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Platform Strategy Theory: A Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Review of Evolution, Methodologies, and Research Frontiers

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

Platform strategy theory has emerged as a central framework for understanding value creation, competitive dynamics, and governance in digital ecosystems and multi-sided markets. This study combines a systematic literature review with a bibliometric analysis, drawing on data from Scopus, Web of Science, and Dimensions, and visualizing them in VOS viewer to map the intellectual structure and global collaboration patterns of the field. The analysis traces the theory's evolution from foundational economic models of network effects and modularity toward more interdisciplinary frameworks incorporating strategic management, information systems, and social science perspectives. Co-authorship and co-citation networks reveal a research landscape increasingly distributed across international institutions, with notable concentration in the United States, China, and the United Kingdom, and an emerging role for institutions in Europe and the Asia Pacific region. Thematically, the field is shifting from static competitive models toward dynamic governance, ecosystem design, and technology-driven platform scaling. Despite significant theoretical development, three persistent gaps are identified: the absence of a unified, integrative framework; limited empirical validation of core constructs, such as network effects and modularity, across non-Western and non-technology contexts; and insufficient attention to governance tensions across platform lifecycle stages. Practical applications are examined in healthcare, agriculture, and e-commerce, with analysis of platforms including Uber, Airbnb, and John Deere. The review concludes with a research agenda addressing governance modeling, cross-industry empirical work, behavioral adoption mechanisms, underrepresented regional contexts, and the integration of artificial intelligence and blockchain into platform governance.

Keywords: Platform strategy theory, digital platforms, network effects, multisided markets, bibliometric analysis, modular architecture, digital transformation, ecosystem governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped competitive dynamics across industries, making platform strategy theory one of the most consequential frameworks in contemporary management research. Recent research highlights the importance of platforms in creating value through multisided markets and network effects (Antipina, 2020). Platforms are conceptualized as nested hierarchies of systems interacting with their environment, encompassing IT artifacts, governance mechanisms, and strategies (Poniatowski *et al.,* 2022). The success of platform businesses relies on creating and monetizing network externalities, with optimal pricing structures dependent on indirect network effects and price sensitivity (Antipina, 2020). Platform strategies can further help achieve organizational ambidexterity through domain, temporal, and organizational separation (Wan *et al.,* 2017). Furthermore, the co-development of business models and ecosystems offers insights into platform competitive dynamics and value creation mechanisms (Ahn & Baden-Fuller, 2020). As platforms continue to evolve, competition is shifting toward service characteristics and pricing, while IoT platforms are expected to drive future growth.

The rise of the digital economy has fundamentally transformed traditional business structures, shifting them toward platform-based models that emphasize networked value creation (Koch & Windsperger, 2017). At the heart of this transformation is the strategic management of multisided markets and the ability to leverage network effects to enhance value generation and maintain sustainable competitive advantage (Van Alstyne & Parker, 2017). Established companies are reconfiguring their resources, capabilities,

and relationships to develop multisided platforms, utilizing accumulated expertise to identify technological opportunities and navigate operational challenges (Dell'Era *et al.,* 2021). In this context, the concept of the interacted actor highlights the collaborative role of both human and non-human agents in driving value co-creation within platform ecosystems (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2020). Successful platforms achieve competitive advantage by fostering dynamic, feedback-driven environments that attract and retain users, thereby increasing overall value and surpassing traditional linear models (Van Alstyne & Parker, 2017). Platform strategies have become increasingly important in the digital era, with major companies like Amazon, Uber, and Facebook exemplifying their impact (Gawer, 2022). These strategies leverage network effects, manage complementor dynamics, and create competitive advantages (Kim, 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017), enabling organizations to design and manage complex digital ecosystems that promote innovation and competitiveness (Cusumano *et al.,* 2019).

Despite growing scholarly interest, the theoretical landscape of platform strategy remains fragmented. Contributions have emerged from industrial organization economics, strategic management, information systems, and technology management, each offering partial accounts of platform dynamics without converging on a unified framework (Förster *et al.,* 2022; Mamonov, 2023). While qualitative literature reviews have mapped individual dimensions of platform theory, a systematic examination of its intellectual structure, global collaboration patterns, and thematic evolution has yet to be conducted comprehensively. This study addresses that gap through a combined systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis of platform strategy theory. Bibliometric data were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and Dimensions and analyzed using VOSviewer to construct co-authorship, co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, and organizational collaboration networks. This dual approach enables both qualitative synthesis of theoretical developments and quantitative mapping of the field's intellectual architecture.

The study pursues five interrelated objectives: to clarify the theoretical boundaries and foundational concepts of platform strategy; to trace the theory's evolution and identify contemporary research trajectories; to evaluate the primary methodological tools employed in the field; to assess the theory's core strengths and acknowledged limitations; and to outline its practical applications and implications for business and policy. Together, these objectives position this review as a contribution to both the theoretical consolidation of platform strategy research and its practical advancement across diverse industry contexts. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the definition, conceptual foundations, and evolution of platform strategy theory, supported by bibliometric network visualizations. Section 3 examines the tools and methodological approaches used in platform strategy research. Section 4 evaluates the theory's strengths and limitations. Section 5 discusses practical applications across healthcare, agriculture, and e-commerce. Section 6 presents a forward-looking research agenda, and Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a two-pronged approach combining a narrative literature review with a bibliometric analysis to examine the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of platform strategy theory. Relevant literature was retrieved from three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Dimensions. Search terms included "platform strategy," "platform ecosystems," "multisided markets," "network effects," and "digital platforms," applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. The search was not restricted by date to capture the full developmental arc of the theory, though particular attention was given to publications from 2017 onward to reflect contemporary research trajectories. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters written in English were considered. Bibliometric mapping and network visualization were conducted using VOSviewer, generating co-authorship networks at the author, institutional, and country levels, alongside keyword co-occurrence and co-citation networks. The narrative synthesis component drew on the retrieved literature to examine definitional debates, theoretical evolution, methodological approaches, strengths and limitations, and practical applications of platform strategy theory across diverse industry contexts.

3. Literature Review of Platform Strategy Theory

3.1 Definition and Conceptual Foundations of Platform Strategy

Platform strategy theory fundamentally revolves around the role of intermediaries that enable and orchestrate interactions between producers and consumers. Central to this theory is the leveraging of network effects and modular design principles, which together facilitate value creation at scale (Domenico *et al.,* 2024; Kim *et al.,* 2020; Mukhopadhyay *et al.,* 2024; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014). These platforms function as vital infrastructures supporting a diverse array of complementary products and services, efficiently matching buyers with suppliers to foster mutually beneficial exchanges (Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014; Zhang, 2014). Platforms can be broadly categorized into product platforms, industry platforms, and multi-sided markets, each serving distinct strategic objectives and operating within unique contexts (Zhang, 2014). The rapid proliferation of digital platforms has profoundly reshaped numerous industries, demanding comprehensive strategic frameworks that account for dynamic market forces, partnership ecosystems, unique differentiators, staged development processes, and sustainable profit models (Mamonov, 2023).

Within platform ecosystems, innovation and collaboration emerge as key drivers of competitive advantage. Firms increasingly shift their focus from standalone products to the collective capabilities embedded within the network, enabling co-creation and shared value generation (Mamonov, 2023; Zhang, 2014). This ecosystem-centric perspective underscores the importance of managing interdependencies among platform owners, complementors, and users to cultivate vibrant, evolving networks of innovation (Förster *et al.,* 2022; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). The concept of a platform is inherently multidisciplinary, with definitions varying across industrial organization economics, strategic management, and technology management (Förster *et al.,* 2022; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Gawer, 2014). From an industrial organization economics standpoint, platforms are often conceptualized as two-sided or multisided markets that reduce transaction costs and facilitate value creation by enabling direct interactions between distinct user groups (Review of Research on the Platform's Ecosystem, 2024). Strategic management scholars emphasize platforms as strategic tools that confer competitive advantage through ecosystem governance and innovation facilitation (Domenico *et al.,* 2024; Mukhopadhyay *et al.,* 2024). Meanwhile, technology management highlights the modular architecture of platforms, which fosters scalability, adaptability, and layered interactions among platform leaders, complementors, and users (Kato & Negoro, 2023).

Network effects lie at the heart of platform success, where the value of the platform to each participant increases as more users join, creating positive feedback loops that accelerate growth and lock-in (Kato & Negoro, 2023; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014). These effects manifest both directly among users and indirectly through complementary products and services, reinforcing the platform's competitive position and market dominance (Kato & Negoro, 2023). Moreover, the emergence of open innovation ecosystems within platform strategies encourages firms to transcend organizational boundaries, engaging in collaborative innovation with external partners and users. This openness accelerates resource sharing, specialization, and rapid innovation cycles, as demonstrated by leading firms such as IBM and Haier (Zhang *et al.,* 2021; Melendez *et al.,* 2019; Ehsanullah *et al.,* 2021). In essence, platform strategy theory integrates economic, strategic, and technological perspectives to explain how platforms orchestrate interactions and innovation within ecosystems, driving competitive advantage and industry transformation through the synergistic effects of network externalities, modular design, and collaborative value creation (Mamonov, 2023; Förster *et al.,* 2022; Gawer, 2014).

3.2 Evolution and Research Trends in Platform Strategy Theory

Platform strategy theory has evolved to encompass various types of platforms, including digital, innovation, and industry platforms. Digital platforms leverage digital technologies to facilitate interactions, while innovation platforms are designed to foster technological advancements (Mattioli & D'Andreamatteo, 2024; Nerbel & Kreutzer, 2023). Industry platforms, by contrast, are tailored to specific sectors and often involve intricate ecosystems of stakeholders (Alghani *et al.,* 2024). The development of platform strategy theory draws from diverse research fields, including economics, computer science, social sciences, and technology management, reflecting the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the subject. To map the thematic development of this theory, this study employs bibliometric analysis using keyword co-occurrence networks generated from Scopus and Dimensions data. Figure 1 presents the keyword co-occurrence network for platform strategy research, revealing four distinct thematic clusters that collectively illustrate the field's evolution from early economic modeling toward more complex, technology-driven, and socially informed frameworks.

The red cluster, featuring terms such as game theory, decision-making, and marketplaces, reflects the foundational economic concepts that shaped early platform strategy research, emphasizing strategic and competitive dynamics between platforms and the decision-making frameworks that guide platform operators. The green cluster, incorporating terms such as simulation platform, optimization, and performance, signals a more recent shift toward computational methods and data-driven approaches in platform management, underscoring the growing reliance on algorithms and technological optimization in platform design. The yellow cluster highlights the social and human dimensions of platform research, incorporating terms such as social media, human behavior, and students, reflecting a heightened scholarly focus on user dynamics, community behavior, and demographic factors.

Finally, the blue cluster centers on technical and scientific approaches, featuring terms such as density functional theory and quantum theory, indicating the integration of advanced modeling techniques and empirical methods into platform strategy scholarship. Together, these clusters reveal a field that has progressively expanded beyond its economic origins, incorporating computational, social, and scientific dimensions to produce a richer and more nuanced theoretical landscape.

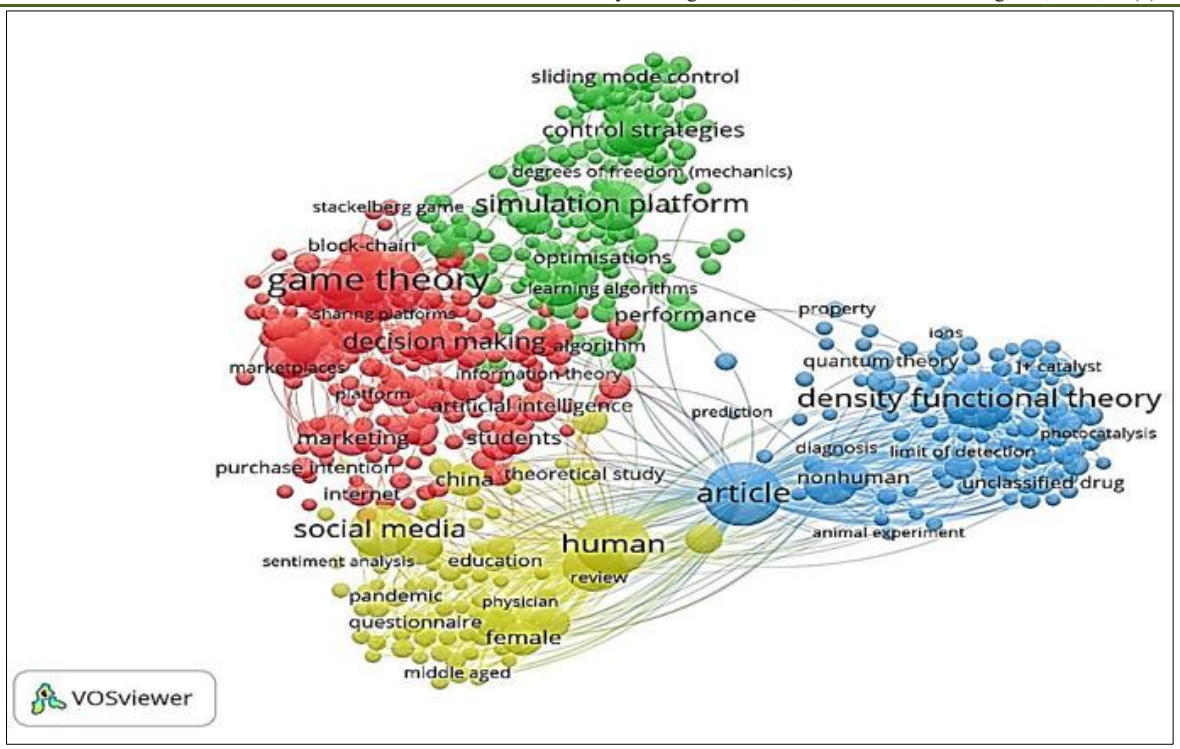

Fig. 1: Keyword Co-occurrence Network in Platform Strategy Research
Source: Scopus Database

As illustrated in Figure 2, the network reveals a research landscape increasingly characterized by international collaboration, with the United States and China emerging as the most central nodes in the global co-authorship structure. Other countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy, also occupy significant positions within the network, maintaining dense connections across diverse national research communities.

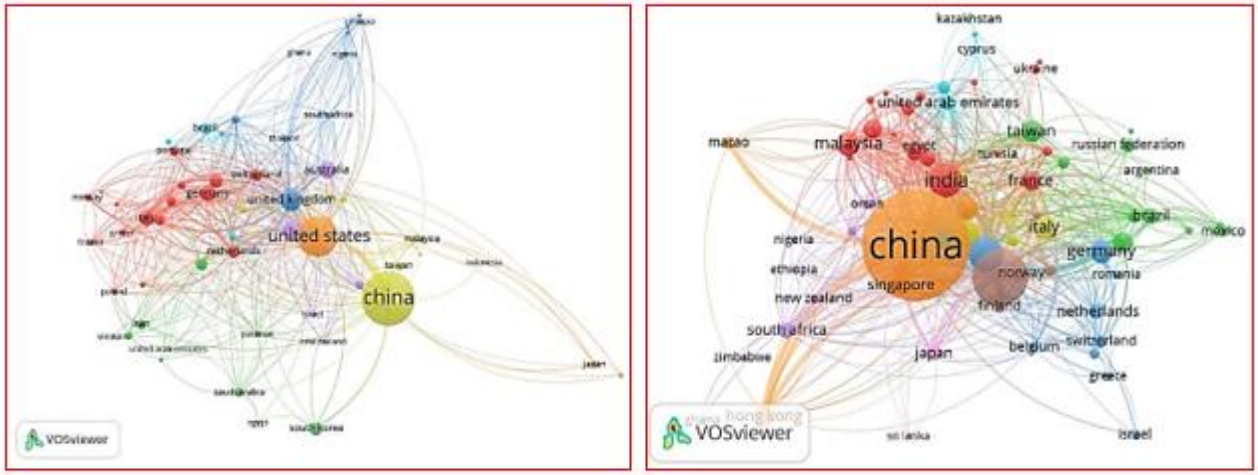

Fig. 2: Country Co-authorship Network in Platform Strategy Research (2020-2024)
Source: Combined Database (Scopus and Dimensions)

The clustering patterns suggest distinct regional groupings of frequent co-authoring nations, while the overall density of links reflects the robust and growing internationalization of platform strategy scholarship. Notably, the period 2020 to 2024 demonstrates a shift from a research landscape dominated by a small number of leading countries toward a more distributed and globally connected network, underscoring the increasing cross-national scope of scientific cooperation in this field. To complement the country-level analysis, a co-authorship network at the individual scholar level was constructed using bibliometric data from Scopus and visualized with VOSviewer. In this network, each node represents an individual researcher, connecting lines indicate collaborative ties, and line thickness reflects the intensity of those partnerships.

Figure 3 reveals several distinct clusters of authors who have collaborated extensively with one another. The central group, anchored by Liu, Yang as the largest and most connected node represented in yellow, maintains collaborative links spanning multiple surrounding clusters, identifying Liu, Yang as the primary bridging figure within the network. Surrounding clusters include a blue cluster centered on Zhang, Lei and Chen, Lin, a red cluster comprising Zhang, Yan and Zhang, Rui, a purple cluster featuring Zhang, Yu, Liu, Chang, and Wang, Yan, and an orange cluster anchored by Liu, Peng.

Fig. 3: Co-authorship Network of the Platform Strategy Theory Research.
Source: Scopus data

Notably, authors such as Chen, Wei, and Li, Dong exhibit strong internal collaborative ties within their respective cluster, while Chen, Jing, and Yang, Hui form a more peripheral but internally cohesive grouping. These patterns highlight the emergence of cohesive research communities alongside more isolated scholars working in niche or emerging areas of platform strategy theory.

As shown in Figure 4, the network identifies seven (7) distinct institutional clusters, indicating a highly collaborative research environment at the organizational level. Prominent Western institutions, including Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Toronto, Imperial College London, and the University of Pennsylvania, have played foundational roles in shaping early platform strategy research, particularly around concepts such as network effects and scalability. Notably, Chinese institutions occupy a visually prominent position within the network, with the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences and Zhejiang University emerging as major nodes alongside Sichuan University and Shenzhen University, reflecting the growing centrality of Chinese scholarship in platform strategy research. The University of Sydney further represents the increasing participation of Asia Pacific institutions in the global platform strategy research community.

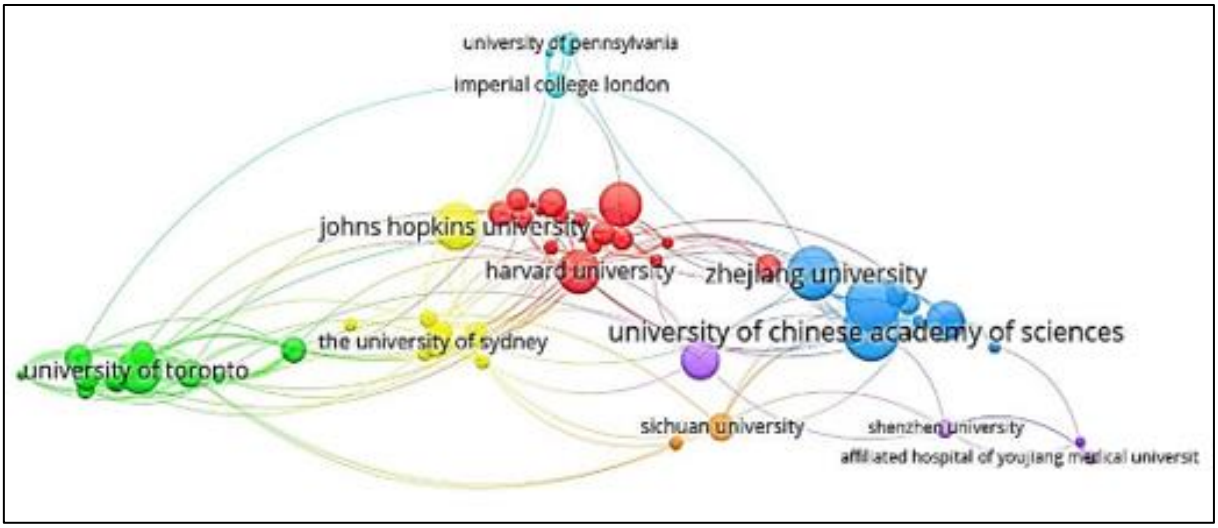

Fig 4. A Co-authorship and Organizational Network Analysis
Source: Dimensions database

The rising participation of institutions from China and Australia reflects the growing strategic importance of platform models in emerging markets, where digital platforms are increasingly central to business and economic development. Overall, the organizational network corroborates the country-level findings, pointing to a field that is progressively decentralizing and diversifying its institutional base while maintaining strong collaborative ties across leading research hubs worldwide.

4. Tools and Methods in Platform Strategy Research

Platform strategy research employs a diverse array of tools and methodological approaches to analyze the complex dynamics of digital platforms and their ecosystems. These methods enable scholars and practitioners to examine the intellectual landscape, strategic behaviors, and evolutionary patterns of platforms, providing both quantitative rigor and qualitative depth to the study of platform phenomena. The three most prominent methodological approaches in the field are bibliometric analysis, case study research, and co-citation analysis, each contributing distinct analytical perspectives to the broader understanding of platform strategy theory.

4.1 Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach that systematically maps the intellectual landscape of a research field by examining citation patterns, co-citation networks, and publication trends to identify influential papers, key authors, and emerging research themes (Abdulkareem Al-Sharaa *et al.,* 2024; Domenico *et al.,* 2024; Liu, 2024). Within platform strategy research, bibliometric methods have proven particularly effective in revealing how knowledge evolves and clusters around core topics such as network effects, platform competition, and innovation management. Common tools employed in bibliometric analysis include VOSviewer, Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, and biblioMagika, which assist researchers in data cleaning, visualization, and metric extraction from large scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. A recent bibliometric study in strategic information systems demonstrated the method's effectiveness in capturing the field's growth, interdisciplinary collaboration patterns, and citation impact, affirming its utility for advancing platform strategy scholarship (Abdulkareem Al-Sharaa *et al.,* 2024; Domenico *et al.,* 2024; Liu, 2024).

4.2 Case Study Research

Case study research provides in-depth qualitative insights into the strategic decisions and ecosystem governance of specific platforms. By examining real-world examples such as Airbnb and Uber, researchers investigate how these platforms generate value, manage network effects, and navigate competitive dynamics across different market contexts. Case studies typically focus on dimensions such as business models, pricing strategies, and platform expansion trajectories to understand how platforms evolve and sustain competitive advantages over time. Research on Airbnb's strategic growth, for instance, demonstrates how the platform not only consolidates its core accommodation market but also diversifies into adjacent services such as personal chef experiences and local activities, thereby enhancing user engagement and generating new revenue streams (Belleflamme, 2025; Carlotta Maria, 2016). Similarly, Uber's case illustrates how value creation through digital platform models is rooted in sharing economy principles and trust mechanisms, offering broader lessons for platform design and governance (Mbanefo & Grobbelaar, 2022; Mukhopadhyay *et al.,* 2024). Collectively, case study research enriches platform strategy theory by grounding abstract theoretical constructs in empirically observable organizational behavior, providing a necessary complement to the quantitative methods that dominate the field.

4.3 Co-Citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis is a specialized bibliometric technique that identifies research clusters by examining how frequently pairs of documents are cited together across the scholarly literature. By mapping these co-citation relationships, researchers can illuminate the intellectual structure of the platform strategy field, revealing dominant themes, foundational theoretical frameworks, and active research communities (Abdulkareem Al-Sharaa *et al.,* 2024; Lin *et al.,* 2017). Prominent topics identified through co-citation networks in platform strategy research include network effects, platform competition, innovation management, and ecosystem governance. Beyond mapping the evolution of theoretical frameworks, co-citation analysis identifies the most influential works shaping ongoing scholarly debates, providing a dynamic picture of how the field's intellectual foundations have developed and shifted over time.

The two network visualizations presented in Figures 5 and 6 offer complementary perspectives on the intellectual and collaborative structure of platform strategy research. Figure 5 presents the co-citation network constructed from the Dimensions database, illustrating how various papers are interconnected through shared citations. The proximity of nodes within this network reflects the frequency with which those papers are cited together, revealing relationships between key theoretical contributions and identifying clusters of closely related studies. It should be noted that the nodes within this visualization carry anonymous labels, arising from incomplete metadata during the data extraction process, which prevents direct identification of individual authors or specific works.

Furthermore, an examination of the visible journal labels within the network, including Science, Nature Biotechnology, Cell, and ACS Nano, suggests

that the dataset from which this network was generated may not have been fully restricted to platform strategy literature, potentially incorporating publications from adjacent natural science fields. This limitation should be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect the broad interdisciplinary reach of platform strategy scholarship rather than a data filtering error, given the theory's established connections to computational, biological, and systems science methodologies. Despite these limitations, the clustering patterns within the network remain analytically meaningful, highlighting the dense interconnections among foundational works and the emergence of distinct thematic groupings within the broader intellectual landscape of platform strategy research. Future bibliometric work in this area would benefit from more stringent database filtering protocols to ensure that co-citation networks accurately reflect the boundaries of the platform strategy literature.

Figure 6 adds a temporal dimension to the collaborative analysis by mapping author collaboration networks over time, with nodes colored according to publication year, ranging from 2023.0 to 2023.8. The bright yellow node of Chen, Ji-hua, on the far right of the network represents the most recent publications, identifying this author as the most temporally prominent figure in the dataset. Liu, Qi, and Tang, Dianping emerge as the most centrally connected nodes within the network, maintaining dense collaborative ties across multiple author clusters. Zhang, Yan similarly occupies a prominent collaborative position, bridging several research groupings within the network. Other visible contributors including Liu, Wei, Liu, Tao, Hou, Changjun, Wang, Yan, Wang, Yu, and Huang, Kejing form a densely interconnected central cluster, reflecting a concentrated but productive research community active within the 2023 publication period. The overall network structure, characterized by a dominant central cluster with several peripheral nodes, suggests that platform strategy research in this period was driven by a relatively cohesive group of scholars maintaining strong mutual collaborative ties. These patterns underscore the cumulative and collaborative nature of knowledge production in platform strategy theory, reflecting a field that continues to evolve through both theoretical refinement and broadening empirical engagement.

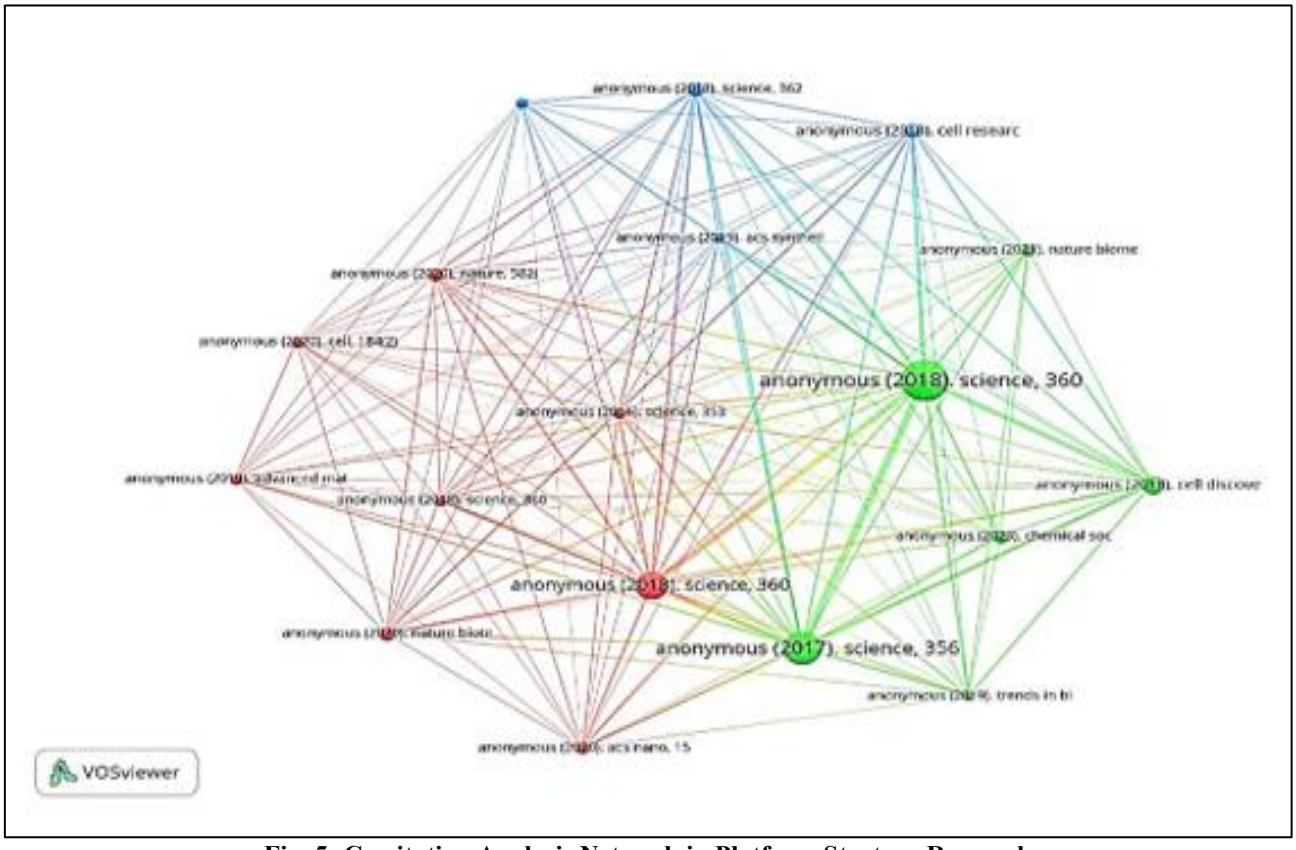

Fig. 5: Co-citation Analysis Network in Platform Strategy Research
Source: Dimensions Database

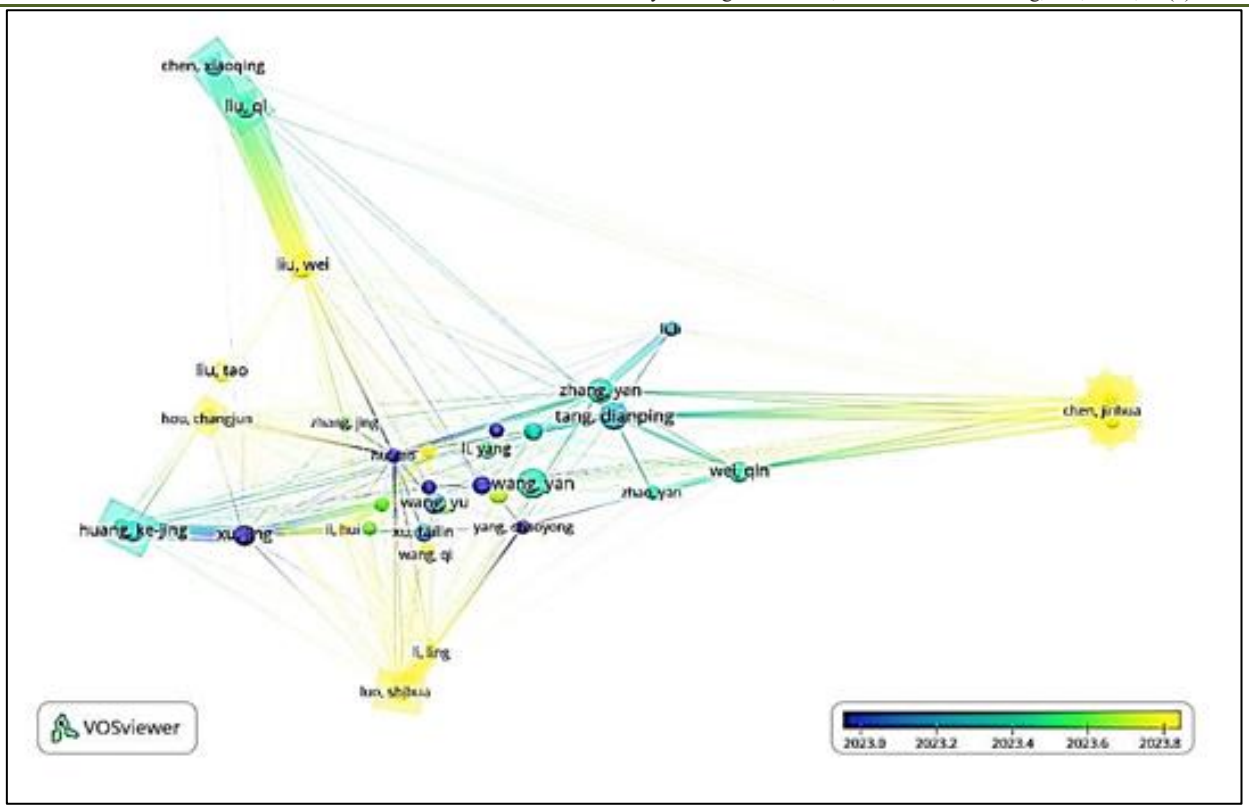

Fig. 6: Authors' Collaborations Network in Platform Strategy Theory Research
Source: Dimensions Data

Building on the theoretical and methodological insights reviewed above, Figure 7 presents a conceptual framework that systematizes the application of platform strategy theory into six sequential implementation steps. The framework begins with market identification, whereby platform operators define the ecosystem boundaries and determine the specific user groups whose interactions the platform will facilitate. This is followed by participant classification, which involves categorizing the distinct sides of the market and understanding their respective needs, incentive structures, and potential contributions to ecosystem value. The third step, value exchange mechanism design, addresses how the platform will structure interactions between participant groups to generate and distribute value effectively. Network effect optimization constitutes the fourth step, focusing on the strategies through which platforms can activate, sustain, and leverage both direct and indirect network effects to achieve scale and competitive advantage.

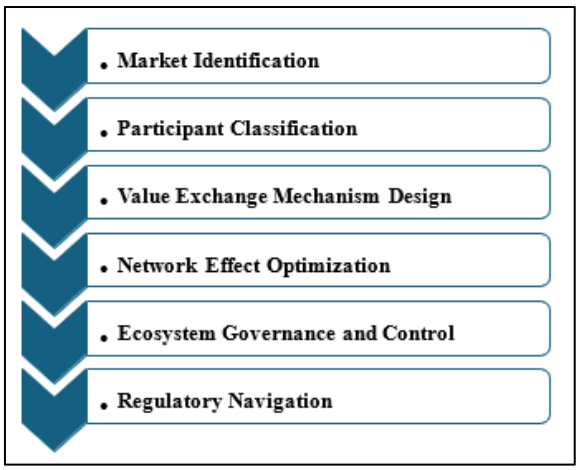

Fig. 7: Conceptual Framework Diagram for Applying Platform Strategy Theory

The fifth step, ecosystem governance and control, concerns the design of rules, standards, and incentive mechanisms that maintain ecosystem quality, manage complementor behavior, and balance openness with control. Finally, regulatory navigation acknowledges that platform operators must engage

proactively with the legal and institutional environments in which they operate, particularly as regulatory scrutiny of platform power intensifies globally (Andreoni & Roberts, 2022; Ozalp *et al.,* 2022; Poniatowski *et al.,* 2022). Together, these six steps provide a practical roadmap for organizations seeking to design, launch, and govern platform-based business models, grounding the abstract constructs of platform strategy theory in actionable managerial guidance.

5. Strengths and Limitations of Platform Strategy Theory

A critical evaluation of platform strategy theory reveals a body of knowledge that has made substantial contributions to the understanding of digital ecosystems while simultaneously exhibiting persistent theoretical and empirical limitations. Engaging with both dimensions is essential for situating the theory's current standing within the broader management literature and for identifying productive directions for future scholarship.

5.1 Strengths of Platform Strategy Theory

One of the most significant strengths of platform strategy theory lies in its interdisciplinary foundations. By drawing simultaneously from industrial organization economics, strategic management, information systems, and technology management, the theory offers a comprehensive analytical lens through which the complex dynamics of platform ecosystems can be examined (Förster *et al.,* 2022; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Gawer, 2014). This interdisciplinary breadth enables researchers to address questions that no single discipline could adequately resolve, ranging from the microeconomic logic of pricing in multisided markets to the organizational challenges of governing large-scale innovation ecosystems (Antipina, 2020; Poniatowski *et al.,* 2022). The theory's treatment of network effects represents a particularly robust conceptual contribution. By theorizing both direct and indirect network effects, platform strategy scholars have provided a powerful explanatory framework for understanding how platforms achieve scale, sustain competitive advantage, and generate lock-in effects that are difficult for rivals to overcome (Kato & Negoro, 2023; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014). This framework has proven empirically productive across a wide range of platform types, from consumer-facing digital marketplaces to industrial and agricultural platforms, demonstrating considerable generalizability (Kenney *et al.,* 2021; Adhikari & Baral, 2025).

The emphasis on modular architecture as a driver of platform scalability and adaptability constitutes another theoretical strength. Modularity enables platform owners to accommodate an expanding array of complementary products and services without redesigning the platform's core infrastructure, thereby lowering barriers to ecosystem participation and accelerating innovation at the periphery (Kim *et al.,* 2020; Domenico *et al.,* 2024). This architectural insight has practical relevance for platform design decisions and has informed both theoretical model-building and empirical research on platform growth trajectories (Van Dyck *et al.,* 2024; Kim & Yoo, 2019). Platform strategy theory has also demonstrated considerable practical relevance. Its constructs have been applied productively across diverse industry contexts, including healthcare, agriculture, e-commerce, and financial services, informing both managerial decision-making and policy debates around platform regulation and competition (Essen *et al.,* 2023; Kenney *et al.,* 2020; Ozalp *et al.,* 2022). The theory's capacity to travel across sectoral boundaries reflects the generality of its core mechanisms and its utility as a strategic planning framework for organizations navigating platform-based competitive environments.

5.2 Limitations of Platform Strategy Theory

Despite these strengths, platform strategy theory faces several notable limitations that constrain its explanatory power and practical applicability. The most fundamental of these is the absence of a unified integrative framework. Because the theory has developed across multiple disciplinary traditions, its core constructs are defined inconsistently across studies, making systematic cumulation of findings difficult and limiting the development of coherent theoretical models that can explain platform dynamics across diverse industries and regions (Mamonov, 2023; Förster *et al.,* 2022). This fragmentation is reflected in the bibliometric analysis presented in Section 2, where distinct thematic clusters reveal parallel research conversations that remain insufficiently connected. A second significant limitation concerns the empirical validation of the theory's central propositions. While constructs such as network effects, modularity, and ecosystem governance have been extensively theorized, many of their underlying mechanisms remain underexplored empirically, particularly in non-Western and non-technology contexts (Mukhopadhyay *et al.,* 2024; Cheng *et al.,* 2024). Much of the existing empirical work concentrates on a small number of high-profile platforms operating in advanced economies, raising questions about the generalizability of findings to platforms in emerging markets, regulated industries, or sectors with different technological and institutional configurations (Andreoni & Roberts, 2022; Kenney *et al.,* 2021).

The dynamic tension between platform openness and control represents a third area of theoretical underdevelopment. While the trade-offs between openness and control have been acknowledged as central to platform governance, existing theoretical frameworks provide limited guidance on how platform owners should navigate this tension across different lifecycle stages or competitive environments (Chen *et al.,* 2022; Tåg, 2011; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2010). Empirical studies tracking governance changes longitudinally remain scarce, leaving platform managers with insufficient theoretical

grounding for consequential strategic decisions. A further limitation relates to the treatment of complementor behavior and technological fragmentation. As platforms proliferate and complementors increasingly operate across multiple competing platforms simultaneously, the conditions under which platforms can sustain ecosystem coherence and capture value from complementary innovation become more complex and less well understood (Gu & Li, 2022; Lin *et al.,* 2017). Existing models tend to treat complementor behavior as relatively predictable, underestimating the strategic agency of complementors and the disruptive potential of multihoming in fragmented technological environments.

Finally, the field has been slow to theorize the implications of emerging technologies for platform governance and value distribution. The potential of artificial intelligence and blockchain to reshape platform architecture, automate governance mechanisms, and redistribute value among platform participants has been noted in recent scholarship but remains theoretically underdeveloped (Banerjee *et al.,* 2024; Costabile, 2024). Addressing these technological dimensions will be critical for ensuring that platform strategy theory retains its relevance as the technological infrastructure of digital ecosystems continues to evolve rapidly.

6. Practical Applications of Platform Strategy Theory

Platform strategy theory has moved well beyond its origins as an abstract analytical framework, demonstrating considerable practical relevance across a growing range of industry contexts. As digital platforms increasingly penetrate sectors characterized by complex regulatory environments, information asymmetries, and diverse stakeholder configurations, the theory's core constructs, namely network effects, modular architecture, ecosystem governance, and value co-creation, have proven instrumental in guiding strategic decision-making and organizational design. This section examines the practical application of platform strategy theory across three sectors that have received particular scholarly attention: healthcare, agriculture, and e-commerce.

6.1 Platform Strategy in Healthcare

The healthcare sector presents one of the most challenging yet consequential contexts for platform strategy implementation. Platforms in this domain must navigate stringent regulatory requirements, sensitive data ownership concerns, and deeply entrenched institutional structures while simultaneously managing the complex interdependencies among patients, clinicians, insurers, pharmaceutical firms, and technology providers (Essen *et al.,* 2023; Ozalp *et al.,* 2022). Despite these challenges, digital health platforms have emerged as powerful infrastructures for integrating fragmented healthcare services, facilitating information exchange, and enabling new models of patient-centered care (Furstenau & Auschra, 2016; Marit, 2021).

The entry of major technology firms into the healthcare sector illustrates both the transformative potential and the governance challenges associated with platform strategies in highly regulated industries. Research by Ozalp et al. (2022) highlights how large technology platforms have pursued what they term digital colonization of healthcare, leveraging their data infrastructure and network advantages to establish positions within ecosystems previously governed by specialized incumbents. This dynamic raise important questions about power asymmetries, data sovereignty, and the conditions under which platform openness serves the public interest rather than private value capture (Andreoni & Roberts, 2022). For healthcare organizations seeking to develop or participate in platform ecosystems, the theory underscores the importance of designing governance mechanisms that balance innovation incentives with accountability, interoperability, and patient data protection (Poniatowski *et al.,* 2022; Costabile, 2024).

6.2 Platform Strategy in Agriculture

Agriculture represents an emerging and rapidly evolving context for platform strategy, driven by the digitization of farming operations, the proliferation of precision agriculture technologies, and the growing role of data as a strategic asset in agricultural value chains (Kenney *et al.,* 2020; Adhikari & Baral, 2025). Agricultural platforms facilitate interactions among farmers, input suppliers, equipment manufacturers, financial institutions, and market intermediaries, generating value through data aggregation, logistical coordination, and the reduction of information asymmetries that have historically disadvantaged smallholder producers (Kenney *et al.,* 2020). John Deere provides one of the most widely studied examples of platform strategy in agriculture. By embedding digital connectivity into its equipment and developing the Operations Center platform, John Deere has effectively repositioned itself from a manufacturer of physical machinery to an orchestrator of a data-driven agricultural ecosystem. This transition exemplifies the broader strategic logic identified in platform strategy theory, whereby firms leverage modular architecture and data network effects to shift competitive advantage from product quality alone toward ecosystem control and complementary innovation (Van Dyck *et al.,* 2024; Porter & Heppelmann, 2014). The technological trajectory underlying this shift is illustrated in Figure 7, which traces the evolution of farming operations from traditional equipment-based models toward fully connected digital ecosystems. The progression from conventional farm and equipment configurations, through smart equipment integration, to a unified cloud-connected ecosystem reflects the platform logic whereby the strategic value of physical assets is progressively

augmented by the data networks and digital services layered upon them (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014).

Figure 8. The diagram illustrates the development of a smart farming platform strategy. Initially, the farm utilizes basic equipment, as shown in the first box. The second stage introduces smart technology to the equipment, resulting in a Smart Farm + Equipment configuration. In the final stage, the farm, smart equipment, and cloud technology are interconnected, enabling real-time data exchange, remote monitoring, and improved decision-making.

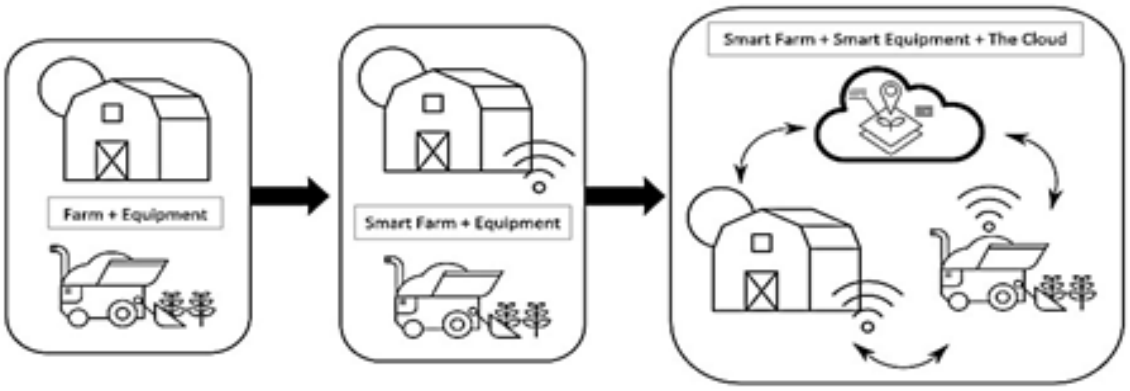

Fig. 8: Evolution of farming. Source (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014)

This evolution demonstrates how platform strategies enhance efficiency and scalability by connecting resources and facilitating new services through the cloud, generating value through network effects. However, this shift also raises concerns about concentration of power and data ownership, particularly for smallholder farmers who generate valuable operational data but may lack the bargaining power to negotiate equitable terms of participation (Kenney *et al.,* 2020; Andreoni & Roberts, 2022). Platform strategy theory thus offers agricultural stakeholders both a framework for understanding the strategic logic driving platform adoption and a critical lens for evaluating its distributional consequences.

6.3 Platform Strategy in E-commerce

E-commerce is the most mature and extensively studied domain for applying platform strategy, providing a rich empirical base from which theoretical propositions about network effects, ecosystem governance, and competitive dynamics have been developed and tested. Platforms such as Amazon, Uber, and Airbnb have become canonical cases in the platform strategy literature, illustrating how digital intermediaries can achieve rapid scale, disrupt incumbent business models, and reshape entire industries through the strategic management of multisided markets (Gawer, 2022; Cusumano *et al.,* 2019; Van Alstyne & Parker, 2017). Airbnb's strategic evolution offers particularly instructive lessons for platform strategy theory. Research by Belleflamme (2025) demonstrates how Airbnb has progressively densified its core accommodation market while simultaneously diversifying into adjacent service categories such as local experiences, personal chef services, and long-term stays. This expansion strategy reflects the theoretical logic of scope extension in platform ecosystems, whereby platforms leverage existing network advantages and user trust to enter complementary markets at relatively low marginal cost. The Airbnb case also highlights the importance of trust mechanisms and reputation systems as governance tools that substitute for the contractual safeguards characteristic of traditional service markets (Carlotta Maria, 2016; Mbanefo & Grobbelaar, 2022).

Uber's trajectory similarly illustrates core platform strategy principles in action, particularly the role of pricing algorithms, dynamic supply-demand matching, and regulatory navigation in sustaining platform growth across diverse geographic markets (Gruel & Piller, 2016). Both cases underscore a finding that recurs across the platform strategy literature: competitive advantage in platform-based markets derives not from the ownership of physical assets but from the ability to attract, retain, and govern a critical mass of participants on both sides of the market, and to design feedback mechanisms that continuously enhance the platform's value proposition for all ecosystem stakeholders (Van Alstyne & Parker, 2017; Kim, 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). Across all three sectors, the practical application of platform strategy theory reveals a consistent set of strategic imperatives: identifying the right participant groups and designing appropriate incentive structures for their engagement; managing the tension between openness and control at different stages of platform development; leveraging data and network effects to sustain competitive advantage; and navigating the regulatory and institutional environments that shape the conditions of platform competition. These imperatives confirm the theory's practical utility while simultaneously pointing to the contextual nuances that a more empirically grounded and sectorally differentiated platform strategy theory must address.

Digital platforms are increasingly making their way into heavily regulated sectors as well, such as healthcare and education, despite encountering specific challenges (Mbanefo & Grobbelaar, 2022; Minz *et al.,* 2024). This process, referred to as "digital colonization," involves establishing data infrastructure, capturing data, providing insights, and creating new services (Ozalp *et al.,* 2022). Platform companies like GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft) are strategically positioned to address inefficiencies in these industries, but must navigate sensitive data and regulatory hurdles (Ozalp *et al.,* 2021). Successfully implementing and scaling digital platforms in healthcare requires a balance between openness and control to attract users while managing associated risks (Furstenau & Auschra, 2016). As platforms enter sectors that are not traditionally platform-based, they must continuously adapt their business models in response to legitimacy concerns, especially in complex environments like digital healthcare (Essen *et al.,* 2023). These studies underscore the persistent challenges and opportunities for digital platforms in heavily regulated industries, highlighting the necessity for adaptive strategies and careful navigation of regulatory environments.

7. Research Agenda

Despite the considerable theoretical and empirical advances documented in this review, platform strategy theory retains several underexplored dimensions that warrant systematic scholarly attention. Drawing on the gaps identified across the preceding sections; this study proposes six priority research directions that collectively address the field's most pressing theoretical deficits and empirical blind spots.

7.1 Dynamic Governance of the Openness and Control Tension

The tension between platform openness and control remains one of the most consequential yet undertheorized dimensions of platform strategy. While existing scholarship acknowledges this trade-off, it offers limited guidance on how governance structures should evolve as platforms transition through the lifecycle stages, from launch through growth to maturity. Future research should pursue empirical modeling of governance evolution in established platforms, examining how changes in API restrictions, pricing tiers, and developer policies affect complementor behavior and ecosystem health over time. Comparative studies contrasting governance trajectories in platforms such as iOS and Android would be particularly instructive in this regard. Behavioral experiments testing complementor responses to governance shifts, such as how changes in SDK policy influence developer loyalty and innovation investment, would further deepen theoretical understanding of this dynamic (Chen *et al.,* 2022; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2010; Tåg, 2011).

7.2 Cross-Industry Empirical Validation

Current platform strategy models have been developed and tested predominantly within technology-intensive industries, leaving significant gaps in understanding how platform logic operates in regulated and emerging sectors. Healthcare, agriculture, and education present distinct institutional configurations, data ownership challenges, and regulatory constraints that existing frameworks do not adequately address (Essen *et al.,* 2023; Kenney *et al.,* 2020; Ozalp *et al.,* 2022). Future research should pursue context-specific comparative studies examining platform scaling dynamics across these divergent environments. Regulatory sandbox methodologies, in which platform designs are tested under simulated policy constraints such as GDPR-compliant data monetization models, offer a promising avenue for developing theoretically grounded and practically actionable insights for platform operators in regulated industries.

7.3 Fragmentation-Resistant Ecosystem Design

The proliferation of competing platforms has intensified the challenge of complementor multihoming, whereby complementors simultaneously serve multiple rival platforms, undermining any single platform's ability to capture value from complementary innovation. This challenge is further compounded in technologically heterogeneous environments such as the Internet of Things, where the absence of dominant standards creates persistent fragmentation risks (Gu & Li, 2022; Lin *et al.,* 2017). Future research should develop agent-based models simulating complementor loyalty under varying incentive structures, comparing the relative effectiveness of exclusivity rewards against cross-platform subsidies in sustaining ecosystem coherence. Standardization frameworks for interoperability in fragmented markets, drawing on cases such as the competition between Amazon Alexa and Google Home in smart home ecosystems, would offer both theoretical contributions and practical design guidance for platform architects.

7.4 Behavioral and Expectation-Driven Platform Adoption

The role of cognitive biases, social signaling, and expectation formation in driving platform adoption and scaling remains insufficiently theorized within the platform strategy literature. User and complementor adoption decisions are shaped not only by objective platform quality but by beliefs about future participation levels, creating self-fulfilling dynamics that can either accelerate or impede platform growth (Boudreau, 2021; Wan *et al.,* 2017). Future research should employ field experimental designs to test the effectiveness of expectation-shaping tactics such as social proof notifications and early adopter visibility mechanisms in accelerating platform takeoff. Longitudinal studies tracking self-fulfilling prophecy dynamics in platform growth, drawing on cases such as crowdfunding platforms where early momentum signals ecosystem

viability to subsequent participants, would extend theoretical understanding of the behavioral foundations of network effect activation.

7.5 Global South and Non-Technology Platform Contexts

The bibliometric analysis presented in this review reveals a pronounced concentration of platform strategy research within Western and Chinese technology contexts, leaving the experiences of platforms operating in the Global South and in non-technology industries largely unexamined. This geographic and sectoral bias limits the generalizability of existing theoretical frameworks and obscures potentially important variations in how platform logic operates under different institutional, infrastructural, and cultural conditions (Andreoni & Roberts, 2022; Kenney *et al.,* 2021). Future research should pursue ethnographic and qualitative studies of informal and analog platforms operating in infrastructure-constrained environments, such as agricultural coordination networks mediated through messaging applications in rural contexts. Resilience modeling for platforms operating under conditions of unreliable digital infrastructure would further extend the theory's applicability to the full diversity of global platform ecosystems.

7.6 Integration of Frontier Technologies into Platform Governance

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and blockchain technology presents both opportunities and challenges for platform governance that existing theoretical frameworks have yet to fully address. Artificial intelligence enables more sophisticated curation, matching, and pricing algorithms, but also introduces new risks around algorithmic bias, opacity, and the concentration of data-driven competitive advantage (Banerjee *et al.,* 2024; Costabile, 2024). Blockchain and smart contract technologies offer the potential for more transparent and automated revenue-sharing mechanisms, reducing platform owners' discretionary control over value distribution and potentially rebalancing power relationships within ecosystems. Future research should investigate smart contract-based governance models through experimental and simulation methodologies, examining how automated and transparent revenue-sharing arrangements affect complementor participation and innovation incentives. Studies examining the trade-offs between algorithmic personalization and content diversity in AI-driven platform curation, drawing on cases such as short-form video platforms, would similarly advance both theoretical understanding and practical governance design in technology-intensive platform ecosystems.

7.7 Methodological Priorities

Beyond these substantive research directions, the field would benefit from greater methodological diversification. The dominance of cross-sectional case studies and static bibliometric analyses limits the field's capacity to capture the dynamic and evolutionary dimensions of platform strategy that its own theoretical frameworks emphasize. Future research should prioritize mixed-methods designs that couple bibliometric mapping with qualitative fieldwork, enabling richer interpretation of the collaborative and intellectual structures identified through network analysis. Longitudinal datasets tracking platform-level metrics such as user churn, complementor innovation rates, and governance policy changes across extended time horizons of five to ten years would provide an empirical foundation currently absent from the literature. Together, these methodological advances would substantially strengthen the evidential base upon which platform strategy theory continues to develop.

8. CONCLUSION

Platform strategy theory has undergone substantial evolution since its foundational articulations in industrial organization economics and strategic management, progressively expanding to encompass the complex governance, technological, and social dimensions of digital ecosystems. This review has traced that evolution through a combined systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis, mapping the intellectual structure, global collaboration patterns, and thematic trajectories of the field while identifying the theoretical gaps and empirical limitations that continue to constrain its development. The bibliometric analysis reveals a research landscape that has grown considerably in scale and geographic diversity over the past decade. Co-authorship and co-citation networks confirm the central role of institutions in the United States, China, and the United Kingdom in driving theoretical development, while simultaneously pointing to the rising contributions of researchers and institutions across Europe, Asia Pacific, and emerging economies. This expanding collaborative base reflects the growing recognition that platform dynamics cannot be adequately understood through the lens of any single national or sectoral context, and that advancing the field requires sustained interdisciplinary and international cooperation (Domenico *et al.,* 2024; Mukhopadhyay *et al.,* 2024; Gawer, 2022).

The theoretical synthesis presented in this review affirms the enduring contributions of platform strategy theory to management scholarship. Its treatment of network effects, modular architecture, and ecosystem governance has provided researchers and practitioners with powerful conceptual tools for understanding how platforms create value, sustain competitive advantage, and reshape industry boundaries (Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Kato & Negoro, 2023). The practical applications examined across healthcare, agriculture, and e-commerce further demonstrate the theory's capacity to travel across diverse institutional and sectoral contexts, informing strategic decision-making in environments as varied as digital

health ecosystems, precision agriculture platforms, and global sharing economy marketplaces (Essen *et al.,* 2023; Kenney *et al.,* 2020; Belleflamme, 2025).

At the same time, this review has identified several persistent limitations that the field must address to fulfill its theoretical potential. The absence of a unified integrative framework remains the most fundamental challenge, with the field's interdisciplinary fragmentation impeding the cumulation of findings and the development of coherent predictive models applicable across diverse platform contexts (Mamonov, 2023; Förster *et al.,* 2022). The empirical base of the theory remains concentrated in a relatively small number of high-profile technology platforms operating in advanced economies, limiting the generalizability of existing propositions to regulated industries, emerging markets, and non-technology sectors (Cheng *et al.,* 2024; Andreoni & Roberts, 2022). The dynamic tension between platform openness and control, while widely acknowledged as central to platform governance, remains insufficiently theorized in terms of how it should be managed across different lifecycle stages and competitive environments (Chen *et al.,* 2022; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2010).

Looking ahead, the research agenda proposed in this review charts a productive course for addressing these gaps. Priorities include the empirical modeling of governance evolution across platform lifecycle stages, the development of context-specific frameworks for regulated and emerging market platforms, the integration of behavioral and expectational dynamics into adoption theory, and the theoretical incorporation of frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain into platform governance models (Banerjee *et al.,* 2024; Costabile, 2024; Boudreau, 2021). Methodologically, the field would benefit from greater investment in longitudinal datasets, mixed-methods designs, and research attentive to the experiences of platforms operating outside the dominant Western and Chinese technology contexts that currently define the field's empirical horizon. In conclusion, platform strategy theory has established itself as an indispensable framework for understanding the competitive dynamics of the digital economy. By addressing its current theoretical fragmentation, expanding its empirical base, and engaging seriously with the governance implications of emerging technologies, the field is well positioned to provide organizations, policymakers, and scholars with the analytical tools necessary to navigate the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly platform-mediated global economy.

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