BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW PAPER DOI: 10.21844/16202118207

Vol. XVIII, No. 2; September 2025 - February 2026 Print ISSN: 0975-024X; Online ISSN: 2456-1371

Digital Marketing as an Enabler of SME Internationalisation: A Bibliometric Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract

Digital marketing has evolved as a critical enabler for SMEs aiming for competitiveness, resilience and growth in the rapidly growing digital business sector. Despite an increasing body of literature, research on digital marketing in SMEs remains fragmented by themes, methodology and geographical contexts. Addressing this gap, the current study investigates the evolution, intellectual structure and research trends in SMEs-focused digital marketing research using a thorough bibliometric analysis. Performance analysis, co-word analysis, thematic mapping, factorial analysis and life cycle modelling were applied to a dataset of 301 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. The data were extracted from the Scopus database. The results reveal a steady rise in scholarly output, with a significant increase in recent years, suggesting rising scholarly interest in the field. Thematic analysis reveals a shift from early adoption-focused research towards more strategic and capability-based perspectives that connect digital marketing with business growth, innovation and entrepreneurial orientation, aligning it with Sustainable Development Goal 9 (SDG 9), which focuses on Industry, innovation and infrastructure. The results point out the limited integration of modern digital technology, sustainability concerns and global business viewpoints. Collaboration analysis highlights uneven global knowledge contributions, implying that research activity is centred in a small number of developed and emerging nations. Overall, this study contributes by systematically mapping the evolving landscape of SME research on digital marketing, identifying prominent and emerging themes while offering future research directions.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Online Marketing, SMEs, Internationalisation

Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are acknowledged as critical drivers of economic growth, innovation and employment generation in both developed and developing economies (OECD, 2019; World Bank, 2020). Despite their significant contribution, SMEs frequently encounter constraints because of their low financial resources, insufficient marketing expertise, and limited access to global and digital marketplaces (Kraus et al., 2018). In this context, digital marketing has evolved into a strategic tool that assists SMEs in surpassing traditional obstacles by using cost-effective technologies like social media marketing, search engine optimisation, content marketing, and online platforms to more effectively reach and interact with consumers (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Scholarly interest in digital marketing for SMEs has increased significantly over the last decade due to rapid digitalisation, the widespread use of social media platforms, mobile commerce and the quick shift towards online business models after the COVID-19 pandemic (Verhoef et al., 2021). Empirical studies indicate that the implementation of digital advertising techniques improves SME performance outcomes,

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How to Cite the article: Mishra; U., Gautam; A., Johri; G.B.S., (2025). Digital Marketing as an Enabler of SME Internationalisation: A Bibliometric Review and Future Research Agenda, Purushartha, 18(2), 99-120
Source of Support: This work was funded by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR/RFD/2024-25/GEN/112)
Conflict of interest: None

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such as sales growth, customer interaction, brand visibility and export market involvement (Dwivedi et al., 2021). These technologies further improve productivity, promote inclusive economic growth and help in the creation of employment, supporting SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth. Further, recent studies reveal that platform-based solutions, artificial intelligence, and data analytics are increasingly influencing the performance of digital marketing for small businesses (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Despite the growing body of research on digital marketing for SMEs, the research area still remains conceptually fragmented and methodologically inconsistent (Singh & Gautam, 2021). Existing studies fail to offer a comprehensive picture of the field's intellectual structure and thematic development because they have mostly concentrated on specific tools or subdomains like digital advertising, adoption of e-commerce, or social media marketing (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Moreover, there continues to be a lack of research on important topics such as platform dependence, data privacy issues, the sustainability of digital marketing efforts and digital capabilities gaps among different regions (Ciacci et al., 2025). Additionally, the literature displays a regional bias in supporting established economies, which limits understanding of the specific circumstances of SMEs in developing and emerging markets (Ajede et al., 2025).

This study performs a bibliometric analysis focusing on the role of digital marketing in increasing SME competitiveness. Bibliometric techniques offer a structured and consistent way of combining vast and fragmented bodies of literature (Marzi et al., 2025). Bibliometric techniques like performance analysis, co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence and thematic evolution help researchers find prominent authors and journals, discover dominant and developing research themes and track the development of scholarly literature over time (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). These methods have been employed in marketing and entrepreneurship research to generate theoretical consolidation and evidence-based research agendas. These are the following research questions that the study aims to address.

RQ1: What are the publication trends and growth patterns of research on digital marketing and SMEs between 2005 and 2025?

RQ2: Which are the most prominent journals and countries focusing on digital marketing research for SMEs?

RQ3: What are the most frequently occurring keywords and research themes in the literature on digital marketing for SMEs?

RQ4: Which new and unexplored theme areas provide potential paths for future SMEs' digital marketing research?

The present study attempts to give academicians and practitioners a greater understanding of the studies that have focused on this field. Even while SMEs contribute significantly to the economy, many of them are still unable to take advantage of digital marketing due to various reasons such as lack of technical expertise, limited resources and untrained staff (Mer & Virdi, 2024). The study offers future research questions and directions to help researchers explore the related field.

Literature Review

Digital Marketing Adoption in SMEs

Digital marketing has evolved as an important strategic tool for SMEs attempting to overcome conventional barriers such as limited resources, geographical coverage and marketing skills. Unlike traditional marketing techniques, digital marketing enables SMEs to engage customers through cost-effective and scalable tools such as

social media platforms, search engine optimisation, content marketing and online marketplaces (Kanojia & Rathore, 2025). Prior research indicates that SMEs increasingly use digital marketing to compete with larger companies in both domestic and foreign markets, increase their visibility and improve customer engagement (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The literature further demonstrates that adoption changes across regions and industries. SMEs operating in emerging economies have to frequently deal with challanges such as inadequate digital infrastructure, shortages of employees and limited knowledge of digital tools, whereas businesses in developed nations possess higher levels of digital marketing capabilities (Sukrat & Leeraphong, 2024). Therefore, SMEs usually implement digital marketing gradually rather than strategically, motivated more by need rather than long-term strategy (Setiawan et al., 2025). These uneven spread highlights the necessity for a comprehensive review of adoption factors and barriers, which current empirical research primarily addresses in fragments.

Digital Marketing Tools and Channels for SMEs

A number of studies concentrates on specific digital marketing technologies which are used by SMEs, with social media marketing receiving the greatest scholarly attention (Chauhan & Mehra, 2025). Social media platforms play an important role as they allow businesses to connect with customers, generate content and develop brand communities at a minimal cost (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Empirical researches have confirmed that small businesses' use of social media has a beneficial impact on brand awareness, customer engagement, and relationship quality (Olearova et al., 2024). Apart from social media, studies have explored search engine marketing, email marketing, influencer marketing and content-based approaches as strategies for enhancing digital reach and client acquisition (Theodorakopoulos & Theodoropoulou, 2024). Recent studies have highlighted the increasing importance of data analytics, artificial intelligence and marketing automation tools in enhancing targeting precision and campaign success (Wedel & Kannan, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Despite the growing diversity of tools, the research remains generally tool-centric, with little focus on how SMEs integrate digital tools into integrated marketing strategy.

Impact of Digital Marketing on SME Performance

Another prominent theme in the literature is the performance resulting from digital marketing adoption (Sharma & Sharma, 2025). Numerous studies demonstrate positive relationships between digital marketing techniques and SME outcomes such as revenue growth, client acquisition, market growth and competitive positioning (Gao et al., 2023). Digital marketing is often described as a catalyst for corporate resilience, especially in times of crisis and market change (Roy et al., 2024). However, the relationship between digital marketing and performance is not always positive. suggest that performance outcomes depend on organisations' digital abilities, organisational alignment and ability to absorb information. SMEs lacking managerial skills or analytical abilities might be unable to convert digital engagement into substantial performance advantages (Veiga et al., 2024). Furthermore, the majority of studies have focused on short-term or subjective performance metrics, leaving long-term effects on business growth, sustainability and internationalisation unexplored.

Capabilities, Strategy and Organisational Readiness

An increasing number of studies emphasise the significance of digital capabilities and

organisational readiness when assessing digital marketing effectiveness (Motamedimoghadam et al., 2025). Digital marketing success is increasingly dependent on an organisation's capacity to integrate technological resources with marketing knowledge, learning orientation and strategic goals. From a resource-based approach, digital marketing capabilities are viewed as important, valuable and difficult-to-imitate resources that can generate competitive advantage for SMEs **(**Lubis, 2022**).** According to studies, digital transformation is not just a technology shift, but also a process of organisational change that requires leadership commitment, employee expertise and cultural acceptance of innovation (Bux et al., 2025). SMEs with a greater level of technological awareness and entrepreneurial attitude are more likely to employ advanced digital marketing techniques and achieve better results (Afifah et al., 2018). However, empirical evidence is fragmented, with little cross-study integration of capability-based explanation.

Contextual, Institutional and Sustainability Perspectives

Recent studies have broadened digital marketing research by addressing contextual and institutional factors such as regulatory environments, dependency on platforms and data privacy concerns (Serhan et al., 2025). SMEs working in digital platform ecosystems face dependency on dominant platforms, which may impact autonomy, pricing power and data ownership (Gautam & Rawat, 2017). These barriers aren't sufficiently addressed in previous digital marketing research. Furthermore, sustainability and inclusivity are emerging as peripheral but developing issues (Bhattacharjee et al., 2020). Digital marketing is increasingly associated with business strategies, inclusive growth and market access for women-owned and informal SMEs (Windarsari, 2025). However, such ideas are only barely included in the core literature, indicating a significant gap for future research.

Overall, the research on digital marketing for SMEs is abundant but fragmented by procedure, outcome and context. Current studies offer useful insights into adoption drivers, tools and impact on performance; however, they lack a thorough understanding of the field's intellectual structure and thematic history. Few studies have focused on how digital marketing research has evolved from tool-centric adoption studies to capability, performance and sustainability-focused viewpoints. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive bibliometric and science mapping assessment to integrate diverse information, identify key emerging themes, and provide a structured agenda for future research.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study thoroughly investigates the growth and thematic evolution of scholarly literature related to digital marketing using bibliometric analysis (Patra & Bansal, 2025). Bibliometric analysis relies on quantitative methods to determine notable publications, prominent authors, most prolific sources and future research directions. It is reported to be particularly ideal for integrating diverse and rapidly increasing literature (Singh et al., 2024).

Data Source and Search Strategy

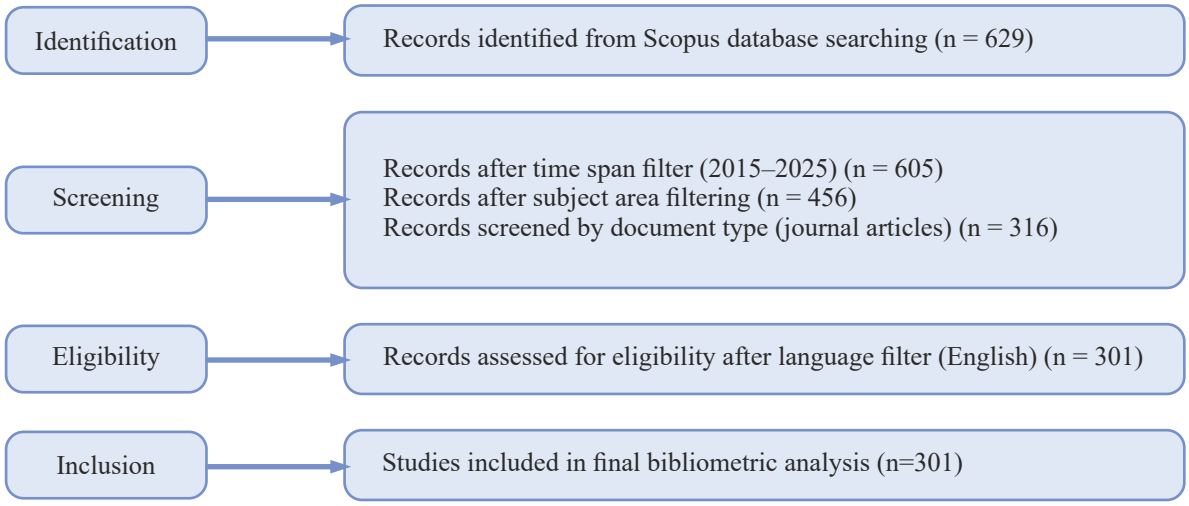
The bibliographic data were extracted from the Scopus database, widely recognised for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed publications especially in the field of business, management, and social sciences (Kaith & Sachdeva, 2024). To ensure retrieval of relevant papers, a systematic keyword search was conducted. The search string contained keywords related to digital marketing and SME; the search string was as follows:

Digital Marketing OR Online Marketing OR Social Media Marketing AND SMEs OR Small Enterprises OR Medium Enterprises OR Small and Medium Enterprise

Table 1 shows the inclusion-exclusion criterion that has been applied to extract relevant articles for the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

The dataset after applying the inclusion exclusion criteria was exported in CSV format and then analysed using the Biblioshiny package in the software R. The analysis comprised of two major components: Performance Analysis and Scientific mapping techniques. Performance Analysis includes identifying the publishing trends, top journals, influential authors, nation contributions and citation patterns while science mapping techniques incorporated keyword co-occurrence analysis, thematic mapping, factorial analysis and thematic evolution to figure out the field's intellectual structure and research fronts. Both of these techniques offered descriptive and important insights on how digital marketing research has transformed SME's over time. Figure 1 displays the Prisma technique, which has been adopted for the study.



(Source: Author's Own)

Figure 1: Prisma Technique (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis)

Table 1: Inclusion-exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Database	Studies indexed in the Scopus database	Studies indexed exclusively in other databases (e.g., Web of Science or Google Scholar)
Time Period	Publications within the period 2015-2025	Studies published outside the defined time span
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, books, editorials, notes, commentaries, dissertations
Language	Publications written in English	Non-English language publications
Subject Area	Business, Management and Accounting; Social Sciences; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Decision Sciences	Studies from unrelated subject areas

(Source: Author's Own)

Results and Findings

Main Information Data

Table 2: Main Information About Data

Timespan	**2015:2025**
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	186
Documents	301
Annual Growth Rate %	6.5
Document Average Age	3.26
Average citations per doc	18.26
References	2519
Document Contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	301
Author's Keywords (DE)	960
Authors	
Authors	930
Authors of single-authored docs	24
Authors Collaboration	
Single-authored docs	24
Co-Authors per Doc	3.29
International co-authorships %	24.92
Document Types	
article	301

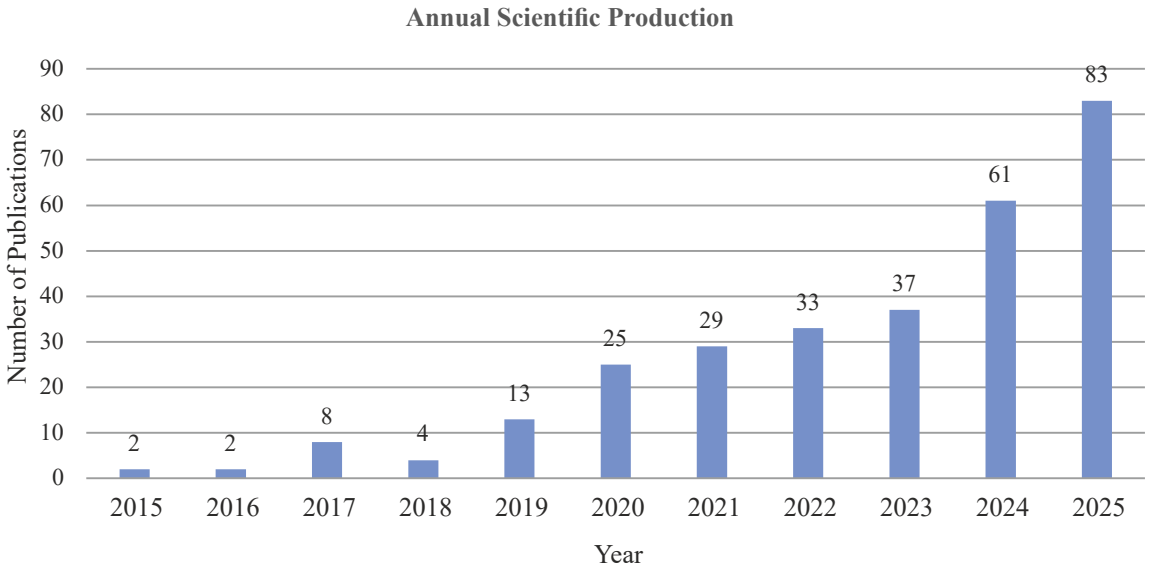
(Source: Analysis Output)

As seen in Table 2, the bibliometric dataset contains 301 publications from 186 sources over the years 2015–2025, showing a broad range of research outlets. The field of study is interdisciplinary; hence, research on the topic has been published across multiple journals. Research interest in the topic is increasing, as seen by the 6.5% annual rise in publications. The literature is contemporary and concentrated on current research, as evidenced by the average publication age of 3.26 years. The average citation rate of 18.26 per document reflects strong academic influence, indicating that published works have been regularly cited in the scholarly community. The dataset's 960 author-defined keywords and 301 Keywords Plus illustrate conceptual variety and the many theoretical and methodological approaches utilised by researchers.

The high number of author keywords indicates conceptual advancement and thematic expansion in the field. A varying research group is indicated by the authorship analysis, which additionally identifies 930 unique authors. With an average of 3.29 co-authors per document, just 24 single-authored articles were discovered, indicating a strong collaborative research trend. However, only 24.92% of articles include international co-authorship, suggesting that cross-country collaboration is low and could be a potential area for future research. Furthermore, every document in this compilation is a journal article, verifying the calibre of publications and the validity of

bibliometric analysis. The findings reflect an emerging, cooperative and evolving field of study with potential for global and multidisciplinary collaboration.

Annual Production of Publications

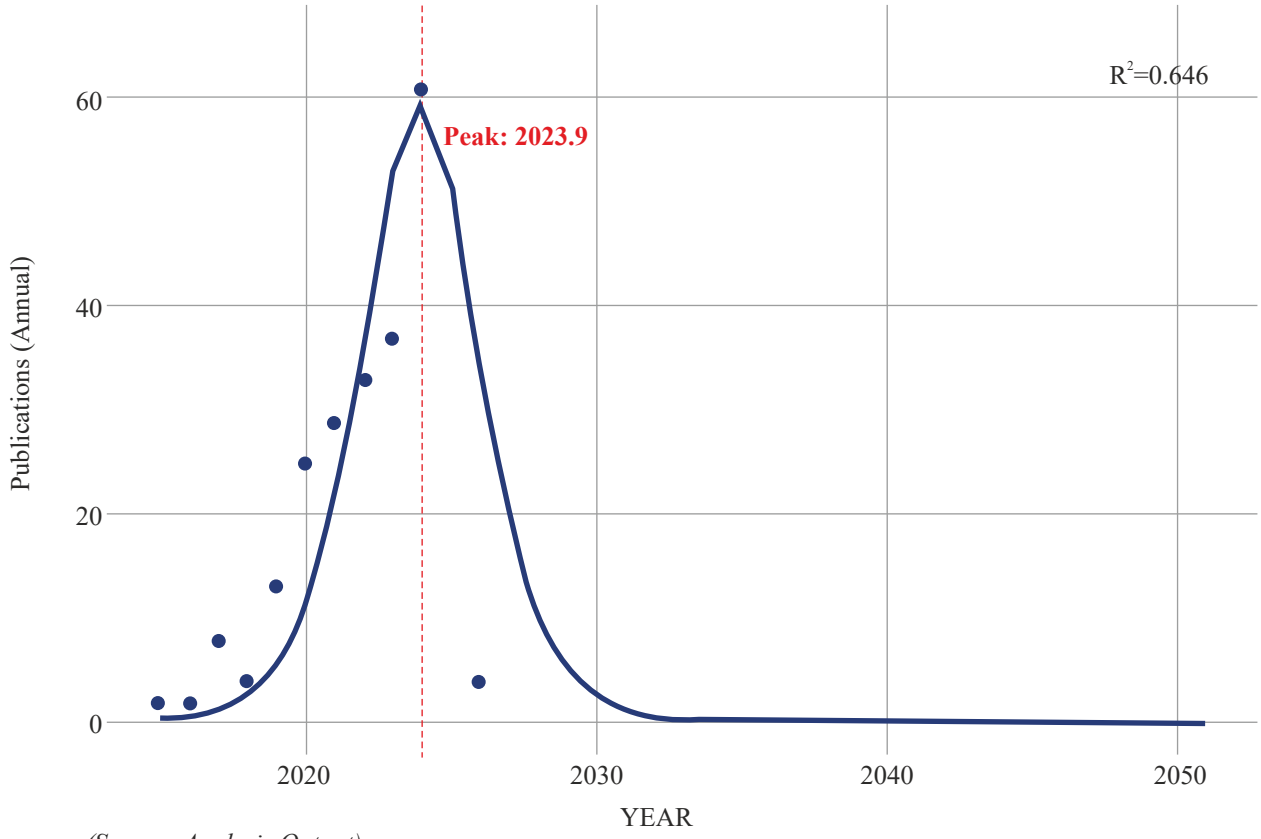


(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 2: Annual Scientific Graph

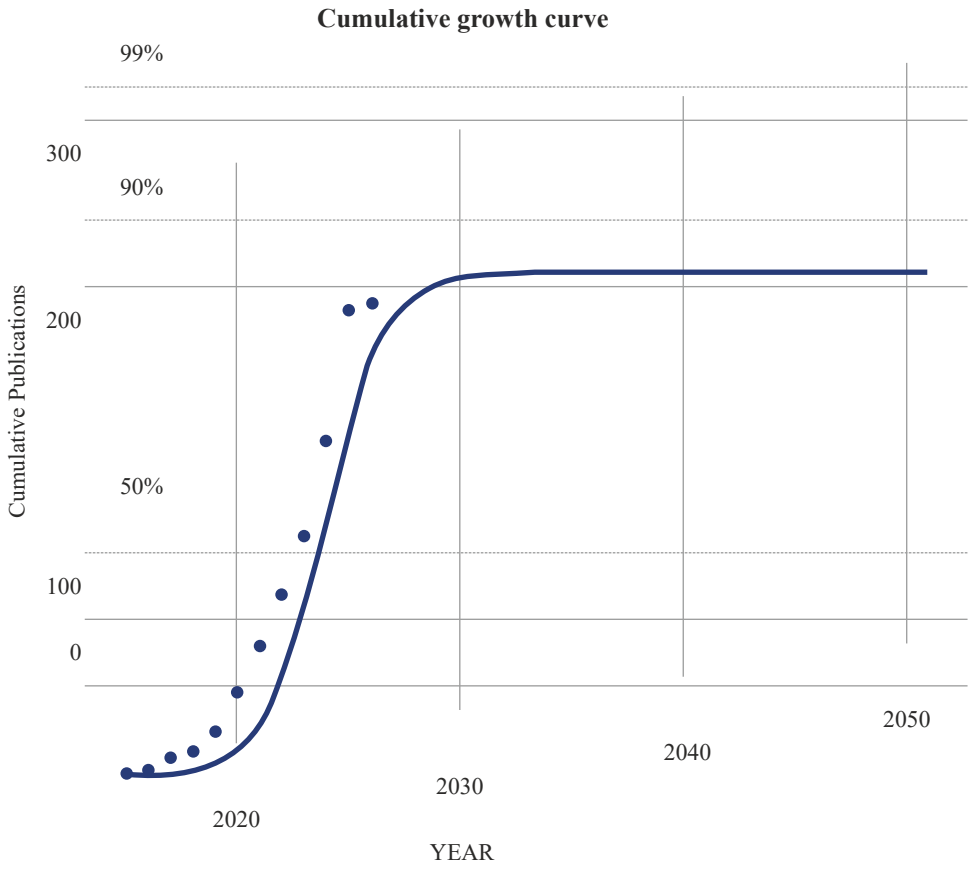
The annual scientific output shows a strong upward trend from 2015 to 2025, as shown in Figure 2. The study area was in its initial stage over the first few years (2015–2018), as shown by the low and mostly steady publication activity. Since 2019, the number of articles has steadily increased, highlighting growing academic interest and stability in the subject. Publications surged significantly between 2023 and 2025, hitting a high in 2025, showing that the topic gained scholarly attention and acquired wider acceptability across fields. The rise in publications indicates that the focus of internationalisation research has changed from traditional market entry approaches to digital-enabled methods that assist SMEs in overcoming resource and geographic constraints. Overall, the pattern in Fig. 2 supports the evolution of the research area from an emerging field to a prominent, rapidly advancing one

Life Cycle of Annual Publications



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 3a: Life cycle of Annual Publications



(Source: Analysis Output)

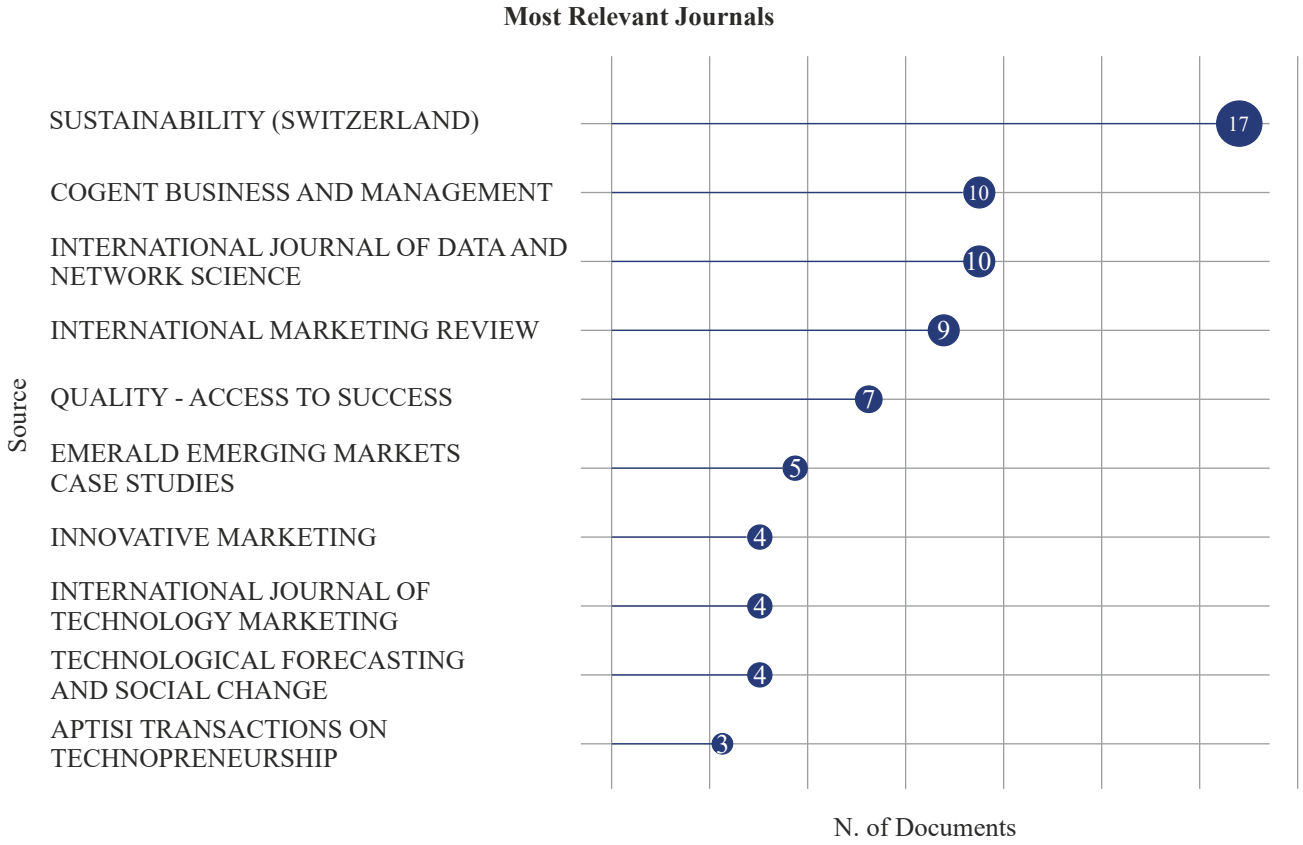
Figure 3b: Cumulative growth curve of publications

The life cycle analysis in Fig. 3(a) is based on a logistic growth model, which highlights a compressed and highly dynamic development of the research field. While a yearly publication output shows a bell-shaped curve, signalling a shift from emergence to rapid growth and a likely move toward achieving maturity, the entire publishing trajectory certainly exhibits an S-shaped pattern. The field evolved slowly and sporadically between 2015 and 2019, with just a few articles year. Early development of ideas and exploratory research are demonstrated during this time. The field then witnessed significant growth between 2020 and 2024, marked by a substantial rise in annual publications and a steep increase in total output. The point of inflexion occurring about late 2023 (2023.92), that denotes the highest rate of growth and peak scholarly interest, is depicted in Figure 3.

The projected carrying capacity K = 320, as shown in Fig. 3(b), suggests a small and specialised scope and a lack of long-term expansion potential. An extremely rapid study cycle is shown by the short time period needed to progress from initial acceptance to almost saturate (delta t = 5.9 years). Current empirical findings suggest that publication counts have exceeded the model's projected peak, suggesting that the subject's momentum may be slightly understated even if the model forecasts a fall in annual publications after 2024. From a scientific standpoint, the results suggest the area is nearing maturity or saturation, with future research moving from exploratory contributions to refinement, consolidation and application-oriented studies. The predicted decline indicates that key scientific problems have already been dealt with, but the quick expansion could have been caused by

external shocks, technological developments, or growing practical significance. Importantly, the observed variances from the figure highlight opportunities for new research patterns, particularly through multidisciplinary integration, theoretical advancement and contextual diversification. Instead of indicating a decline, the life cycle pattern points to an important turning point where the field may either continue to grow by redefining its limits and research objectives or stabilise as a niche domain.

Most Relevant Sources



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 4: Most Relevant Journals

Figure 4 reveals that the work focussing on digital marketing is distributed across a wide range of journals, which highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the field. With 17 article publications, Sustainability (Switzerland) is at the top. This reveals that the concerned topic is closely related to discussions of sustainability, particularly regarding digital transformation and the growth of SMEs. The International Journal of Data and Network Science and Cogent Business & Management have 10 publications each, making them important sources in this research field. The International Marketing Review's nine publications underscore the topic's relevance to traditional marketing and international business research and point to theoretical integration beyond sources that are solely practical or practitioner-focused. Contributions of journals such as Quality Access to Success (7 publications) and Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies (5 publications) shows the increasing engagement from quality management and emerging-market viewpoints. Technology and innovation-oriented

journals, including Innovative Marketing, International Journal of Technology Marketing and Technological Forecasting and Social Change, contribute a smaller but meaningful number of articles, suggesting that technological aspects are present but not yet dominant in the literature.

Overall, the distribution of publications in multiple journals shows that the field is still evolving and has not yet matured within a definite set of journals. This pattern suggests that there's prospects for future theoretical integration and that there is opportunity for the topic to be more prominently featured in prominent marketing and international business journals.

Word Cloud Analysis

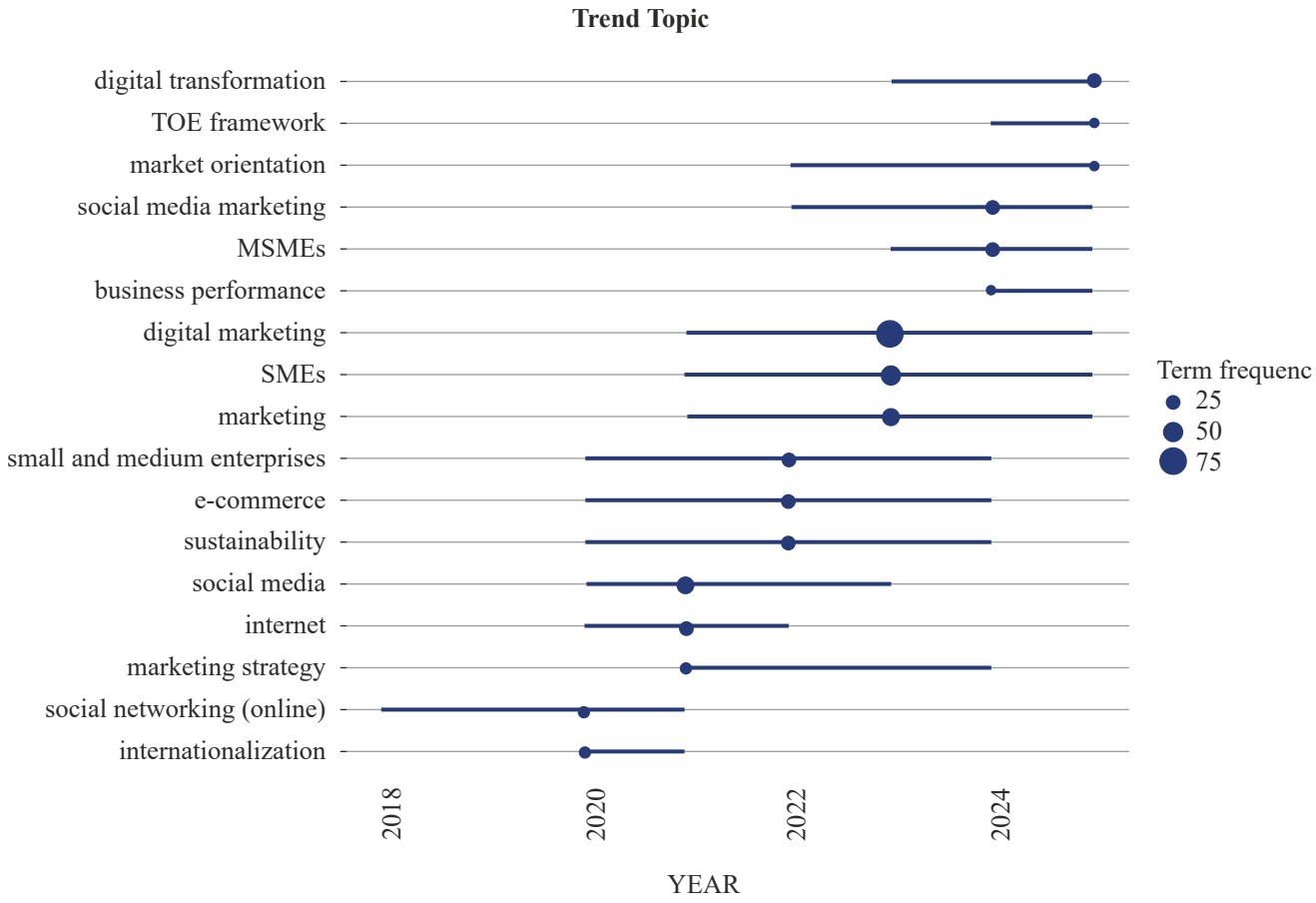


(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 5: Word Cloud

The literature primarily focuses on digital marketing in the context of SMEs, as shown in Figure 5, with frequent emphasis on social media marketing, marketing tactics and technology adoption. The presence of terms such as innovation, business performance, e-commerce and digital transformation suggests that prior studies have focused primarily on the role of digital marketing tools in firm-level outcomes and SMEs' competitive position. The presence of COVID-19 is indicative of an increase in studies on digital marketing as a result of crisis-driven disruptions, emphasising its role in fostering continuity and resilience in times of uncertainty. The literature primarily focuses on adoption and short-term performance benefits, as evidenced by the limited attention to advanced digital technologies, cross-border or global digital marketing and capability development over time. This pattern shows that, to better understand the changing role of digital marketing in SME growth and competitiveness, additional attention should be given to strategic, longitudinal and internationally focused approaches.

Trend Topic Analysis



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 6: Topics in Trend

Figure 6 highlights the trending topics from 2018 to 2024, with a focus on the recent and dynamic period. It clearly shows a progressive shift in research focus, from basic digital concepts to highly strategic and integrative themes. The trend-topic analysis indicates that between 2018 and 2024, there is a clear shift in research focus from basic digital concepts toward more strategic and integrative themes. Early important topics, such as social networking (online), internationalisation and the internet, reflect initial interest in digital connectivity and global reach. By 2021, attention had shifted to applied digital areas such as social media, e-commerce, sustainability and marketing strategy, along with increased interest in SMEs, indicating an emerging concern about how digital tools influence SME activities. The year 2022 saw significant consolidation in the field, with digital marketing emerging as the dominant theme, while SMEs and marketing remained major priorities. The increasing prominence of social media marketing demonstrates a growing discipline in digital marketing research. In 2024, digital transformation has been the dominant theme, signifying a shift away from the tactical adoption of digital tools toward broader strategic and organisational change. Technology organisation environment framework (TOE) indicates a more advanced, integrated approach towards understanding the effects of digital change. Moreover, the findings indicate a growing field of study that has shifted from descriptive analyses of digital technologies to more practical, theory-driven research, with an ongoing focus on SMEs

and their role in technologically enabled enterprises. Future research should inquire into the specific challenges of implementing digital transformation in different business contexts, the long-term impact of AI and advanced data analysis on digital marketing strategies, and the ethical and societal implications of increasing digitalisation, particularly for SMEs.

Visualisation of Keyword Co-occurrences



(Source: Analysis Output)

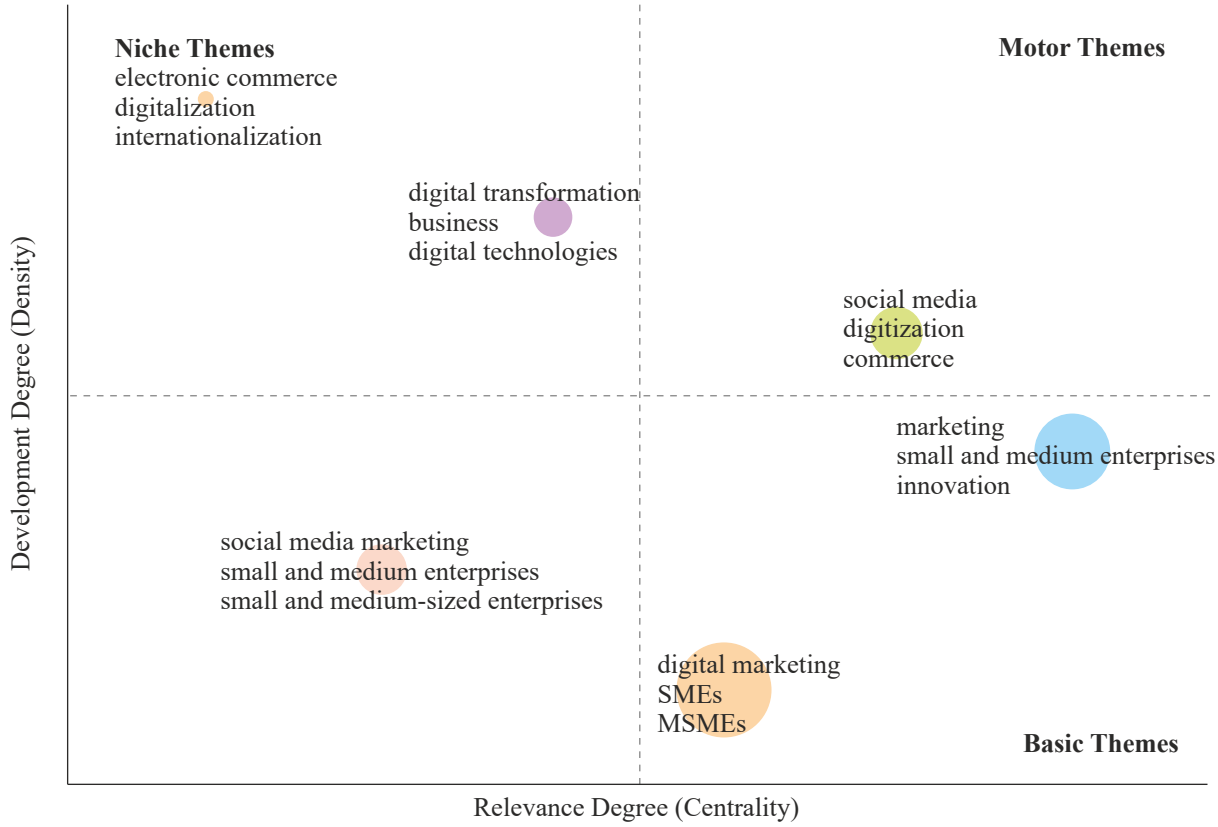
Figure 7: Co-word Network Analysis

A fairly dense structure composed of multiple interlinked clusters and a few highly central nodes that serve as significant hubs has been displayed in Figure 7. The varying node sizes clearly show the different frequency and significance of terms in the dataset and the edges show the strength of co-occurrence. The Louvain clustering method identified four separate clusters. The Red cluster is the focal point of digital adoption for SMEs, driven by keywords like digital marketing, SMEs, social media, competitiveness, and digitalisation.

It focuses primarily on the adoption and effectiveness of digital marketing and social media strategies among SMEs. This cluster shows a significant research focus on how SMEs utilise digital marketing technologies, notably social media and e-commerce, to improve their business performance, competitiveness and sustainability. The presence of Indonesia implies geographic concentration, indicating that emerging-economy contexts influence this stream. The occurrence of "Indonesia" is interesting and calls for additional inquiry in this particular geographic area. The blue cluster has a strong connection to the red cluster and concentrates on broader issues such as digital transformation, innovation, marketing and digital technology, reflecting a broader understanding of digital transformation and innovation in SMEs. While marketing is essential, it is considered within the framework of a larger digital transformation enabled by the use of technology and the internet. This cluster offers a more strategic approach to digitization, highlighting how technological adoption contributes to long-term organisational development and economic progress. The existence of COVID-19 shows that recent studies increasingly looking at environmental shocks as

accelerators for digital change. Furthermore, analysing the network's evolution over time, such as building networks for different time periods, can reveal shifts in focus, developing technologies, or shifting goals for SMEs in a post-pandemic environment. The green cluster, although smaller, emphasises online social networking, commerce, and performance, presenting a more complete view of Online Social Networking and Business Performance. This smaller, more focused cluster is expected to explore how online social networking impacts business performance, implying a more specialist interest in how online interactions influence economic outcomes. The purple cluster encompassing Entrepreneurial Marketing & Orientation stands for "entrepreneurial marketing," market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation, which is a unique and comparatively isolated community that emphasises the theoretical underpinnings of entrepreneurial approaches to marketing and firm orientation. It could be useful to examine how these theoretical ideas inform or are tested by the real-world applications in SMEs.

Centrality Density Thematic Map of the Research Field



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 8: Thematic Map

Figure 8 depicts research theme clusters of terms applying two major metrics: Relevance Degree Centrality. The X-axis measures how well a theme is related to other themes in the network. Highly central issues are influential and widely debated in the field. Development Degree Density. The Y-axis measures a theme's internal strength and coherence, indicating how strongly the different keywords are related to one another. High density reflects a well-developed, concentrated and

potentially established study area. This design creates four quadrants: motor themes, niche themes, basic themes and emerging or decreasing themes. The Motor topic in the upper-right quadrant, includes social media, digitization and commerce, illustrates that it is both advanced and fundamental to the subject. The presence of recent high-impact works shows this stream is actively impacting the domain's intellectual structure. This issue emphasises the significance of social platforms and e-commerce in current business research, which continues to drive theoretical and empirical progress. Niche themes in the upper-left quadrant include electronic commerce, digitalisation and internationalisation, demonstrating high density but low centrality. It shows significant internal coherence and research depth (high density), indicating a specialised community investigating the links among electronic commerce, digitalisation and internationalisation. However, its lower centrality means it operates comparatively independently, with fewer connections to other major topics in the area.

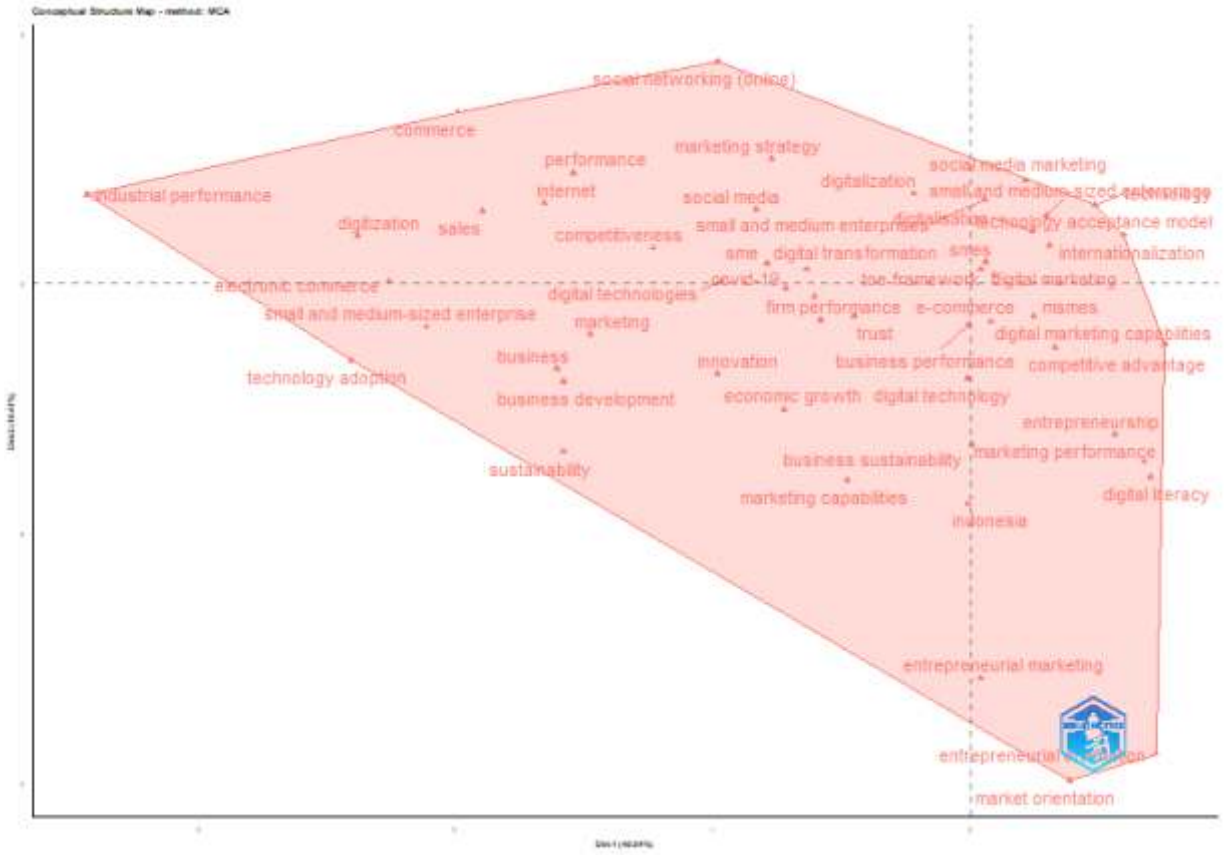
Furthermore, digital transformation, business and digital technology are positioned in the upper-middle, leaning left on centrality while having a high density. It's on the edge of shifting from a niche to a motor theme. This represents a highly specific and internally unified study

field focused on digital transformation principles, their commercial implications and the underlying digital technologies. This fragmentation reveals a lack of coordination between international business, digital strategy and entrepreneurship perspectives.

The Basic Theme in the Lower right quadrant consists of marketing, small and medium-sized businesses and innovation, with high centrality but moderate density. It is highly relevant and central to the broader research field, illustrating that "marketing," "SMEs," and "innovation" are fundamental and extensively debated ideas. However, its moderate density suggests that, while essential, internal research in this theme may be larger or more narrowly concentrated than in motor or specific fields. Furthermore, digital marketing, SMEs and SMEs show high centrality but low density. Digital marketing is a key and well-known issue reflected via high centrality that underpins many other discussions in the context of "SMEs". Its lower density suggests that, while widely discussed, internal theoretical or methodological growth within this specific cluster might be broad or less closely integrated, reflecting its broad application rather than a specialised, dense internal structure. Their sustained recognition in recent years demonstrates that SMEs are the preferred empirical setting for investigating digital marketing and innovation, though more theoretical consolidation is required.

Emerging themes in the lower-left quadrant include social media marketing and SMEs , which show low centrality and density. It exhibits low internal coherence, low density and weak connections to other themes, signifying that research on social media marketing in SMEs is still in its beginning stages, with methodologies and theoretical frameworks that are yet to be fully solidified or widely accepted across the broader field. The issue offers clear prospects for systematic theory development and empirical validation, but it lacks a coherent conceptual underpinning. Scholars might look into why, despite active publication, the subject remains low in both density and centrality. This may be due to a number of techniques, a lack of a unified theoretical framework, or simply because it is still too new to have established relationships.

Factorial Analysis



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 9: Factorial Map

The map is effectively classified into four thematic quadrants, establishing four clusters as shown in Figure 9. The first cluster, *Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for Cross-Border Commerce*, covers investigations into how businesses, particularly SME, employ digital technologies, the internet and social networking globally to enable digitisation, electronic commerce and sales, therefore impacting competitiveness and industrial performance. Online social networking appears to be a significant feature of this digital involvement. This area of research concentrates on how businesses, in particularly SMEs, use digital technologies for enhanced competitiveness and operational effectiveness.

The second cluster, *Business Ecosystems and Sustainability in Global Business Development*, includes broader business ideas that are frequently addressed alongside digital projects. Innovation and economic growth in business are important goals, but the role of trust remains essential in digital interactions and transactions. Sustainability is placed considerably lower, suggesting that it is an important, potentially emerging or cross-cutting strategic factor that supports or impacts digital business strategies rather than being an important enabler in this context. These themes appear to serve as supporting or integrative notions, creating digital initiatives instead of acting as direct technological drivers. Furthermore, sustainability, trust, and innovation appear to be slightly distant, demonstrating a lack of integration between digitisation research and broader societal or long-term value outcomes.

The third cluster, *Digital Platform Adoption and Internationalisation of Firms*, examines the use of digital tools for marketing and business growth. Social media marketing is a widely used technique driven by research into how the technological acceptance model predicts user adoption. The phrase "internationalisation" underlines how these digital marketing efforts enable firms to access foreign markets, emphasising their significance in achieving SDG 9. Academic interest in whether digital platforms promote adoption behaviour and help businesses to penetrate international markets is evident in this cluster.

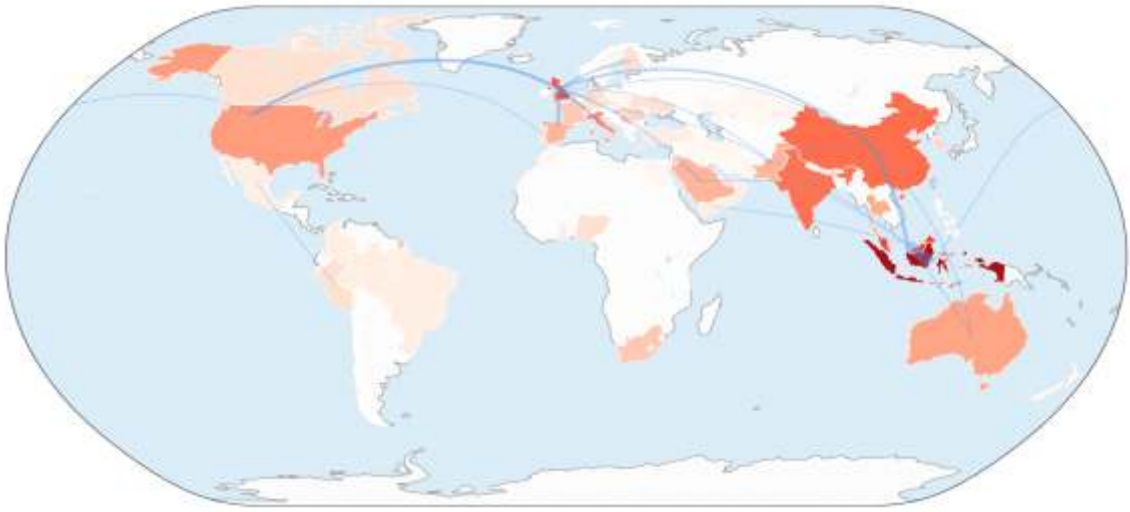
Additionally, the fourth cluster, *Entrepreneurial Orientation and Digital Capabilities of SMEs*, shows the tactical and performance-based elements of SMEs' digital activity, emerging as a powerful and unified cluster. It concentrates on entrepreneurial marketing that is driven by both market and entrepreneurial viewpoints. Moreover, Indonesia's importance as a geographic node reflects a significant regional concentration, underlining a lack of comparison evidence between various national and institutional settings. All factors considered, the map suggests that future researchers should use a cross-cluster approach that links digital adoption to sustainability, institutional context and long-term societal effects. Based on the themes shown in Fig. 9, Table 3 illustrates the clusters that were created and the fundamental ideas for the relevant domains.

Table 3: Identification of clusters from the factorial map

Cluster	Cluster name	Core concepts	Representative keywords
Cluster 1	Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for Cross-Border Commerce	Foundational enablers of digitalisation, technology adoption, competitiveness and operational improvement among firms, especially SMEs	Digitisation, electronic commerce, technology adoption, internet, digital technologies, digital transformation, competitiveness, sales, commerce, industrial performance, social networking online, small and medium-sized enterprise
Cluster 2	Business Ecosystems and Sustainability in global business development	Cross-cutting contextual and supporting factors shaping digital initiatives and business development	Trust, innovation, sustainability, economic growth, business, business development
Cluster 3	Digital Platform adoption and Internationalisation of Firms	Use of digital tools for marketing, technology acceptance and international market reach. The adoption of Digital Platforms highlights technological innovation and modern infrastructure supporting SDG 9.	Social media marketing; digitalisation (marketing context), technology acceptance model, internationalization, marketing strategy, social media
Cluster 4	Entrepreneurial orientation and Digital Capabilities of SMEs	Strategic capabilities, entrepreneurial approaches and performance outcomes of digitalisation among SMEs	SMEs, digital marketing capabilities, marketing performance, business sustainability, entrepreneurial marketing, entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, competitive advantage, digital literacy, e-commerce, business performance, Indonesia

(Source: Author's Own)

Collaboration World Map



(Source: Analysis Output)

Figure 10: Collaboration Map

Figure 10 displays an asymmetric and highly centralized worldwide research network. The United States, the United Kingdom, China, India and Australia are all important contributors in the scholarly output and international collaboration, which shows that the activity is concentrated in a small number of nations. Due to their strong international co-authorship and high publishing rate, these nations are considered major nodes in the global academic network. Strong collaboration corridors can be seen both within the Asia-Pacific area and along the North America Europe region. These countries symbolize for established academic ties, standardized research infrastructure and institutional support for global research collaboration.

The United Kingdom and the United States play an important role in the research field, connecting European, Asian and Australian research hubs. In a comparable manner, China and India are increasing their international involvement, which reflects the growing significance of emerging nations in global research.

Regional clustering can be observed in East and Southeast Asia as countries like Singapore, Japan and South Korea have strong intra and inter-regional ties, strengthening their roles as knowledge intermediaries. Nearly all of Africa, Latin America and sections of the Middle East, on the contrary, have weaker collaborative ties and lower publishing rates, demonstrating inadequate participation in international research networks. The difference reflects the continued predominance of knowledge creation in both developed and emerging nations. Expanding collaborative efforts, funding strategies and cross-regional studies would enhance inclusion and diversify scholarly perspectives, particularly from underserved places, thus enhancing the global relevance and reliability of future research.

Conclusion

This bibliometric research offers a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual framework, topic evolution and global linkage trends in research on digital marketing and digital transformation in SMEs. Digital marketing also endorses international trade by fostering collaboration among firms, government and digital platforms, contributing to SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals. The results suggest that the area of analysis evolved from conventional descriptive analyses of digital connection into more strategic, theoretically based and capability-driven approaches. After 2020, the yearly scientific output graph depicts an uptick in

articles. The trend topic assessment exhibits a unique, sluggish evolution, with initial research focusing on fundamental digital concepts like the internet, social networking and internationalisation, subsequent to a rise in digital marketing and applications focused at SMEs. A shift toward broader institutional, strategic and theoretical understanding is reflected by the relevance of digital transformation, the Technology Organization Ecosystem framework and market orientation in the present day. This expansion confirms that the field has reached a further advanced stage, marked by integrated approaches rather than isolated technology adoption studies.

The factorial and co-word network analyses offer further evidence of distinct yet connected thematic clusters. While key research areas emphasise on adoption of technology and performance among SMEs, clusters focused on digital evolution and innovation, business ecosystems and sustainability in global business development, digital platform adoption and internationalisation of firms; and entrepreneurial orientation and digital capabilities of SMES. Nevertheless, there is limited overlap among digital research and more broad topics like sustainability, trust and long-term value creation, indicating that these clusters are not fully interconnected. This remark is backed by the thematic map, which emphasises the significance of marketing, SMEs and creativity in the area. However, certain specific problems, like social media marketing in SMEs, remain largely unmapped and theoretically fragmented. According to the nation's alliance study, established and expanding countries dominate a centralised global research structure, with the US, UK, China, India and Australia serving as major knowledge hubs. However, regional concentrations, especially in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, those found reflect the spatial uniqueness of the vast majority of empirical findings, underscoring the need for more comprehensive cross-national and comparative research. Overall, the study confirms that research on digital marketing and digital transformation in SMEs is dynamic and evolving, yet remains fragmented and geologically concentrated. This work helps a better understanding of how this domain has evolved and where future studies may have a major effect, especially through the use of integrative, theory-driven and globally appropriate research techniques, by accurately evaluating these trends.

Implications of the study

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this bibliometric analysis contribute to theory by demonstrating how research on digital marketing and digital transformation in SMEs has evolved from a technology-adoption perspective to more strategic, capability-oriented implications. This shift indicates the need for better capability-based and strategic frameworks, such as the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities, explaining how SMEs build long-term value through digital marketing rather than short-term profit. In addition, the relative isolation of digital transformation, marketing strategy and sustainability-related topics indicates a lack of unified theoretical frameworks that connect these diverse fields. The study recommends that future researchers should prioritise synthesis, longitudinal perspectives, and multi-level explanations above incremental adoption studies. Overall, these findings promote the development of frameworks that account for the dynamic, contextual and evolutionary nature of SMEs' digital marketing.

Practical Implications

For SME owners and managers, the findings suggest that digital marketing is no longer just a tactical tool but a strategic capability that promotes innovation, provides a competitive edge, and supports long-term success. The growing focus on digital transformation and strategic orientation indicates that SMEs need to invest in digital marketing technologies while also developing organisational capabilities, such as digital expertise and data-driven decision-making. The presence of social media and e-commerce in literature underscores their growing importance in digital marketing. However, there is a lack of focus by SMEs on advanced technologies with untapped

potential, which can be addressed through data-analytics-driven and automation-enabled marketing techniques.

Policy Implications

The uneven participation of countries revealed that research work is concentrated in a small number of developed and emerging economies. This has important policy implications, as government and academic institutions in underrepresented regions should improve research infrastructure, funding mechanisms and international collaboration initiatives. Supporting cross-border research initiatives and capacity-building efforts can enhance the global applicability of digital marketing strategies for SMEs. Table 4 presents future research directions and questions based on the clusters formed.

Future Research Directions

Table 4: Future Research Directions

Cluster	Cluster name	Future research questions	Future research directions
Cluster 1	Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for Cross-Border Commerce	What effects does early digital adoption have on the long-term competitiveness and resilience of SMEs? Which issues, such as capacity gaps or digital overload, surface after first adoption? What effects do the latest innovations AI, analytics and platforms have on post-adoption results?	Analyse the long-term impact of digital adoption on firm resilience and survival. Research post-adoption issues such as digital weariness and capability gaps and examine how AI, big data, and platform technologies can advance beyond simple adoption.
Cluster 2	Business Ecosystems and Sustainability in global business development	In which way does digitalisation promote long-term sustainability over short-term performance? How does trust mediate digital interactions among platforms, customers and businesses? How can digital strategies promote inclusive economic growth?	Analyse how digital strategies boost long-term societal and environmental value, not just economic success, create multi-level frameworks integrating business strategy with societal effect, and more explicitly map sustainability and trust into digitalisation models.
Cluster 3	Digital Platform adoption and Internationalisation of Firms	How do businesses use digital platforms strategically beyond just technology adoption? In which way does social media marketing help SMEs penetrate new markets and expand globally? What impact do platform governance and algorithms have on the effectiveness of marketing?	Investigate how digital marketing supports cross-border SMEs and born-global enterprises, moving beyond adoption models such as TAM toward behavioural and strategic platform utilisation. Study platform governance, influence of algorithms and ethics in digital marketing.
Cluster 4	Entrepreneurial orientation and Digital Capabilities of SMEs	Which variables account for the higher performance that results from digital marketing capabilities? How does digital success of SMEs influence institutional settings and policy ecosystems? Do similar relationships hold true across nations and industries?	Employ longitudinal designs to test the causal relationship between technological abilities and performance. Broaden the scope of studies beyond dominant contexts like Indonesia by incorporating comparative cross-country analyses. Explore how infrastructure, policy ecosystems and institutional support affect SMEs' digital success.

(Source: Author's Own)

Limitations

This study has some limitations, which should be acknowledged. The analysis relies primarily on the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant research indexed in other databases, so restricting coverage. Only English-language journal papers were collected, which excludes region-specific research papers in other languages. Bibliometric findings depend on author-defined keywords and citation patterns, which may not accurately represent the conceptual complexity of particular studies. The use of quantitative bibliometric tools highlights research trends but does not assess technical accuracy or contextual depth. Furthermore, citation-based metrics could disadvantage recent articles that have not yet received citations. Future research might overcome these limitations by integrating multiple databases and complementary qualitative research methodologies.

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