

Unpacking digital transformation in B2B marketing: a comprehensive bibliometric analysis and TCCM based systematic literature review

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to present a systematic literature review (SLR) that consolidates fragmented scholarly knowledge on digital transformation (DT) in business to business (B2B) marketing by synthesizing existing literature into a cohesive narrative. It seeks to interpret how B2B firms navigate technological disruption while advancing an integrated understanding of the domain's theoretical, contextual and methodological development.

Design/methodology/approach – A domain-based systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted on 106 peer-reviewed papers published between 2016 and 2025, sourced from Scopus and Web of Science databases. This review was further enriched through a bibliometric analysis performed using R Studio and Biblioshiny. To enhance analytical rigor, the study used the theory, contexts, characteristics and methods (TCCM) framework, enabling a structured examination of prevailing theoretical foundations, sectoral and geographical contexts, empirical constructs including antecedents, mediators, moderators and outcomes and methodological orientations.

Findings – This study formulates 12 research propositions that together offer a detailed and coherent overview of the digitalization landscape in B2B marketing. It presents an integrated framework that underscores the essential role of digitalization strategies and decision-making tools in shaping effective B2B marketing practices. In addition, the research identifies a range of strategic and tactical digitalization approaches that can help narrow the existing digitalization gap within B2B organizations. Finally, the study outlines a future research agenda, structured around the TCCM framework, to further advance scholarly inquiry and deepen understanding in the field of B2B marketing digitalization.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this review represents the first effort to combine bibliometric techniques with the TCCM framework in examining digital transformation in B2B context. By offering a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the field's intellectual development, it provides valuable, actionable insights for both scholars and practitioners striving to advance more inclusive and effective transformation strategies. In doing so, the study strengthens theoretical understanding, advances methodological rigor and supports the evolution of strategic practice within B2B marketing.

Keywords Digital transformation, B2B marketing, Bibliometric analysis, Thematic analysis, TCCM framework

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the B2B marketing landscape has undergone significant changes. The rapid proliferation of digitization, in particular, has transformed how businesses interact (Han *et al.*, 2021). Many traditional market barriers have fallen, making business environments more permeable and flexible. Digital tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, social media, augmented reality (AR) and the Internet of Things (IoT) are reshaping the B2B marketing process, making it increasingly informed, demanding and interactive (Mukhopadhyay *et al.*, 2025; Shashi *et al.*, 2025).

Along with redefining the traditional marketing landscape, the aforementioned changes have also introduced multiple challenges and complexities to the B2B marketing process (Arghashi *et al.*, 2025; Mukhopadhyay *et al.*, 2025). These developments have prompted both academics and practitioners to advocate for more flexible and adaptive approaches to help firms and their employees navigate these challenges. In B2B

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marketing, where firms must build increasingly interactive relationships with stakeholders, customers are seeking new and diverse touchpoints for engagement (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2025; Lundin and Kindström, 2024). For instance, recent research indicates that around 80% of B2B customers prefer online interactions and relationships over traditional ones (Corsaro and D'Amico, 2022). Furthermore, a recent survey conducted by Google and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology highlighted that B2B marketing services rank among the top areas for implementing DT initiatives aimed at fostering innovation (Han *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, DT has emerged as a key avenue for value cocreation in B2B contexts.

Understanding DT in B2B marketing is critical, given topic holistic portrayal of the digital experiences with a firm (Wieland *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, despite significant advancements in the DT and related literature, prior studies have used a range of B2B DT conceptualizations, methods and perspectives, yielding scrappy and potentially incompatible findings. For instance, some studies overlap B2B actors' experience with the B2C context; however, prevalent B2C DT strategies do not necessarily apply to the B2B context (Corsaro and D'Amico, 2022). Moreover, a few studies highlighted the positive impact of DT on firms' effectiveness. Yet, extant DT in the B2B marketing context lacks a systematic and structured view of multifaceted functions that DT plays in B2B marketing innovation (Kowalkowski *et al.*, 2024; Mattila *et al.*, 2021). This notion is in keeping with calls by recent studies Setkute and Dibb (2022) who argue that future research endeavors should focus on harnessing the DT in B2B marketing functions.

Consequently, a critical gap or tension in the existing B2B literature is exposed, highlighting the need for its systematic mapping. Prior studies have conducted a systematic review of DT in B2B literature (Han *et al.*, 2021; Sagala and Óri, 2024). However, these review studies overly emphasize digital mediation via specific technologies (e.g. social media and AI: Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Han *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, these studies exhibit limited integration of theoretical, contextual and methodological insights, resulting in a lack of cohesive exploration of how firms navigate technological disruption and strategic realignment (see Table 1). This fragmentation impedes the development of a cohesive framework capable of capturing the multidimensional nature of DT in B2B contexts (Paul *et al.*, 2024).

Against this backdrop, current research assesses the intellectual structure of DT in the B2B marketing literature context from 2016 to 2025, therefore consolidating embryonic views of the B2B DT and its dynamics and reducing the observed fragmentation. Drawing on 106 peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2025, this review provides a panoramic view of the field's intellectual evolution and proposes actionable insights for advancing both scholarly and managerial understanding. To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first systematic quantitative synthesis of DT in B2B marketing that integrates bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping alongside the theory, context, characteristics and methodology (TCCM) framework. In doing so, it not only consolidates fragmented insights but also establishes a roadmap for inclusive, adaptive and ethically grounded transformation strategies across B2B ecosystems. To

guide our analyses, this study further seeks to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1. What prominent theories or frameworks have shaped the field, and how has the research background evolved over time?
- RQ2. Which industries, regions and contexts have been the focus of prior research?
- RQ3. What characteristics, drivers and actions define research on digital transformation in B2B marketing, and which research methods are most commonly employed?
- RQ4. What are the major themes and emerging topics at the forefront of digital transformation in B2B marketing research?
- RQ5. What directions for future research can be identified within the digital transformation in B2B marketing literature?

The contribution of this research is multifaceted. First, our study summarizes the ten years of DT research by using a comprehensive literature review on the B2B marketing context that disclosed some important new avenues where research is needed. Second, adhering to the TCCM framework, this research serves as a guiding structure to help authors effectively accumulate knowledge and better comprehend prior findings on DT in B2B marketing studies by examining the theories, contexts, characteristics and methodologies used in those studies. Finally, Mele *et al.* (2025) and MacInnis (2011) proposed that knowledge advancement not only happens through examining and developing constructs but also through conceptualizing their relationship to other concepts. Based on this, we group DT in B2B marketing themes and develop an integrative conceptual framework in the context of DT in B2B marketing. We group DT in B2B marketing antecedents, mediators, moderators and outcomes. By mapping out the identified DT in B2B marketing themes into an integrative framework, our work fosters a much better understanding of each theme's association with the DT in B2B marketing, providing vital insight to DT and B2B marketing researchers.

The study is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. Section 3 details the research methodology and data sources. Section 4 presents the descriptive analysis, followed by Section 5, which reports the bibliometric analysis of the literature. Section 6 offers a synthesis of prior studies using the TCCM framework and Section 7 outlines future research directions derived from the TCCM analysis. Finally, Section 8 discusses the study's implications and acknowledges its limitations.

2. Literature review

Prior reviews of B2B marketing research (see Table 1) have examined the evolution of DT in the field and provided insights into methodological trends, thematic emphases and future research directions. These reviews differ in terms of the timeframe covered, the analytical methods used and the databases used, yet their key aim has been to synthesize knowledge, identify research

Table 1 Previous review studies on digital transformation in B2B marketing research

Authors	Review type	Timeframe	Database	Article analyzed	Analysis	Research focus
(Shashi <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	Systematic literature review	2003–2023	Web of Science	96	Descriptive statistical and content analyses	Systematically reviewed the digital transformation of B2B marketing and identifying key trends, barriers and strategic frameworks. Proposed research directions to guide future studies and enhancing managerial practices in digital B2B environments
(Amoozad Mahdiraji <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review	2012–2022	Scopus and Web of Science	43	Thematic analysis	Investigated the effects of data analytics on Marketing 4.0 in the B2B sector and developed an integrated framework. Identified future research directions of Marketing 4.0 analytics in the B2B sector contexts
(Petrescu <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Bibliometric analysis	1995–2021	Web of Science	73	Co-occurrence analysis, cocitations analysis, conceptual mapping and semantic content analysis	Developed an interdisciplinary framework for AI-based innovation in B2B marketing by integrating academic and practitioner perspectives
(Sharma <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review	1990–2020	Web of Science	363	Descriptive analysis, keyword co-occurrence analysis, thematic analysis and content analysis	Mapped the intellectual structure of technological advancements and B2B relationship research. Highlighted key thematic areas while proposing future research directions
(Han <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Bibliometric analysis	1990–2021	Scopus and Web of Science	221	Performance, network and content analysis	Investigated how AI enables innovation in B2B marketing and identified major research trends and future directions. Classified AI-enabled B2B marketing innovation into major domains
(Kumar <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Bibliometric analysis	1999–2019	Scopus, Google Scholar, Business Source Premier, Web of Science, and Social Science Citation Index	119	Document cocitation and content analysis, hierarchical cluster analysis, metric multidimensional scaling and exploratory factor analysis	Synthesized the literature on digital mediation in B2B marketing, classified subdomains and identified thematic clusters and future research directions
(Lacka <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review	1970–2020	Web of Science	94	Cooccurrence analysis, cluster mapping and theme-based synthesis	Assessed technological advancements in supporting B2B international trade, identified research gaps and propose future research directions. Emphasized the underrepresentation of research on technologies like IoT, AI and blockchain in the B2B cross-border trade
This article	Bibliometric analysis combined with systematic literature review	2016–2025	Scopus and Web of Science	106	Performance analysis, science mapping and TCCM (theory–context–characteristics–methodology) framework	Examined how B2B firms navigate digital transformation and mapped the field's intellectual structure. Highlighted thematic shifts and applied the TCCM framework to uncover dominant and emerging theoretical, contextual, empirical and methodological patterns. Developed an integrated framework, identified research gaps and proposed future research directions to advance theoretical integration, sectoral diversity, construct development and methodological trends in the digital transformation of B2B marketing

Source: Authors' own work

gaps and guide future inquiry. Some studies have focused solely on bibliometric analysis or systematic literature reviews (SLRs), while others have used bibliometric techniques combined with SLRs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the field.

A SLR conducted by [Shashi et al. \(2025\)](#) assessed 96 articles (2003–2023) and applied descriptive statistical and content analyses to identify trends, barriers and strategic frameworks in digital B2B marketing. Their review emphasized the importance of managerial practices in digital B2B environments and proposed research directions to enhance future studies. In contrast, [Petrescu et al. \(2022\)](#) adopted a bibliometric approach to analyze 73 articles (1995–2021) and developed an interdisciplinary framework for AI-based innovation in B2B marketing by integrating academic and practitioner perspectives. Similarly, [Han et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted the bibliometric analysis on 221 publications (1990–2021), focusing on AI-enabled innovation in B2B marketing and classifying major trends across performance, network and content domains. Furthermore, [Kumar et al. \(2020\)](#) analyzed 119 publications published between 1999 and 2019, using cocitation, hierarchical cluster and multidimensional scaling analyses to synthesize literature on digital mediation in B2B marketing.

Whereas several studies have extended bibliometric methods with SLRs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of thematic clusters and research directions. In this vein, [Amoozad Mahdiraji et al. \(2023\)](#) reviewed 43 articles (2012–2022), using a combined bibliometric and systematic review methodology to examine the influence of data analytics within the Marketing 4.0 paradigm in B2B settings. Their study developed an integrative conceptual framework and identified underexplored areas in B2B analytics research. [Sharma et al. \(2022\)](#) examined 363 articles (1990–2020) using descriptive, co-occurrence and thematic analyses to map technological advancements and B2B relationship research, highlighting key thematic areas and suggesting directions for future inquiry. Likewise, [Lacka et al. \(2020\)](#) combined bibliometric and systematic reviews of 94 articles (1970–2020) to assess technological advancements in supporting B2B international trade and highlighted underrepresented research areas such as IoT, AI and blockchain.

Building on these prior efforts, the present study extends the bibliometric inquiry by examining 106 articles (2016–2025) from the Web of Science and integrating performance analysis with the TCCM framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on mapping research trends or identifying thematic clusters, this study explores how B2B firms steer DT and connects it clearly to the intellectual structure of the field. It highlights theoretical, contextual, empirical and methodological patterns while developing an integrated framework, uncovering research gaps and proposing directions to advance theoretical integration, sectoral diversity and methodological rigor in the DT of B2B marketing.

3. Methods and data

The study aims to systematically map the existing body of knowledge and evaluate framework-based research to identify

future research avenues. To achieve this, we used the bibliometric-systematic literature review framework ([Marzi et al., 2025](#)). The study uses the TCCM framework, categorizing research based on theory, characteristics, context and methodology, to gain deeper insights into existing frameworks and research patterns ([Sharma et al., 2020](#)). The findings are synthesized into a conceptual framework that highlights gaps and suggests future research directions in B2B marketing for sustainability. This two-pronged approach rooted in the highly regarded Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines ([Kelly et al., 2016](#)).

Following [Kyrdoda et al. \(2025\)](#), we adhered to the PRISMA protocol ([Moher et al., 2015](#)) and the AMSTAR 2 checklist ([Shea et al., 2017](#)) to ensure the quality and reproducibility of the study. Initially, we reviewed the literature on “digital, digitalization, digital innovation and DT in the B2B marketing context” to gain deeper insights and identify relevant related terms. Subsequently, we applied the AMSTAR 2 criteria to define the inclusion and exclusion criteria before commencing data collection ([Kyrdoda et al., 2025](#)). To facilitate targeted data collection, our research query was defined and the keywords were refined accordingly. To achieve this, we first developed a large pool of keywords appearing in titles, abstracts and authors’ keywords based on previously established papers (e.g. AI, digital, digitalization, IoT, block-chain: [Han et al., 2021](#); [Shashi et al., 2025](#)). After that, we refined and reduced the number of keywords until we reached a string that was able to cover all the documents relevant to our topic. Next, we used the final set of keywords “digital transformation in B2B marketing” OR “digital transformation in Business-to-Business marketing” OR “digitalization in B2B marketing” OR “digitalization in Business-to-Business marketing.” Following the domain-based approach guidelines ([Chiarini et al., 2013](#)), we identified Web of Science and Scopus as suitable databases for searching the relevant literature. This selection was informed by an initial scoping review of relevant articles and prior bibliometric studies, which confirmed their prominence in scholarly discourse. Furthermore, the Boolean operator “OR” was applied to combine these terms, ensuring inclusivity and minimizing the risk of omitting relevant studies. Furthermore, we include the journal articles published in English from the field business, management and accounting. The initial search returned a total of 602 articles, including 220 relevant articles in Scopus and 382 in Web of Science. Subsequently, the refined data set advanced to the screening phase, where articles were subjected to a rigorous exclusion process based on predefined criteria ([Watson, 2002](#)). This phase commenced with the removal of duplicate records, resulting in the exclusion of 88 articles. Next, 22 review articles were eliminated, further reducing the data set to 492 articles. The screening process then proceeded with the removal of articles that did not meet the ABDC journal ranking criteria (A* or A), leading to the exclusion of 314 articles. In line with [Paul and Criado \(2020\)](#), this study focused on journals ranked A* and A to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed research, thereby enhancing the rigor and credibility of the review. Consequently, the remaining 178 articles underwent a precise evaluation based on their titles, abstracts and keywords, leading to the exclusion of 54 articles deemed irrelevant.

Following this, the remaining 124 articles were fully read and reviewed independently by all authors to ensure their alignment

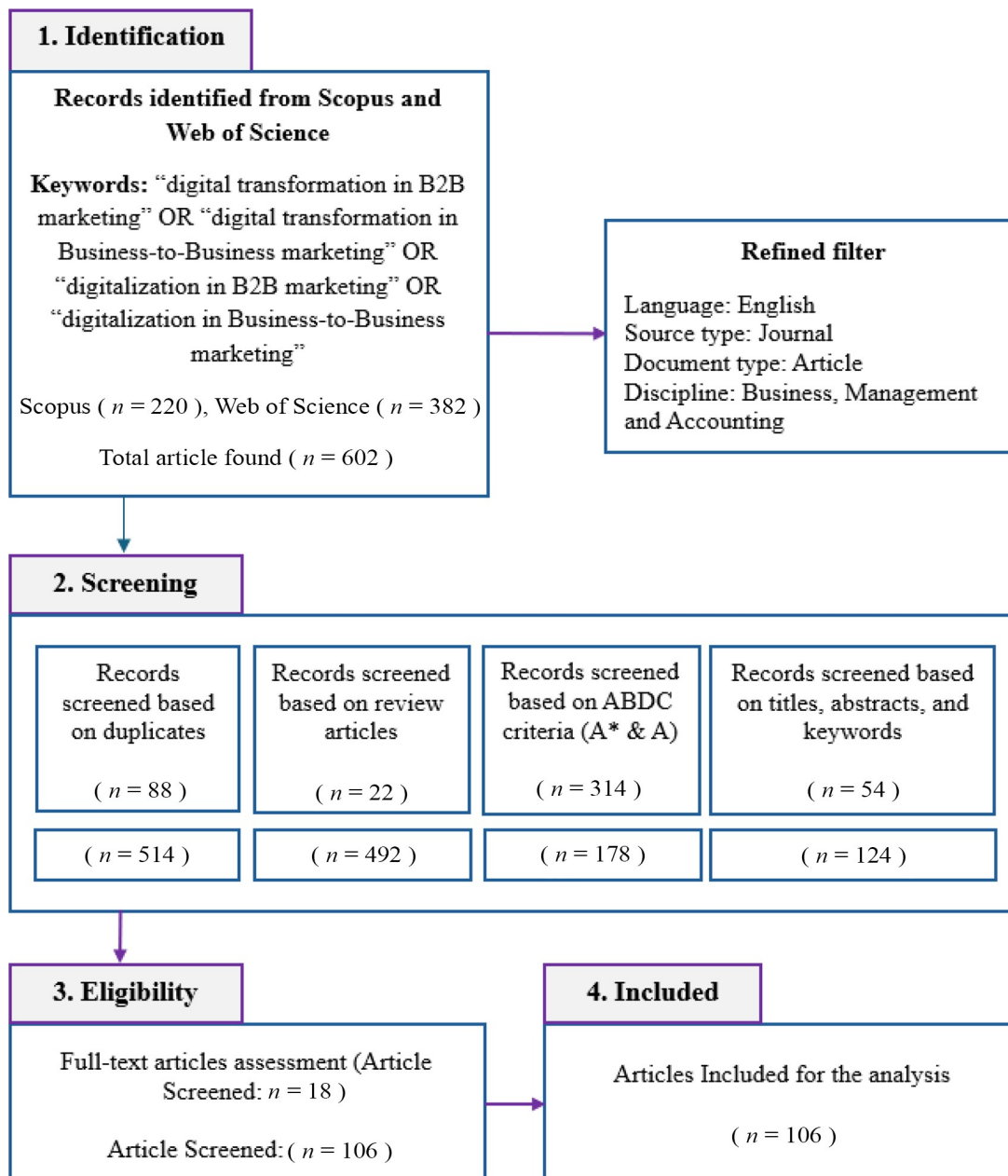
with the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria before selecting the final data set. As a result, 18 articles were excluded after discussion and consensus. Ultimately, a total of 106 high-quality articles were deemed eligible and proceeded to the inclusion phase for the final bibliometric analysis (see Figure 1).

4. Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis of the literature on DT in B2B marketing reveals a dynamic and rapidly expanding field. The timespan from 2016 to 2025 reflects the evolution from

exploratory studies toward more structured, forward-looking research, indicating that DT is transitioning from a technological trend to a strategic imperative in B2B contexts. The annual growth rate of 38.7% highlights an accelerating scholarly interest, which can be interpreted as a response to the increasing complexity of digital ecosystems and their impact on interorganizational relationships, an area that challenges traditional B2B marketing theories grounded in linear value chains. The concentration of 106 documents across 34 publication sources, including high-impact journals ($A^* = 38$ and $A = 68$), suggests that the discourse is gaining legitimacy

Figure 1 PRISMA framework



Source(s): Authors' own work

within mainstream marketing research. This legitimization points to a theoretical shift where digitalization is no longer peripheral but central to understanding value creation, customer engagement and governance mechanisms in B2B markets. Collaboration patterns, with 347 authors and only six single-authored papers, highlight the multidisciplinary nature of this research, integrating marketing, information systems and strategic management perspectives. However, the relatively modest international coauthorship rate (11.32%) indicates that theoretical development may still be influenced by regional contexts, leaving room for cross-cultural and global frameworks that can enrich existing models of DT. These patterns do more than describe growth, they reveal an emerging research paradigm that challenges conventional B2B theories and calls for integrative models addressing digital connectivity, data-driven decision-making.

5. Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric analysis uses bibliographic data from article databases to construct structural illustrations of a scientific field (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). The following sections of bibliometric analysis elaborate on the different methods of performance analysis (publication trends and impactful journals, publications and countries) and science mapping (evolution of trending topics, thematic mapping) applied in this study.

5.1 Performance analysis

5.1.1 Publications trends

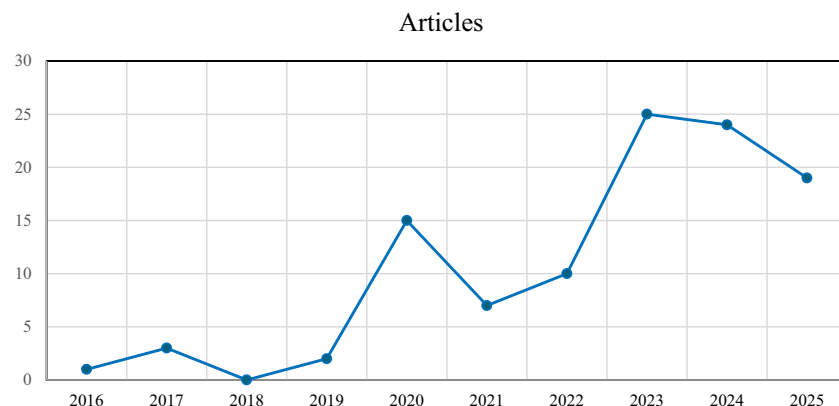
The publication trends in DT within B2B marketing, as depicted in the annual scientific production graph (see Figure 2), demonstrate a fluctuating yet generally upward trajectory in scholarly output. In 2016, the volume of publications was relatively modest, indicative of the emerging nature of the research domain. Subsequent years saw a gradual increase, culminating in a pronounced peak in 2020. This surge likely corresponds to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital adoption across industries and intensified academic focus on transformation strategies. Following 2020, publication levels exhibited minor fluctuations but remained consistently elevated, with another significant peak

observed in 2023. This pattern highlights the sustained academic interest and the continued relevance of DT in B2B contexts. The observed decline in 2024, along with the data point for 2025, may reflect either a natural tapering in output or incomplete data for the most recent years. Overall, the trend highlights a dynamic and responsive research environment, shaped by developing technological advancements and shifting market conditions.

5.1.2 Impactful publication, journals and countries

Among the most influential academic papers, the most highly cited is the article by Pagani and Pardo, (2017), titled “The impact of digital technology on relationships in a business network,” published in *Industrial Marketing Management*. With 330 citations, this study has played a pivotal role in shaping the conversation around how digital technologies reconfigure interorganizational relationships, particularly within complex business networks. It offers a comprehensive understanding of how digitalization alters relational dynamics and governance structures, in B2B ecosystems. Another key contribution is the work by Paiola and Gebauer, (2020), “Internet of things technologies, digital servitization and business model innovation in BtoB manufacturing firms,” also published in *Industrial Marketing Management*, which has garnered 306 citations. This paper advances the theoretical integration of IoT technologies with servitization strategies, highlighting how digital tools enable B2B manufacturers to transition toward service-oriented business models. It emphasizes the transformative potential of digital servitization in reshaping value propositions and organizational capabilities. In terms of publication outlets, *Industrial Marketing Management* emerges as the leading journal in the domain of DT in B2B marketing (see Table 2). It has contributed 27 documents to the field, positioning itself as a central platform for scholarly inquiry into B2B strategies, digital innovation and transformation frameworks. The journal’s consistent focus on empirical rigor and managerial relevance has made it a cornerstone for both academic researchers and industry practitioners. Closely following is the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, which has published 24 documents related to DT. This journal plays a critical role in bridging theoretical insights with practical

Figure 2 Publications trends



Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 2 Impactful journals

Impactful sources	No. of articles	ABDC ranking
Industrial Marketing Management	27	A*
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	24	A
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	5	A
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	5	A
International Marketing Review	4	A
Journal of Business Research	4	A
Journal of Enterprise Information Management	3	A
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	3	A*
Technovation	3	A

Source: Authors' own work

applications, particularly in industrial marketing contexts. Its contributions often emphasize strategic alignment, customer-centric innovation and the operationalization of digital tools in B2B settings. In addition, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning* and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* each contribute five documents to the discourse. While smaller in volume, these journals offer distinct strategic and future-oriented perspectives.

The Table 3 presents a comparative overview of the most impactful countries contributing to the scholarly discourse on Digital Transformation in B2B marketing. China emerges as the leading contributor with 20 articles, representing 18.9% of the total output. A significant portion of these is single country publications (SCP), suggesting a strong domestic research focus. The UK follows with 11 articles (10.4%), evenly split between SCP and multiple country publications (MCP), indicating a balanced approach between national and international collaboration. Germany and Italy each contributed nine articles (8.5%), while France and the USA produced seven articles each (6.6%). Overall, the data illustrates a diverse and globally distributed research setting, with varying degrees of international collaboration shaping the development of knowledge in this domain.

Table 3 Impactful countries by article publication

Country	Articles	Articles %	SCP	MCP
China	20	18.9	14	6
United Kingdom	11	10.4	5	6
Germany	9	8.5	6	3
Italy	9	8.5	6	3
France	7	6.6	6	1
USA	7	6.6	6	1
India	6	5.7	3	3
Finland	5	4.7	5	0
Australia	4	3.8	3	1
Denmark	3	2.8	1	2

Note(s) SCP: single country publication, MCP: multiple country publication

Source: Authors' own work

5.2 Science mapping

5.2.1 Evolution of trending topics

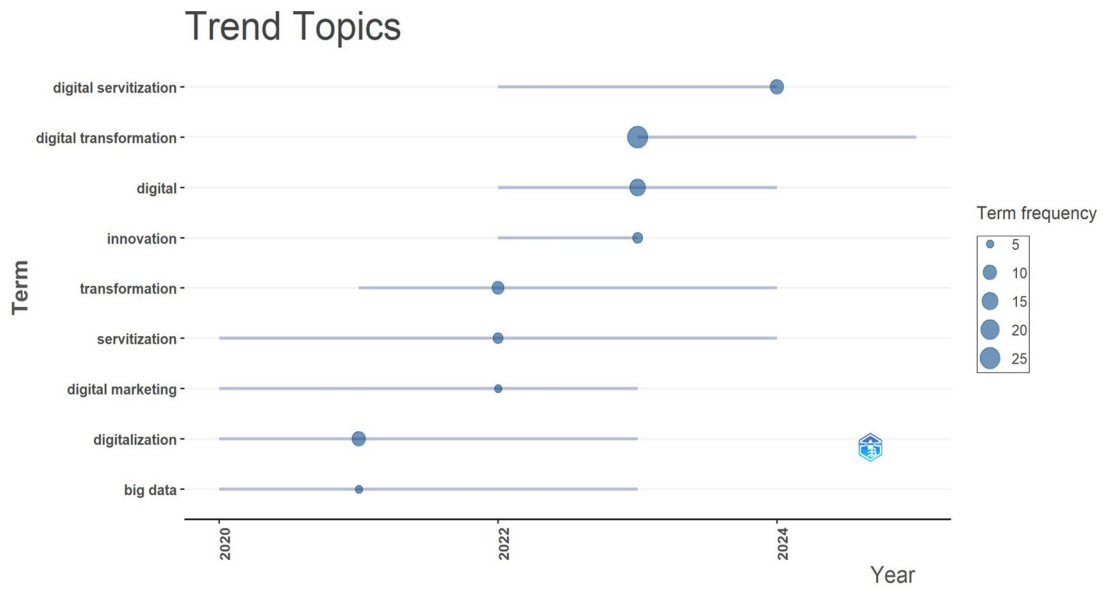
The longitudinal visualization of keyword prominence within the B2B marketing literature (see Figure 3), capturing the dynamic progression of scholarly and industry focus as DT gains strategic momentum. The size of each circle corresponds to the frequency of term usage, thereby serving as a proxy for thematic emphasis and intellectual engagement across time. In 2020, the literature reflects an early-stage orientation toward enabling technologies. Keywords such as big data and digitalization appear with moderate frequency, indicating a foundational interest in data-driven decision-making and the digitization of operational workflows. These terms suggest that the academic discussion was primarily concerned with the infrastructural and technological prerequisites for DT. Meanwhile, concepts such as servitization and transformation are present but relatively subdued, implying that the reconfiguration of business models and strategic logic was still in its conceptual infancy (Caliskan *et al.*, 2020; Fernández-Rovira *et al.*, 2021; Marcon *et al.*, 2022).

By 2022, the thematic terrain begins to shift markedly. The term digital gains substantial prominence, reflecting a broader and more integrated engagement with digital technologies across both strategic and operational domains (Battisti and Brem, 2020; Corsaro and D'Amico, 2022). This rise signals a shift from isolated technological adoption to more holistic digital integration. Concurrently, innovation experiences a notable increase in frequency, highlighting the growing recognition of digital tools as enablers of novel practices, business model renewal and competitive agility. The emergence of DT as a frequently cited term marks a conceptual inflection point, indicating that scholars and practitioners are increasingly framing digital initiatives within structured, enterprise-wide change programs (Brewis *et al.*, 2023). The appearance of digital marketing further reflects expanding interest in customer engagement, value cocreation and channel strategy within digitally mediated environments. By 2024, the literature reaches a stage of conceptual and strategic maturity. Keywords such as digital servitization and DT dominate the visualization, with the largest circles denoting peak academic and practitioner interest (Joshi *et al.*, 2024; Kristiansen and Aas, 2024; Mohaghegh *et al.*, 2024). This prominence signals a merging of digital capabilities with service-oriented business models, marking a strategic reorientation in B2B marketing. The upheld rise of servitization and transformation reinforces the shift from product-centric to service-centric value propositions, driven by the integration of digital technologies into core business logic. These developments suggest that DT is no longer viewed as a technological upgrade but as a fundamental driver of strategic differentiation, customer experience enhancement and long-term value delivery.

5.2.2 Thematic analysis

This thematic map outlined in Figure 4 presents an analysis of the key research themes, categorized into four quadrants based on their development degree (density) and relevance degree (centrality). Each quadrant represents different types of themes that are crucial for understanding trends in DT in B2B marketing.

Figure 3 Evolution of trending topics



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 4 Thematic mapping



Source(s): Authors' own work

The Niche Themes quadrant (top left) comprises topics that are internally well-developed but exhibit limited connectivity to broader research streams. These themes reflect depth in specific subdomains yet remain marginal to mainstream discussion. Constructs such as *trust* and *commitment* represent enduring pillars of relationship marketing, particularly

significant in B2B contexts characterized by long-term interorganizational partnerships (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023). The presence of *COVID-19* denotes a temporally significant theme, likely capturing crisis-induced adaptations in marketing strategy and digital responsiveness. Topics such as *B2B marketing* and *multi-sided platforms* suggest focused

investigations into platform-based business models, while *organizational agility* highlights the strategic responsiveness required to steer digital environments (Heikinheimo *et al.*, 2025). Although these themes are rich in conceptual depth, their marginal positioning suggests potential for greater integration into central discourses to enhance their theoretical and practical impact. The Motor Themes quadrant (top right) summarizes the intellectual engines driving the field. These themes are both central and well-developed, indicating their pivotal role in shaping contemporary research and guiding strategic practice. *Digital transformation*, *digital marketing* and *digitalization* form the conceptual backbone of the digital shift in B2B marketing, involving strategic, operational and technological dimensions (Mohaghegh *et al.*, 2024; Shashi *et al.*, 2025). The inclusion of *firm performance* and *crisis management* reflects outcome-oriented and resilience-focused outlooks, respectively, while *big data* and *digital servitization* focus the role of advanced analytics and service-oriented innovation in enabling competitive advantage (Ahmed *et al.*, 2026; Pauwels and Aksehirli, 2025). The presence of *B2B* and *digital* as standalone nodes reinforces their foundational relevance across multiple subdomains, suggesting their integrative function within the broader thematic design.

In the Emerging or Declining Themes quadrant (bottom left), *SLR* appears as a solitary node, indicating a methodological focus that is either gaining traction or experiencing reduced scholarly attention (Lasrado *et al.*, 2022). Its positioning may reflect a renewed interest in meta-analytical approaches or a temporary lull in methodological innovation (Bauer *et al.*, 2023; Fernández-Rovira *et al.*, 2021). This theme serves as a strategic signal for researchers to either strengthen its application or monitor its trajectory for future relevance, particularly in synthesizing fragmented insights across the DT literature. The Basic Themes quadrant (bottom right) includes topics central to the field but exhibit lower internal development, suggesting foundational relevance with scope for deeper theoretical or empirical elaboration. Themes such as *business-to-business marketing*, *B2B* and *collaboration* represent core constructs that underpin the discipline, yet may require renewed scholarly attention to maintain conceptual robustness. *Social media* and *digital technology* reflect global platforms and tools whose strategic integration into B2B marketing remains an ongoing endeavor (Liu *et al.*, 2025). These themes offer fertile ground for future research, particularly in aligning technological capabilities with collaborative value creation and customer-centric innovation.

6. TCCM framework

A SLR on the topic “digital transformation in B2B marketing” was conducted to comprehensively explore the existing body of knowledge and identify key patterns, gaps and future research directions in this domain. To guide the review and ensure a systematic and analytical structure, the TCCM framework was used (Behera and Kumra, 2023), as detailed in the next section. This framework enabled an inclusive classification and critical analysis of the literature, supporting the identification of theoretical underpinnings, contextual relevance, research design features and methodological trends within the existing studies.

6.1 Theories

This systematic review, conducted using the TCCM framework, offers valuable insights into the theoretical foundations of research on “digital transformation in B2B marketing.” These findings demonstrate that “digital transformation in B2B marketing” can be effectively examined through multiple theoretical lenses, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The analysis identified a varied range of theories and concepts. 46 theories and concepts have been applied to the research field as provided in Table 4. These theories vary in maturity, disciplinary origin and empirical application, offering both depth and breadth to the evolving research environment. The review also highlights that while several studies explicitly used theory to develop hypotheses, others used theory primarily to interpret findings or draw comparisons with existing literature. Several articles did not reference any theoretical framework.

The used theories alongside the pertained context are provided in Table 4. Widely adopted theories such as dynamic capabilities (Brewis *et al.*, 2023; Magistretti *et al.*, 2021; Oliveira *et al.*, 2025; Soluk *et al.*, 2023; Zia *et al.*, 2023), resource-based view (RBV) (Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021; Elia *et al.*, 2021; Homburg and Wielgos, 2022; Ranjan, 2024) and organizational learning theory (Liu *et al.*, 2025; Zhang *et al.*, 2025) highlight the strategic and operational imperatives of firms steering digital change. Practice theory (Busca and Bertrandias, 2022; Heeris Christensen *et al.*, 2023) and institutional theory (Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021; Busca and Bertrandias, 2022), while moderately used, contribute socio-structural insights to shape digital adoption and organizational behavior. Emerging theories like affordance theory (Mersico *et al.*, 2022; Naik *et al.*, 2020) and triple bottom line (TBL) theory (Sivarajah *et al.*, 2020) signal an alteration toward more delicate, human-centered and sustainability-oriented perspectives, reflecting the growing importance of ethical and environmental considerations in digital strategy. Furthermore, strategic and organizational theories such as contingency theory (Troilo *et al.*, 2017), organizational theory (Hafezieh and Pollock, 2023) and upper echelon theory (Erhan *et al.*, 2023) highlight the importance of contextual fit, leadership influence and structural responsiveness. Marketing and consumer engagement theories including value consumption theory (Joshi *et al.*, 2024) and classic technology adoption theory (Su *et al.*, 2023) offer behavioral and experiential insights, particularly in gamification and digital readiness. In addition, theories linked to digital servitization, such as paradox theory (Eggert *et al.*, 2022), legitimacy theory (Kristiansen and Aas, 2024) and niche theory (Y. Zhang *et al.*, 2025), explore the validation mechanisms and collaborative dynamics inherent in-service transformation. Besides, resource governance theories like resource orchestration (Mohaghegh *et al.*, 2024) and conservation of resources theory (Leo *et al.*, 2022) address supply chain agility and employee resilience, while innovation diffusion and unified theory extend the conversation to emerging technologies and digital skills.

6.2 Context

Within the TCCM framework, the contextual dimension of scholarly contributions to DT in B2B marketing reveals a

Table 4 Theories used in “digital transformation in B2B marketing” research

Theories	(%) of the studies used	Related characteristics	References
Dynamic capabilities theory	23.92	Design thinking, digital transformation, dynamic capabilities, big data, strategic marketing and market responsiveness, business networks, adoption of non-disruptive digital technologies, sales digitization and sales process optimization, firm performance, digital orientation, innovation performance, international market growth, explorative and exploitative innovation, firms' innovation behavior, digital collaboration capability, incremental and radical service innovation, digital technology adoption, radical and incremental innovations, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)	(Brewis <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Magistretti <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Oliveira <i>et al.</i> , 2025; Soluk <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Zia <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Resource-based theory	10.89	Market orientation implementation, firm performance, digital technologies and capabilities, cross-border e-commerce, Internet of Things (IoT), servitization journey, classic marketing capabilities	(Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021; Elia <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Homburg and Wielgos, 2022; Ranjan, 2024)
Organizational learning theory	6.57	Digital transformation, profitability and marketability, digital business strategy, service innovation, participation in cross-border digital platforms, discretionary adaptation strategy	(F. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2025; X. Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2025)
Practice theory	4.35	Dialectical emotional labor, transmutation of workers' emotional systems	(Busca and Bertrandias, 2022; Heeris Christensen <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Institutional theory	4.35	Market orientation implementation and firm performance	(Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021; Busca and Bertrandias, 2022);
Affordance theory	4.35	Big data investments, service innovation, digital transformation, servitization and Internet of Things (IoT)	(Mersico <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Naik <i>et al.</i> , 2020);
Triple bottom line theory	2.17	Big data and social media analytics, business to business sustainability	(Sivarajah <i>et al.</i> , 2020);
Relational view theory	2.17	Digital servitization	(Kamalaldin <i>et al.</i> , 2020);
Social exchange theory	2.17	Coronavirus crisis in B2B settings	(Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2020)
Contingency theory	2.17	Data management and analytics technologies, service innovation	(Troilo <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Marketing-mix theory	2.17	Digital transformation of traditional marketing business	(Caliskan <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
Resource allocation theory and market equilibrium theory	2.17	Servitization, efficiency of resource allocation	(Liu and Hua, 2024)
Commitment and trust theory	2.17	Relational governance	(Alalwan <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Paradox theory	2.17	Digital servitization	(Eggert <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Classic technology adoption theory	2.17	Market pressures and organizational readiness, digital marketing adoption strategies' evolution	(Su <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Organizational theory	2.17	Born digital organize, respond to consumer demands	(Hafezieh and Pollock, 2023)
Life cycle theory	2.17	Cultural heritage branding,	(Li <i>et al.</i> , 2025)
Upper echelon (UE) theory	2.17	Digital marketing innovation, firm performance	(Erhan <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Theory of consumption values	2.17	Gamification value, consumer engagement	(Joshi <i>et al.</i> , 2024)
Resource orchestration theory	2.17	Supply chain agility, supply chain adaptability, supply chain alignment, sustainable performance	(Mohaghegh <i>et al.</i> , 2024)
Niche theory	2.17	Collaborative decisions, digital servitization	(Y. Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2025)
Unified theory	2.17	Digital skills, artificial intelligence	(Vitezić and Perić, 2024)
Legitimacy theory	2.17	Digital servitization	(Kristiansen and Aas, 2024)
Conservation of resources theory	2.17	Digital transformation, service employees' beliefs	(Leo <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Innovation diffusion theory	2.17	Blockchain technology, digital transformations	(Dehghani <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
Social practice theory	2.17	Gamified online loyalty, value cocreation	(Dreher and Ströbel, 2023)
Change readiness theory	2.17	Organizational and managerial influence mechanisms, frontline readiness and effectiveness	(Mullins and Agnihotri, 2022)

Source: Authors' own work

pronounced geographical asymmetry, with a notable tilt toward developing economies. Approximately 56% of the total research output in this domain originates from emerging markets (Erhan *et al.*, 2023; Jean *et al.*, 2020; Ranjan, 2024), emphasizing a growing academic and practitioner interest in how these regions are harnessing digital technologies to reconfigure complex B2B ecosystems. This surge reflects not only the dynamism of digital adoption in these economies but also their strategic prioritization of industrial modernization as a lever for global competitiveness. Among developing economies, China emerges as a dominant contributor, accounting for 52% of the research output from this cohort. This concentration is indicative of China’s deliberate national agenda to advance industrial digitization, particularly within manufacturing and technology-intensive sectors (X. Zhang *et al.*, 2025). The country’s evolving role as a global B2B powerhouse is mirrored in its scholarly footprint, which aligns with its policy-driven emphasis on digital infrastructure, smart manufacturing and export-led innovation. In contrast, developed economies contribute 44% of the literature (Brewis *et al.*, 2023; Elia *et al.*, 2021; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2024), with a strong European academic presence. The UK, Germany and Italy collectively represent 47% of this segment (Chen *et al.*, 2022; Hu, 2022), reflecting the maturity of digital infrastructures and the sophistication of B2B service models in these regions. Notably, 64% of the research from developed economies originates in Europe, reinforcing the continent’s leadership in digital innovation, regulatory frameworks and policy-driven transformation (Oliveira *et al.*, 2025). This European dominance suggests a research environment shaped by institutional support, cross-sectoral collaboration and a long-standing tradition of industrial excellence. Regionally,

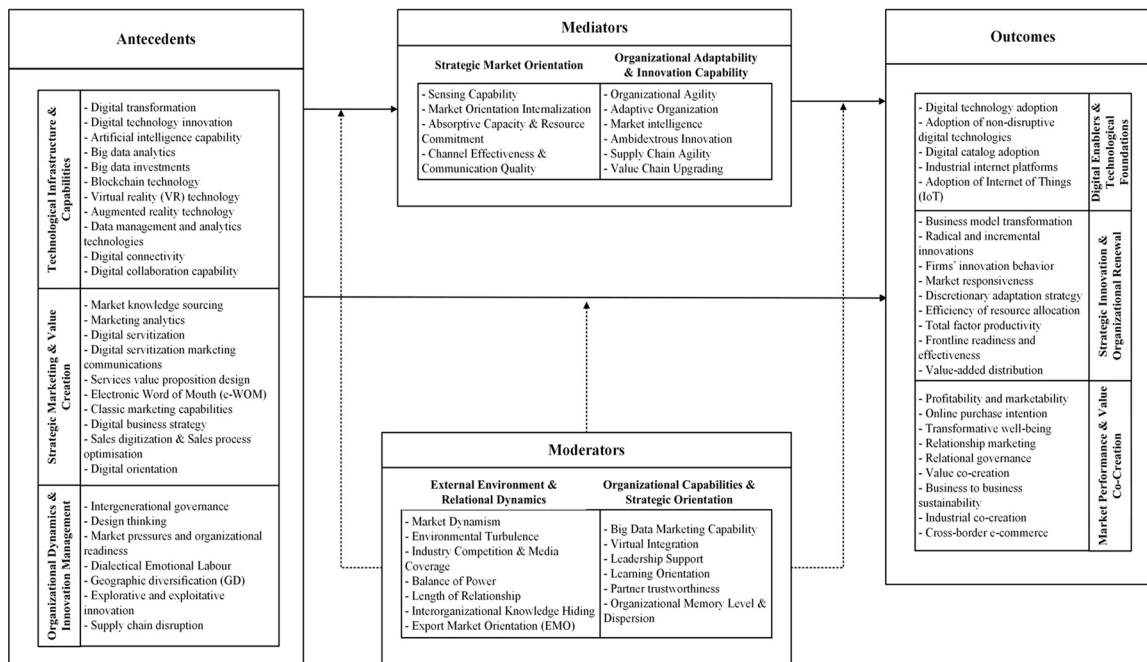
Asia accounts for 90% of the research output from developing countries, highlighting the continent’s rapid digital adoption and its strategic integration of B2B transformation into broader economic development narratives. This regional concentration reflects both the scale and urgency with which Asian economies are embedding digital technologies into their industrial and commercial architectures.

The sectoral focus of the literature is equally revealing. Nearly 47% of the studies in the data set concentrate on manufacturing firms, emphasizing the sector’s pivotal role in DT discourse (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023; Corsaro and Maggioni, 2022; Iriarte *et al.*, 2023; Liu *et al.*, 2025). This thematic emphasis is particularly prominent in economies where industrial modernization is tightly coupled with national competitiveness and export-oriented growth strategies. The manufacturing sector’s prominence in the literature suggests that DT is not merely a technological shift but a strategic imperative for enhancing operational agility and sustaining global relevance. The geographical and sectoral contours of B2B DT offers contextual insights and also invites further inquiry into underrepresented regions and sectors, encouraging a more balanced and globally inclusive research agenda.

6.3 Characteristics

The characteristics dimension of the TCCM framework provides a multi-layered understanding of the constructs that define the empirical and conceptual foundation of DT research in B2B contexts. These constructs are systematically organized in an integrated framework (see Figure 5) via four unified domains including antecedents, mediators, moderators and outcomes, each representing distinct yet interconnected facets of organizational transformation.

Figure 5 Integrated conceptual framework of “digital transformation in B2B marketing” research



Source(s): Authors’ own work

Antecedent constructs serve as the foundational drivers that enable firms to initiate and sustain DT. These are grouped into three thematic categories: technological infrastructure, strategic marketing mechanisms and organizational enablers. Technological infrastructure includes elements such as DT capability (Zafar *et al.*, 2025), digital technology innovation (Liu *et al.*, 2025), AI capability (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023), blockchain technology (Dehghani *et al.*, 2021), digital connectivity (Rajala and Hautala-Kankaanpää, 2023) and digital collaboration (Zhang and Hao, 2024). These constructs reflect the technological readiness and integration capacity of firms. Strategic marketing mechanisms encompass digital servitization (Kamalaldin *et al.*, 2020), electronic word-of-mouth (Liu *et al.*, 2024), digital business strategy (Yin *et al.*, 2024), sales digitalization and sales process optimization (Oliveira *et al.*, 2025) and digital orientation (Ranjan, 2024). These constructs denote the strategic imperatives that guide firms' market engagement and buyer-centric innovation. Organizational enablers include intergenerational governance (Jean *et al.*, 2020), design thinking (Magistretti *et al.*, 2021), geographic diversification (Luu, 2024) and supply chain disruption (Hu, 2022). These constructs highlight the internal capabilities and structural flexibility that support adaptive and innovative responses to digital challenges. Together, these antecedents signal a shift toward capability-based and value-centric paradigms, aligning with contemporary strategic management and marketing theory.

Mediating constructs explain how antecedents translate into performance outcomes, functioning as the internal mechanisms that facilitate strategic impact. These are grouped into strategic market orientation and organizational adaptability. Strategic market orientation includes sensing capability (Endres *et al.*, 2020), market orientation internalization (Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021), absorptive capacity and resource commitment (Rauniar *et al.*, 2023), channel effectiveness and communication quality (Hänninen and Karjaluo, 2017). These constructs articulate the firm's ability to interpret market signals, absorb external knowledge and activate resources effectively. Organizational adaptability comprises organizational agility (Zhang and Hao, 2024), adaptive organizational structures (Wardhana *et al.*, 2022), market intelligence (Yin *et al.*, 2024), ambidextrous innovation (Dong *et al.*, 2024), supply chain agility (Mohaghegh *et al.*, 2024) and value chain upgrading (Liu *et al.*, 2025). These constructs are inherently dynamic and processual, illustrating the internal transformation pathways through which firms evolve, learn and innovate. The mediating domain highlights the importance of intermediate capabilities in bridging technological investments with strategic outcomes.

Moderating constructs establish contingency factors that account for variability in DT outcomes. These are divided into environmental and relational dynamics and organizational capability and strategic orientation. Environmental and relational dynamics include market dynamism (Endres *et al.*, 2020), environmental turbulence (Rajala and Hautala-Kankaanpää, 2023), industry competition (X. Zhang *et al.*, 2025), balance of power (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2024), knowledge hiding (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023) and export market orientation (Luu, 2024). These constructs reflect the

external pressures and relational complexities that influence strategic decision-making. Organizational capability and strategic orientation include big data marketing capability (Wang *et al.*, 2025), virtual integration (Jean *et al.*, 2020), leadership support (Zafar *et al.*, 2025), learning orientation (Abbu and Gopalakrishna, 2021), partner trustworthiness (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023) and organizational memory level and dispersion (Yin *et al.*, 2024). These constructs represent internal contingencies that modulate the effectiveness of DT strategies. By incorporating these moderators, the framework enhances its explanatory robustness and supports more context-sensitive theorization.

Outcome constructs capture the tangible and intangible results of DT, spanning three domains: digital enablers and technological foundations, strategic innovation and organizational renewal and market performance and value cocreation. Digital enablers and technological foundations include digital technology adoption (Rauniar *et al.*, 2023), adoption of nondisruptive digital technologies (Soluk *et al.*, 2023), digital catalog adoption (Wilson and Stephens, 2022) and IoT integration (Naik *et al.*, 2020). These constructs reflect the technological outputs and infrastructure upgrades resulting from transformation initiatives. Strategic innovation and organizational renewal encompass business model transformation (Wardhana *et al.*, 2022), radical and incremental innovation (Shi *et al.*, 2024), market responsiveness (Brewis *et al.*, 2023), resource allocation efficiency (Liu and Hua, 2024), total factor productivity (Yu *et al.*, 2023) and value-added distribution (Liu *et al.*, 2025). These outcomes signal strategic renewal and operational excellence. Market performance and value cocreation include profitability and marketability (X. Zhang *et al.*, 2025), online purchase intention (Erdmann *et al.*, 2021), transformative well-being (Bakri *et al.*, 2023), relationship marketing (Hänninen and Karjaluo, 2017), B2B sustainability (Sivarajah *et al.*, 2020), industrial cocreation (Kostis and Ritala, 2020) and cross-border e-commerce (Elia *et al.*, 2021). These constructs capture both economic performance and stakeholder-centric value creation, offering a holistic view of the impact of DT.

6.4 Methodology

The methodological dimension of the reviewed literature on DT in B2B marketing reveals a balanced orientation, with a discernible tilt toward qualitative inquiry. A substantial proportion of studies (47%) adopt qualitative methodologies, with a strong preference for interview-based designs (Elia *et al.*, 2021; Heeris Christensen *et al.*, 2023; Magistretti *et al.*, 2021; Mosch *et al.*, 2022; Mukhopadhyay *et al.*, 2025; Naik *et al.*, 2020; Pardo *et al.*, 2020). These approaches are mostly effective in depicting contextually embedded insights into organizational practices, managerial cognition and transformation trajectories. These studies contribute to theory-building by illuminating the interpretive frames and strategic logics that underpin digital adoption and integration in B2B settings. Complementing this, quantitative methodologies account for 34% of the literature, primarily through survey-based instruments (Arias-Pérez and Huynh, 2023; Endres *et al.*, 2020; Moschko and Blažević, 2023). These studies typically aim to measure constructs such as digital maturity, strategic alignment, innovation capabilities and performance outcomes. By leveraging structured data collection and

statistical analysis, these contributions enhance the empirical rigor of the field, enabling broader generalizations and comparative insights across industries and geographies. In addition, 19% of the reviewed literature uses secondary data sources, including archival records, financial databases and digital performance metrics (Cheng *et al.*, 2021; Elia *et al.*, 2021; Liu and Hua, 2024). These studies frequently use econometric and statistical modeling techniques to identify macro-level patterns, correlations and causal relationships (Chen, 2022). Such approaches are influential in revealing sectoral trends, benchmarking digital capabilities and assessing the economic impact of transformation initiatives. This methodological diversity not only improves the theoretical development of the field but also aligns with its inherently interdisciplinary and practice-oriented nature.

7. TCCM based future research directions

7.1 Theory development

To advance the theoretical outlook of DT in B2B marketing, future research must move beyond descriptive narratives and engage in deeper conceptual and theoretical integration. A review of the extant literature reveals a concentration around strategic and resource-based theories such as RBV, dynamic capabilities and institutional theory, which have provided valuable insights into firm-level adaptation and competitive advantage. Nevertheless, this theoretical clustering has also led to underutilization of other foundational and emergent perspectives that could augment our understanding of DT's multifaceted nature. One promising avenue is the revitalization of classical theories such as marketing-mix theory and life cycle theory. Although these frameworks have historically shaped marketing thought, their application in digitally transforming B2B contexts remains limited (Caliskan *et al.*, 2020; Schmitz *et al.*, 2019). Marketing-mix theory, with its emphasis on the structure of product, price, place and promotion, poses useful lens to examine how digital technologies reconfigure value propositions and engagement strategies (Ho *et al.*, 2022). When included with life cycle theory (Yang *et al.*, 2025), which conceptualizes B2B organizational and product evolution across stages, researchers can better portray the temporal dynamics of service innovation and platform-based business model transformation. This integration is particularly relevant in platform-driven ecosystems where B2B firms must continuously adapt their offerings and structures in response to technological shifts and market feedback loops. Moreover, the behavioral and relational dimensions of DT remain under-theorized. Theories such as theory of consumption values and change readiness theory offer mechanisms to explore how B2B firms experience and respond to digital change. Theory of consumption values emphasizes the symbolic and experiential aspects of value creation (Tanrikulu, 2021), which are increasingly salient in digital B2B interactions. Change readiness theory, instead, provides a psychological framework for understanding acceptance, resistance and adaptation during organizational change (Mullins and Agnihotri, 2022). Extending these theories to digital contexts allows for richer exploration of emotion-driven engagement, resistance behaviors and identity reconstruction as firms digitize their

operations and interfaces. Following the above explanation, the following propositions have been developed:

- P1. Marketing-mix theory and life cycle theory can be integrated to examine service innovation and platform-driven business model evolution in digitally transforming B2B environments.
- P2. Theory of consumption values and change readiness theory can be extended to explore emotion-driven engagement, resistance behaviors and identity reconstruction among the firms during DT in B2B ecosystems.

In addition, sustainability-oriented theories such as the TBL and legitimacy theory are gaining traction but remain conceptually diffuse in digital servitization research (Kristiansen and Aas, 2024; Ozturkoglu *et al.*, 2025). These frameworks can be used to examine how DT intersects with environmental, social and governance (ESG) imperatives. For instance, legitimacy theory can help explain how B2B firms seek stakeholder approval for digital initiatives that disrupt traditional norms (Kristiansen and Aas, 2025), while TBL can guide inquiry into how digitalization contributes to or detracts from sustainable value creation across economic, environmental and social dimensions (Saha *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the rise of servitization in B2B markets calls for theoretical cross-pollination. Social practice theory, when combined with innovation diffusion or niche theory, can illuminate how routines and behaviors evolve in response to digital stimuli. Based on these arguments, the following propositions have been made:

- P3. Triple bottom line and legitimacy theory can be employed to provide a robust framework to evaluate how digital servitization aligns with or challenges ESG imperatives in B2B settings.
- P4. The combination of social practice theory with innovation diffusion or niche theory can be applied to explain how digital transformation reshapes routines, norms and behaviors in B2B servitization.

7.2 Context

The contextual perspective of DT in B2B marketing remains unevenly distributed across regions and sectors. A review of the literature reveals a strong concentration of empirical studies in parts of Asia and Europe, particularly within manufacturing and technology-intensive industries. While this reflects the global diffusion of DT practices, it also exposes significant gaps in geographical representation and sectoral diversity. Emerging economies in Africa, Latin America and Oceania are increasingly adopting digital technologies to reshape B2B interactions yet remain underrepresented in scholarly discourse. This exclusion limits the generalizability of existing frameworks and overlooks the unique institutional, infrastructural and cultural dynamics that shape DT in these regions. For instance, studies have shown that digital adoption in African B2B contexts often involves advancing traditional infrastructure (Antai and Eze, 2023), while Latin American

firms face distinct regulatory and resource constraints that influence their digital trajectories (Klein and Braido, 2023). Oceania, with its isolated markets and strong service orientation, presents yet another formation of DT. These regional shades assure comparative inquiry to uncover context-specific mechanisms and enhance global theorization.

Similarly, the dominance of manufacturing in B2B DT research has constrained our explanation of how digitization expands in other critical sectors. Logistics and agriculture sectors are undergoing rapid digitalization, often under different institutional pressures and innovation logics. For example, logistics firms are leveraging IoT and blockchain to optimize supply chains (Pelé *et al.*, 2022) and agricultural enterprises are adopting precision farming and platform-based trading (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2025). These sectors present distinct challenges and opportunities that merit focused investigation to capture the heterogeneity of DT across B2B domains. To address these contextual gaps and foster a more inclusive and representative body of knowledge, future research should pursue the following propositions:

- P5. Cross-regional comparative studies should be conducted to examine digital transformation trajectories in underrepresented geographies such as Africa, Latin America and Oceania, thereby enhancing the global inclusivity of B2B marketing research.
- P6. Sector-specific investigations should be extended beyond manufacturing to explore digital transformation in B2B domains such as logistics and agriculture, where institutional constraints and innovation pathways may differ significantly.

7.3 Characteristics

In the context of B2B marketing, advancing the characteristics dimension of DT requires a shift from fragmented construct analysis to a more integrated, multi-level conceptualization. Antecedent characteristics such as AI capability, blockchain readiness, digital servitization and organizational innovation should be reconceptualized as layered enablers of transformation. In B2B settings, these antecedents are rarely standalone drivers, their influence is contingent on how they are embedded within strategic routines (Hanelt *et al.*, 2020), customer engagement models (Srivastava *et al.*, 2024) and interorganizational systems (Hamann-Lohmer *et al.*, 2023). For example, AI capability in a B2B firm is shaped not only by technical infrastructure but also by its integration into sales enablement (Latinovic and Chatterjee, 2022), predictive analytics (Cho and Chiu, 2022) and customer support functions (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, digital servitization reflects a shift in value delivery logic (Wirtz and Kowalkowski, 2022), requiring firms to reconfigure offerings around digitally enabled services and long-term customer outcomes (Struwe and Slepnirov, 2023). Organizational antecedents such as design thinking, innovation orientation and governance structures must be examined for their role in shaping transformation readiness, particularly in firms with complex stakeholder networks and legacy systems. Future studies should explore these antecedents as multi-dimensional

constructs that vary across industries, firm sizes and digital maturity levels:

- P7. Antecedent constructs such as AI capability, blockchain readiness, digital servitization and organizational innovation should be refined and examined as multi-dimensional enablers to assess their differential impact on digital transformation outcomes.

Mediating characteristics such as absorptive capacity, organizational agility and ambidextrous innovation represent the dynamic capabilities through which B2B firms convert digital inputs into strategic outcomes. These mediators are especially critical in industrial contexts where transformation is incremental, path-dependent and shaped by long sales cycles and procurement processes (Ameen and Tarba, 2025; Bettiol *et al.*, 2023; Najafi-Tavani *et al.*, 2023). Absorptive capacity enables firms to internalize knowledge from digital ecosystems (Salam and Bajaba, 2022), while agility supports rapid reconfiguration of processes in response to shifting customer demands or supply chain disruptions (Ameen and Tarba, 2025). Ambidextrous innovation allows firms to simultaneously optimize existing operations and explore new digital business models (Dong *et al.*, 2024). These mediators should be studied as evolving capabilities that interact with antecedents over time, forming adaptive transformation pathways:

- P8. Mediating constructs like absorptive capacity, organizational agility and ambidextrous innovation should be studied as evolving capabilities that interact with DT antecedents-outcomes relationships.

Moderating characteristics including market dynamism, environmental turbulence, leadership support and organizational memory, serve as boundary conditions that shape the strength and direction of transformation relationships. In B2B markets, these moderators are particularly salient due to the prevalence of long-term contracts, regulatory constraints and interorganizational dependencies. Market dynamism may accelerate digital adoption by increasing competitive pressure (Endres *et al.*, 2020), while environmental turbulence such as geopolitical shifts or supply chain shocks can either catalyze or derail transformation efforts (Rajala and Hautala-Kankaanpää, 2023). Leadership support influence how transformation initiatives are prioritized, resourced and sustained (Zafar *et al.*, 2025), especially in firms with entrenched operational logics:

- P9. Moderating constructs such as market dynamism, environmental turbulence and leadership support should be examined as boundary conditions that influence the strength and direction of relationships between digital transformation antecedents-outcomes relationships.

Outcome characteristics such as business model transformation, innovation behavior and market responsiveness reflect the realized effects of DT in B2B firms. These outcomes are not merely operational improvements but signify strategic renewal and repositioning within industrial ecosystems. Business model transformation involve shifts from product-centric to solution-centric offerings, platform-based value creation or ecosystem

participation (Wardhana *et al.*, 2022). Market responsiveness reflects the firm's ability to sense and respond to customer needs in real time, often enabled by digital analytics and agile marketing capabilities (Brewis *et al.*, 2023). Besides, transformative well-being incorporates digital technologies to reshape and enhance individual and societal well-being through innovation, inclusion and sustainable development. Beyond firm-level outcomes, future research should also examine broader market-level effects such as industrial cocreation, cross-border e-commerce and sustainability-oriented transformation. These outcomes signal shifts in strategic orientation and stakeholder engagement and require multi-level theorization that captures firm, network and ecosystem dynamics:

P10. Outcome constructs such as business model transformation, and transformative well-being should be conceptualized as multi-dimensional results of DT, shaped by antecedents, mediators and moderators.

7.4 Methodology

Methodological advancement is critical to deepening our understanding of DT in B2B marketing. Existing studies often rely on single-method designs, limiting their ability to capture the intricacy and dynamism of digital change. To address this, future research should embrace mixed-methods approaches that combine the exploratory richness of qualitative inquiry along generalizability of quantitative analysis. Sequential exploratory designs, for instance, allow researchers to first uncover emergent constructs through interviews or case studies and then validate these insights across broader populations using structured surveys (Koskey *et al.*, 2023). This approach is particularly valuable in DT research, where novel phenomena such as platform composition, algorithmic decision-making and digital servitization, require both conceptual discovery and empirical validation (Gogia *et al.*, 2023). In addition, the temporal nature of DT demands longitudinal and panel designs that can track changes in digital maturity, strategic alignment and performance outcomes over time (Liu and Hua, 2024). These designs enable researchers to move beyond static snapshots and capture the evolving interplay between technology adoption and organizational adaptation. The nonlinear, multi-causal nature of DT demands analytical tools that go beyond linear regression. structural equation modeling (SEM) allows researchers to test complex causal pathways and latent constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2020). Complementing SEM, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) supports configurational theorizing, identifying combinations of conditions that lead to successful transformation (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021). Machine learning methods, including clustering and predictive modeling, offer scalable tools to detect patterns and anomalies in large data sets, especially when combined with digital trace data and web analytics:

P11. Mixed-methods designs, particularly sequential exploratory approaches, should be employed to integrate qualitative depth and quantitative generalizability in examining digital transformation processes within B2B marketing.

P12. Advanced analytical techniques such as structural equation modeling, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis and machine learning should be applied to find nonlinear relationships among organizational capabilities and market dynamics.

8. Implications and limitations of the study

8.1 Theoretical implications

This study comprehensively examines the DT literature in B2B marketing through a systematic review and bibliometric analysis. We contribute to the theoretical understanding of this domain in several significant ways. First, this study offers a systematic synthesis of the evolving literature on DT in B2B marketing, showcasing its development over the past decade. Despite rapid technological advancements such as AI, blockchain and IoT – that have significantly reshaped B2B ecosystems, the existing scholarly landscape remains fragmented and conceptually diffuse. Therefore, this review fills a critical gap by providing a comprehensive overview of the progress made in the field, encompassing the theoretical foundations, sectoral and regional contexts, key constructs and mediating mechanisms and the diverse research methodologies used. By integrating bibliometric analysis with the TCCM framework, the study not only maps the intellectual structure of the domain but also highlights opportunities for theoretical enrichment, contextual inclusivity and methodological innovation.

Second, this study consolidates the key antecedents, mediators and moderators associated with DT in B2B marketing, as presented in the integrated conceptual framework (Figure 4). These constructs are systematically organized into technological, strategic and organizational domains, reflecting their relevance across diverse B2B contexts. The antecedents include digital infrastructure (e.g. AI capability, blockchain readiness), strategic marketing mechanisms (e.g. digital servitization, value proposition design) and organizational enablers (e.g. dynamic capabilities, market readiness). Mediating constructs such as absorptive capacity, organizational agility and ambidextrous innovation articulate the internal mechanisms through which transformation unfolds, while moderating variables like environmental turbulence, leadership support and learning orientation introduce contingency and boundary conditions. This consolidation offers a robust foundation for future empirical investigations. Researchers can adopt the full framework or selectively engage with specific constructs to suit their study objectives. For example, scholars may examine how digital servitization influences innovation behavior in manufacturing firms under varying levels of environmental turbulence or explore the role of absorptive capacity in mediating the relationship between AI capability and business model transformation.

Third, this review scrutinizes the diverse theoretical underpinnings used in DT research within B2B marketing and proposes alternative theories for future exploration. The study identifies 46 distinct theories, ranging from strategic and organizational frameworks to behavioral and sustainability-oriented perspectives, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the field. While dominant theories such as dynamic capabilities,

RBV and organizational learning have provided robust foundations for understanding firm-level transformation, there remains significant scope to enrich the theoretical landscape. For instance, legitimacy theory and TBL theory offer promising avenues to explore stakeholder acceptance and sustainability alignment in digital servitization initiatives. Similarly, value consumption theory and change readiness theory can be extended to unpack emotional engagement, resistance behaviors and identity formation among employees and customers navigating digital transitions. The integration of niche theory and social practice theory may also illuminate the evolution of embedded routines and collaborative dynamics in platform-based ecosystems. Finally, the thematic analysis conducted in this review offers valuable insights into emerging themes. These themes reflect the evolving priorities of the field and provide a structured lens for future inquiry.

8.2 Practical implications

Beyond its academic contributions, this review offers actionable insights for B2B firms navigating DT. First, the findings equip managers with a comprehensive understanding of the strategic, technological and organizational factors that shape transformation outcomes. The integrated conceptual framework (Figure 4) reveals that several firm-level enablers such as digital infrastructure (e.g. AI capability, blockchain readiness), strategic marketing mechanisms (e.g. digital servitization, value proposition design) and organizational capabilities (e.g. dynamic capabilities, market readiness) play a pivotal role in driving successful transformation. In addition, mediating constructs like absorptive capacity and organizational agility, along with moderating factors such as environmental turbulence and leadership support, influence how firms adapt and innovate. Second, B2B marketers and strategists should actively incorporate these constructs into their transformation roadmaps. For instance, enhancing absorptive capacity can accelerate the internalization of digital tools, while fostering organizational agility enables firms to respond swiftly to market modifications. Moreover, understanding the contingency effects of industry competition and learning orientation can help tailor transformation strategies to specific sectoral and regional contexts. By aligning technological investments with strategic and organizational readiness, firms can optimize DT efforts, improve stakeholder engagement and achieve sustainable performance gains. Finally, our study will assist B2B marketing managers by familiarizing them with the theoretical environment surrounding DT and its implications for organizational perception and strategic alignment. The constructs identified in our integrated framework serve as critical factors for attracting and retaining business clients in digitally evolving ecosystems. Therefore, we recommend that managers apply this framework to gain deeper insights into how firms perceive, internalize and respond to DT initiatives.

8.3 Limitations

Like other bibliometric and systematic review studies, this study may also suffer from certain limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, our review included only studies published in peer-reviewed journals (ranked A* and A in the ABDC ranking) and written in English. This approach excluded conference proceedings, journals classified under ABDC B and C tiers and other grey literature, as well as works published in other languages. In line with Tsotsou and Boukis (2022) suggestion, we believe

that the studies identified adequately represent the current body of literature on DT in B2B marketing; therefore, including every available article may not be necessary or feasible. Second, to identify and review relevant literature, we followed the PRISMA and AMSTAR 2 protocols. Despite the robustness of this methodology, future studies could consider adopting more comprehensive systematic review approaches (e.g. SPAR-4-SLR protocol; Paul *et al.*, 2021). Finally, we realize that the thematic analysis and the identification of future research directions may be subject to scholarly debate. However, the analytical procedure was conducted in a systematic and transparent manner, thereby enhancing methodological accuracy and reducing potential selection bias. It is also important to note that DT within the B2B context remains in an emergent stage and often lacks a clear strategic orientation. The findings of this study suggest that the growing convergence between digitalization and B2B markets depicts frequent opportunities for continued academic exploration.

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