Bibliometric Analysis of B2B Marketing in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map and synthesize the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaboration patterns of B2B marketing research in the digital age using a bibliometric approach. Drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in the Scopus database, the study employs VOSviewer to conduct citation analysis, co-word analysis, co-authorship analysis, and network visualization. The results reveal that digital marketing constitutes the central conceptual core of contemporary B2B marketing research, integrating technological, strategic, and relational dimensions. Thematic evolution analysis indicates a clear shift from early emphases on electronic commerce and information systems toward more recent focuses on artificial intelligence, digital platforms, social media marketing, customer engagement, and customer journey. Collaboration analysis further shows a globally interconnected yet uneven research landscape, with the United States and several European countries acting as dominant hubs of knowledge production. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how B2B marketing scholarship has evolved in response to digitalization and offers a structured foundation for future theoretical development and empirical research in digitally mediated B2B contexts.

Keywords: B2B Marketing, Digital Marketing, Digital Transformation, Bibliometric Analysis, VosViewer

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the landscape of business-to-business (B2B) marketing. Traditionally, B2B marketing emphasized long-term relationships, personal selling, and offline communication channels [1], [2]. However, the emergence of the digital age characterized by the widespread adoption of the internet, social media, big data, artificial intelligence, and marketing automation has reshaped how organizations create value, communicate, and engage with other businesses [3]. Digital platforms now enable firms to reach global markets, personalize interactions, and enhance decision-making processes, thereby redefining conventional B2B marketing practices [4]–[6].

In the digital era, B2B buyers have become increasingly informed and autonomous. Access to online information, peer reviews, professional networks, and digital content allows buyers to evaluate alternatives long before engaging with suppliers [7]. This shift has reduced information asymmetry and altered the power dynamics between buyers and sellers. As a result, B2B marketers must adapt their strategies by leveraging digital tools such as content marketing, search engine optimization, social media marketing, and customer relationship management systems to influence purchasing decisions more effectively [8], [9]. These developments highlight the growing complexity and strategic importance of digital B2B marketing.

Alongside these practical changes, academic interest in B2B marketing within the digital context has grown substantially. Scholars have explored various themes, including digital transformation, customer engagement, relationship management, omnichannel strategies, and the role of data analytics in B2B markets [10]. The increasing volume of publications reflects both the maturity of the field and the diversity of research perspectives. Nevertheless, this rapid expansion

also creates challenges in synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying dominant research streams, and recognizing emerging trends within the literature [11], [12].

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a valuable methodological approach to address these challenges. By applying quantitative techniques to academic publications, bibliometric studies enable researchers to map the intellectual structure of a research field, evaluate scientific productivity, and analyze collaboration patterns among authors, institutions, and countries. Moreover, bibliometric tools allow for the identification of influential journals, highly cited articles, and thematic evolutions over time, offering a comprehensive overview of knowledge development [13]. In marketing research, bibliometric analysis has been increasingly used to examine subfields such as digital marketing, consumer behavior, and strategic marketing.

Despite the growing relevance of digital technologies in B2B marketing, comprehensive bibliometric studies focusing specifically on B2B marketing in the digital age remain limited. Existing reviews often emphasize consumer-oriented digital marketing or treat B2B marketing as a secondary topic. Consequently, there is a lack of systematic understanding of how scholarly research on B2B marketing has evolved in response to digitalization, which themes dominate the literature, and how future research directions are shaping the field. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing theory and guiding practitioners and researchers toward more impactful and relevant studies.

Although the literature on B2B marketing in the digital age has expanded significantly, it remains fragmented and dispersed across multiple disciplines, journals, and research themes. This fragmentation makes it difficult for scholars and practitioners to obtain a holistic understanding of the field's intellectual structure, key contributors, and emerging trends. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive bibliometric analysis limits the ability to identify research gaps, assess the influence of digital transformation on B2B marketing scholarship, and provide a strategic foundation for future studies. Therefore, a systematic bibliometric examination is needed to consolidate existing knowledge and clarify the development trajectory of B2B marketing research in the digital era. The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of B2B marketing research in the digital age

2. METHODS

This study adopts a bibliometric research design to systematically analyze the scientific literature on B2B marketing in the digital age. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach that examines patterns within academic publications to evaluate research productivity, intellectual structure, and thematic evolution of a specific field. This method is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for an objective and replicable assessment of large volumes of scholarly data. By applying bibliometric techniques, the study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how research on digital B2B marketing has developed over time and how knowledge is structured within the field.

The data for this study were collected from a reputable academic database commonly used for bibliometric research, ensuring high-quality and peer-reviewed sources. A systematic search strategy was employed using keywords related to "B2B marketing," "business-to-business marketing," "digital marketing," and "digital transformation." The search was limited to journal articles published in English to maintain consistency and academic rigor. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria such as relevance to the research topic and document type the final dataset was refined to include only articles that explicitly addressed B2B marketing within a digital or technology-driven context.

Data analysis was conducted using VOSviewer to perform descriptive, citation, and network analyses. Descriptive analysis was used to examine publication trends, annual growth, and journal

distribution. Citation analysis helped identify influential articles, authors, and sources, while co-authorship and co-word analyses were employed to explore collaboration patterns and thematic structures within the literature. Visualization techniques, including network maps and thematic clusters, were applied to enhance interpretation of the findings. Together, these analytical procedures provide a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the evolution, structure, and emerging directions of B2B marketing research in the digital age.

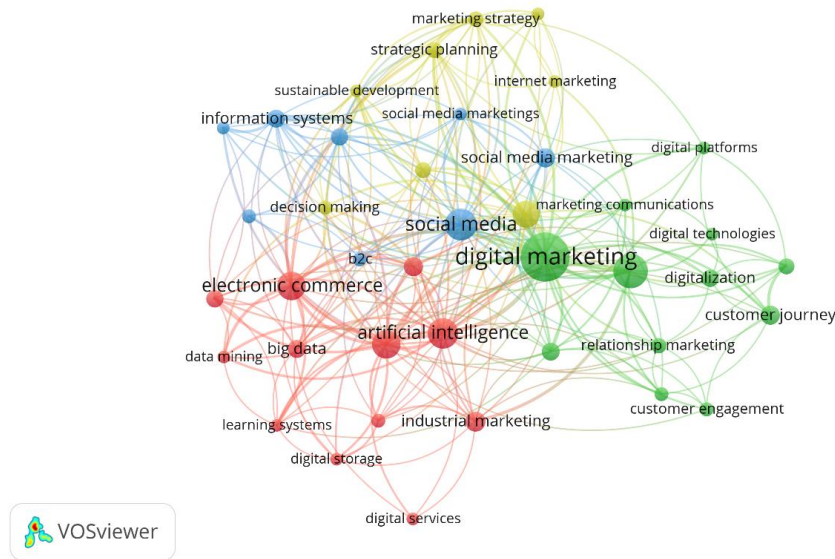## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Network Visualization

Figure 1. Network Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 1 reveals digital marketing as the most central and dominant node, indicating its role as the conceptual backbone of contemporary B2B marketing research in the digital age. Its large node size and dense interconnections with multiple clusters suggest that digital marketing functions as an integrative framework through which technological, relational, and strategic dimensions of B2B marketing are examined. This centrality reflects a paradigmatic shift in B2B marketing scholarship, where traditional industrial marketing approaches are increasingly embedded within digitally enabled environments. The green cluster represents research focused on relationship-oriented and customer-centric digital practices, encompassing keywords such as relationship marketing, customer engagement, customer journey, digitalization, and digital platforms. This cluster highlights how digital technologies are reshaping long-term inter-organizational relationships, moving beyond transactional exchanges toward continuous engagement and value co-creation. The strong linkage between digital platforms and relationship marketing suggests that platform-based ecosystems play a critical role in sustaining B2B relationships in digitally mediated contexts.

The red cluster centers on data-driven and intelligence-based marketing, with prominent terms including artificial intelligence, big data, data mining, electronic commerce, and digital services. This cluster reflects the growing reliance on advanced analytics and AI to support decision-making, personalization, and operational efficiency in B2B markets. The proximity of artificial intelligence to industrial marketing and electronic commerce indicates a convergence between traditional B2B domains and emerging computational technologies, underscoring the strategic importance of data capabilities in modern B2B marketing. The blue cluster emphasizes the role of information systems and decision-making, featuring keywords such as information systems, decision making, learning systems, and sustainable development. This cluster suggests that digital

transformation in B2B marketing is not solely about market-facing activities, but also about internal organizational capabilities and system integration. The inclusion of sustainability-related terms indicates an emerging concern with aligning digital marketing practices with long-term organizational and environmental objectives.

The yellow cluster reflects a strategic and communication-oriented perspective, linking marketing strategy, strategic planning, internet marketing, social media marketing, and marketing communications. This cluster bridges tactical digital tools with higher-level strategic planning, indicating that digital B2B marketing is increasingly framed as a strategic function rather than a purely operational one. The interconnectedness of this cluster with both relational and technological clusters suggests that effective B2B digital marketing requires alignment between strategy, communication channels, and advanced digital infrastructures.
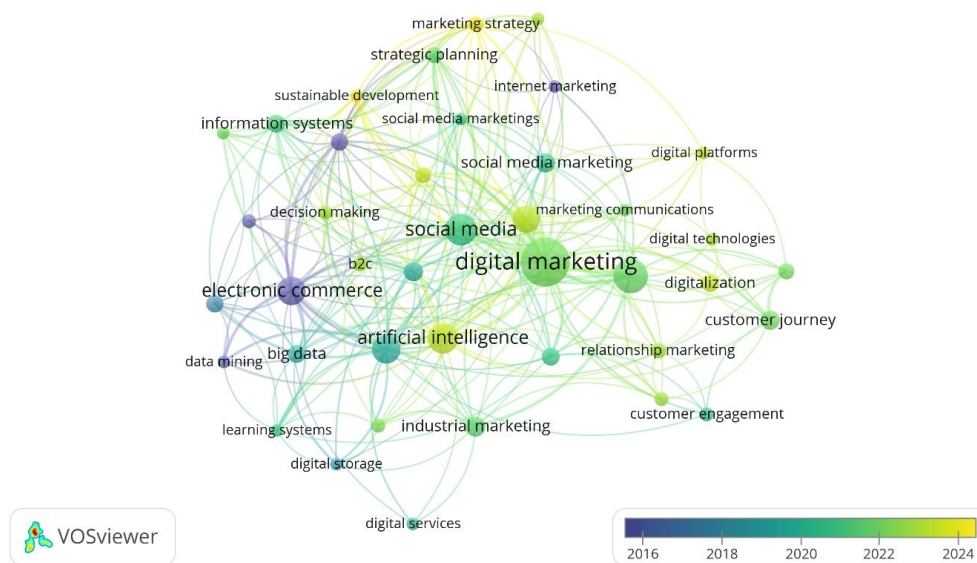
3.2 Overlay Visualization

Figure 2. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal evolution of B2B marketing research in the digital age, highlighting how research themes have shifted over time. Earlier studies, represented by cooler colors (blue–purple), are concentrated around electronic commerce, information systems, decision making, and big data. This indicates that initial scholarly attention focused on building digital infrastructure and leveraging information systems to support transactional efficiency and managerial decision-making in B2B contexts, reflecting the early phase of digital adoption in inter-organizational marketing. As the field evolved, mid-period themes (green tones) such as digital marketing, artificial intelligence, industrial marketing, and relationship marketing gained prominence. This transition suggests a move from purely technology-driven discussions toward the strategic integration of digital tools into B2B marketing processes. The growing importance of artificial intelligence and analytics highlights the increasing role of data-driven insights in enhancing relationship management, personalization, and strategic marketing decisions between firms. More recent research trends, indicated by warmer colors (yellow), emphasize social media marketing, digital platforms, marketing strategy, strategic planning, customer engagement, and customer journey. This shift reflects a contemporary focus on platform-based ecosystems, interactive communication, and value co-creation in B2B markets.

3.3 Citation Analysis

Table 1. The Most Impactful Literatures

Citations	Authors and year	Title
1497	[14]	Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions
485	[15]	Challenges and solutions for marketing in a digital era
282	[16]	Business to business digital content marketing: Marketers' perceptions of best practice
281	[17]	Harnessing marketing automation for B2B content marketing
237	[18]	Role of big data and social media analytics for business to business sustainability: A participatory web context
222	[19]	Setting B2B digital marketing in artificial intelligence-based CRMs: A review and directions for future research
182	[20]	Advancing social media driven sales research: Establishing conceptual foundations for B-to-B social selling
155	[9]	Digital marketing for B2B organizations: structured literature review and future research directions
153	[21]	Strategic use of social media within business-to-business (B2B) marketing: A systematic literature review
142	[22]	In pursuit of an effective B2B digital marketing strategy in an emerging market

Source: Scopus, 2025

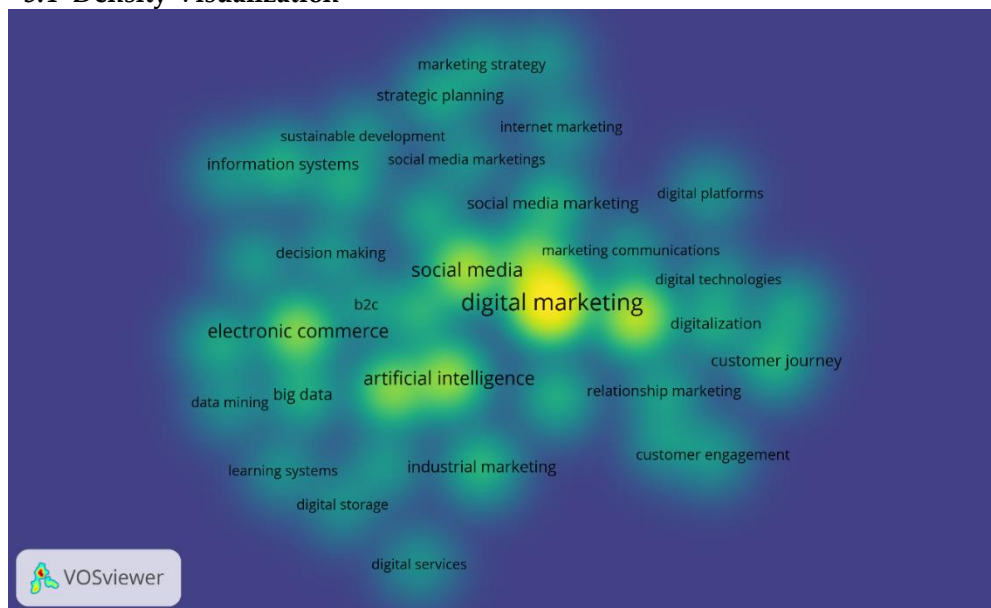### 3.4 Density Visualization

Figure 3. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 3 highlights digital marketing as the most intensively researched and conceptually concentrated theme in B2B marketing literature within the digital age. The bright yellow region at the center, surrounded by closely related terms such as social media marketing, marketing communications, digital technologies, and digitalization, indicates that these topics form the core research nucleus. This concentration suggests that scholarly attention has increasingly converged on how digital tools and communication channels transform B2B marketing practices, particularly in enabling interactive engagement, integrated communication strategies, and digitally mediated value creation. Surrounding this core, moderately dense areas emphasize artificial intelligence, electronic commerce, big data, relationship marketing, and customer journey, reflecting important supporting

themes that extend the central discourse. These topics illustrate how data-driven technologies and relational perspectives complement digital marketing by enhancing personalization, decision-making, and long-term inter-firm relationships. In contrast, lower-density areas such as digital services, learning systems, and industrial marketing suggest emerging or more specialized research streams, indicating opportunities for future studies to further integrate advanced digital capabilities with traditional B2B marketing frameworks.
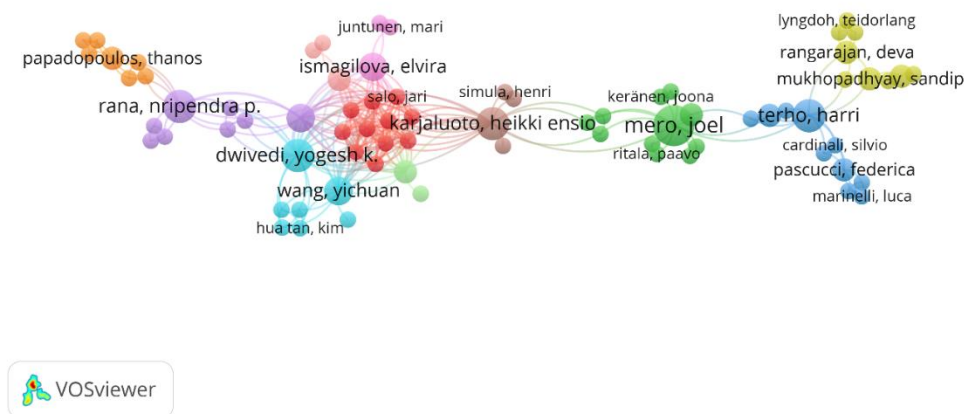
3.5 Co-Authorship Network

Figure 4. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 4 reveals a moderately fragmented yet interconnected scholarly structure within B2B marketing research in the digital age. Several distinct clusters can be observed, each centered around influential authors such as Kärjäluoto, Heikki, Dwivedi, Yogesh K., Wang, Yichuan, and Mer o, Joel, who act as key hubs connecting different research groups. These central authors facilitate knowledge diffusion across clusters, indicating their significant role in shaping interdisciplinary conversations that bridge digital marketing, technology adoption, and B2B contexts. At the same time, the presence of peripheral clusters such as those led by Papadopoulos, Thanos and Mukhopadhyay, Sandip suggests specialized research streams with relatively limited cross-collaboration, highlighting opportunities for greater international and cross-domain collaboration to strengthen the cohesion of the field.
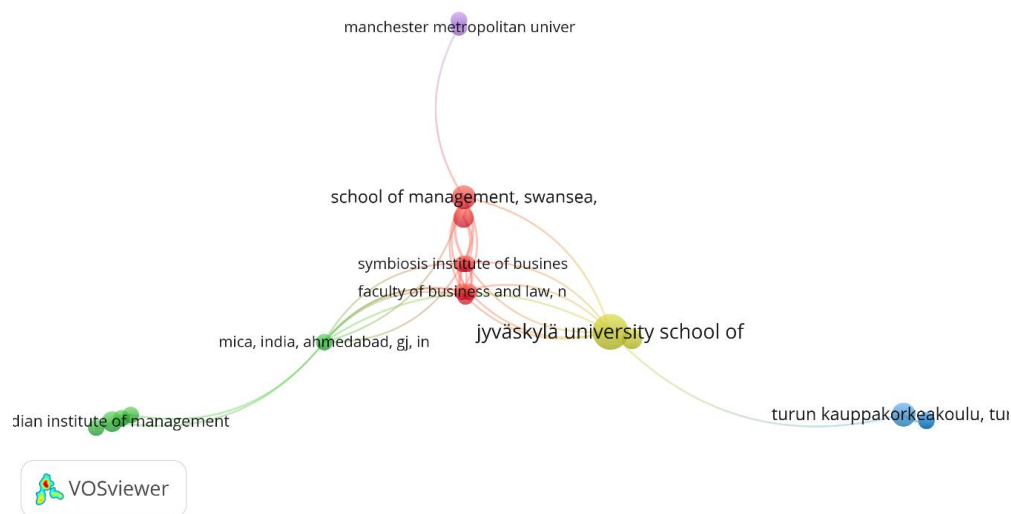
Figure 5. Affiliation Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 5 shows a highly centralized structure in which Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics emerges as the most prominent and influential hub in B2B marketing research in the digital age. Its strong collaborative ties with institutions such as the School of Management at Swansea University, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Turun kauppakorkeakoulu (University of Turku) indicate the central role of European universities in advancing this research domain. Additionally, the presence of connections with Indian institutions, including Symbiosis Institute of Business and MICA, Ahmedabad, reflects growing international collaboration between European and Asian academic centers.
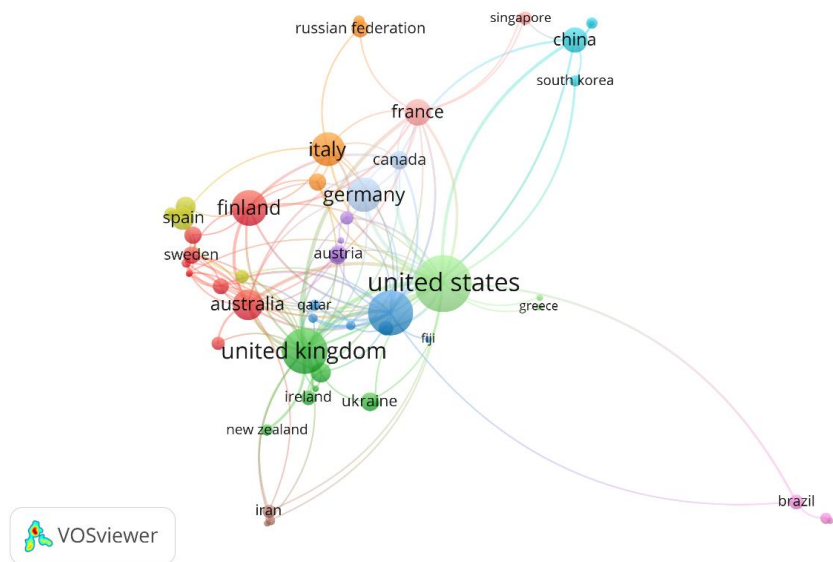

Figure 6. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 3 demonstrates a highly centralized global research structure, with the United States occupying the most dominant and influential position in B2B marketing research in the digital age.

The large node size and extensive linkages indicate that the U.S. functions as the primary international hub, connecting multiple regional clusters across Europe, Asia, and Oceania. Strong collaborative ties are evident between the United States and countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, and Australia, reflecting well-established transatlantic and inter-European research partnerships. European countries form a dense and cohesive collaboration cluster, particularly involving Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Finland, suggesting robust intra-regional cooperation and a shared research agenda on digital and B2B marketing topics. In Asia, China and South Korea emerge as key contributors, closely linked to the United States and European partners, indicating their growing influence in the global B2B digital marketing research landscape. Meanwhile, countries such as Brazil, Iran, and Russia appear more peripheral, with fewer collaborative ties, highlighting geographical imbalances in global research collaboration and pointing to opportunities for broader international engagement in future B2B marketing scholarship.

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis demonstrate that B2B marketing research in the digital age has undergone a clear structural and thematic transformation, evolving from technology-enabled transactions toward strategically embedded, relationship-driven, and data-intensive marketing paradigms. The dominance of digital marketing as the central conceptual node indicates that digitalization is no longer treated as a peripheral tool but as the core logic shaping contemporary B2B marketing thought. Early research streams emphasized electronic commerce, information systems, and decision-making support, reflecting an infrastructure-building phase. Over time, these foundations enabled the integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and analytics, which now play a crucial role in supporting strategic decision-making and inter-firm value creation.

The thematic evolution further reveals a shift toward customer-centric and ecosystem-based perspectives, as evidenced by the growing prominence of social media marketing, digital platforms, customer engagement, and customer journey concepts. This trend suggests that B2B marketing scholarship increasingly aligns with service-dominant logic and relational exchange theories, where value is co-created through ongoing interactions rather than discrete transactions. The emergence of digital platforms as a recent research hotspot highlights how B2B firms are repositioning themselves within multi-actor ecosystems, leveraging digital infrastructures to enhance communication, collaboration, and long-term relationships. These developments indicate a maturation of the field, moving beyond operational efficiency toward strategic differentiation and sustained competitive advantage in digitally mediated markets.

From a structural perspective, the collaboration analyses reveal a globally interconnected yet uneven research landscape. The United States functions as the central hub of international collaboration, while European countries form dense and productive regional networks, particularly involving Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. Asian countries such as China and South Korea are increasingly integrated into these networks, signaling their rising influence in B2B digital marketing research. However, the relative peripheral position of several emerging economies indicates persistent imbalances in global knowledge production. This suggests opportunities for future research to foster broader international collaboration, incorporate diverse market contexts, and deepen theoretical integration between digital transformation, strategic marketing, and inter-organizational relationship theories within B2B settings.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaborative patterns of B2B marketing research in the digital age. The findings reveal a clear shift from early technology- and transaction-focused research toward more integrated, data-driven, and relationship-oriented marketing paradigms, with digital marketing

emerging as the central conceptual anchor of the field. The growing prominence of themes such as artificial intelligence, digital platforms, customer engagement, and customer journey reflects the maturation of B2B marketing scholarship toward strategic, ecosystem-based, and customer-centric perspectives. At the same time, the dominance of a limited number of countries and institutions in global collaboration highlights both the strength and the imbalance of knowledge production in this domain.

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