

A Bibliometric Study of Digital Franchise Models in Emerging Markets

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ABSTRACT

The rapid digital transformation across emerging markets has introduced new dynamics to franchising models, enabling innovative approaches that leverage technology, user experience, and scalable infrastructures. This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of scholarly literature on digital franchise models within these regions, using data from the Scopus database covering the period 2000–2024. Through VOSviewer, the study maps key trends in keyword co-occurrence, author collaboration, temporal evolution, and geographical distribution. Results reveal a multidisciplinary structure shaped by themes such as digital storage, human-computer interaction, transmedia, and design, with a recent rise in franchise-focused research. The United States, United Kingdom, and Australia emerged as dominant contributors, while countries like India and China show increasing participation. The findings provide valuable insights for academics, entrepreneurs, and policymakers by outlining the intellectual foundations of the field and identifying research gaps, particularly the need for context-specific studies and deeper integration of digital business theories. This study lays the groundwork for advancing a more inclusive, data-driven understanding of how franchising is evolving in digitally empowered but institutionally diverse economies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of franchising has evolved dramatically over the past few decades, especially with the rise of digital technologies that have disrupted traditional business models. Franchising, once dominated by brick-and-mortar establishments, is now undergoing a digital transformation driven by internet penetration, mobile commerce, and platform-based ecosystems [1]. This evolution is

particularly pronounced in emerging markets, where the convergence of youthful demographics, growing digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurial aspiration has created fertile ground for new types of franchise models. These digital franchise models are reimagining how businesses scale, operate, and engage consumers in resource-constrained but rapidly modernizing economies.

The momentum behind digital franchise models is further bolstered by the

increasing accessibility of digital tools and platforms that lower the barriers to entry for potential franchisees. In markets such as Indonesia, India, Brazil, and Nigeria, the democratization of digital technology has enabled small entrepreneurs to plug into franchise systems without the traditional need for physical storefronts or large capital outlays [2]. These digital-native franchises typically rely on app-based operations, digital payment systems, and social media marketing to reach consumers and manage operations. As such, the traditional franchise manuals and face-to-face training are increasingly being replaced by online dashboards, cloud-based SOPs, and virtual support systems [3]. This shift not only reduces costs but also expands the reach and scalability of franchise systems in regions previously underserved by conventional models.

Emerging markets offer a unique and complex setting for studying digital franchise innovations. These economies are characterized by a mix of institutional voids, infrastructure gaps, and informal business practices, which make traditional franchise systems difficult to implement at scale [4]. However, digitalization acts as an equalizer, bridging infrastructural deficits through mobile-first strategies and cloud-based solutions. For example, e-franchise models in rural India leverage WhatsApp and vernacular apps for franchisee communication and order fulfillment [5]. Similarly, micro-franchising in Sub-Saharan Africa is using mobile money and SMS-based reporting to scale small service businesses. In this context, digital franchises are not merely an extension of existing models; they represent a structural innovation tailored to the needs and constraints of emerging economies.

Despite the growing relevance of digital franchise models, the academic literature on this topic, especially within the context of emerging market, remains fragmented and underdeveloped. While there has been extensive research on franchising in developed economies [6], [7], only a limited body of work explores the intersection of digital transformation and franchising in

developing regions. Even fewer studies adopt a systematic approach to mapping how this field has evolved over time, what themes dominate current scholarship, and where research gaps persist. Bibliometric analysis offers a powerful lens to address this gap, enabling researchers to quantify patterns, trends, and scholarly networks across decades of research [8]. Through such an approach, one can not only visualize the intellectual structure of the domain but also identify clusters of knowledge and emerging topics within the broader discourse of digital franchising.

Moreover, understanding the bibliometric landscape of digital franchise models in emerging markets is vital for both scholars and practitioners. For researchers, it lays the foundation for future inquiry by highlighting neglected areas, methodological patterns, and key contributing journals and authors. For practitioners and policymakers, it provides evidence-based insights into how digital franchise strategies are being conceptualized and implemented across diverse market contexts. As digital economy policies become increasingly central to development agendas, knowing the academic terrain can inform more inclusive, scalable, and sustainable franchise interventions. As noted by [9], aligning academic knowledge with ground-level entrepreneurial realities is crucial for fostering innovation ecosystems in low-income economies.

Despite the accelerating growth of digital franchise models in emerging markets, there remains a noticeable absence of a consolidated and quantitative understanding of how this research field is developing. Most existing studies are anecdotal, case-specific, or exploratory in nature, lacking the theoretical depth or systemic review needed to establish a coherent body of knowledge. Without a structured bibliometric assessment, it is difficult to discern which themes are overrepresented or underexplored, what conceptual frameworks dominate the literature, and how research production is distributed across geographies, institutions, or time periods. Consequently, the absence of a bibliometric foundation limits both the

academic evolution of the field and the practical development of digital franchise strategies that are responsive to emerging market conditions. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of scholarly literature on digital franchise models in emerging markets.

2. METHOD

This study adopts a bibliometric analysis approach to systematically review and visualize the landscape of academic literature concerning digital franchise models in emerging markets. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to examine the structure, dynamics, and trends within a specific field of research. It enables researchers to map publication patterns, identify influential sources and authors, and detect key thematic areas. The method is particularly useful for assessing fields that are rapidly evolving and where research is dispersed across multiple disciplines. Following [8], this study applies bibliometric techniques to offer both performance analysis and science mapping of the selected literature.

The data for this analysis was retrieved from the **Scopus** database, chosen for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed academic journals and high-quality metadata. The search was conducted using a carefully constructed query string to capture relevant publications. Specifically, the keywords used

were: (“digital franchise” OR “e-franchise” OR “online franchise”) AND (“emerging markets” OR “developing countries”), searched in the article title, abstract, and keywords fields. The search was limited to English-language articles published between 2000 and 2024, to capture the rise of digitalization in franchise systems within the last two decades. The initial search yielded 148 documents, which were then screened for relevance by reading titles and abstracts. After removing irrelevant or duplicate entries, a final dataset of 112 articles was retained for analysis.

The final dataset was exported in **BibTeX** format with complete metadata and citation information. The analysis was carried out using **VOSviewer version 1.6.20**, a widely used tool for creating and visualizing bibliometric networks. VOSviewer enabled the construction of co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence maps, and citation analysis. These visualizations were used to identify influential authors, frequently co-occurring terms, and dominant thematic clusters in the literature. In particular, the keyword co-occurrence analysis provided insight into the conceptual structure of the field, while co-authorship mapping revealed collaboration patterns among researchers.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Co-Authorship Analysis

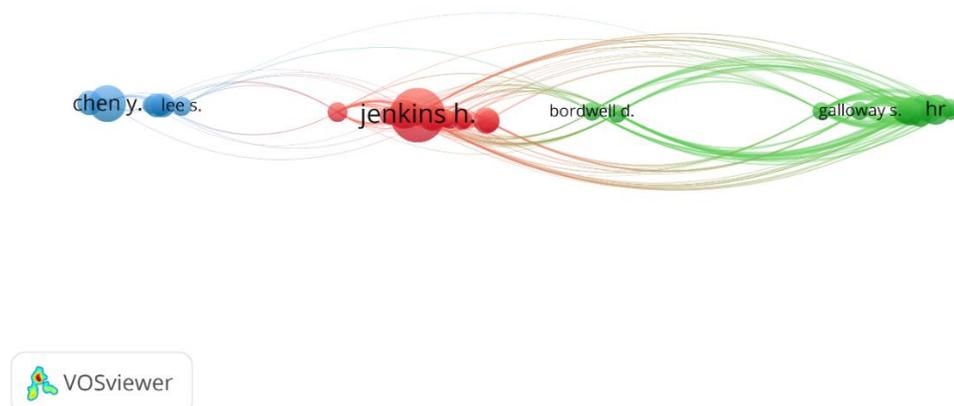


Figure 1. Author Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 1 presents a co-citation network of authors related to digital franchise or related literature. Each **node** represents an author, with **node size** indicating the frequency of citations that author receives across the dataset. The **lines (edges)** between authors represent the strength of co-citation links (how often two authors are cited together in the same documents) while **colors** denote different clusters of scholarly communities or thematic groupings. From the visualization, **Jenkins H.** appears as the most prominent and central figure (large red node), suggesting a pivotal role in shaping the discourse or being widely referenced in the literature. He connects various clusters, indicating

that his work bridges multiple thematic streams. On the left, **Chen Y.** and **Lee S.** form a distinct **blue cluster**, possibly indicating a shared focus or methodological approach—likely oriented toward East Asian or technology-specific contexts. On the right side, **Galloway S.** and **Hr...** (possibly an author with an abbreviated name due to visualization cut-off) are part of the **green cluster**, which seems to represent a different conceptual approach, possibly tied to media or platform economy studies. **Bordwell D.**, situated between clusters, may act as a theoretical or conceptual bridge, cited by both Jenkins' cohort and the Galloway group.

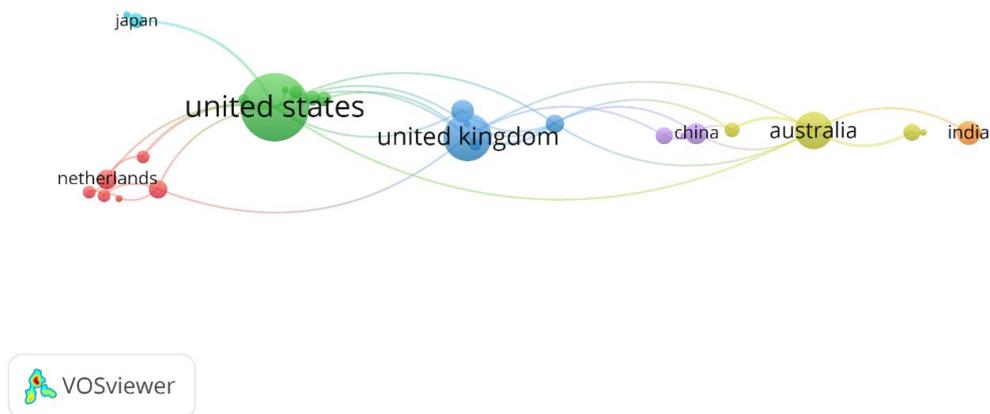


Figure 2. Country Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 2 displays the international collaboration network among countries publishing research on digital franchise models or related topics. The **United States** stands out as the most prominent and central node, indicating its dominant role both in publication volume and in international co-authorship. The **United Kingdom** also plays a key bridging role, linking with both Western and Asia-Pacific research communities. The **Netherlands**, **Japan**, and **Australia** form smaller but active clusters, reflecting their

contributions to niche subfields or partnerships with leading countries. Notably, **China** and **India** appear on the periphery but are connected, suggesting emerging participation in the global discourse—especially relevant given their status as major emerging markets. The color-coded clusters represent regional or thematic affinities, with visible collaboration lines suggesting an encouraging level of cross-national exchange, albeit still centered around a few dominant academic hubs.

3.2. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

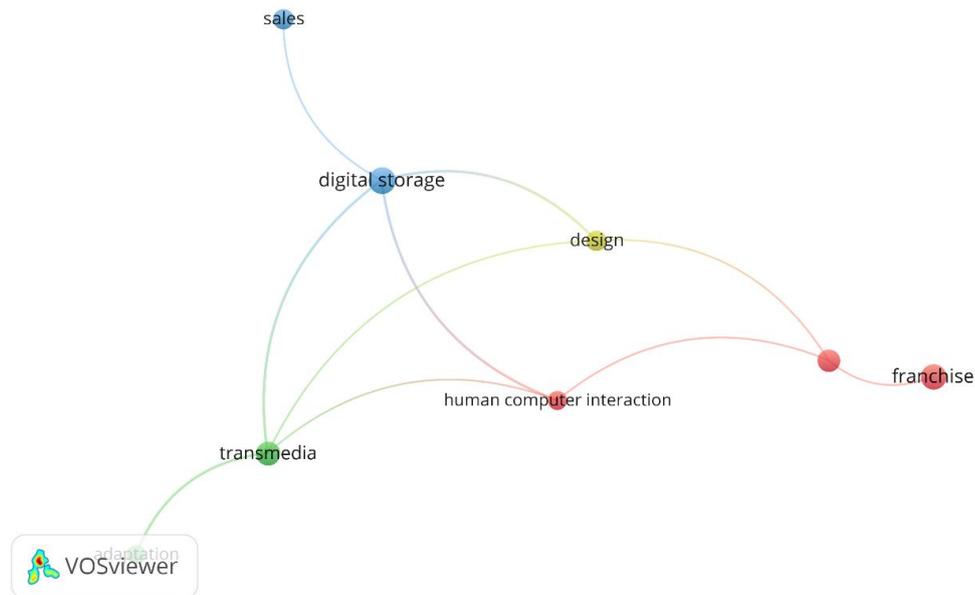


Figure 3. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 presents a keyword co-occurrence map that highlights the core themes associated with research on digital franchise models or related interdisciplinary areas. Each node represents a keyword, with larger nodes indicating higher frequency of appearance across the literature. Notably, the term "**digital storage**" appears central in the map, suggesting its importance in the infrastructure of digital franchise systems—possibly linked to data management, content distribution, or backend operations in digital business models. Its multiple connections to both technical and human-centered terms reveal its bridging role. One cluster, represented primarily by the blue nodes, connects "**digital storage**" with "**sales**", indicating research intersections where technological infrastructure directly supports commercial outcomes. This likely reflects studies on how digital tools—such as cloud storage or data analytics—enable or optimize sales operations in franchise systems. The

strong linkage suggests that technological enablers are essential not only for operational efficiency but also for driving revenue in digital-first franchise models.

Another cluster is organized around "**design**", "**human-computer interaction**", and "**franchise**", marked by red and yellow nodes. This cluster points toward a research stream focused on how digital franchise platforms are built and used—emphasizing usability, interface design, and user experience. The connection between "franchise" and "human-computer interaction" suggests that as franchise operations become digital, user engagement through well-designed platforms becomes a critical success factor, particularly in customer-facing services or mobile-based franchises. A smaller but notable cluster involves the term "**transmedia**", connected to "digital storage" and "design". This cluster likely refers to research exploring digital franchises that operate across multiple media platforms—such as

storytelling-based or content-driven business models. The presence of “transmedia” indicates a narrative or entertainment dimension to some digital franchises, such as those found in gaming, entertainment, or branded content ecosystems where intellectual property is monetized across channels.

The map reveals that research on digital franchises is highly interdisciplinary—bridging fields like technology, business, media, and design. However, while the visualization shows connections across domains, it also highlights some **fragmentation**. For example,

“sales” appears relatively isolated despite its importance to business outcomes, suggesting a potential research gap in integrating marketing performance with user experience and platform design. Similarly, while “franchise” is connected to “design” and “HCI”, it remains on the periphery—indicating that the specific business model of franchising may still be underexplored in the digital context. These insights offer opportunities for more integrated future research that connects technical, commercial, and experiential dimensions of digital franchise models.

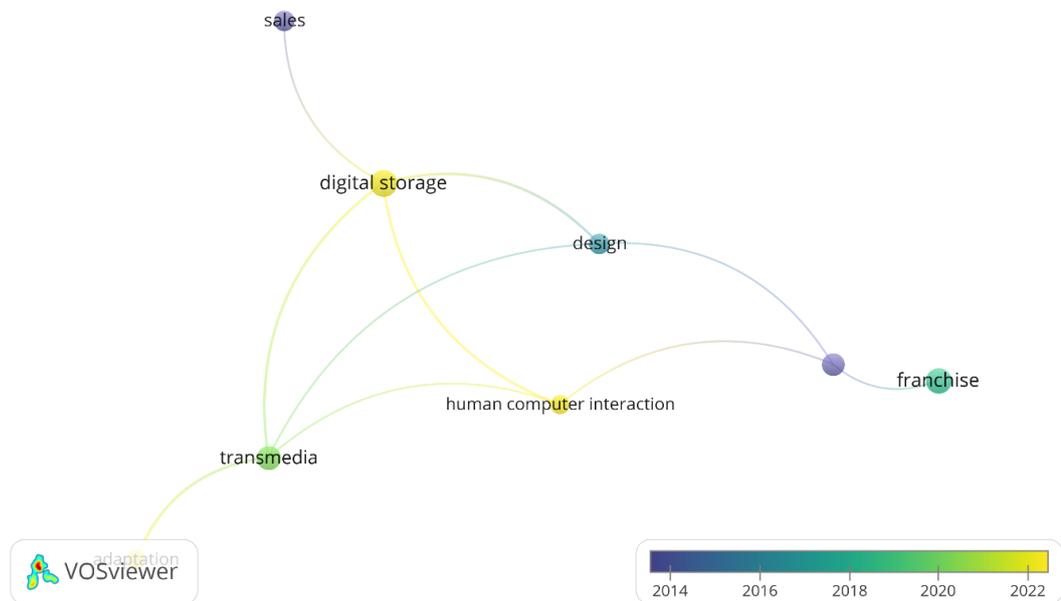


Figure 4. Overlay Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 4 maps keyword co-occurrence over time, with color gradients indicating the average publication year—from older topics in **purple (2014–2016)** to more recent ones in **yellow-green (2020–2022)**. The keyword “sales”, shaded in darker purple, appears as one of the earliest focal points in this research field. It suggests that initial studies were largely concerned with traditional commercial outcomes—

possibly examining how digital channels affect sales performance within franchise systems or early e-commerce strategies. As research progressed, the term “**digital storage**” emerged in a more central and transitional position, marked in yellow, indicating its relevance in studies from around 2020. This reflects a growing interest in the infrastructure supporting digital franchises, such as data

management, cloud services, and system integration.

A second trend observed is the shift from purely technological focus to **design-oriented and interactive domains**. Keywords such as “**design**”, “**human-computer interaction**”, and “**transmedia**” appear in a lighter yellow-green gradient, placing them in a more recent timeline (around 2021–2022). This shows how the field is increasingly engaging with **user experience, platform aesthetics, and cross-media branding**—important considerations as franchises expand into mobile-first and omnichannel digital ecosystems. The inclusion of “transmedia” further suggests that digital franchises are not only transactional but also narrative-driven, integrating storytelling and multi-platform engagement strategies, particularly relevant in entertainment, gaming, or education sectors.

Interestingly, the keyword “**franchise**” itself appears in **green**, indicating that explicit focus on franchising in digital contexts is relatively recent (2019 onward). This supports the notion that while digital business models and tools have been widely studied for years, **the franchise model as a specific lens has only started to gain prominence** in the past few years. Its peripheral yet connected position also implies that it may still be emerging as a standalone research category, often embedded within broader conversations around digital transformation, platform design, or interaction design. Going forward, this opens opportunities for researchers to develop more **focused theoretical and empirical work** on how digital transformation is redefining the core logic and scalability of franchise systems in both developed and emerging economies.

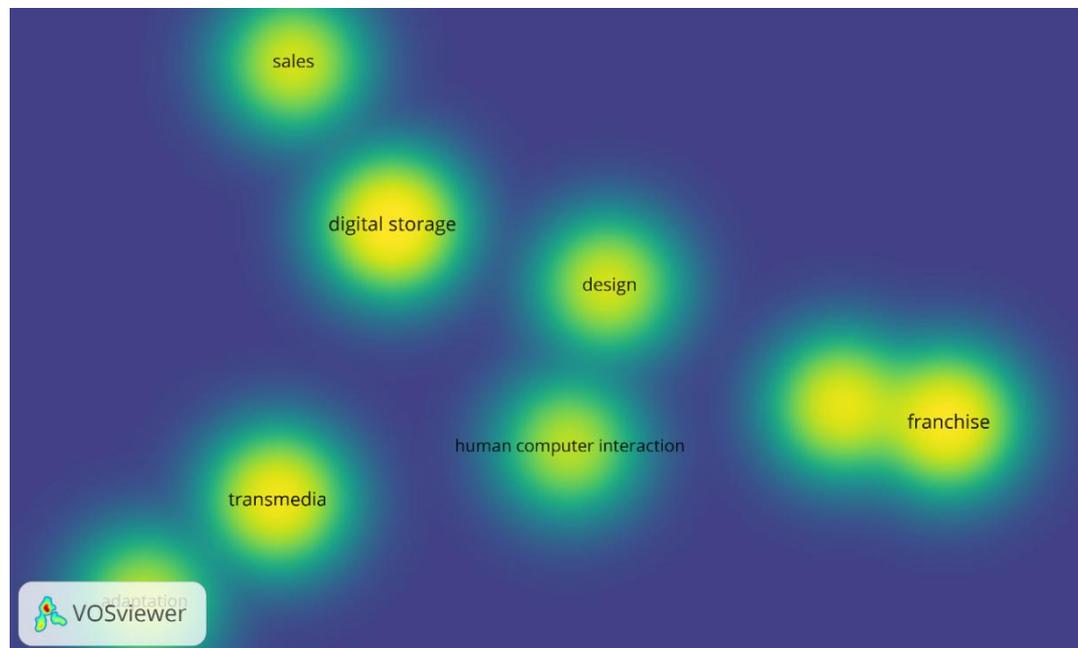


Figure 5. Density Visualization
Source: Data Analysis

Figure 5 visualizes the **frequency and intensity of keyword occurrences** within the literature on

digital franchise-related topics. Brighter yellow zones represent **higher density**, meaning these

keywords appear frequently and are central to the scholarly discussion. Notably, “franchise”, “digital storage”, and “sales” are among the most prominent terms, indicating they are core concepts within the field. Their high density reflects sustained academic interest in the foundational business model of franchising, its digital infrastructure, and commercial performance metrics. Meanwhile, the positioning of “human-computer interaction” and “design” in adjacent yellow-green zones suggests growing

engagement with user experience, especially as franchise models increasingly rely on digital platforms and interfaces. In contrast, while still significant, terms like “transmedia” and “adaptation” are slightly less intense but well-defined within their respective areas of the map. This implies niche yet meaningful streams of research, possibly in sectors like entertainment franchises or cross-platform storytelling models.

3.3. Citation Analysis

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title
273	[10]	“Untact”: a new customer service strategy in the digital age
116	[11]	Junk food on demand: A cross-sectional analysis of the nutritional quality of popular online food delivery outlets in Australia and New Zealand
111	[12]	The three faces of Business model innovation: Challenges for established firms
109	[13]	The Ransomware-as-a-Service economy within the darknet
101	[14]	Videogames and postcolonialism: Empire plays back
89	[15]	The Frodo franchise: The Lord of the Rings and modern Hollywood
86	[16]	Gaming representation: Race, gender, and sexuality in video games
63	[17]	Game play: Paratextuality in contemporary board games
59	[18]	The video bubble: Multichannel networks and the transformation of YouTube
57	[19]	Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom: Mapping new congruencies between the Internet and media entertainment culture

Source: Scopus, 2025

The citation analysis (Table 1) indicates that the most impactful article is authored by [10] (273 citations) concerning the untact digital service strategy, succeeded by Partridge et al. (116 citations) addressing the nutritional quality of online food delivery, and Koen et al. (111 citations) focusing on business model innovation. Cybersecurity is identified as a crucial subject in Meland et al. (109 citations) on the Ransomware-as-a-Service business. Cultural and media studies provide

substantial contributions, shown by Mukherjee (101 citations) on videogames and postcolonialism, Thompson (89 citations) on The Lord of the Rings franchise, and [16] (86 citations) on gaming representation. The most frequently referenced works emphasize three primary clusters: digital change in services and business, social and health ramifications of online platforms, and cultural representation in modern media and entertainment.

3.4. *Practical Implications*

This study offers several key insights for practitioners, policymakers, and entrepreneurs operating within the digital franchise landscape in emerging markets. First, the identification of dominant themes such as **digital storage, sales, design, and human-computer interaction** underscores the need for franchise operators to invest not only in technology infrastructure but also in user-centric design and digital literacy. For franchise founders and managers, this means prioritizing seamless platform experiences and backend systems that enable scalability across geographically dispersed regions. Moreover, the emerging focus on **transmedia** and digital storytelling presents an opportunity for brand expansion strategies that are culturally adaptive and multimedia-driven—particularly relevant for sectors like food, retail, entertainment, and education.

Policymakers and ecosystem enablers can also benefit from these findings by recognizing the shifting dynamics of franchising in the digital age. The visibility of countries like India and China in the collaboration maps, though still growing, suggests untapped potential in facilitating cross-border knowledge exchange and policy frameworks to support micro and digital-first franchisees. Training programs, incentives for platform adoption, and regulatory support for digital entrepreneurship could accelerate inclusive franchise participation in underrepresented regions.

3.5. *Theoretical Contributions*

From a scholarly standpoint, this bibliometric study contributes to a more **systematized understanding of digital franchising** as a developing area of research. While franchising has traditionally been

analyzed through the lenses of management, marketing, and international business (e.g., Combs et al., 2004), this study introduces a **multi-disciplinary framing** by highlighting intersections with digital infrastructure, human-computer interaction, and transmedia systems. By mapping the evolution and co-occurrence of these concepts over time, the research offers a **foundational framework** for scholars seeking to explore digital franchising not just as a business model but as a socio-technical system. Furthermore, the country collaboration and author co-citation maps identify **scholarly networks and intellectual foundations** that have shaped the current knowledge base. This allows future research to be more targeted—either by building upon the central figures and institutions identified or by addressing the gaps in underexplored geographical or conceptual areas. The inclusion of design and interaction terms within the franchise discourse also invites theoretical expansion into **platform theory, experience design, and digital value co-creation**, which are often absent in traditional franchise literature.

3.6. *Limitations*

While this study provides a comprehensive overview, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is limited to the Scopus database, which, despite its breadth, may exclude relevant publications indexed in other databases such as Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, or regional repositories. This could result in bias toward English-language and Western-published research, potentially underrepresenting contributions from emerging economies not covered in Scopus. Second, bibliometric analysis is inherently

quantitative and descriptive; it does not assess the qualitative depth or contextual nuances of each publication. Therefore, while co-occurrence and citation patterns are insightful, they cannot substitute for in-depth content analysis or case-specific interpretations. Finally, the use of keywords relies on author-supplied metadata, which may vary in precision and terminology, especially across interdisciplinary studies. Future research could complement these findings with **systematic literature reviews** or **meta-syntheses** to deepen the theoretical insights and application contexts revealed by this mapping.

4. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a structured and data-driven overview of the evolving research landscape surrounding digital franchise models, particularly within

the context of emerging markets. Through the use of keyword mapping, co-authorship analysis, temporal overlays, and density visualizations, the study uncovers a multidisciplinary field characterized by intersecting themes of digital infrastructure, sales optimization, user-centered design, and media integration. The findings reveal a growing scholarly interest in how digital technologies are reshaping traditional franchise systems—making them more scalable, adaptive, and user-engaged. However, the literature also exhibits fragmentation, with limited theoretical consolidation and underrepresentation from Global South research contexts. As such, this study not only charts the intellectual terrain but also identifies promising avenues for future research that bridges business strategy, digital innovation, and localized entrepreneurial ecosystems. By laying this foundation, the research supports a more inclusive and holistic understanding of digital franchising as a dynamic force in both academic inquiry and real-world practice.

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