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Digital Trust in Online Platforms: A Bibliometric Review

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ABSTRACT

Digital trust has become a fundamental element in shaping user engagement, transaction reliability, and sustainable interactions across online platforms. As digital ecosystems continue to expand through social media, electronic commerce, and intelligent technologies, research on digital trust has grown rapidly and become increasingly interdisciplinary. This study aims to examine the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and emerging trends in Digital Trust in Online Platforms through a bibliometric review approach. Bibliographic data were collected from the Scopus database and analyzed using VOSviewer to perform publication trend analysis, citation analysis, collaboration mapping, keyword co-occurrence, overlay visualization, and density analysis. The findings reveal that research in this field is centered on themes such as trust, social media, electronic commerce, consumer behavior, artificial intelligence, and data privacy. Collaboration analysis shows active global participation, with India, China, and the United States emerging as major contributors to scientific development. Temporal and thematic mapping indicates a transition from foundational discussions on trust and online interaction toward more advanced topics including AI-driven trust mechanisms, blockchain, machine learning, privacy governance, and secure digital infrastructures. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the current research landscape and offers future research directions for strengthening digital trust in increasingly complex online environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced development of digital technology has led to a change in interactions between individuals, companies, and even governments via the Internet. E-commerce websites, social networking services, digital banking solutions, e-learning platforms, and even sharing economy services have taken central stage in the contemporary social and economic environment [1], [2]. An increase in internet use and mobile phones ownership has resulted in an increased reliance on digital platforms for communication, financial transactions, and information dissemination. Within this digital realm, trust has become one of the most important issues affecting user engagement and the sustainability of these digital platforms. The involvement of people within online environments often entails the provision of personal data,

information related to finances, and behavioral trends. Therefore, privacy issues, cybersecurity threats, the problem of spreading misinformation, and unethical data practices have become particularly salient in the digital age, thereby highlighting the importance of digital trust [3], [4].

The term digital trust can be defined as the level of confidence placed by users in digital technologies and online platforms for providing reliable and secure services. The definition of digital trust is broader than the idea of trust relating to security and also involves several other factors such as data privacy, institutional trust, reliability, transparency, and ethics. According to several researchers, digital trust acts as the basis for building long-term relationships between users and technology systems, as trust eliminates uncertainties and risks in online transactions [5]. In the online environment where there is no physical interaction between users, the trustworthiness of a platform can be gauged based on various factors such as design, reputation, policies, and previous experiences of users. With the advent of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and blockchain in online platforms, the definition of digital trust has become even more complex because along with trust in organizations, users need to put their trust in automated systems and digital infrastructure.

The importance of digital trust has significantly increased because of the rising cybersecurity attacks, data breaches, and misinformation campaigns. Cases where there were unauthorised data harvesting, identity theft, online scams, and biased algorithms have been reported to undermine consumer trust towards the internet. The use of the internet for collecting and sharing information has become common knowledge among users. In addition, concerns about false reviews, manipulated information, and misinformation through artificial intelligence have led to distrust towards digital platforms. Research findings have indicated that the perception of security, privacy, and reputation affects the level of digital trust and behaviour towards internet usage [6], [7]. Therefore, digital trust can be described as a critical factor that cannot only be addressed from a technological perspective but also socially and organizationally. Digital trust plays an important role in fostering customer loyalty, adoption of digital platforms, and innovation.

Due to the increasing importance of digital trust, the amount of scientific investigations dedicated to this subject has grown immensely over the past decades. Scholars from various disciplines have analyzed the development of trust within online platforms ranging from ecommerce sites to fintech services, social media, and artificial intelligence solutions. Current researches have identified the factors that affect trust such as privacy protection, perceived usefulness, reputation, transparency, and quality of service. Some scholars have examined issues related to trust recovery after security breaches, protection of users by governmental regulation, and ethical concerns within algorithmic systems. Despite the growth in the number of publications dedicated to digital trust, this area of research has not been systematized and unified due to a large variety of approaches and methods applied by researchers from different disciplines. Thus, there is a need for identification of current research trends, main issues under investigation, leading authors, and collaboration patterns in the field of digital trust [8], [9].

Indeed, bibliometrics analysis is becoming a popular way of examining systematically the development of scientific research in a certain area. This approach differs from traditional literature review in that it involves a set of quantitative techniques allowing the analyst to examine the dynamics of publications, citation patterns, the relationship between keywords, and collaboration networks. The analysis based on bibliometrics allows the researcher to establish influential publications and clusters, find gaps, and define the new areas of research. Concerning the area of digital trust, the application of bibliometrics is essential since it will help the researcher make an overall assessment of the evolution of the

topic and define its most prominent directions, which, in turn, will affect further research on the subject. Also, bibliometric maps allow for discovering interconnections between several areas such as information systems, cybersecurity, digital governance, artificial intelligence, and consumer behavior studies. The latest studies have proved that the application of the approach in analyzing different technology-related topics such as digital identity, trust in artificial intelligence, and digital transformation brings many benefits due to the fact that it allows gaining an objective understanding of knowledge evolution [8].

Although many papers have been published about digital trust within online platforms, it appears that the current body of research lacks coherence and does not provide a holistic analysis of intellectual developments concerning digital trust in online platforms. Indeed, various academic fields have studied the topic of digital trust in online platforms, and the inconsistency between the theories and methods used has led to fragmented results. Previous research on the topic has tended to focus on narrow research contexts, such as e-commerce, fintech, social media, or artificial intelligence, instead of offering a general discussion of the entire research landscape. Moreover, few studies have comprehensively analyzed publication trends, key contributors, institutional collaboration, core themes, and new research avenues associated with digital trust in online platforms. This bibliometric review addresses the gap in the literature by mapping the development of digital trust research in online platforms.

In this study, an attempt will be made to perform a bibliometric analysis of the literature related to digital trust in online platforms to understand the developments, structure, and emerging trends in this area of study.

2. METHODS

The proposed study utilizes a bibliometric review methodology to examine the evolution of research into digital trust in online platforms. Bibliometric analysis is an approach applied quantitatively to assess scientific literature within a particular field of interest. This methodology is deemed suitable for the present research since it allows the researcher to explore publication patterns, citation relationships, collaborations, and topics within the scope of digital trust research. A descriptive and exploratory design will be used in the research to describe the intellectual structure of digital trust research. The source of data used in the bibliometric analysis will be the credible databases of academic journals including Scopus and Web of Science, as the two databases cover peer-reviewed scientific publications across various fields of study. In the process of searching relevant studies, the following keywords will be used including: "digital trust," "online platforms," "trust in digital systems," "platform trust," and others. Only articles and conference papers written in English will be included in the analysis.

The publications are then assessed in line with predefined criteria. The publications that have no relationship with digital trust on online platforms, those having duplicate information, and those having incomplete bibliographic information will be excluded from the analysis. The database of publications will finally be converted into files compatible with the VOSviewer. The bibliometric indicators used in this study include publication growth, citation analysis, co-authorship analysis, co-citation analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Publication growth will be employed in assessing the growth and development in the subject area, whereas citation analysis will be used in order to find out the prominent figures and publications in the field of digital trust. Co-authorship analysis will help in exploring collaboration among the researchers, institutions, and countries, while keyword co-occurrence analysis will aid in finding dominant themes and emerging topics.

Results from the bibliometric analysis will be shown through statistical descriptions, tables, and maps produced via bibliometric analysis software tools. Network mapping

methods will be employed in order to map the relationships between authors, organizations, and research themes. Moreover, thematic mapping will be undertaken in order to categorize research themes according to relevance and advancement in the existing literature. Interpretation of results will be concentrated on establishing main research themes, knowledge gaps, and emerging areas in the field of digital trust in online platforms.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Co-Authorship Analysis

It is evident from the visualization of co-authorship network that the research of Digital Trust in Online Platforms is conducted by a number of co-operative groups of researchers in collaboration with each other to some extent. There are two primary clusters present: one is the cluster on the left-hand side of the visualization colored red, while the other is the cluster on the right-hand side colored green and both are connected with the help of a third smaller cluster colored blue. This cluster on the left-hand side consists of a high level of intra-cluster collaboration involving authors such as Qiu Shi, Liu Ming, Luo Jinhao, along with their network and thus signifies a highly established and well-connected community of researchers who contribute extensively to this particular research area. Similarly, the second cluster represents another group of collaborating scholars headed by Chen Yu and involves other authors such as Ge Jiaying, Zhou Jing, Chen Yang, and so forth.

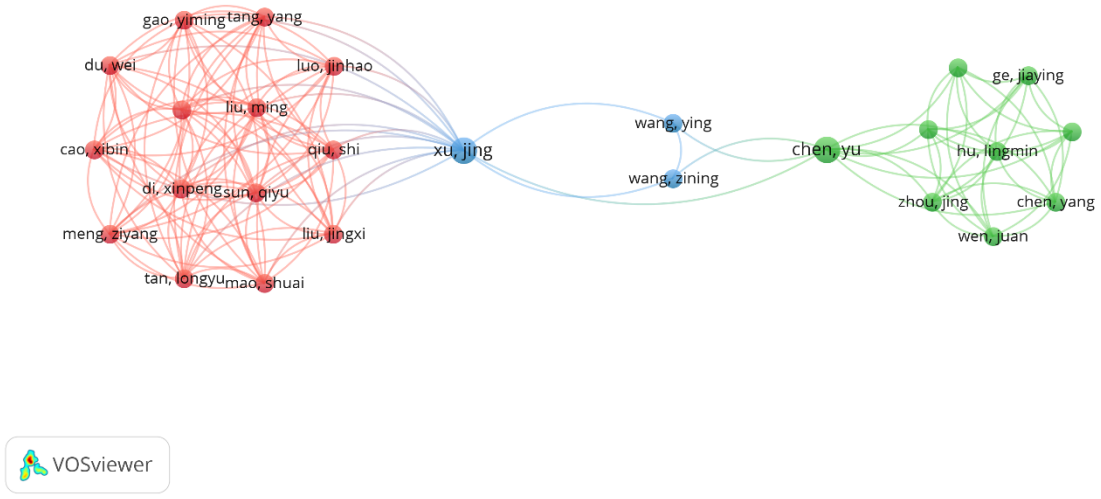

Figure 1. Author Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

One interesting insight revealed by the analysis is the identification of bridge authors such as Xu Jing, Wang Zining, and Chen Yu, bridging between otherwise distinct author networks. The strategic positions of these intermediaries provide a means for knowledge sharing and perspective integration within different clusters of authors. In fact, Xu Jing can be considered as a gateway from the more numerous red cluster to the blue nodes, while Chen Yu represents a connector to the green cluster. From these relationships, one might conclude that even though research on digital trust literature still exhibits some level of fragmentation into distinct regions or

collaboration clusters, there is a growing trend towards cross-network integration among the researchers.

Collaborative network visualization reveals a well-connected and multi-disciplinary knowledge production framework in the area of Digital Trust in Online Platforms, whereby the participating institutions have developed extensive collaborations instead of isolated research groups. As opposed to fractured networks which form several fragmented clusters, the visualization presented above includes one major cluster (colored in red), with dense connections between the departments and research labs, implying that knowledge production in this area is greatly aided by interdisciplinarity in research. This can be seen from the connections made by institutions belonging to different domains, including computer science, biomedicine, public health, biology, genetics, nutrition, and engineering, implying that digital trust research goes beyond the realm of technology and is a socio-technical issue.

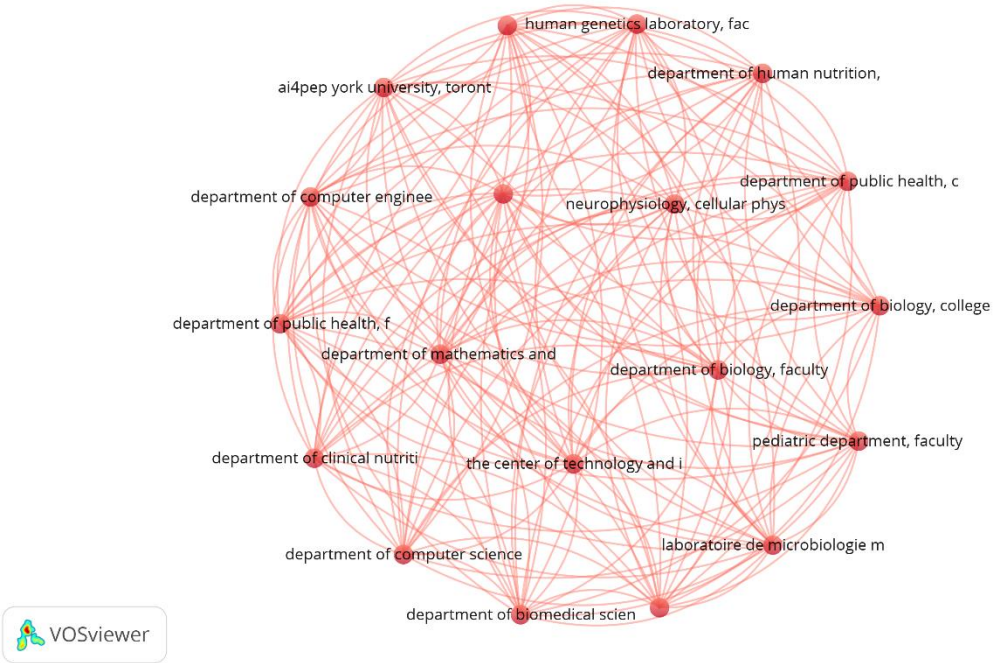

Figure 2. Institution Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

It is also evident that certain entities seem to have a relatively central position in the network, which include institutions associated with computer sciences, public health, biology, and technology centers. These institutions may serve as nodes facilitating the connection of various research streams. This is shown by the inclusion of entities like Department of Computer Science, Department of Public Health, Department of Biology, and The Center of Technology and Innovation, demonstrating the fact that research into digital trust increasingly encompasses views on data systems, human behavior, governance, privacy, health communication, and user experience. Furthermore, the inclusion of special laboratories and biomedical departments implies that digital trust mechanisms are studied in the context of sensitive data sharing platforms.

From the above country collaboration network, it is clear that the study of Digital Trust in Online Platforms has become an internationally connected area where several countries have played prominent roles as players within the area of international scientific collaboration. In this regard, the

countries such as India, China, and the United States can be seen to play prominent roles, which have been reflected through larger node sizes along with connections with several countries. Out of these three countries, India seems to be one of the prominent hubs where it holds broad connections with different parts of the world such as Middle Eastern countries, Asian countries, and emerging economies; meanwhile, China has been seen to exhibit intense collaboration with Asian countries and neighboring countries. On the other hand, the United States has occupied a prominent central position connecting different clusters of countries.

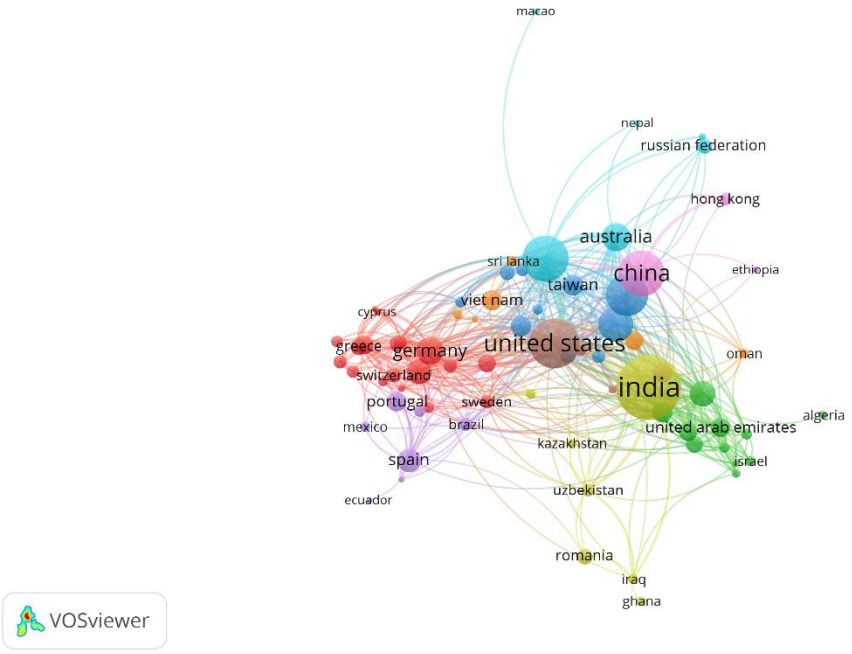

Figure 3. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The clustering trend shows not only the tendencies of collaboration within the regions but also international integration as well. The countries in Europe such as Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Greece, and Portugal are clustered together to show the collaborative trends among themselves. China and Australia are engaged in collaborative work with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Some other countries like India, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and some other developing countries represent the research trend of developing interest in the topic of digital trust among rapidly developing countries.

3.2 Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

As can be seen from the keyword co-occurrence network, the research of Digital Trust in Online Platforms is organized in multiple domains interconnected with each other. In this case, one can see that digital trust has developed to become a multifaceted concept which involves technology, behaviors, business, and governance issues. There are four thematic areas identified with different colors. It is possible to highlight such highly related concepts as trust, social media, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, and data privacy. As for the keyword trust, its central position and significant node size denote that it serves as the intellectual center of this field where various aspects such as users' behavior, interaction, technology, and decision-making processes are discussed.

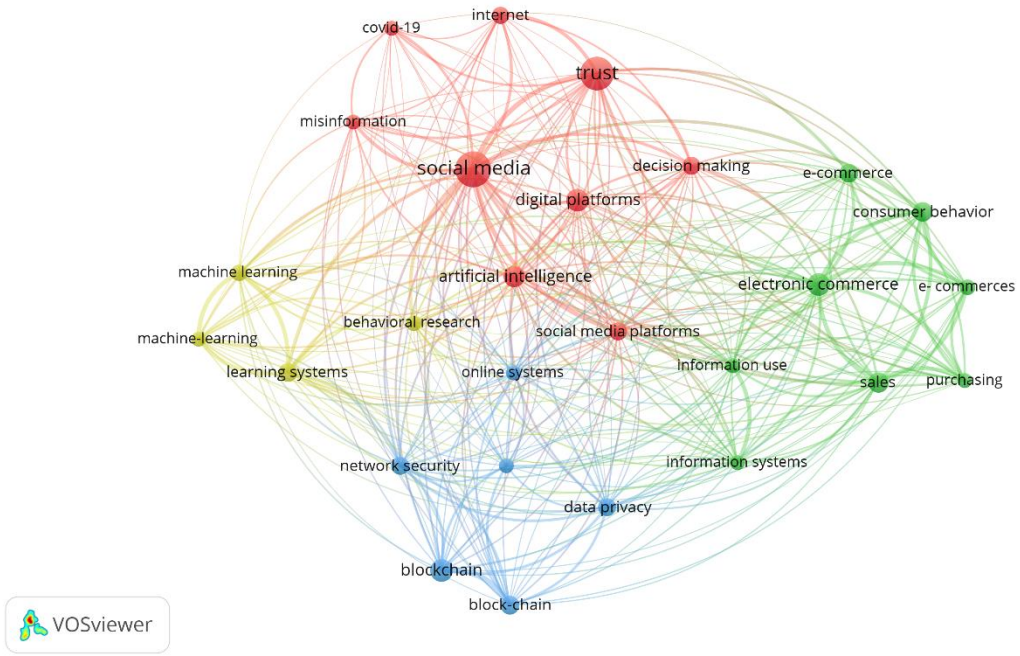

Figure 4. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

The red cluster could be viewed as the behavioral/social aspect of digital trust since trust, social media, digital platforms, decision making, misinformation, and COVID-19 form a complex network among each other. These keywords imply that research on the influence of trust is commonly done to understand the behavior of the users and their perceptions regarding the decisions taken through digital platforms. The occurrence of keywords such as misinformation and COVID-19 implies that research related to trust no longer remains limited to transactions but covers the development of trust during the period of digital ambiguity and information overflow. The cluster of the green color represents the business/consumer perspective of digital trust, which is associated with such keywords as electronic commerce, consumer behavior, buying, selling, and information systems. These connections mean that digital trust still plays a key role in shaping user acceptance, intention, and loyalty in the context of online marketplaces' ecosystem. High connections between these keywords mean that researchers start considering digital trust as an effective strategy to minimize risk perception and promote consumers' engagement in digital economics activities. It is important to note that the popularity of the keyword "electronic commerce" means that online platform researches are significantly influenced by transaction/adoption theories.

On the other hand, the clusters that are blue and yellow focus on the technological architecture used in the creation of trust. The key issues that appear include blockchain technology, network security, data privacy, machine learning, and learning systems. It is evident that there is a move toward studying issues of trust based on technological capabilities and systems. The terms relating to blockchain and privacy show the importance that is now being attached to transparency, decentralization, and the safeguarding of user data.

In the case of the overlay visualization, we can see the chronological development of research themes within the framework of Digital Trust in Online Platforms, as illustrated by the color scale that shows the degree of recency of the appearance of the keyword (from earlier themes colored dark blue and purple through to more recent themes colored green and yellow). According

to the network, the first discussions related to this topic were focused on terms like trust, internet, online, and COVID-19, all of which are shown in darker shades and have a central position within the network.

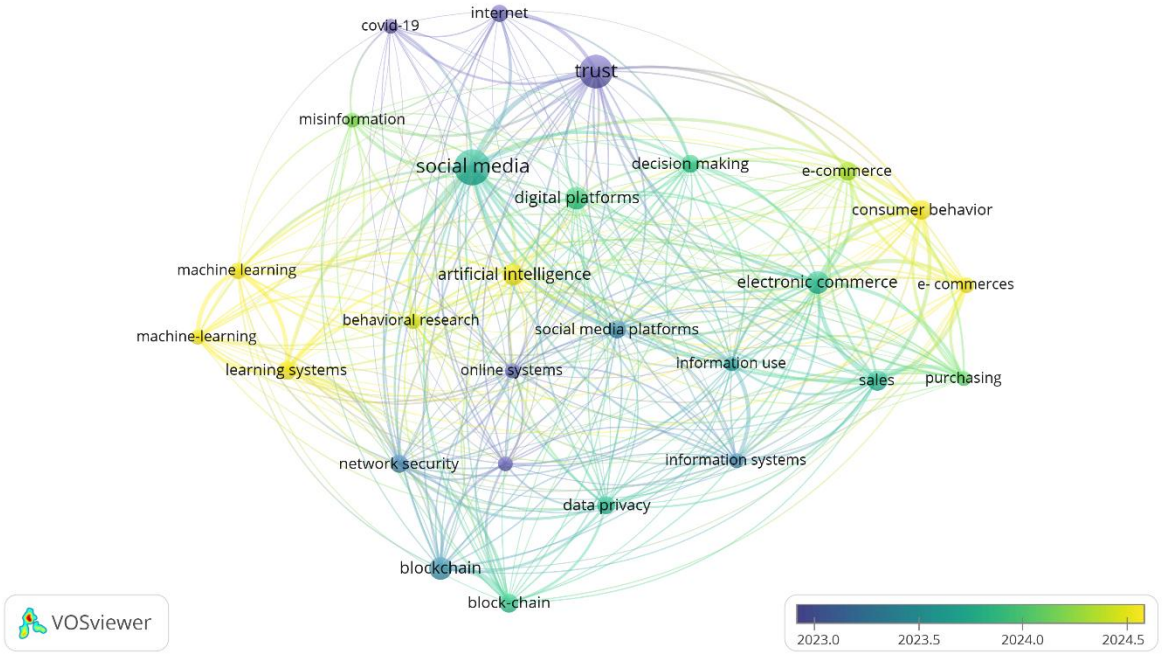

Figure 5. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

In line with the development in the area, studies progressed towards a wider platform and technology integration focus as evident from intermediate-colored keywords like social media, digital platform, e-commerce, data privacy, blockchain, information systems, and decision making. Such developments show how researchers gradually started to move away from studying trust from a purely theoretical viewpoint to incorporating more practical aspects associated with platform management, digital transactions, user security, and technology dependability. A close connection between these key terms reveals that researchers no longer consider digital trust as a behavioral construct only, but rather through system mechanisms. The most recent trends are depicted using bright yellow nodes such as consumer behavior, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and learning systems, pointing to emerging areas of research. These emerging trends show that there is now an increasing focus on the influence of intelligent systems as well as customized digital environments on the development of trust and purchase behaviors. The importance accorded to machine learning and artificial intelligence suggests increasing academic interest in algorithmic trust and recommendations.

The density map shows the frequency and the strength of research topics in the study area of Digital Trust in Online Platforms, where the brighter yellow regions denote more researched topics with greater conceptual density, while green and blue regions denote the relatively lesser studied topics. The major hotspot areas lie at trust and social media, implying that trust and social media comprise the main topics of interest in the field under discussion. High density in this regard shows that several studies have been conducted regarding the formation of trust and its influence on digital platforms such as social media sites. High-density areas associated with electronic commerce, consumers' behaviors, and artificial

intelligence imply that studies related to trust have been increasingly associated with these areas.

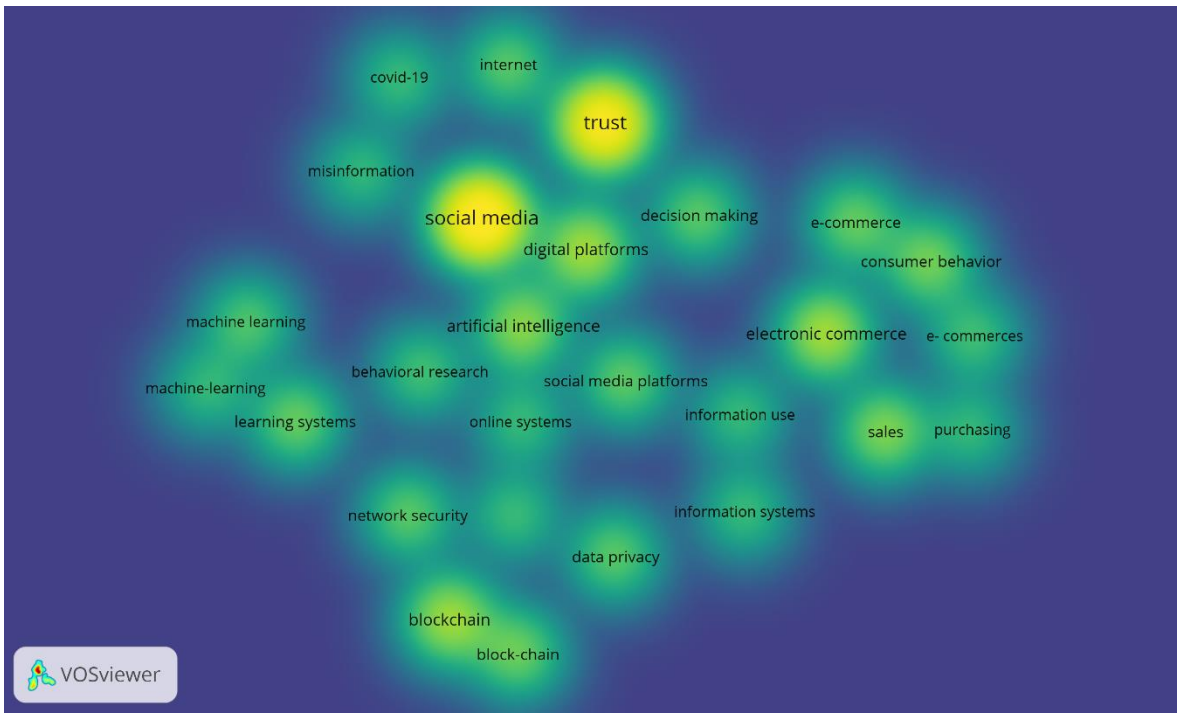

Figure 6. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

The visualization also highlights some of the additional but nascent thematic zones, which facilitate the evolution of the area of research. Concepts such as blockchain, privacy, cybersecurity, machine learning, and learning systems have emerged as moderately dense themes and hence denote rising scholarly interest but low maturity compared to key themes. Such themes are seen to reflect the movement of focus from the conventional discussion of behavior and platforms to technological means of building trust mechanisms based on transparency, security, and reliability. In general, the density map shows that the present research is highly centered around trust mechanisms in social and commercial platform settings, whereas future avenues lie in intelligent trust-based platforms and networks.

3.3 Citation Analysis

Table 1. Top Cited Literature

Citations	Authors and Year	Title
728	[10]	Digital Content Marketing's Role in Fostering Consumer Engagement, Trust, and Value: Framework, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications
662	[11]	Detecting spammers on social networks
242	[12]	Sustaining enterprise operations and productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Enterprise effectiveness and sustainability model"
190	[13]	Social media and luxury brand management: The case of burberry
179	[14]v	Detecting Review Manipulation on Online Platforms with Hierarchical Supervised Learning

156	[15]	Determinants of individuals' belief in fake news: A scoping review determinants of belief in fake news
156	[16]	Who do you trust? The digital destruction of shared situational awareness and the COVID-19 infodemic
156	[17]	Spreading (Dis)trust: Covid-19 misinformation and government intervention in Italy
135	[18]v	The transparency paradox. Building trust, resolving disputes and optimising logistics on conventional and online drugs markets
129	[19]	Customer experience in digital banking: a review and future research directions

Source: Scopus 2026

As presented in Table 1, the top cited literature related to Digital Trust in Online Platforms includes topics associated with trust and consumer engagement, social media, misinformation, platform manipulation, and digital services experience. Among the most influential papers is the one by [10], which cites 728 other research works, suggesting that digital content marketing, consumer engagement, trust, and value creation play an important role as the foundations of the field. Another significant trend is demonstrated by several cited papers (such as those by [11], [20]), as they focus on the integrity problems in platforms, such as spam and manipulation of reviews. Moreover, there is a number of papers related to the COVID-19 period that focus on digital trust within the context of misinformation and crisis communications.

4. CONCLUSION

The current bibliometric study clearly illustrates that the field of Digital Trust in Online Platforms is now an interdisciplinary area attracting scholarly attention from across the globe. According to the results obtained during this review, there are a number of interrelated topics that dominate the existing body of knowledge on Digital Trust, namely trust development, interactions in social media, e-commerce, consumer behavior, artificial intelligence, data privacy, and online platforms security. In terms of international cooperation, the role of India, China, and the United States as key contributors to this research domain can be noted. As for citations, it should be stressed that they tend to focus on consumer involvement, misinformation control, platform reliability, and digital experience. The results of these three approaches show that there is a clear trend towards an evolutionary development in the study of online trust from a traditional topic to a more advanced topic related to intelligent technologies, algorithmic governance, privacy, and decision-making. The appearance of topics like artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, and secure information systems reveals that technology will play a significant role in future trust mechanisms.

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