

Makale türü/Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article

THE CONSUMER'S JOURNEY IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

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Abstract

Increasing consumer interaction thanks to the development of communication facilities has great importance on company decisions. Digital transformation, one of these decisions, necessitated the transfer of actual business processes to digital. The central dynamic that reveals this necessity is the digitalization of the consumer. With the digitalization of the consumer, the attitudes of the companies towards the consumers and the expectations of the consumers from the companies have changed. In this context, it has been aimed to compile and examine the studies with the keywords "customer" and "consumer" in the publications on digital transformation in the WOS (Web of Science) database. Therefore, this study examines academically qualified studies on both digital transformation and consumers through a conceptual framework. On digital transformation, a current concept, some remarkable consumer-oriented studies have been carried out in Germany, Russia, Italy, the USA, Spain, and England. It has been observed that the keywords of digitalization, big data, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital entrepreneurship are the subject matters studied in this context. These are the most frequently used keywords in digital transformation and digital consumer. It also reveals possible literature gaps on which future studies in this context can focus. The research results extracted from 432 studies provide an overview of the studies on the digital transformation between 2010-2021. It also contributes to the literature by visualizing the role of the consumer in digital transformation.

Key Words: Digital transformation, Digital marketing, Consumer, Bibliometric analysis

TÜKETİCİNİN DİJİTAL DÖNÜŞÜM SÜRECİNDEKİ YOLCULUĞU

Öz

İletişim olanaklarının gelişmesi nedeniyle artan tüketici etkileşimi, şirket kararlarında büyük öneme sahip olmuştur. Bu kararlardan biri olan dijital dönüşüm, gerçek iş süreçlerinin dijitalle aktarılmasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Bu gerekliliği ortaya çıkaran temel dinamik ise tüketicinin dijitalleşmesidir. Tüketicilerin dijitalleşmesi sayesinde firmaların tüketicilere yönelik tutumu ve tüketicilerin onlardan beklentileri değişime uğramıştır. Bu bağlamda çalışmada, WOS (Web of Science) veri tabanında yer alan dijital dönüşüm üzerine yazılmış çalışmalardan "müşteri" ve "tüketici" anahtar kelimelerini içerenlerin toplanması ve incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Dolayısıyla çalışma, dijital dönüşüm üzerine yazılmış akademik açıdan nitelikli çalışmaları kavramsal bir çerçeve üzerinden incelenmektedir. Güncel bir kavram olan dijital dönüşüm konusunda Almanya, Rusya, İtalya, ABD, İspanya ve İngiltere'de tüketici yönelimli dikkat çekici çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Dijitalleşme, büyük veri, e-ticaret, yapay zekâ, makine öğrenimi ve dijital girişimcilik anahtar kelimelerinin bu bağlamda çalışıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Dijital dönüşüm ve dijital tüketici bağlamında en çok kullanılan kelimeler olmuştur. Ayrıca çalışma, ileride bu alanda yapılacak çalışmaların odaklanması muhtemel literatür boşluklarını açığa çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. 432 çalışmanın incelenmesiyle ortaya çıkarılan sonuçlar, dijital dönüşüm alanında 2010-2021 yılında dijital dönüşüm altında yapılan çalışmalara yönelik bir genel bakış sağlamaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca literatüre dijital dönüşümün rolünün literatür destekli olarak görselleştirilmesi ile de katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Dönüşüm, Dijital Pazarlama, Tüketici, Bibliyometrik Analiz

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Bu Yayına Atıfta Bulunmak İçin/Cite as: Tuna, M.F. (2021), Consumer's Journey in the Digital Transformation Process., *Düzce Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 11(2), 308-320.

1. Introduction

The role of suppliers in the traditional marketing approach has begun to make a distinction because of the changes in the market structure. Due to these changes, the balance of power shifted from suppliers to customers. As a result, suppliers resorted to various efforts to attract and persuade customers (Durmaz and Efendioglu, 2016:35). These competition-enhancing efforts have increased customers' choice of alternatives and have made it difficult to determine their wishes and needs in purchasing products. This phenomenon has caused customers to feel the need for serious questioning before making a purchase decision, which is another factor that necessitates the change of traditional marketing understanding. The developments in information technologies accompanying the difference in marketing performance have caused many companies to operate in various sectors in order to undergo digital transformation. Thus, consumers have begun to play an active role in the marketing approach brought by the new age with instant interaction accompanied by digital transformation (Schultz, 2016:277).

The increasing trend of digital transformation in the last ten years has led to a revolution in the way companies do business; accordingly, it has caused a change in relations with consumers, suppliers, and other stakeholders (Matarazzo et al., 2021:642). Relations with the consumer have been heavily influenced by digital transformation because of the increase in communication opportunities of consumers. This has led to the formation of a process that can be expressed as the digitalization or digital transformation of the consumer. With this process, consumers have come to demand the opportunities offered by the digital world more intensely and have forced the businesses they prefer to provide them with these opportunities. Digitalizing consumers has required companies to evolve to use digital technologies that allow them to create more value and to develop digital business models (Verhoef et al., 2021:1).

The digitalization of the economy and business processes has caused the digital consumer to be at the centre of academic studies. Today, studies on the effects of digital transformation on consumers continue to increase. Accordingly, the relative importance of compiling the information included in the studies that deals with the digital consumer on its own is rising. Giving a summary of the dimensions of the digital consumer and compiling the results of qualified studies on this subject is a powerful alternative way to create a foresight about the digital consumer's behaviour. In this context, this study aims to compile and examine the studies containing the keywords 'customer' and 'consumer' in publications on digital transformation in the WOS (Web of Science) database, which is a generally accepted academic database in the scientific world. It also aims to examine the qualified academic studies on the digital consumer from a conceptual perspective and reveal possible literature gaps on which future studies to be made in this context can focus. This study is thought to show the historical development process of digital consumer studies and to guide future studies accordingly.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Consumer and Digital Customer

The fact that companies undergo digital transformation one after another creates a negative competitive element for other companies that have not yet taken this action. Digital transformation has led to a change in the demand of consumers; thus, it differentiates their wants and needs. In addition to focusing on traditional elements such as service quality, companies also aim to catch the technology line required by the age. Online companies and physical businesses are looking for ways to digitalize and increase competitiveness within the possibilities of technology (Sun et al., 2020:1).

These developments have led to the emergence of the digital consumer concept. Today, digital consumers; attach importance to digital consumer interaction (Singh et al., 2021), have a

digital subculture of their own (Dey et al., 2020), adopt social media communication (Stephen, 2016), feel the need to share their knowledge in all digital channels (Belk and Llamas, 2013), demand fast and instant information (Dwivedi et al., 2021) and investigate more than the traditional consumer in the market (James, 2021). Moreover, they are aware of their rights in the digital world (Helberger et al., 2004). They demand the protection of the requests by the company they prefer (Rothchild, 1998). They can choose many physical and non-physical distribution channel alternatives (Yuruk-Kayapinar, 2020) and have the opportunity to compare many options before purchasing (Mishra, 2018), can be in a challenging structure (Gelbrich et al., 2021). They pay more attention to the traditional customer (Yakob, 2015) and give importance to the instant evaluation of their feedback (Bhandari et al., 2021). Also, the data derived from them can be examined instantly through various technological methods due to technological improvements (Gussen et al., 2020; Tupikovskaja-Omovie and Tyler, 2021). This type of data on their purchasing behaviour is strictly considered an essential part of big data in the business (Fernández-Rovira et al., 2021). This fact obligates that they must be regarded as a stakeholder that must be constantly interacted with (Piccinini et al., 2015).

As the name suggests, a digital customer is a customer who interacts with a company in any non-physical way and uses internet technologies to buy and sell products or services. The reduction of the digitalization context to the social dimension has led to these customers to gain a more apparent profile and identity (Singh et al., 2021). This identity has caused them to have a completely different business perception, from their efforts to promote the products and services they purchase to their distribution channels (Sun et al., 2020). This customer is adopting a sedentary lifestyle (Internet-1), mainly from generation Z (Matveeva and Krasnov, 2019), actively using social media and digital communication tools (Berman and Kesterson-Townes, 2012). This is also a type of customer who is skilled at building brand communities and tribes (Hamilton and Hower, 2012), familiar with digital payment methods and cryptocurrencies (Bagla and Sancheti, 2018), expects 24/7 service (Alam et al., 2019), and is keen on using intelligent technologies (Foroudi et al., 2018).

2.2. Bibliometric Studies on the Digital Consumer & Customer

No national or international bibliometric research on direct digital transformation and the digital consumer has been found in the literature synchronously. However, some bibliometric studies are carried out in the digital transformation infrastructure. It is understood from the literature that these studies are prevalent today and have gained importance in the last few years. The first study strongly related to this study was conducted by Chawla and Goyal (2020). Their study was about emerging trends in digital transformation via bibliometric analysis. They have showed that digital transformation has been the most studied topic among studies related to digital transformation. Manufacturing and strategy in digital transformation have followed this as the second and third places in terms of popularity.

The databases used in the bibliometric studies may become varied. Since it is the most frequently used database in the literature on subjects that are indirectly close to the subject of this study, it is thought to primarily refer to the articles that benefited from the Scopus database. In one of them, Schaller et al. (2021) examined articles on sustainable business models and digital transformation with the help of bibliometric analysis. In another study using the same database, Dunakhe and Panse (2021) applied bibliometric research to articles on the effects of digital marketing.

On the other hand, Verma et al. (2021) focused on articles containing "digital marketing" simply. Abbas et al. (2020) performed a bibliometric analysis to investigate the global electronic

word-of-mouth trend. Finally, Miskiewicz (2020) conducted bibliometric research on the internet, a sub-element of digital transformation in marketing.

The studies which reveal the results of bibliometric analysis of articles in a limited number of journals in the literature are analysed. In a close study in terms of subject-matter, a bibliometric analysis of articles published in three leading journals in the field of digital marketing communication (Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, and International Journal of Advertising) has been performed by Kim et al. (2021).

There are also bibliometric studies on theses in the literature. For instance, Zeren and Kaya (2020) performed a bibliometric analysis of the dissertations on digital marketing. They have analysed total of 334 studies including digital marketing concepts in the title, summary, or keywords of TR Dizin and National Thesis Centre (YÖKTEZ) via bibliometric analysis.

Finally, there are studies on articles in the Web of Science (WOS) database. In one of these studies, papers on digital transformation and business economics were questioned and subjected to bibliometric analysis (Pan et al., 2020). In another study, using the same database, bibliometric analysis was applied to articles written on credit usage behaviour in the context of digital consumers (Carlsson et al., 2017). In their study, Martínez-Polo and Navarro-Beltrá (2020) used the papers in the Scopus and Dialnet databases and the WOS database, and they performed bibliometric analysis to reveal the relationship between digital company reputation and collaborative economy.

In conclusion, although there is a bibliometric analysis in the field of management and the business world on digital transformation, studies on digital marketing and digital transformation have been concentrated in the last two years (Chinotaikul and Vinayavekhin, 2020). However, there has been no study on digital transformation and the role of the consumer in this atmosphere. It is understood that bibliometric analysis was not performed. It is thought that this study will reveal the dimensions of the digital consumer concept based on digital transformation.

3. Method

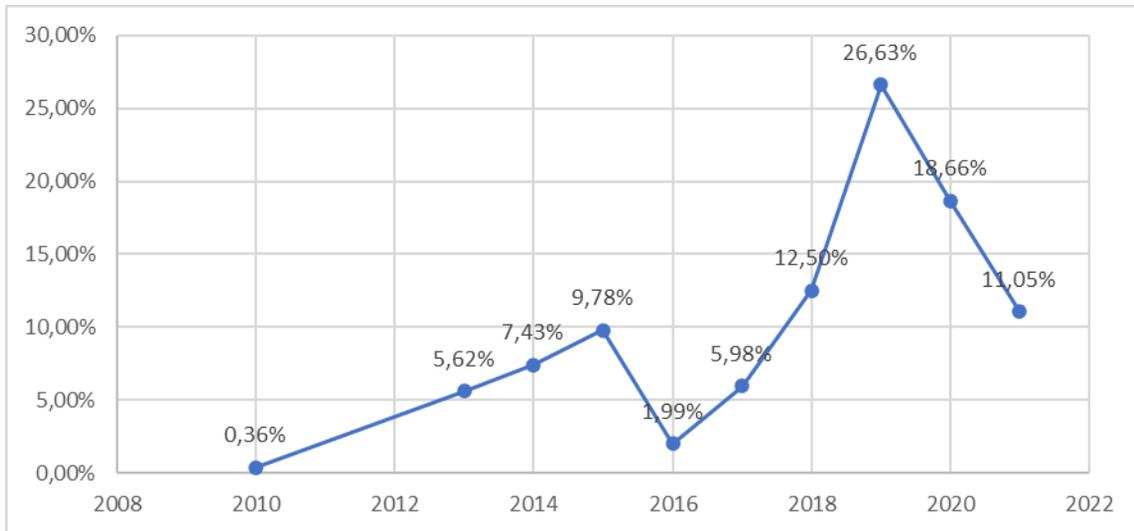
Bibliometric analysis helps investigate patterns and characteristics; it facilitates the discovery, organization, and expression of the work undertaken in a specific field in a particular discipline (Kim et al., 2021: 553). The bibliometric analysis also draws inferences on articles' interconnection by analysing their citation and co-citation performed by other articles (Chawla and Goyal, 2020:1470). In this study, studies with the words 'customer' and 'consumer' in publications on 'digital transformation' published in the Web of Science Social Science Citation Index database between 2010-2021 were included in the research process.

This study reviews the studies published on digital transformation and digital consumers in literature. Along these lines, studies related to digital transformation and the digital consumer are often involved in more than one category. A 'topic-based' search was used in the Web of Science Social Science Citation Index database. A total of 432 articles were reached by examining all studies including articles, congress papers, books, book chapters, etc. for predetermined search terms. The results are stored to include all essential article information such as title, abstract, author(s), keywords, references.

4. Findings

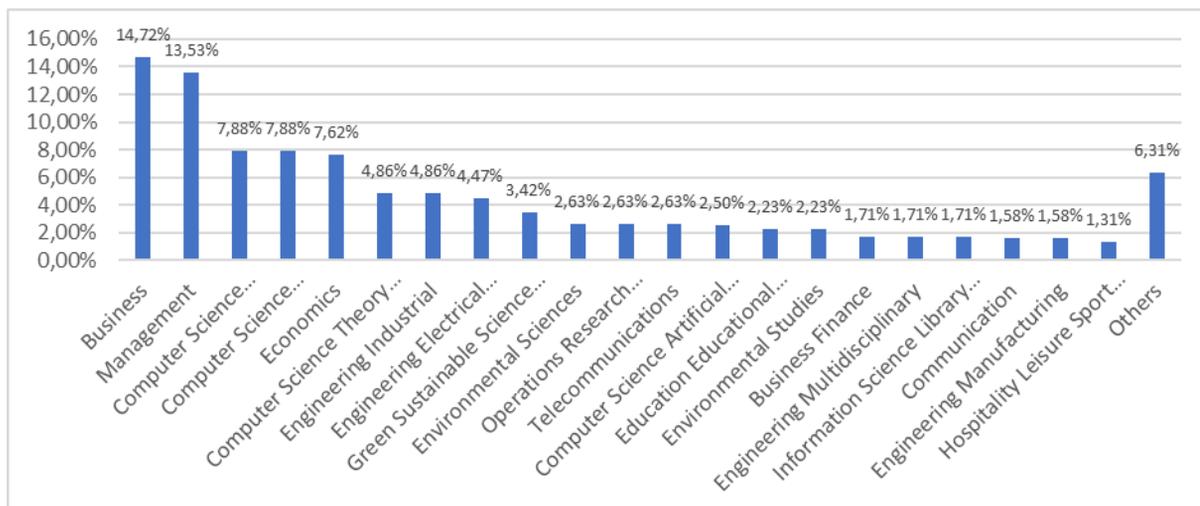
For the 432 studies in the WOS database, firstly, the number of publications by years was examined. The results of this review are shown in Chart 1.

Chart-1. Number of Publications by Years



Publications on digital transformation have started to take part in the literature since 2010 and have attracted the attention of researchers with an increasing trend except for the ones published between 2016 and 2020. When the researches of the last 11 years are taken into consideration, it is seen that the most researches were done in 2019 at a rate of 26,63%. Chiefly in this year when most of the USA technology expenditures were shifted to digital transformation (Internet-2) academic studies have shown an increase in amount. In 2011 and 2012, there was no publication on the subject matter. It has also been determined that the number of publications fluctuates between 2019 and 2020. This is because of Covid19 pandemics. After Covid19 started in 2019, the number of publications dramatically decreased. 432 studies analysed in this study are categorized according to their fields, and they are shown in Chart 2.

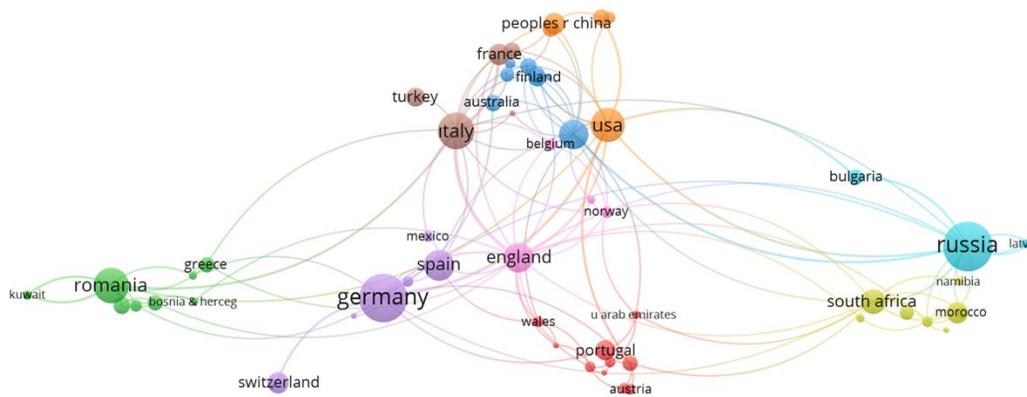
Chart-2. Number of Publications by Category



When the studies in the WOS database are examined via bibliometric analysis, it can be said that the disciplines with the most research done on the subject are divided into two categories. The first category is ‘business’, ‘management’, and ‘economics’ at a rate of 35,87% while the second one is ‘computer science, engineering, sustainability, and communication’ at a rate of 33,38%.

Regarding the keywords – ‘consumer’ and ‘customer’, the most published studies are in the fields of business with 112 studies and of management with 103 studies. The fields of computer science information systems and computer science interdisciplinary applications with 60 publications for each are the second most popular fields. Besides, studies in economics with 58 publications are included in the literature. The number of publications by country was examined for 432 studies in the WOS database. The results of this review are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of Digital Transformation Studies Published Between 2010-2021 by Country

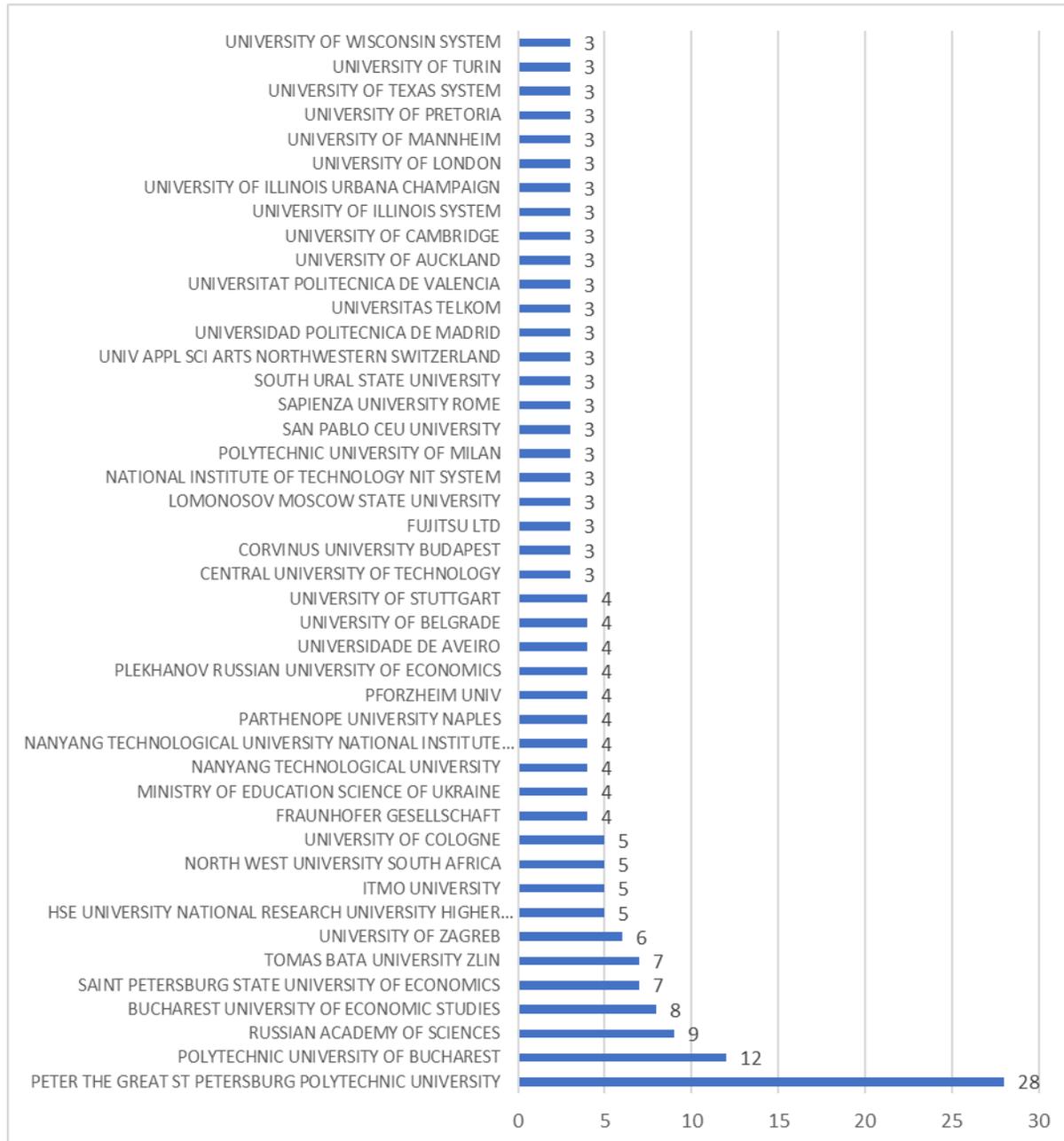


Interpretations were made according to both WoS numbers and balloon sizes.

As shown in Figure 1 (size of the representation), the countries which have the highest number of studies are Russia and Germany. Russia ranks first with 62 publications regarding the number of articles produced while Germany ranks second with 58 journals. Italy with 33 journals, Romania with 32 publications, and the USA with 29 studies follow these countries.

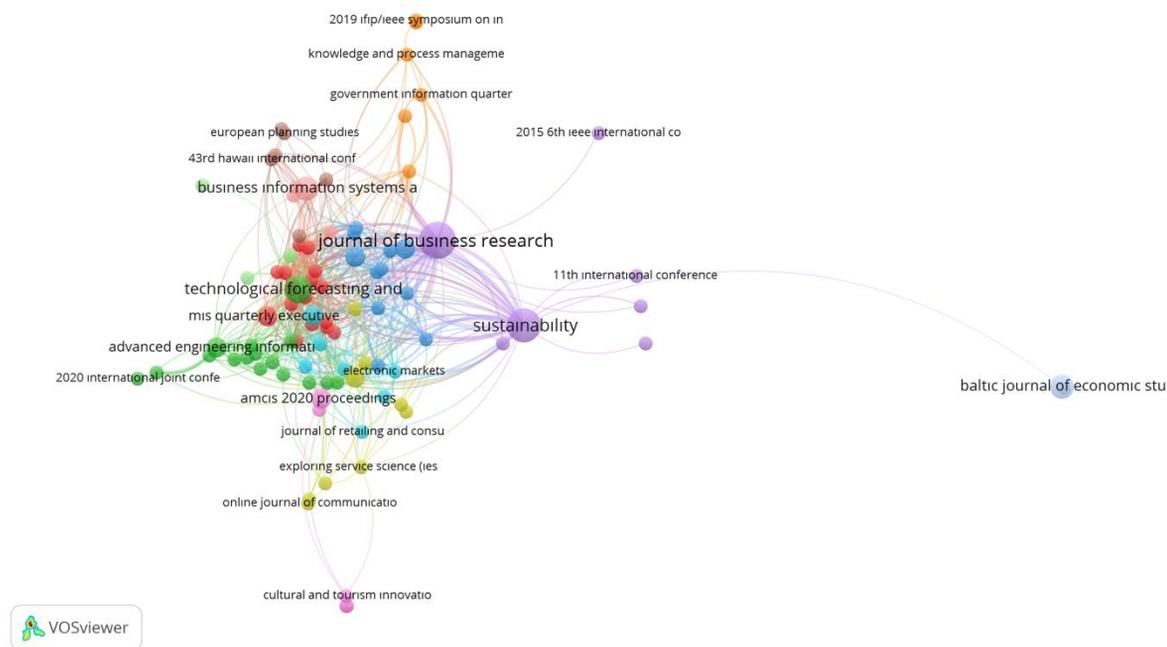
When the citation numbers of the produced publications are examined, Germany ranks the first with 451 citations. Italy is in the second place with 271 citations after Germany while Bulgaria has 226 citations. Other countries with the highest number of citations are the USA with 171 citations, France with 140 citations, and Spain with 139 citations.

When the studies by countries are examined, it is seen that the studies of 2020 are concentrated in Spain, Romania, Russia, Italy, and England. It is seen that researches in Germany which is one of the countries where the most studies were conducted between 2017 and 2019. It is noteworthy that studies on digital transformation have been given importance in the last 2 or 3 years in Turkey. The bibliometric analysis process includes journals in which digital transformation studies were published. The results are shown in Figure 2.

Chart 3. Number of Publications by University

When the data in Graph 3 is examined, it is seen that the majority of the studies on digital transformation were carried out in Russian universities. With 28 publications, Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University draws attention as the university that publishes the most ones on digital transformation in the world.

Finally, the results showing the journals which include the studies published on digital transformation are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Journals Publishing Digital Transformation Studies between 2010 and 2021

When we examine the studies in which the digital transformation concept is used of "consumer" and "customer", it is seen that the "Journal of Business Research" takes the first place (35,87%), and the "Sustainability" journal takes the second place (33,38%). Since the concept of digital transformation is a current issue, it can be seen on the map in Figure 3, where studies on this subject are frequently included in congresses.

5. Conclusion

In addition to its contribution to sales rates and productivity, digitalization also offers some benefits in terms of innovations in value creation and newly established interaction with customers. Digital transformation can shape or change all existing business models by providing a new business model to companies (Downes and Nunes, 2013). Literature review attempts to map the existing data to identify research gaps that may be of interest for the future and highlights its current nature. However, to make this complex situation easier with the help of technology, bibliometric analyses make a quantitative analysis of the literature in general (Tranfield et al., 2003). This study examines the reflections on the concept of digital transformation in terms of "consumer" and "customer" as the words published in journals in the Web of Science database. 432 studies were examined for this study. All of them were included in the analysis. These studies were examined according to countries, keywords, and journals by using the "VOSviewer" program so as to show the analysis results by the mapping method. As a result of these analyzes, it has been determined that the studies published between 2010 and 2021 have increased since 2016. On digital transformation as a current concept, there are remarkable studies carried out in Germany, Russia, Italy, the USA, Spain, and England. It has been observed that the keywords as digitalization, big data, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital entrepreneurship are the words or key concepts used extensively in the studies published frequently in congress papers.

The most studied topics seen in our study are digital technologies and industry 4.0, which are also seen in other studies about digital transformation (Chawla and Goyal, 2020) and digital consumers. Digital technologies are still getting wider attention using digital consumer as a keyword. On the other hand, industry 4.0 also contains new technologies such as the Internet of

Things (IoT), big data, cyber-physical systems, and augmented reality. This is why studies related to the digital consumer are also related to digital transformation. The new type of consumer accepts digital transformation because of their new needs, requiring a high level of information technologies. These technologies also form the basis of Industry 4.0, one of the most studied topics in the literature about digital transformation and digital consumers. Moreover, there is no study related to both Industry 5.0 and digital transformation within the consumer context.

Literature shows that digital transformation has also been studied in consumer behaviour. On the other hand, topics studied less in the study about digital consumers were B2B and C2B. It can be implicated that C2C and B2C, which have relatively higher importance within e-commerce, can be subjected to possible future research because digital consumers have changed their 'digital shopping behaviour' via these platforms first. After B2B and C2B, e-CRM, e-health, and mobile payment have been determined as less studied topics in the study. Among these topics, e-CRM could be a key concept to future studies with its sub-dimensions including customer acquisition, customer retention, customer churn, and customer win-back. Moreover, studies that measure digital customer lifetime value are another literature gap that can be a subject matter for future studies. Digital consumers are impatient consumers who expect quick and agile solutions from businesses. New generation software and information systems generated in line with digital transformations have made businesses more intelligent, fluid, productive, and agile. The literature review conducted in this study also has verified this phenomenon. Chatbots, which serve as a contributor mechanism to these aspects of the digital consumer, have started to be a subject matter in the literature. Yet, hybrid studies that combine chatbots with big data and expert systems can be studied as further research. Moreover, this type of quick response software can be handled in the context of e-service quality in e-commerce. Because digital consumers need to be handled in a new business model, keywords such as "business models" have been encountered in the literature. These models are considered a key determinant of sustainability in digital transformation (Schaller et al., 2021). Capabilities and consumer interactions in both digital platforms and e-born businesses can be subjects for future studies. Due to the relative importance of digital businesses, conceptual architecture has become more important in software processes. The analysis conducted in this study indicates this concept in connection with artificial intelligence. It is predicted that future studies focus on business models and digital transformation and consider these phenomena within the context of sustainability. It can also be implicated that studies that use big data and expert systems in building design architecture will become more popular in a few years.

Another literature gap depicted in this study is the digital transformation within the frame of information systems. Decision support systems such as geographical information systems, expert systems, and hospital information management systems can be investigated within digital transformation and digital consumer mechanisms. On the other hand, modern supervised and unsupervised prediction methods except for artificial intelligence (because there are some studies about it) can be integrated into future studies in the context of digital transformation and digital consumers. The digital consumer's perception, attitude, or behaviours can be examined as part of exploratory and thematic studies. Digital transformation has a great effect on the financial world—this phenomenon is called Fintech. Although there are some studies about digital transformation and Fintech, there are no studies that evaluate the digital capabilities and behaviours of e-investors. So possible further researches can explain digital consumers' behaviour within e-traders, and digital platforms and take part in the digital financial world. Mobile payment, another studied topic in the literature, maybe integrated around digital investors and finance market consumers. On the other hand, it can be thought that studies related to Blockchain technologies will pave the way for studies subjecting digital consumers to the finance sector.

It is a fact that this study has some limitations. Examining only the journals in the WOS database constitutes the first limitation of this study. As Scopus, Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic Search, etc. has increased the number of publications examined during the research process by including databases in the study, this study can provide information that will shed light on other studies on digital transformation. The second limitation of the study is the keywords examined. During the research process, the only concepts of digital transformation are discussed in terms of "consumer" and "customer." That identifies the studies containing the keywords of digitalization and "big data," which have been frequently studied with the subject of digital transformation, and by including these publications in the analysis process in future studies it will help examine the existing literature from a broader perspective.

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