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Research Article

Digital Economy and SME Research Landscape: A Bibliometric Analysis of Emerging Themes and Trends

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the research landscape on the digital economy and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) through bibliometric analysis of 130 Scopus-indexed articles. The study identified publication trends, influential sources, geographical contributions, and the evolution of research themes from 2001 to 2024. Data were collected using a custom query on Scopus and analysed with R Studio software and the bibliometrix package. Results show a significant increase in academic interest in this topic, especially after 2015, which is in line with the wave of global digital transformation. Key findings include the dominance of themes such as "digital economy," "e-commerce," and "digital transformation" as highly developed core themes, while themes such as "small and medium-sized businesses" and "economy and society" were identified as emerging but under-explored areas. The study also found significant geographical disparities, with China leading in number of publications, but the UK and Pakistan showing the highest impact based on average citations per article. This study contributes by filling the literature gap through mapping the evolution of research themes and providing guidance for future research to focus on less developed yet crucial areas. The findings provide valuable insights for researchers, policymakers and practitioners in supporting SMEs to maximise the potential of the digital economy.

Keywords: Digital economy, SMEs, Bibliometric analysis, Thematic evolution, Research trends.

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INTRODUCTION

The global business landscape is evolving with the digital economy as it drives innovation, enhances efficiency and creates new avenues of economic opportunity. The digital economy is simply all economic activity that occurs by the billions of connections between people, businesses, devices, data and processes digitally. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are the backbones of nearly every country in the world. To keep the SMEs survive and keep growing in a market that becomes more interconnected and competitive every other second, adopting digital technologies became necessary. SMEs make significant contributions to national economic development and job creation as digital transformation can support SME's operational efficiency, enable them to share new market opportunities while improving customer experience.[1-3]

Despite these benefits, digital adoption amongst these SMEs continues to be inconsistent, and many struggle to incorporate digital technologies into their operations compared to resource-advantaged firms. Evidence suggests that addressing these barriers is not universal, leading to a mismatch between the increase in economic challenges for consumers and an expansion of digital access.[3] This disparity stems from several issues such as financial resource constraints, skill gaps among the workforce, and technology infrastructure inadequacies[4,5] As a result, it is of paramount importance to evaluate the drivers and inhibitors of SMEs digital transformation, and how to increase their engagement in the digital economy.[6,7] This understanding requires a structured approach, including relevant theoretical perspectives

In this context, emerging theories provide an important foundation for understanding the dynamics of digital transformation in SMEs. Rogers[8] through Diffusion of Innovation explains that the successful adoption of new technologies depends on factors such as perceived benefits, compatibility, and organisational readiness. Meanwhile, Chesbrough's[9] Open Innovation theory emphasises the importance of leveraging external partnerships as a way to overcome resource limitations. Brynjolfsson and McAfee's[10]

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offers insights into how digital technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and data-driven processes, are reshaping industries and enhancing productivity. These theoretical frameworks not only help explain the barriers SMEs face but also identify collaborative opportunities that can support their digital.

In addition, studies such as the Digital Economy and Society Index[11] highlight the adaptation processes of SMEs across Europe in response to digital change, emphasising the role of ecosystems and supportive policies. Complementing this, systematic review of digital transformation in SMEs shows how these businesses can achieve operational and strategic benefits through technologies such as big data, cloud computing and e-commerce platforms.[12] Together, these studies enrich the theoretical foundation and provide a comprehensive lens to explore the relationship between digital adoption and SME performance.

Interest in SMEs 'digital transformation is also reflected in recent literature that increasingly highlights the contribution of digital technologies in improving SMEs' competitive position. These developments include cloud computing, big data analytics, and ecommerce platforms which provide greater business agility with lower entry barriers.[3,6] A few literatures mentioned the growing dependence on digital platform as a mechanism to digitize operations and engage customers, where positive correlations with firm performance and innovation are found.[2,3,6]

Yet, there are still considerable gaps in the literature as to the wider implications of the digital economy for SMEs more generally. Previous studies mainly concentrate on the firm-level technology adoption processes, and focus less on how these technologies interact with wider socioeconomic forces as well as industry-specific dynamics. And although numerous organisations have stated opportunities for digital transformation, few reviews investigate the evolution of research themes, geographical gaps and collaboration in this area.[13-15]

One of the major gaps that this paper seeks to fill is a systematic mapping and analysis of the academic landscape on the digital economy and SMEs. Although the importance of digital transformation for SMEs is widely acknowledged, a synthesis of current knowledge regarding how research on this topic has developed over time, which themes dominate and where significant research gaps exist is absent.[16-18] Getting to grips with this information is vital to point the finger at future research paths and inform policies and good practices that can better assist SMEs in the digital economy.

However, literature generally suggests different solutions to enhance digital adoption by SMEs. From this perspective, these can include government support programs to subsidize Tech investments, training initiatives to build digital skills or developing of supportive Digital Infrastructure. SMEs have also been offered guidance on assessing their digital maturity and readiness, allowing them to measure progress in the digital transformation journey.[16-18]

The literature suggests certain solutions, such as the development of digital tools designed to meet specific needs of SMEs, scalable software and affordable cloud services. Nevertheless, an essential gap in the literature is present where few studies have conducted more extensive analyses that take into consideration not only the evolution of research themes but also of collaboration networks over time. Some of them tend to only reflect a momentary state in digital adoption trends while none have evolved an ever-changing landscape. Further, the research contributions and ongoing differential level impact of digital transformation in various geographies is still not well understood.

To fill this gap, we do a bibliometric analysis covering the Scopus database about digital economy and SMEs. This research has the following objectives: 1. Map the evolution of research themes in the digital economy and SME literature over the past two decades; 2. Identify key journals, authors, and collaboration networks that have shaped the field; 3. Analyse geographical contributions and gaps in research outcomes and impact; and 4. Highlight emerging research trends and gaps to inform future studies and policy interventions.

This study provides a new contribution to the growth and compilation of literature on this subject by undertaking a comprehensive bibliometric review, aided by modern analytical tools to provide an overview through patterns in contributions to unpacking their individual citation records from the digital economy and SME research landscape.[19,20] This study contributes with new insights into the dynamics of digitisation of SMEs by systematically mapping and analysing the evolution of research themes over time, as well as identifying potential under-researched areas. Not only does this methodology address a meaningful gap in the literature, it also allows for future focused and directed research to build off of its foundation.[7,21]

The scope of this study includes bibliometric analyses of articles with a focus on the digital economy and SMEs. The study covers a wide range of topics, including technology adoption, digital transformation, e-commerce, and the socio-economic impact of digitalisation on SMEs. This study offers both a literature review and perspective by analyzing the amount, quality, thematic and geographical trends of publications, providing a complete picture of the present landscape and future pathway for research in this critical area.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses bibliometric analysis and explore the research landscape on digital economy implications for SMEs. A bibliometric methodology was selected as it allows to provide the whole picture of a fragmented and dynamic research area like that of digital economy and SMEs This method facilitate detailed

trend analysis of publications, identification of hotspot.[22] topics, and visualization of geographical participation. Using bibliometric analysis, this study was able to identify important patterns, emerging themes, as well as unfilled gaps in the literature, which are highly relevant to answering research questions on the evolution and impact of the digital economy on SMEs. Figure 1 shows the data collection procedure for article identification, screening and inclusion of papers for data collection.

Data was used from Scopus database, which is known for its wide coverage of literature from various disciplines. The first step of data extraction was to search using a systematic search string: "Digital Economy" AND ("SMEs" OR "SME" OR "Small business" OR "Small and Medium Enterprises" OR "small and medium-sized enterprises") which led to 256 documents from different types of publications containing diverse research contributions on Digital economy and SMEs.

The data set was screened using certain filters in order for the records to be relevant and of good quality. Only articles and conference papers underwent selection, covering genuine research input while excluding reviews, notes, editorials and other lesser document types. Study selection included only English-language publications for feasibility and accessibility purposes, and only documents documenting the final published manuscript to ensure that manuscripts had completed peer review. This left us with the data sets from which we narrowed down a total of 195 documents.

Lastly, the papers were manually verified to check that they are sufficient and relevant. This whole process was followed after conducting a thorough content analysis for looking into the title, abstract and keywords of each document to confirm that they are focused on explaining digital economy and SMEs. We retained a final dataset of 130 documents following this manual verification.

Bibliometric analyses were performed in Excel and R Studio, using the bibliometrix package for comprehensive bibliometric analyses. Bibliometrix offers different functions for the retrieval and analysis of scientific literature data (Descriptive statistics, Trends analysis, Thematic mapping) and is particularly suited to the objectives of this study. Then, to have the final dataset of 130 documents for bibliometric analysis we imported it to R Studio with the bibliometrix data import function, first turning the Scopus export file into a data frame ready for analysis in R.

Descriptive statistics were created to summarise the data, including the number of publications per year, average citations per document, and the most prolific authors and journals. Thematic maps were created using excel and bibliometrix to visualise the evolution of key research themes over time, and thematic evolution was analysed by splitting the publication timeline.

Further analysis includes keyword analysis using the term Extraction function of bibliometrix, which provides insight into the most frequently occurring terms and their evolution over time. Statistical analysis included time series analysis to identify publication trends using the functions in bibliometrix. Co-word analysis was used to identify relationships between keywords that frequently co-occur in articles, helping to uncover major themes and relationships between concepts. Clustering was used to group documents based on thematic similarities, which were visualised to gain more comprehensive insights.[23] All methodologies and analysis procedures were documented to ensure replicability of the study. The bibliometric package commands, parameter settings, and data processing steps that allow other researchers to replicate the analyses with similar data sets or extend them to other thematic areas in the digital economy and SME research landscape.[24] The limitation of this study is its reliance on Scopus-indexed publications, which may exclude valuable insights from non-English publications or grey literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study conducted a bibliometric analysis of 130 Scopus-indexed articles on the theme of Digital Economy and SMEs. The manuscript answers the fundamental question about changes in scholarly publications in this field and it recognizes trends, leading sources, geographic contributions, thematic focus and areas of specialization evolution. The results showed a notable increase in the number of publications, especially in recent years, which demonstrates an increasing recognition of the importance of digital economy on SMEs.[13,25]

Article Trends and Citation Analysis

Figure 2 shows the sum number of publications and average citations per year from 2001–2024. The data indicates an initial low volume of publications before 2018, but increasing to the greatest publication volume between 2021 and 2023. Such a surge is consistent with the global trend of digital transformation and reinforces the relevance of digital economy theme in SME research. This evidenced by the steep rise in MeanTCperYear for some years, such as 2003 and 2018, suggests that during these years there are crucial studies or central reviews directing scientific discussion. Although the mean volume of publications may ebb and flow, these findings suggest that high-impact studies provide periodic impetus for the field, illustrating the relationship between dynamism and evolution.[13,26] These citation peaks correlate with global digital trends, demonstrating that academic research is reflective of transitions in technology and changes in the broader market.

Leading Journal Sources

The five journals with highest contributions to digital economy and SMEs literature are shown in Figure 3 among the journals,; "Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems" and

"Sustainability (Switzerland)" show a noticeable increase in the number of published articles from 2020 onwards. This significant representation of journals provides further evidence of the interdisciplinary and applied nature of this work across technology, sustainability and systems analysis. That journals from outside economics and business are now in the vanguard reflects a view more generally that discussion of the digital economy is not constrained to traditional economic or business topics, but increasingly is built into a broader technology-society paradigm.[27,28] This interdisciplinary reach mirrors the findings of other studies, which emphasise the cross-cutting impact of digital transformation on business and societal structures.

Geographical Contribution

As shown in Figure 4, China leads the number of publications from different countries, followed by Indonesia and Malaysia. Interestingly, the UK and Pakistan, despite not having more publications than the previous countries, showed the highest average article citations, indicating a strong impact per publication. This discrepancy between publication volume and citation impact highlights the qualitative differences in research outcomes across regions. China's leadership in publications in one country underscores its national emphasis on digital economy initiatives, whereas the higher citation impact in the UK may reflect a stronger integration of digital economy research in a broader, high-impact context.[29,30] This pattern is consistent with previous research noting how established research ecosystems, such as in the UK, often produce heavily cited foundational research.

The geographical disparities in the results and impact of this research, as illustrated in Figure 4, are influenced by various socio-economic and policy factors in each country. China, for example, shows dominance in publication volume driven by government initiatives such as the 'Digital Silk Road,' which focuses on digital infrastructure development and technology integration as part of the national agenda.[31] In contrast, the UK stands out with its high average citation impact, reflecting the

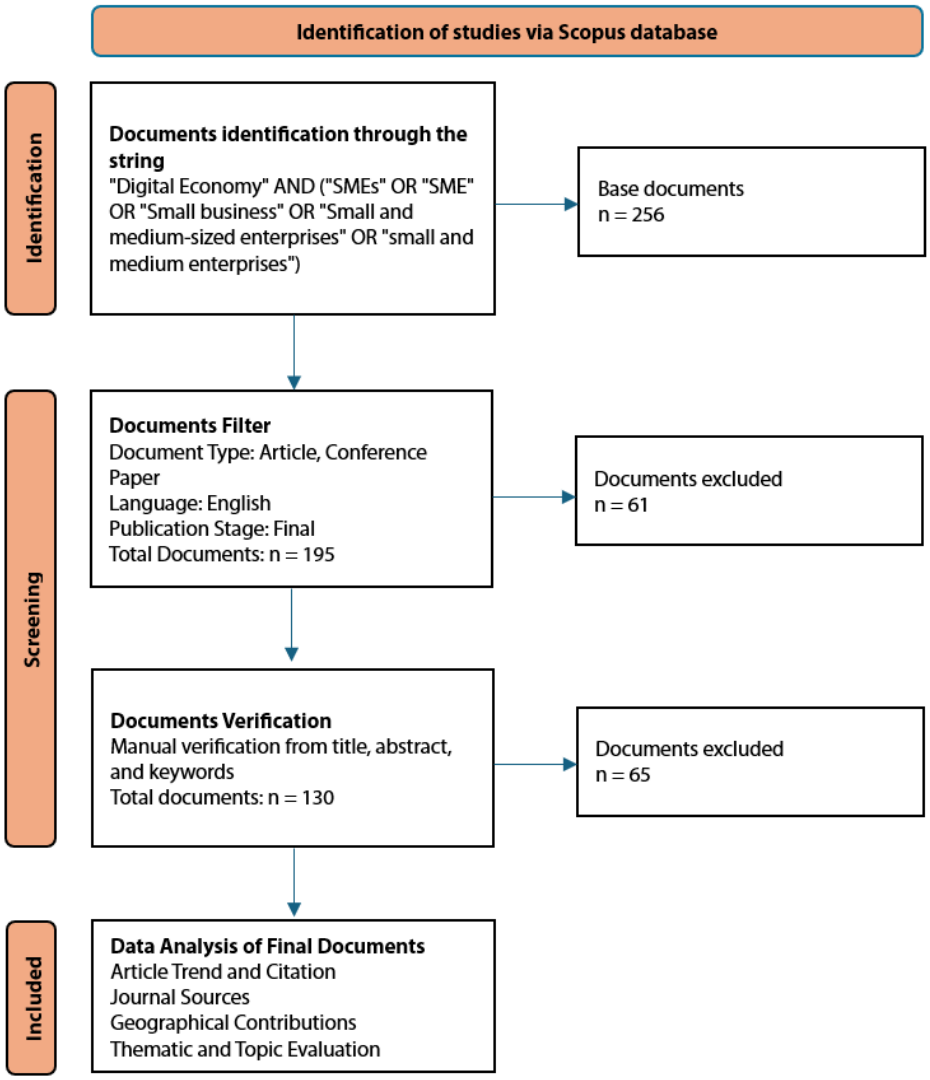

Figure 1: Document Identification Procedure for Digital Economy and SMEs Research.

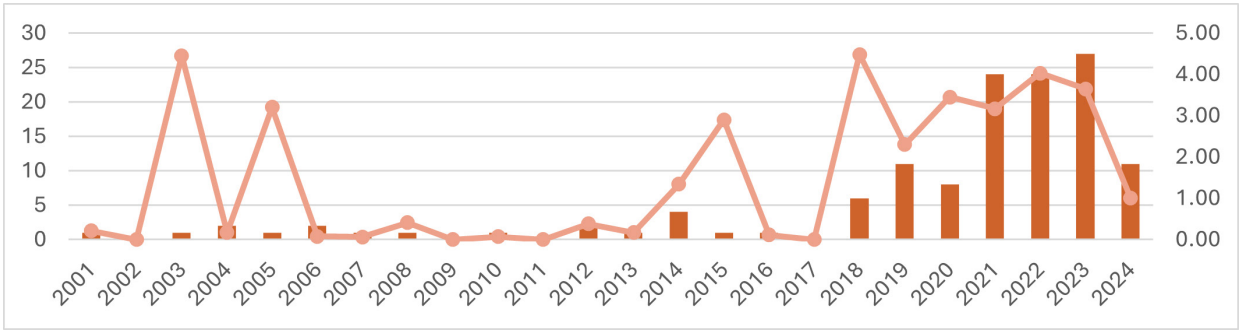

Figure 2: Publication and Citation Trends of Articles from 2001-2024.

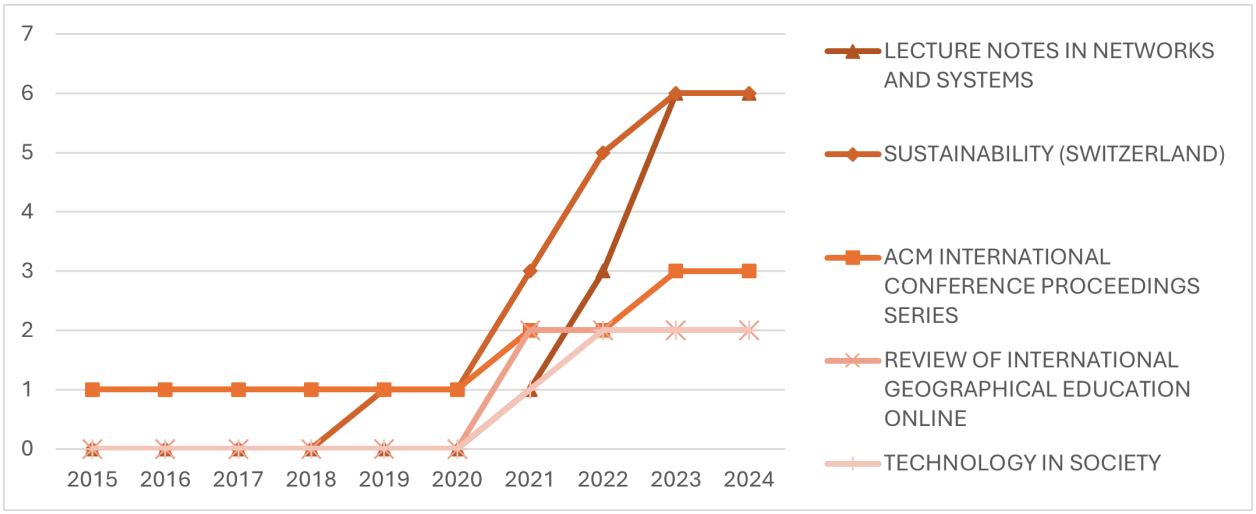

Figure 3: Contribution of Top Five Journal Sources.

integration of research findings into policy-making and practical applications, supported by national strategies such as the UK Digital Strategy.[32] On the other hand, Indonesia and Malaysia, despite having a relatively high number of publications, face challenges in aligning research results with digital transformation strategies that can be applied to SMEs, largely due to limited cross-sector collaboration in both countries.[33]

Thematic Analysis and Topic Evolution

Figure 5 outlines keyword trends over time, revealing a shift in research focus from basic concepts such as "economy" and "industry" in earlier years to more specialised and modern topics such as "digital transformation" and "innovation" after 2015. This evolution demonstrates the growing maturity of the field, with early studies laying the groundwork for more nuanced explorations of how digital technologies specifically drive change within SMEs. The emergence of themes such as "blockchain" and "big data" in recent years suggests a forward-looking orientation, as researchers increasingly explore the latest technological advances and their implications for SME activities.[13,25,34] This thematic shift is in line with other study findings, which emphasise the transformative potential of digital tools in redefining SME business models.

However, to complement the insights presented through bibliometric analyses, some previous studies offer qualitative perspectives that deepen understanding of the challenges SMEs face in adopting digital technologies. Many SMEs, for example, face skills gaps due to the lack of employees with adequate digital literacy, hindering the effective implementation of advanced technologies.[35] Financial constraints are also a major obstacle, where limited budgets reduce the ability of SMEs to invest in scalable and advanced digital tools.[36,37] In addition, cultural resistance to change is often a significant barrier, with many SMEs sticking to traditional business practices that they perceive as safer.[38] These barriers, as emphasised by previous research, point to the need for more targeted strategies to support more inclusive adoption of digital technologies.

The thematic map in Figure 6 provides further insight, by categorising the research themes based on their centrality (relevance) and density (level of development), which provides a comprehensive overview of the digital economy and SME research landscape. The visualisation breaks themes into four quadrants:

Motor Themes (Upper Right Quadrant)

Themes that are highly developed and their presence indicate a high level of centrality in the research landscape. These include several such as industry management, information management and also more focused on SMEs, e-commerce and technology adoption. We identified these themes as core because of their developments and connections with other research topics which are essential for understanding digital transformation in SMEs.

Basic Themes (Lower Right Quadrant): These are relevant yet underdeveloped themes that can be thought of as basic but still in need to be further developed upon. Themes like digital economy, e-commerce, digital transformation, economy, industry and internet are in this part. These are critical and frequently cited topics requiring attention, indicating that they likely underpin ongoing research yet their density suggests that there is room for more thorough investigation and elaboration.

Niche Themes (Upper Left Quadrant)

These themes are well developed but have lower centrality, indicating that they are more specialised and less connected of the core field. They include economy and society, blockchain, big data, and behavioural research. These represent very narrow or heuristic fields, suggesting that they are of great importance in some contexts but lacking widespread relevance within the field.

Emerging or Declining Themes (Lower Left Quadrant)

These are themes with low density and low centrality and this quadrant identifies the emerging or declining themes. This includes themes like digitalisation and also Russian Federation, small and medium sized enterprises, data handling, and human resource management. These topics could indicate nascent research areas or ones that are waning interest of the field. This analysis provides insight into how these themes can be positioned in the research landscape to address practical and theoretical needs.

Emerging themes, such as 'economy and society' and 'small and medium enterprises,' reflect under-researched research areas with significant implications. For example, the digital transformation of SMEs can make a major contribution to community development, job creation and social equality, which makes it an important topic for further study. Similarly, an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities facing specific sectors, such as retail, manufacturing or agriculture, would be helpful in developing more targeted digital integration strategies. Focusing on these themes not only broadens the scope of the research but also provides a foundation for generating relevant and impactful solutions for SMEs across different sectors.

It offers a structured analysis that informs key research trends in the digital economy and SMEs, as well as envisaged future trajectories. The comprehensive thematic mapping thus allows us to understand the current state and development of knowledge regarding research on digital economy and SMEs. Motor themes spotlight established areas that currently drive research, representing mature topics emerging with high significance to the field and closely integrated with it. Basic themes show these places to consider delving deeply. Niche themes embody distinct frontiers of research, that may lend them to wider scope and significance as the digital economy matures. Emerging or declining themes suggest areas that are still being explored or have lost their relevance over time and need to be revisited.

This in turn allowed the researchers to discern complimentary strengths and gaps within existing literature which was then used to help strategise any future research directions. The direction for cross-disciplinary and global studies to explain the manifold impacts of digital transformation on SMEs highlights the need for focused research that can deepen our understanding of these evolving facets in the digital economy. The evolution of themes highlighted in Figure 7 supports the dynamism of this research field. Research in the early years concentrated exclusively on "trade" and "SME", while recent research has evolved into areas such as "digital economy", "international trade" and small business, mirroring the increasing breadth reflected by SMEs responses

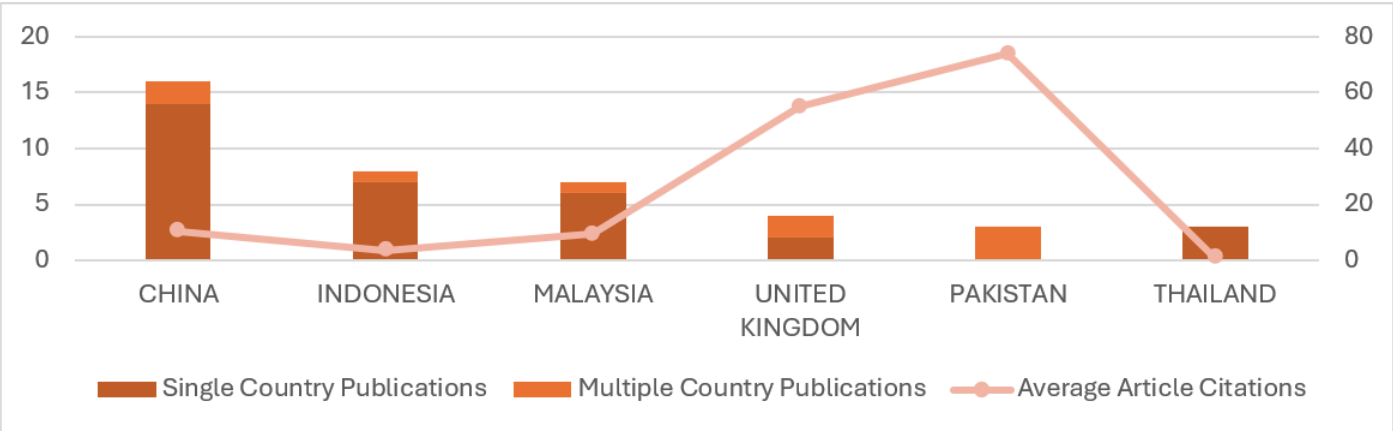

Figure 4: Country Contributions to the Number of Articles and Average Citations.

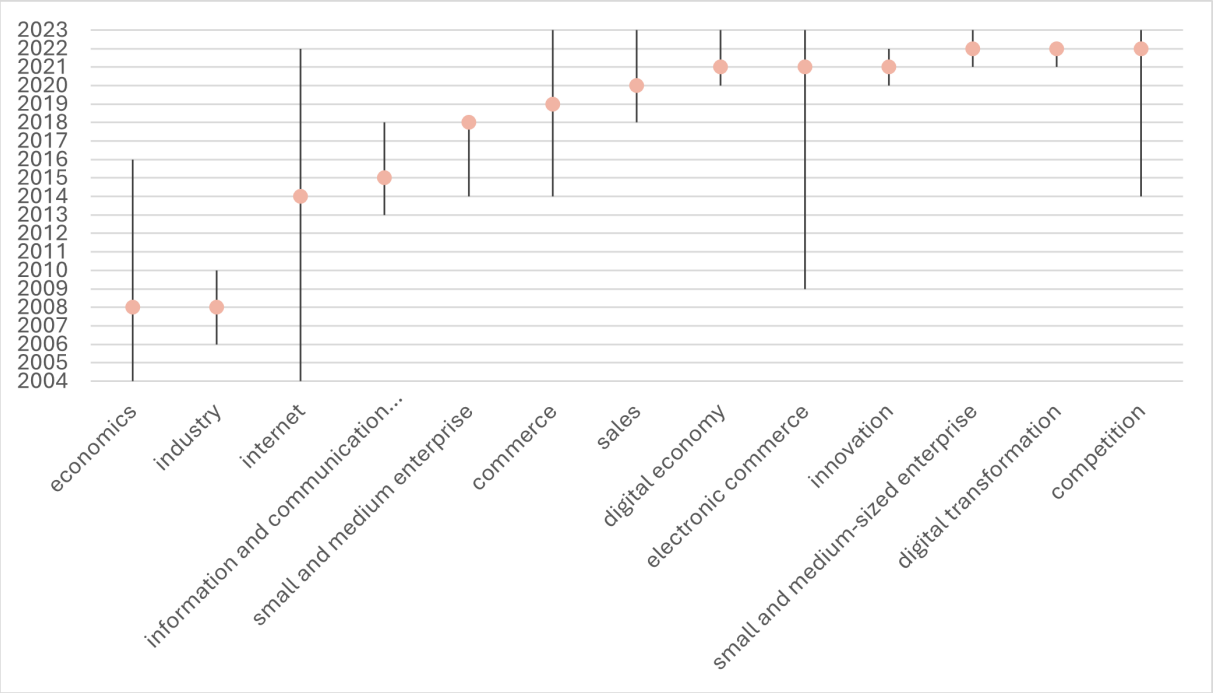

Figure 5: Keyword Trends from 2004-2023.

regarding to digital economy impacts. These changes not only underscore the transition from more general to increasingly specific and applied research, but also reflect global technological and economic upswing. These trends reflect to global technology and economic trends, highlighting how research perspectives are evolving to meet the needs of SMEs in the digital economy.

Unlike previous research that comparatively examines the effect of specific technologies on SMEs, this paper gives an overarching view on the development of academia over time. This analysis focuses on the research areas that the current literature in this area captures the influence of digital transformation on SMEs unlike earlier studies centred around technology adoption. Such a more wide-angle perspective is important critical to understanding not only the technology, but also the socio-economic implications of the digital economy.[39]

These insights highlight the importance of digital economy in determining their future. Tracking how research is changing in the context of digital transformation—which continues to be a central impetus for competitiveness and efficiency—enables policymakers, business leaders, and academics to identify important opportunities as well as challenges firsthand. It demonstrates that ongoing cross-sectional research to integrate technology and innovation management with economics is important for SMEs as digital innovations have not yet achieved their full potential.[40]

Based on these findings, this study offers relevant policy recommendations to support SMEs in digital transformation. The government could introduce financial incentives in the form of grants, subsidies or tax breaks to lower the cost of digital technology adoption for SMEs. In addition, capacity building through the establishment of a national training centre focused on digital skills development for SME employees and management could be a strategic move. It is also important to encourage the development of digital solutions that are affordable and customisable to the unique needs of SMEs, such as cloud-based tools or e-commerce applications. Finally, partnerships between the government, private sector, and academic institutions should be prioritised to improve access to digital infrastructure and expertise, creating a collaborative ecosystem that supports digital transformation across the board.

DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis carried out in this research with a significant growth of studies on both digital economy and SMEs mostly after 2015. This growth happens at the same time as a worldwide acceleration of digital technologies and greater promotion of the strategic role of digital technologies for SME competitiveness. The identification of themes evolving from elementary topics like "trade" and "industry" to modern concepts such as "digital transformation" and "e-commerce," denotes to the maturity and diversification of the field through time. It is indicative of wider technology trends and policy efforts to promote digitalisation in SMEs within the context of a global agenda for the digital economy.[41,42]

The analysis also notes important regional inequities in research performance and impact. The relatively high publication volumes in China imply a national focus on activities related to the

digital economy, and are also likely supported by government led policies across various sectors to encourage digitisation. But the average citation numbers are higher in the UK indicating a more important role there for research from a country where digital economy work is very much embedded in the national socio-economic context. This result aligns with existing research, which highlights that high impact research often arises from contexts where digital strategies are closely aligned with policy frameworks and economic contexts.[43]

The results of this study are consistent with, and in some cases extend, prior findings. Prior research highlights that digital platforms play a crucial part in making SMEs operations and competitive. However, unlike previous research that often focuses on specific technologies or case studies, this bibliometric

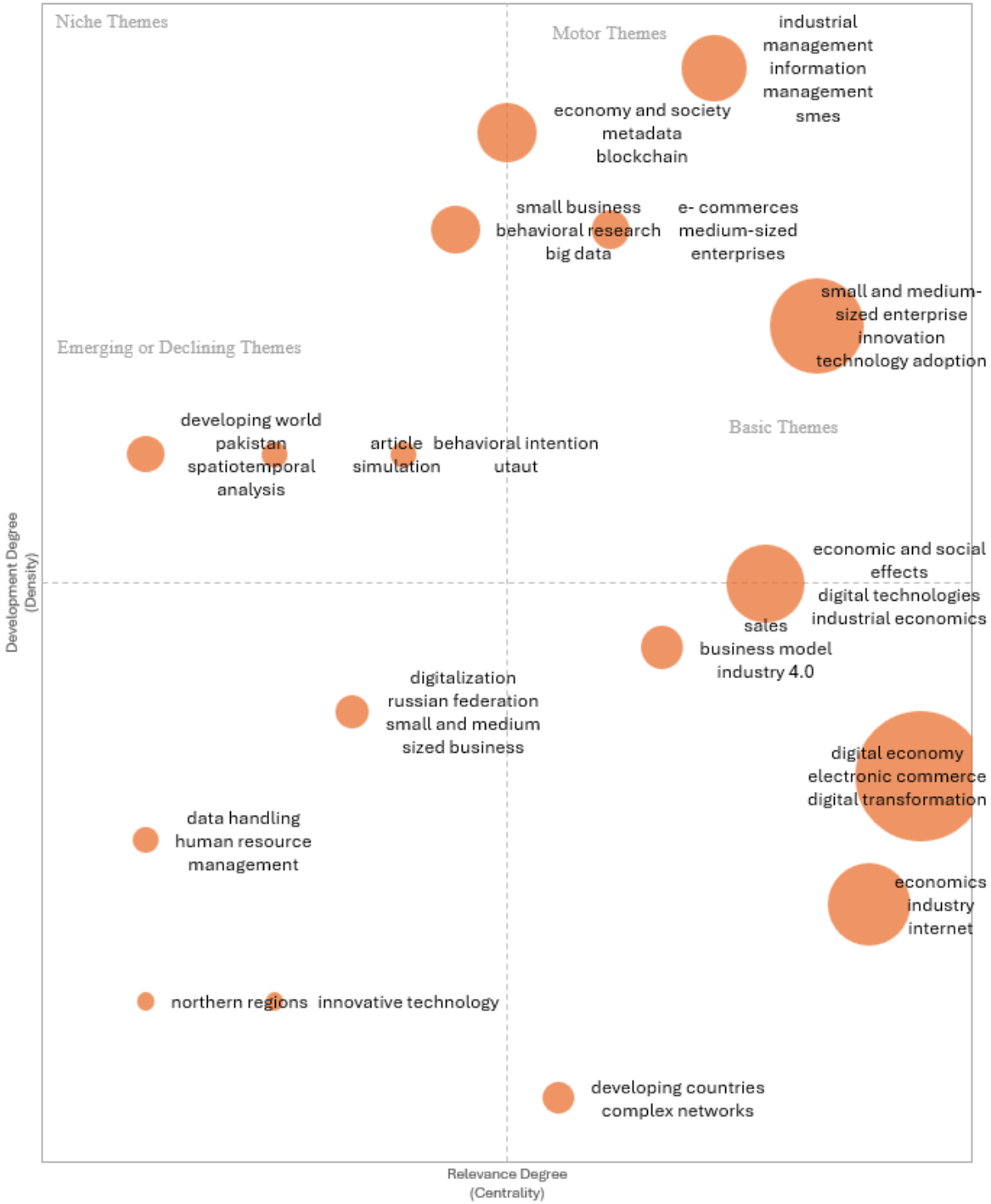

Figure 6: Thematic map of research themes.

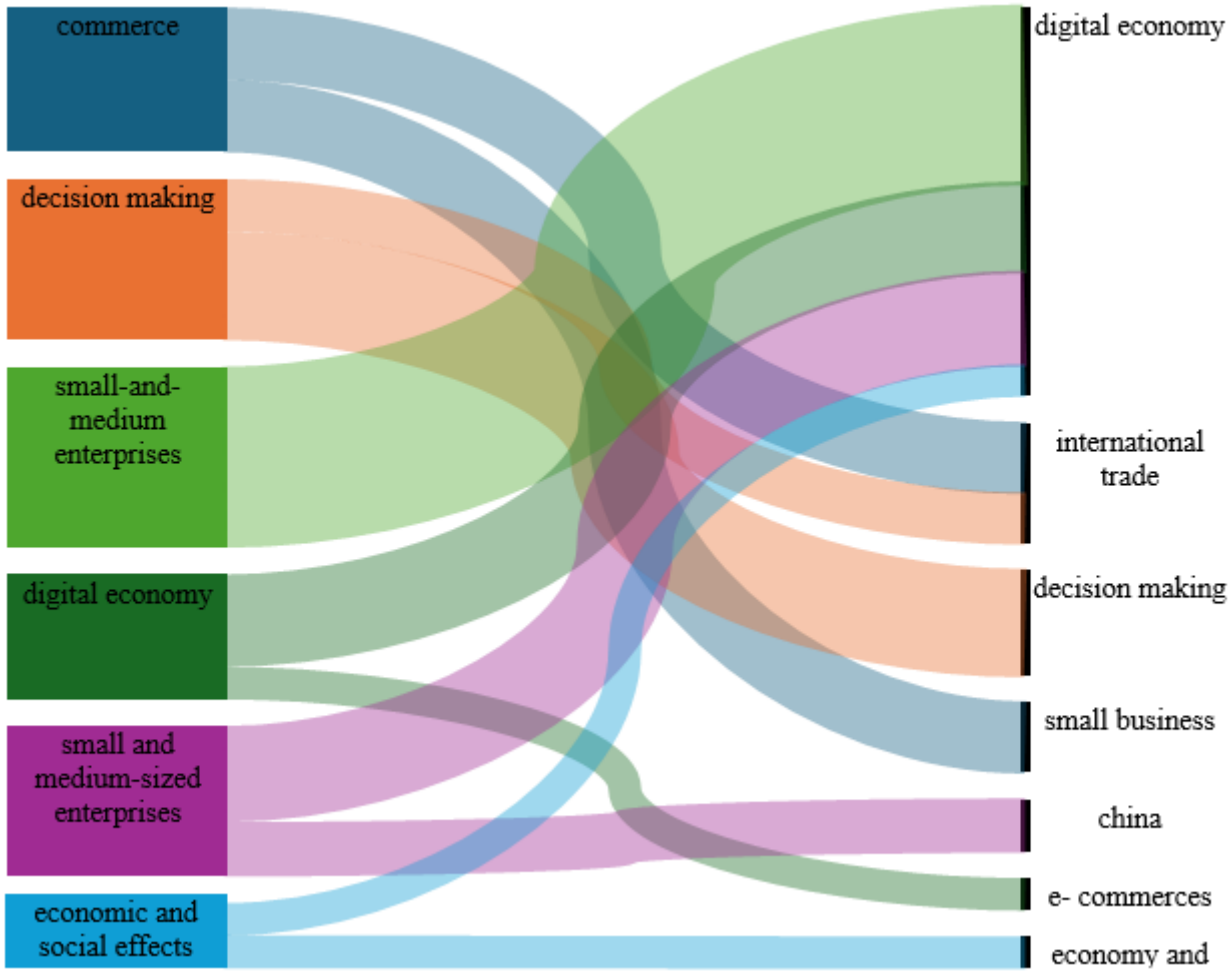

Figure 7: Thematic evolution of research keywords.

approach provides a comprehensive overview of the entire research landscape, offering multi-perspectives that capture the breadth and depth of scholarly contributions. By mapping the evolution of key themes and identifying unexplored areas, this research complements other findings, most of which focus on barriers to digital adoption and readiness among SMEs. This wider approach illustrates trends and gaps in the literature that may inform a more comprehensive future research agenda.[44-46]

The fragmented research community even within a same country may explain why the international collaboration in developing countries is relatively low. This finding fits with other findings, which identify similar patterns of collaboration in digital economy research. Nevertheless, this study expands upon existing literature to demonstrate detailed contributions and shortcomings by geography and describe where research impact is geographically concentrated and where there exist opportunities for international collaboration.[47,48]

While data-driven mapping of the digital economy and SME literature is not new, this study provides a comprehensive view of existing knowledge to highlight areas that are lacking in information as well as emerging ones. The study also sheds light on the changing landscape of research themes and contributes to a better understanding of past advancements, future exploration as well as shifts in the academic conversation related to digital transformation. Such insights are a significant resource for researchers and policy makers alike, who seek to ensure that ongoing and future research identifies areas where further attention is needed in order to capitalise on emerging trend developments or address unexplored domains with the potential for important implications to SME development.[49,50]

To support further exploration, a multidisciplinary approach is essential. This study advocates integrating perspectives from sociology, economics, and technology studies to enrich the understanding of digital transformation in SMEs. The interaction between cultural attitudes, economic policies, and technological capabilities not only provides deeper insights into the challenges faced by SMEs, but also opens up opportunities to create more holistic and relevant solutions. This multidisciplinary perspective

provides a basis for bridging existing knowledge gaps, while supporting more targeted policy-making.

The role of journals and authors also helps create the basis for establishing a more cohesive research community that can advance the field in a more coordinated way. The findings here also highlight the importance of considering regional contexts when analysing digital economy research, as these contexts significantly influence the focus and impact of research.[51,52] Through a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of themes, trends in research and gaps between regions, this study makes a considerable contribution to the field by providing such basis for future research whilst also supporting strategic development direction of SMEs within digital economy. As socio-economic status and dynamics vary widely among cultures, it is thus recommended for future research to generalize these findings in diverse contexts, widen the geographic scope of studies, and promote collaboration at international level for higher contributions of digital economy literature on SMEs overall.[53,54]

The study broadly tracks the evolution of academic research on the digital economy and SMEs, highlighting the dynamic growth and diversification of research topics. The research objectives were largely achieved, with clear evidence of growing trends and impactful contributions in the literature. Future research should focus on deepening the understanding of specific technologies and their strategic applications in SMEs, especially in underrepresented regions and industries. These research findings offer an opportunity for further investigation and help in the strategic management of SMEs in the digital age.[55,56]

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the research landscape on the digital economy and SMEs, this study also maps predominant themes and regions within the SME-digital economy literature from 2001 to 2024. The results demonstrate the increase of scholarly interest in this subject, especially after 2015 which highlights the acknowledgement of digital transformation as a harbinger factor for SME competitiveness. Some of the key journals with a higher percentage such as "Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems" and "Sustainability (Switzerland)" have been established over the years as major contributors to this interdisciplinary field that gather technology, business, and sustainability.

Geographically, the analysis indicates that not only does China of output first but also that UK emerges with an average citations number higher than any other country, indicating a qualitative impact that goes beyond the quantity of publications. The evolution of themes from fundamental ideas like "trade" and "SMEs" all the way to sophisticated subjects such as digital transformation, blockchain, and big data reflects how quickly the domain has developed over time alongside evolving digital technology. This change reflects the increasing complexity of the research as it transitions from generic concerns about digitalisation to specific contexts and implications for SMEs. To better understand the sustainability of digital transformation, future research should adopt a longitudinal perspective. Tracking SMEs over extended periods would provide insights into the adaptability of digital initiatives and their correlation with operational efficiency, market expansion, and customer satisfaction. Future studies are encouraged to include a wider range of data sources, including grey literature and non-English publications, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

This study makes an contribution by reviewing the literature relating to SMEs and the digital economy, mapping its evolution over time, highlighting key gaps in our current knowledge as well as emerging themes that would benefit from further research. This comprehensive mapping not only provides a foundation for future research, but also serves as an important guidance to policy makers and practitioners who might be interested in the implications of digital transformation on SMEs. The findings suggest that future research should focus on unexplored areas, such as the socio-economic impact of digitalisation on SMEs in different contexts and the development of a more integrated framework that bridges the technological, economic and social dimensions.

This study represents a substantial contribution to the understanding of digital economy SMEs by providing an overview of the research landscape, recognizing salient trends and gaps within it while outlining avenues for future research. The findings presented can further assist researchers, policymakers and business leaders to enable SMEs the best way possible in exploiting the full potential of digital economy thereby supporting the growth and resilience of SMEs more massively in the increasing digitalised world.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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