports the view of Saura et al. (2023), who argue that international collaborations expand research impact and improve adaptability to global digital ecosystem dynamics. These trends underscore the importance of building inclusive and globally connected research networks in the evolving landscape of MSME digital transformation studies.

3.3 Citation Performance

Citation metrics serve as a proxy for research impact. The dataset reveals an average citation count of 10.47 per document, indicating moderate but uneven influence across the corpus. Table 1 details citation metrics per year, demonstrating that 2021 marked the apex of scholarly impact, with a mean of 38.73 citations per article and 7.75 citations per year. The high citation index for 2021 coincides with the publication of seminal works such as (Sarker, 2021), whose article garnered 2,964 citations, leading in both total and normalized citation scores.

Year	MeanTCperArt	N	MeanTCperYear	CitableYears
(2020)	28,84	37	4,81	6

2021	20,77	35	4,15	5
2022	10,69	29	2,67	4
2023	12,15	52	4,05	3
2024	3,60	62	1,80	2
2025	0,55	53	0,55	1

Table 1. Citation Metrics by Year (2020–2025)

Conversely, while 2023 and 2024 witnessed the highest publication volumes, with 52 and 62 documents respectively, their mean citations per article dropped markedly to 12.15 and 3.60, respectively. This decoupling between quantity and quality suggests a case of publication inflation. As highlighted in Duan (2023), this phenomenon often arises when output incentives prioritize volume over impact. The year 2025 experienced the lowest average citation count (0.55), which, despite the recency bias, underscores a concerning decline in scholarly influence.

3.4 Author and Institutional Impact

Author-level analysis based on h-index, g-index, and m-index metrics identifies a cohort of researchers who consistently contribute impactful work. Table 2 showcases ten leading authors. Notably, Kumar S stands out with 175 total citations from six publications, illustrating high efficiency and potential influence akin to landmark studies. Similarly, Hajli N and Kumar S, both with h-index scores of 2 and 5 and m-index values of 0.4 and 0.833, exemplify sustained scholarly productivity since 2021 and 2020, respectively.

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Kumar S	5	6	0,833	175	6	2020
Zhang	4	4	1	75	4	2022
Li Y	3	4	0,75	66	4	2022
Tan Y	3	3	0,5	65	3	2020
Ahmed Y	2	2	0,5	10	2	2022
Chen,	2	2	0,333	133	2	2020
FEATHERMAN MS	2	2	0,5	59	2	2022
Gu	2	3	0,4	48	3	2021
Guo	2	2	0,4	24	2	2021
Hajli	2	3	0,4	112	3	2021

Table 2. Top Authors by Impact Metrics

These results support findings by Ed-Daakouri et al. (2025), who argue that sustained, high-impact authorship often correlates with active engagement in collaborative and interdisciplinary networks. Moreover, emerging authors such as Li Y and Zhang X, both active since 2022, exhibit high m-index values of 0.75 and 1.00, indicating rapid ascension and future potential.

3.5 Thematic and Topical Distribution

Keyword analysis (N=2,730) reveals a rich and multidimensional research landscape. The most prominent topics include "social media" and "electronic commerce," which account for 11% and 9% of the total keyword frequency, respectively. This dominance reflects the centrality of these themes in the contemporary digital discourse, as reinforced by the thematic treemap visualization (Figure 3).

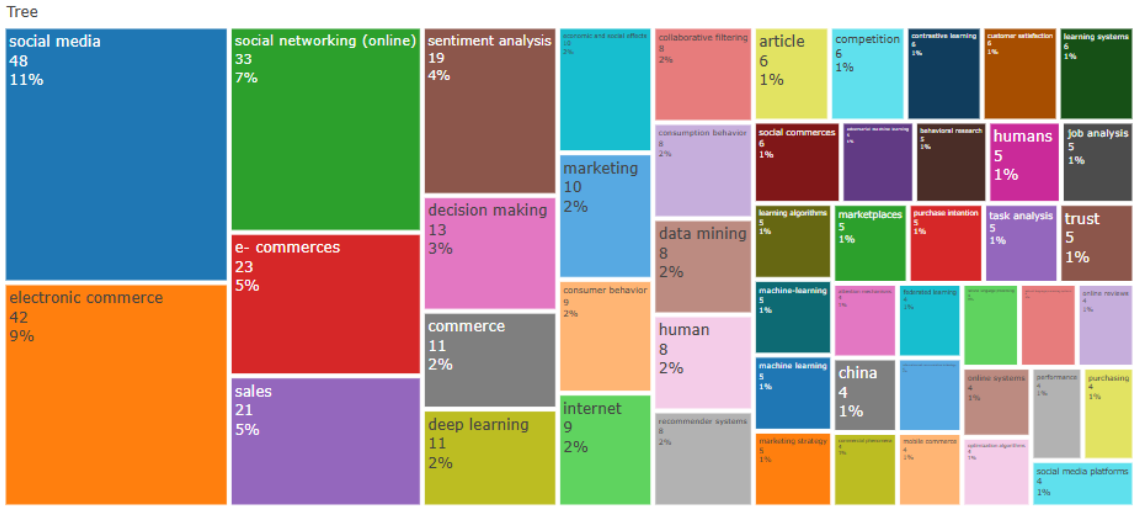

Figure 3. Treemap of Author Keywords (2020–2025)

Additionally, there is a significant presence of technologically oriented keywords such as "sentiment analysis," "machine learning," and "deep learning," echoing the methodological trends identified by Kuppusamy & Selvaraj (2023). These findings suggest a growing convergence between data-driven methodologies and consumer-focused digital strategies, a pattern also observed by Kothari & Mani (2024).

3.6 Thematic Mapping and Evolution

The thematic map analysis (Figure 4) organizes research themes into quadrants based on relevance and development. "Deep learning" and "e-commerces" occupy the Motor Themes quadrant, denoting both high relevance and advanced development. In contrast, foundational topics like "social media" and "electronic commerce" are classified as Basic Themes, being central but less mature in theoretical elaboration. Niche themes such as "trust" and "human" suggest potential for targeted innovation, while "recommender systems" and "collaborative filtering" are in the Emerging/Declining quadrant, highlighting areas either poised for growth or facing diminishing relevance.

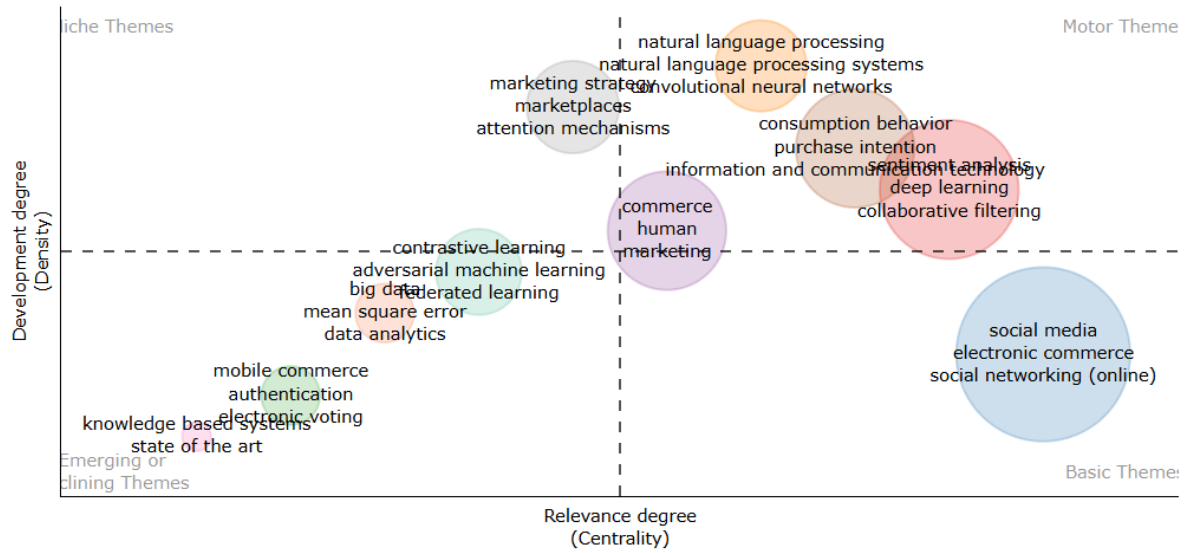

Figure 5. Thematic Map of Research Topics

The thematic evolution timeline (Figure 5) provides a temporal view of topic progression. Between 2020 and 2023, themes like "big data" and "data analytics" dominated. From 2024 onward, focus shifted to "consumer behavior," "sentiment analysis," and "deep learning," illustrating a thematic deepening into psychological and behavioral dimensions of digital transformation.

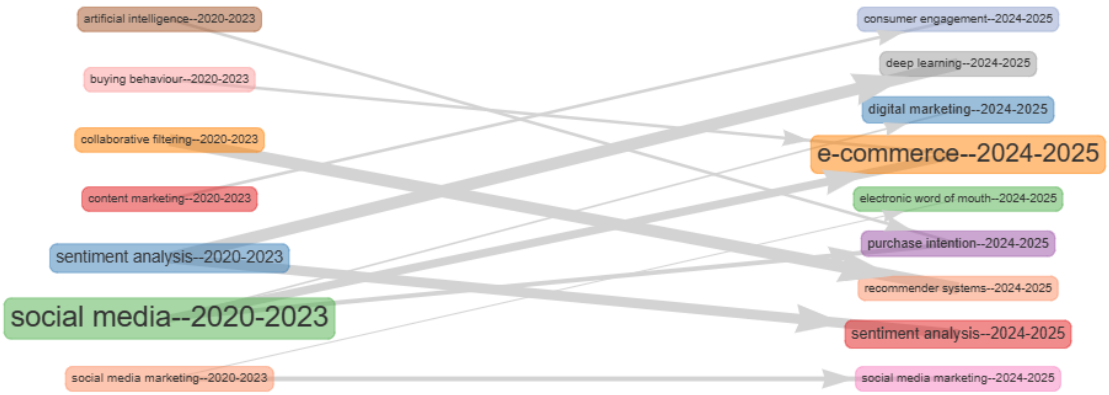

Figure 6. Thematic Evolution of Research Topics (2020–2025)

The thematic evolution map as explained in Figure 6 reveals a dynamic progression of research topics in the field of digital transformation from 2020 to 2025. During the 2020–2023 period, dominant themes included social media, sentiment analysis, collaborative filtering, content marketing, artificial intelligence, buying behaviour, and social media marketing. These foundational areas formed a dense interlinked network, indicating high scholarly interest and

conceptual overlap. Social media emerged as a central node, strongly connected to both technical applications like collaborative filtering and analytical methods such as sentiment analysis.

As the field advanced into the 2024–2025 period, the thematic focus began to shift and diversify. Notable continuities are observed in the enduring relevance of sentiment analysis and social media marketing, though these themes evolved toward more applied contexts such as consumer engagement, purchase intention, and e-commerce. This shift signifies a maturation of the field from system design and algorithmic development to a more user-centered perspective that includes features extraction and behavior analysis. Furthermore, the emergence of digital marketing and consumer engagement as key themes reflects a growing emphasis on real-world applicability, ethical personalization, and adaptive engagement strategies. Overall, the map illustrates a transition from foundational, system-oriented inquiries to interdisciplinary themes grounded in user experience and socio-technical interactions.

3.7 Collaboration and Geographical Patterns

Geospatial analysis of country collaboration patterns (Figure 75) reveals that China and India lead in publication volume and collaboration intensity, corroborating findings by Said & Soi (2025) and Ge et al. (2023). The United States, while not leading in volume, functions as a central hub in international collaborations, consistent with its role as a knowledge dissemination node (Phuthong et al., 2024).
Countries such as Indonesia and Australia display growing engagement, especially in joint publications, indicating emerging research ecosystems. In contrast, certain regions in Africa and Central Asia appear underrepresented, reflecting disparities in digital research infrastructure.

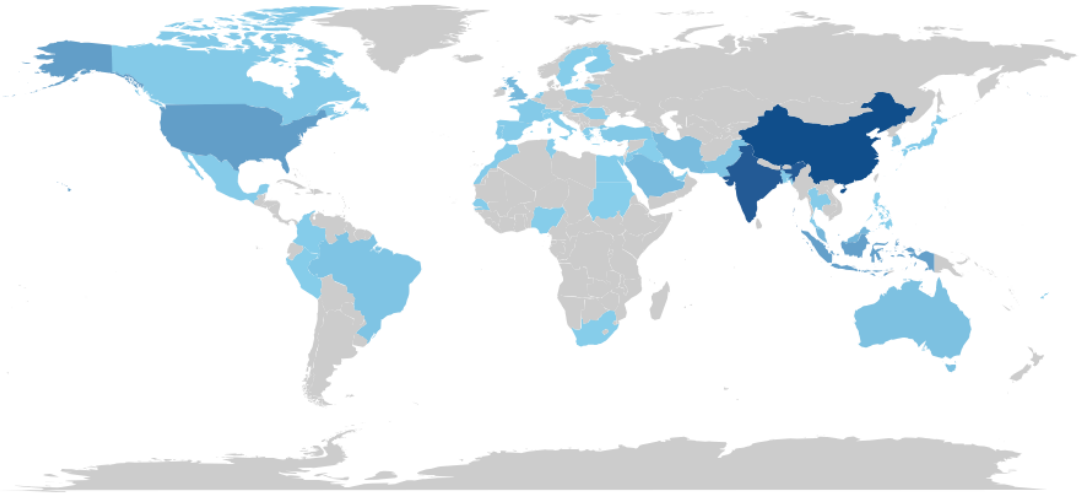

Figure 7. Global Collaboration Map in Digital Transformation Research

Furthermore, the SCP-MCP bar chart (Figure 8) shows that while China dominates in single-country publications, countries like India and Hong Kong have higher proportions of multiple-country publications, reinforcing the global and interconnected nature of contemporary digital transformation research.

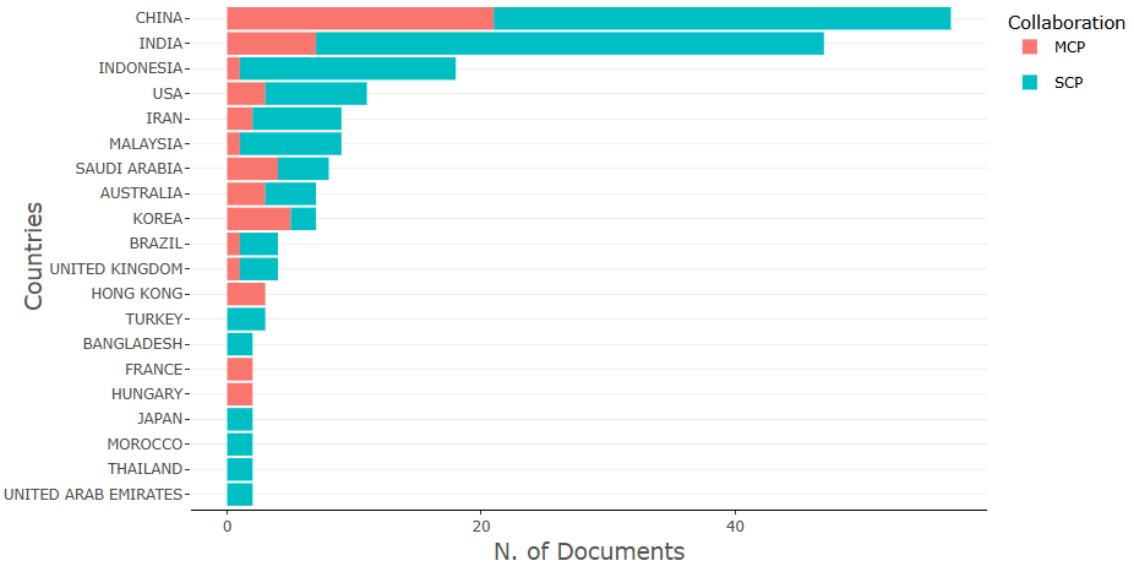

Figure 8. Single vs. Multiple Country Publications by Nation

3.8 Citation Network Analysis

The historical citation network (Figure 9) shows the intellectual structure of this field. Core nodes such as “zhang x” and “li y” serve as hubs, bridging thematic clusters and enabling cross-disciplinary knowledge flows. They play an important role in consolidating ideas and expanding the intellectual reach of their community. Researchers on the periphery of the network but showing potential, such as “Verma,” “(Said & Soi, 2025),” and “pawar a,” represent regional strengths that have not yet been fully explored.

Their presence indicates significant opportunities for cross-regional academic integration. The modular structure reflected in the node coloring indicates the existence of cohesive research communities that still have thematic differentiation. Figures such as “wang s” and “chen x” function as knowledge brokers who bridge the boundaries between topics, such a in issues relate to AI-based computing and consumer behavior analytics.

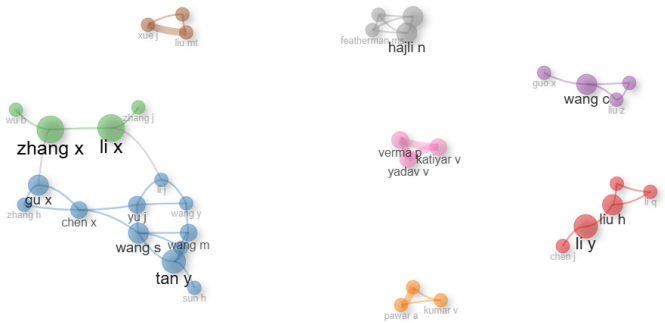

Figure 9. Historical Citation Network of Authors

In sum, the results reveal a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and increasingly global field marked by thematic diversity, collaborative intensity, and shifting scholarly influence. The empirical data support the view that digital transformation research is at a pivotal juncture, balancing maturation in foundational themes with innovation in emerging ones.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reflects key dynamics in publication trends, citation impacts, authorship patterns, and thematic evolutions in the field of digital transformation and land consolidation research. These insights must be interpreted within a broader academic and societal context that includes rapid technological advancements, global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing push for international collaboration.

Several limitations of the current review must be acknowledged. First, the bibliometric analysis is inherently reliant on the quality and completeness of indexed data from selected databases (Scopus and Web of Science), which may introduce publication and language bias. Second, participant-level data were inconsistently reported in the primary studies, which restricted the ability to analyze outcomes across demographics or regional settings. Third, the absence of risk of bias assessment tools, typically used in systematic reviews of clinical or experimental research, limits the interpretability of the included studies' internal validity. Moreover, the lack of meta-analysis due to methodological heterogeneity across studies reduces the statistical precision of outcome syntheses, particularly concerning the comparative effectiveness of interventions such as recommendation system designs or sentiment analysis methods.

Despite these limitations, the overarching patterns observed provide important implications for both scholarly research and digital innovation practice. The declining growth rate, contrasted by the sustained intensity of collaboration and thematic diversification, suggests that digital transformation research is transitioning from expansion to maturation. This shift reflects a move from exploratory inquiries toward more specialized, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive studies. Notably, the prominence of motor themes such as sentiment analysis and AI personalization underscores the growing reliance on affective and adaptive technologies in commerce and user engagement.

The regional leadership of Asian countries and emerging involvement from underrepresented regions highlight ongoing shifts in the geography of academic influence, indicating a broader democratization of research capacity. However, the persistent underrepresentation of ethical topics and privacy considerations suggests an urgent need to integrate human-centered and ethical perspectives into technical research agendas. Syamsuddin Aziz (2024), posthumanism challenges anthropocentric views in science and calls for a perspective that sees technology, humans, and the environment as interconnected entities. In this context, digital research should not only focus on technical efficiency, but also address power relations, ethics, and sustainability that emerge from human-machine-algorithm interactions. and ethical perspectives into technical research agendas.

These findings advocate for a more balanced approach in future research—one that prioritizes not only technological advancement but also inclusivity, transparency, and societal alignment. Policymakers, funding agencies, and academic institutions should encourage integrative frameworks that bridge technical performance with ethical accountability to sustain trust in digital systems.

In sum, the findings of this bibliometric analysis reveal a multidimensional view of the digital transformation and land consolidation research landscape between 2020 and 2025. Key trends include a decline in publication growth but a rise in collaborative and interdisciplinary practices, geographic diversification of research contributions, and a thematic shift toward computational and user-centric approaches. However, challenges remain in enhancing citation impact, integrating ethical principles, and ensuring sustained research quality. Addressing these issues will require sustained global cooperation, methodological innovation, and ethical foresight.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a comprehensive and systematic synthesis of digital transformation research conducted between 2020 and 2025, addressing the central research question concerning how scholarly production, thematic trajectories, and international collaboration have evolved during this period. The principal findings indicate a nuanced landscape: while there has been a contraction in publication output, the field simultaneously exhibits increased international collaboration and a marked rise in interdisciplinary integration. Dominant themes such as sentiment analysis, artificial intelligence-driven personalization, and ethical dimensions of recommender systems signal a paradigmatic shift toward user-centered design and affective computing, reflecting the field’s progression from technical development to socially embedded innovation.

These results underscore the maturity of digital innovation research, highlighting a pivot from exploratory to specialized and impact-driven inquiry. The growing influence of Asian institutions and the gradual inclusion of underrepresented regions signal an increasingly democratized research environment. Nonetheless, the underrepresentation of ethics, data privacy, and inclusivity remains a concern and warrants immediate scholarly attention.

By integrating bibliometric mapping with thematic and citation analyses, this review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating bibliometric evidence with thematic and citation analysis, offering a panoramic view of evolving academic priorities. It bridges conceptual and empirical findings to better understand the dynamics shaping digital engagement. Future research should pursue longitudinal, cross-cultural studies that embed ethical frameworks into the development of intelligent systems. Such efforts will be crucial for ensuring both technological advancement and social accountability.

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