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Is Platformization Reshaping Fandom Research? A Bibliometric Mapping of an Emerging Conceptual Orientation (2009–2026)

Sema Bulat Demir

Radio Television Cinema (Eng), Communication Faculty, Istanbul Aydın University, Istanbul 34295, Türkiye; semabulat@aydin.edu.tr

Abstract

Fandom studies conceptualize fans as active agents who reinterpret and circulate cultural texts while collectively producing meaning. However, contemporary fan practices increasingly occur within platform infrastructures governed by algorithmic ranking, recommendation systems, content moderation, data production, and engagement metrics. This study examines the extent to which platformization has become an established conceptual framework in fandom research. A Web of Science Core Collection search on 3 August 2026, followed by rule-based eligibility screening and manual validation, produced a dataset of 2986 fandom publications from 2009 to 2026. Based on coding of titles, abstracts, and author keywords, 1433 publications were classified as digital fandom studies, while 45 were identified as platformization-focused studies. In the most recent period, the share of platformization-focused publications increased to 2.48% of the overall fandom literature and 4.51% of the digital fandom subset. Nevertheless, the co-citation structure remains organized around foundational fan studies scholarship, while platform-oriented theoretical sources have yet to attain canonical status. The findings indicate that platformization does not constitute an institutionalized paradigm within fandom research. Rather, it represents an emerging conceptual orientation that is rapidly gaining visibility at the publication and keyword levels but has yet to become established within citation structures and research fronts.

Keywords: digital fandom; platformization; fan studies; bibliometrics; platform governance; algorithmic visibility

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1. Introduction

Fan culture has been understood in two contrasting ways within popular culture research. On the one hand, fans have been associated with excessive consumption; on the other, they have been regarded as productive communities that reinterpret, transform, and circulate cultural texts. Challenging approaches that conceptualized audiences as passive recipients, classical fan studies foregrounded fans' capacities for interpretation, appropriation, rewriting, and community building (Fiske, 1992; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992). The participatory culture approach similarly demonstrated that the boundaries between production and consumption have become increasingly porous and that fans play an active role in the circulation of popular culture (Jenkins, 2006, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Digitalization has not eliminated this participatory capacity; rather, it has transformed the conditions under which it is exercised. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, X/Twitter, and Discord are not merely communication channels through which fan communities convene. They are sociotechnical structures that organize

visibility, recommend content, quantify engagement, and incentivize particular practices. Platformization refers to the penetration of these economic, infrastructural, and governance logics into the domains of cultural production (Gillespie, 2010, 2014; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Plantin & Punathambekar, 2019; Poell et al., 2021; van Dijck et al., 2018). Under these conditions, fans' capacities to produce content, gain visibility, and engage in collective action are shaped by recommendation algorithms, engagement metrics, data collection, and content moderation. Core concepts in fan studies, including creativity, participation, identity, and community, therefore need to be reconsidered from an infrastructural perspective.

Research on algorithmic visibility, datafied fandom, platform governance, and platform-specific participation practices has increased in recent years (Abidin, 2020; Bishop, 2019; Luo & Li, 2024; Yin, 2020; Zhang & Negus, 2020). However, the more frequent use of platform-related terminology does not, in itself, demonstrate that the field's theoretical core has changed. Bourdieu's account of the scientific field provides an analytical foundation for assessing the position of platformization within fandom research (Bourdieu, 1975, 1993). Proceeding from the assumption that conceptual visibility does not necessarily amount to doxic embeddedness, this study examines the extent to which platformization has become institutionalized at the levels of publication output, keywords, co-citation patterns, and research fronts.

Although existing studies provide rich empirical insights into particular platforms, fandoms, and national contexts, few have examined the position of platformization within the broader intellectual structure of fandom research. This study addresses this gap by drawing on a corpus of fandom scholarship that was not predetermined by platform-related search terms. Rather than selecting only digital or platform-focused publications at the outset, the study first constructs a corpus of the broader fandom literature published between 2009 and 2026 and subsequently codes the digital fandom and platformization subsets. This approach makes it possible to assess not only the growth of platformization research over time but also its relative weight within the broader fandom literature and the digital fandom subset.

This study makes three principal contributions. First, by distinguishing between a general fandom dataset comprising 2986 publications and a digital fandom subset of 1433 publications, it examines the development of the field from a comprehensive baseline. Second, it calculates the period-specific share of platformization-focused publications in both datasets and tests the observed change using the Cochran–Armitage trend test. Third, it distinguishes visibility at the publication and keyword levels from institutionalization at the levels of co-citation and research fronts. In doing so, the study empirically investigates whether platformization has produced a fully realized doxic transformation within fandom research.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did the volume of fandom research develop between 2009 and 2026, and what proportion of this literature falls within the digital fandom subset?

RQ2: How did the relative share of platformization-focused publications within the broader fandom literature and the digital fandom subset change across periods?

RQ3: To what extent has platformization become conceptually and intellectually institutionalized within digital fandom research at the levels of keywords, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classical Fan Studies and Participatory Culture

Classical fan studies foregrounded fans' cultural productivity in opposition to approaches that regarded fandom as a form of pathological consumption. Fiske (1992) argued that fans create cultural value through textual, semiotic, and enunciative forms of productivity. Drawing on de Certeau's (1984) account of tactical appropriation, Jenkins (1992) conceptualized fans as "textual poachers" who rewrite media texts in accordance with their everyday needs. Hills (2002), in turn, distanced himself from one-sided emancipatory interpretations by demonstrating that fandom simultaneously encompasses tensions between resistance and consumption, as well as between authenticity and commodification.

This foundational perspective is consistent with the conception of the active audience in Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model. Audiences do not merely accept the dominant meanings of media texts; they may negotiate these meanings or interpret them from an oppositional position. Fandom constitutes an intensive cultural domain in which this interpretive capacity acquires continuity through community norms and collective memory. Gray et al. (2007) and Sandvoss (2005) demonstrated that fan identity involves not only relationships with texts but also processes of belonging, selfhood, and social positioning.

Approaches to participatory culture and convergence reconsidered fan productivity through circulation and networked connectivity as digital environments became increasingly widespread. Jenkins (2006, 2008) and Jenkins et al. (2013) emphasized that fans' practices of reproducing and circulating content establish complex relationships with media industries. Although this perspective remains important for positioning fans as active agents of cultural circulation, the technological and economic conditions of fan agency may recede into the background when insufficient attention is paid to the ownership and governance of the infrastructures through which participation occurs.

2.2. Digital Fandom: From Community to Networked Practices

Digital fandom research encompasses the transition from early online communities to social media and mobile platforms. Booth (2010) demonstrated that digital fandom is grounded in the mutual production of texts, users, and technologies. Bennett (2014) further argued that digital media have not merely introduced new empirical objects into fan studies but have also reshaped the field's methodological and theoretical boundaries. This transformation encompasses a wide range of practices, extending from fan fiction archives and forums to hashtag campaigns, short-form videos, livestreaming, and cross-platform coordination.

Fan labor in networked environments also possesses relational and affective dimensions. Baym (2018) demonstrated that maintaining continuous connection and producing intimacy in artist–fan relationships require labor, while Jenkins et al. (2013) emphasized the role of circulation in generating cultural and economic value. Practices such as sharing, commenting, tagging, and archiving strengthen community ties while simultaneously generating measurable data and engagement for platforms. Participation thus becomes both a form of cultural expression and a process of economic value creation.

Digital fandom and platformization, however, are not synonymous. Digital fandom research may examine online fan practices while treating platform infrastructure merely as contextual background. The platformization approach, by contrast, makes the economic, technical, and governance logics of platforms direct objects of analysis. This distinction provides the theoretical basis for separately coding digital fandom and the more narrowly defined indicators of platformization in the present study.

2.3. Platformization, Governance, and Algorithmic Visibility

The sequence of the preceding subsections should not be read as suggesting that platform-related concerns are wholly new to fan studies. Concerns with the industrial and economic conditions of fan production were already present in the classical and digital-fandom studies reviewed above: Jenkins (2006, 2008) and Jenkins et al. (2013) examined the relationship between fan circulation and media industries, and Smythe's (1981) audience-commodity thesis and Terranova's (2000) account of free labor, both predating the platform economy literature, anticipated several of the commodification concerns later revisited within platform studies. What the platformization literature contributes is therefore not the discovery of these concerns but a more specific theoretical vocabulary and empirical focus for analyzing how data extraction, algorithmic ranking, and infrastructural dependency reorganize them under contemporary conditions. The three subsections above are consequently better read as tracing a shift in analytical emphasis and vocabulary across an overlapping set of concerns than as marking successive, mutually exclusive stages of fan studies.

Platform capitalism refers to an economic model in which digital intermediation is organized through data extraction, network effects, and economies of scale (Srnicek, 2017). Nieborg and Poell (2018) defined the platformization of cultural production as the growing dependence of cultural products on the economic and governance logics of platforms, while Poell et al. (2021) demonstrated that this process operates simultaneously across markets, infrastructures, and governance arrangements. Platformization, therefore, involves more than the distribution of content through digital channels; it entails reorganizing the conditions of production and circulation in accordance with platform rules.

Although platforms present themselves as neutral intermediaries, they actively regulate cultural visibility through decisions concerning classification, ranking, and moderation (Gillespie, 2010, 2014). Helmond (2015) argued that the technical layers of the web have become increasingly adapted to platforms, while Plantin and Punathambekar (2019) maintained that platforms have progressively acquired infrastructural characteristics. Platform affordances emerge not only from technical features but also from the relationships among user practices, interface design, and platform policies (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

In the context of fandom, platform governance becomes particularly evident in practices of visibility. Bishop's (2019) concept of "algorithmic gossip" demonstrates how users develop strategies based on experience, rumor, and observation despite lacking definitive knowledge of how algorithms operate. Through an examination of attention economies on TikTok, Abidin (2020) showed that users continuously manage content and relationships to adapt to algorithmic circulation, while Rieder et al. (2018) argued that ranking algorithms produce particular cultures of visibility. Fan accounts' practices of using tags, timing posts, producing serialized content, and mobilizing engagement constitute everyday manifestations of these regimes.

Platformization is also associated with the commodification of fan labor. Terranova's (2000) account of free labor and Smythe's (1981) concept of the audience commodity explain how user activity is converted into economic value. Fan production, however, cannot be reduced solely to exploitation; it also generates pleasure, belonging, identity, and collective agency. The analytical value of the platformization approach lies in its capacity to make the infrastructural and commercial conditions of these cultural meanings visible without erasing the meanings themselves.

2.4. Transcultural Fandom and Differentiated Platform Practices

The global expansion of digital fandom has made it necessary to examine Western-centric concepts in fan studies across different media and governance environments. Chin

and Morimoto (2013) conceptualized transcultural fandom as a form of attachment constituted through relationships among texts, identities, and affinities beyond national borders. Studies of K-pop and data fandom in China have further demonstrated how fans coordinate practices such as streaming, voting, tagging, and data generation in pursuit of collective objectives oriented toward visibility and ranking systems (Cho, 2022; Yin, 2020; Zhang & Negus, 2020).

Platformization does not operate uniformly across contexts. Censorship, moderation, commercial models, data governance, and state–platform relations vary across countries and platforms. Luo and Li (2024) demonstrated the connection between community management and political governance through participatory censorship in Chinese online fan communities. Madianou and Miller's (2012) polymedia approach similarly reminds us that users select communication media not as isolated tools but as elements within a relational ecology. The platformization of fandom must therefore be examined with attention to differences among platforms, countries, languages, and cultural industries.

2.5. The Scientific Field and Conceptual Institutionalization

Bibliometric networks reveal which concepts are used together within a field, which sources constitute a shared intellectual foundation, and which publications form research fronts through similar reference lists (Donthu et al., 2021; van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2014; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies conceptual proximities, co-citation analysis reveals the field's retrospective intellectual foundation, and bibliographic coupling identifies research fronts formed through the references shared by contemporary publications (Kessler, 1963).

From the perspective of Bourdieu's (1975, 1993) theory of the scientific field, a co-citation core reflects the process through which particular studies accumulate symbolic capital and become legitimate points of reference. New concepts may rapidly gain visibility in publications; however, their incorporation into the field's doxa depends on their regular use and citation across different research traditions. The institutionalization of platformization must therefore be assessed by considering its publication share, keyword structure, co-citation core, and research fronts identified through bibliographic coupling. This framework enables an examination of the potential time lag between conceptual innovation and intellectual consolidation.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs bibliometric science mapping to examine the publication trends and conceptual structure of fandom research between 2009 and 2026, identify the digital fandom subset within this literature, and assess temporal changes in platformization-focused publications (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The data were retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection on 3 August 2026. This date served as the upper cutoff for the 2021–2026 period.

3.2. Search Strategy

The following query was executed in the Topic (TS) field using the Advanced Search interface of the Web of Science Core Collection. It is reproduced below in fixed-width format, exactly as entered, so that it can be copied directly for replication:

> TS = (fandom OR "fan studies" OR "fan culture*" OR "fan communit*" OR "fan activis*" OR "fan labor" OR "fan labour" OR "participatory fandom" OR "transcultural fandom" OR "digital fandom" OR "online fandom" OR ((fan OR fans) NEAR/3 (culture* OR communit* OR activis* OR practice* OR audience*)))

At this stage, the query was deliberately kept broad and did not include platform- or social media-specific terms. The objective was to construct a baseline dataset encompassing both digital and nondigital fandom publications and to code the digital and platform-focused subsets separately in subsequent stages.

3.3. Scope Filters and Initial Dataset

The results were limited to the 2009–2026 publication period, the English language, the Article and Review Article document types, and the SSCI, ESCI, and A&HCI citation indexes. No research area filter was applied. Review articles were included to capture the syntheses that contribute to the field's conceptual and citation structures. Following filtering, 3044 records were exported in seven files using the Full Record and Cited References option.

3.4. Title and Abstract Screening and Eligibility Criteria

The records were screened for eligibility based on their titles, abstracts, and author keywords. Studies were included if they centered on fandoms within the contexts of media, music, television, film, sports, gaming, celebrity culture, or digital culture, or if they focused on fan communities, labor, activism, participatory culture, or fan practices. Publications that used the word "fan" in the context of industrial ventilation or merely as a sample characteristic were excluded, as were general studies of consumer behavior and brand loyalty that did not center on fandom.

In the first stage, rule-based screening was applied to identify high-confidence false matches in the title, abstract, and keyword fields. Automatic exclusion was restricted to unambiguous patterns, including geological or hydrological references to "alluvial fans," medical and engineering devices, mechanical fans, text-extraction errors in which "farming" had been corrupted as "fanning," and instances in which "Fan" was used as a surname. General terms such as "algorithm," "visibility," and "moderation" were not considered grounds for exclusion. This procedure automatically excluded 26 records and flagged 86 borderline cases containing expressions such as "brand fan," "fan page," "brand loyalty," and "brand community" for manual review.

The titles, abstracts, author keywords, and WoS Keywords Plus fields were used to screen the borderline cases. A sensitivity check showed that 23 of the 86 records had been flagged solely through Keywords Plus, four of which were excluded following manual review. Keywords Plus was therefore retained only as a sensitivity measure for identifying borderline cases and was not used to code platformization.

3.5. Manual Validation

All 26 automatically excluded records and 86 flagged borderline cases (n = 112) were evaluated by the researcher based on their titles and abstracts. All 26 automatically excluded records were confirmed to be unrelated to fandom. Among the borderline cases, studies examining fandoms in the contexts of media, sports, gaming, celebrity culture, or digital culture were retained even when they employed a marketing framework. General research on brand communities and consumer marketing that did not center on a specific fandom was excluded. Accordingly, 32 of the 86 borderline cases were excluded, while 54 were retained. The decisions and their justifications were recorded in an Excel file. Following the removal of 58 records, comprising 26 automatically excluded and 32 manually excluded records, the final dataset consisted of 2986 publications.

3.6. Identification of the Digital Fandom Subset

The titles, abstracts, and author keywords in the final dataset were screened for the following terms: digital, online, internet, web, "social media," "social network*," "new

media," platform*, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Tumblr, Twitch, Discord, Weibo, WeChat, Bilibili, Douyin, "Archive of Our Own," and AO3. Publications matching at least one term were coded as digital fandom studies. This procedure assigned 1433 publications to the digital fandom subset and 1553 publications to the nondigital/general fandom subset.

For preliminary validation of the automated classification, a stratified random sample of 40 records, comprising 20 records from each group, was manually reviewed based on their titles and abstracts. Of these records, 34 (85.0%) were correctly classified. The 6 misclassified records included false-positive cases in which terms such as "online" or "Web" referred to data collection methods or database names rather than digital fandom, as well as false-negative cases involving missing abstracts or terminology not covered by the dictionary, such as "Virtual Reality" and "CSCW." This validation was conducted as a diagnostic assessment rather than a comprehensive test of classification validity. Accordingly, the counts and proportions reported for the digital fandom subset should be interpreted as estimates derived from automated classification and subject to potential measurement error.

3.7. Coding the Platformization Indicator

The platformization variable was coded through exact phrase matching in titles, abstracts, and author keywords using the following terms: platformization, platformisation, platform logic, platform logics, platform governance, platform power, algorithmic visibility, algorithmic governance, recommendation algorithm, recommender system, datafication, datafied, metricization, metricisation, engagement metrics, visibility labor, visibility labour, content moderation, platform affordance, and platform affordances. General terms appearing in isolation, such as "algorithm," "visibility," and "moderation," were not included. Keywords Plus was also excluded because it does not necessarily reflect the publication's own conceptual orientation.

The screening procedure flagged 47 records, all of which were manually verified. Two records were excluded because the expressions "platform governance" and "engagement metrics" appeared only in secondary recommendations in their conclusion sections and did not constitute the theoretical or analytical focus of the studies. The final platformization subset therefore comprised 45 publications, representing 1.51% of the cleaned dataset.

To assess the risk of false negatives in this dictionary-based procedure, an additional stratified random sample of 40 records coded as non-platformization (seed = 42) was drawn from the final dataset and manually reviewed on the basis of titles and abstracts. Of these 40 records, 39 (97.5%) were confirmed as correctly excluded. One record, concerning the governance of non-normative genders within China's platform economy, was identified as a false negative: its title and abstract referred explicitly to "platform economy" and "platform industries," terms that are conceptually related to platformization but were not included in the original phrase list. This diagnostic check indicates an estimated false-negative rate of approximately 2.5% for the platformization indicator and suggests that extending the term list to include platform-economy vocabulary could marginally increase the size of the platformization subset in future replications.

3.8. Analysis Procedure

Three periods were defined to examine change over time: 2009–2015, 2016–2020, and 2021–2026. The relative share of platformization-focused publications was calculated using both the overall fandom literature and the digital fandom subset as denominators:

Percentage within the overall fandom literature = (Number of platformization-focused publications in the period/Total number of fandom publications in the period) × 100

Percentage within digital fandom = (Number of publications coded as both platformization-focused and digital fandom in the period/Total number of digital fandom publications in the period) × 100

In the second calculation, the numerator and denominator were derived from the same subset. Of the 43 platformization-focused publications from the 2021–2026 period, two did not trigger the digital fandom indicator because they contained terms such as "Netflix" and "recommender system," which were not included in the digital fandom dictionary. These two publications were therefore excluded from the numerator of this percentage.

The share of platformization-focused publications increased from 0.00% to 0.26% and then to 2.48% within the overall fandom literature. Within the digital fandom subset, the corresponding share increased from 0.00% to 0.62% and then to 4.51%. The Cochran–Armitage trend test applied across the ordered periods showed that the increase was statistically significant for both the overall fandom denominator (n = 485, 767, and 1734; platformization = 0, 2, and 43; $Z = 4.82$; $p < 0.001$) and the digital fandom denominator (n = 199, 324, and 910; platformization ∩ digital fandom = 0, 2, and 41; $Z = 4.19$; $p < 0.001$). The test supports a directional trend across the three aggregated periods but does not demonstrate uninterrupted year-to-year growth. A complete year-by-year disaggregation of these counts, requested as a robustness supplement to the three aggregated periods reported above, is provided in Table A1 in Appendix A.

3.9. Limitations

All 112 records flagged during eligibility screening and all 47 records identified by the platformization indicator were manually reviewed. The automated classification of the 2986 publications into digital and nondigital/general fandom subsets was additionally assessed using a stratified random sample of 40 records. This diagnostic validation yielded an accuracy rate of 85.0% and indicated that the term list could fail to identify publications referring to "Virtual Reality," "Netflix," "CSCW," or streaming services that did not mention a platform by name. It also showed that some matches for "online" referred solely to the research method rather than to the object of study. The counts and proportions derived from the digital fandom subset should therefore be interpreted as estimates subject to potential measurement error. Although the use of specific phrases and the manual validation of all positively identified platformization records reduced the risk of false positives, these procedures could not entirely eliminate false negatives. Moreover, restricting the dataset to Web of Science and English-language publications may have excluded relevant research. The extensive reference lists of review articles may also have affected the density of the co-citation network. Because the 2026 data were retrieved on 3 August, publication counts for that year are incomplete and not directly comparable with those of complete publication years. Finally, the three-period analysis is sensitive to the selected period boundaries and does not capture continuous annual change.

4. Results

4.1. Screening Process, Publication Distribution, and Platformization Trend

This section presents the findings under two subsections: (a) descriptive findings concerning the screening and coding process, the distribution of publications over time, and the platformization trend (Figures 1 and 2); and (b) findings from the bibliometric science-mapping analyses conducted using VOSviewer (Figures 3–6).

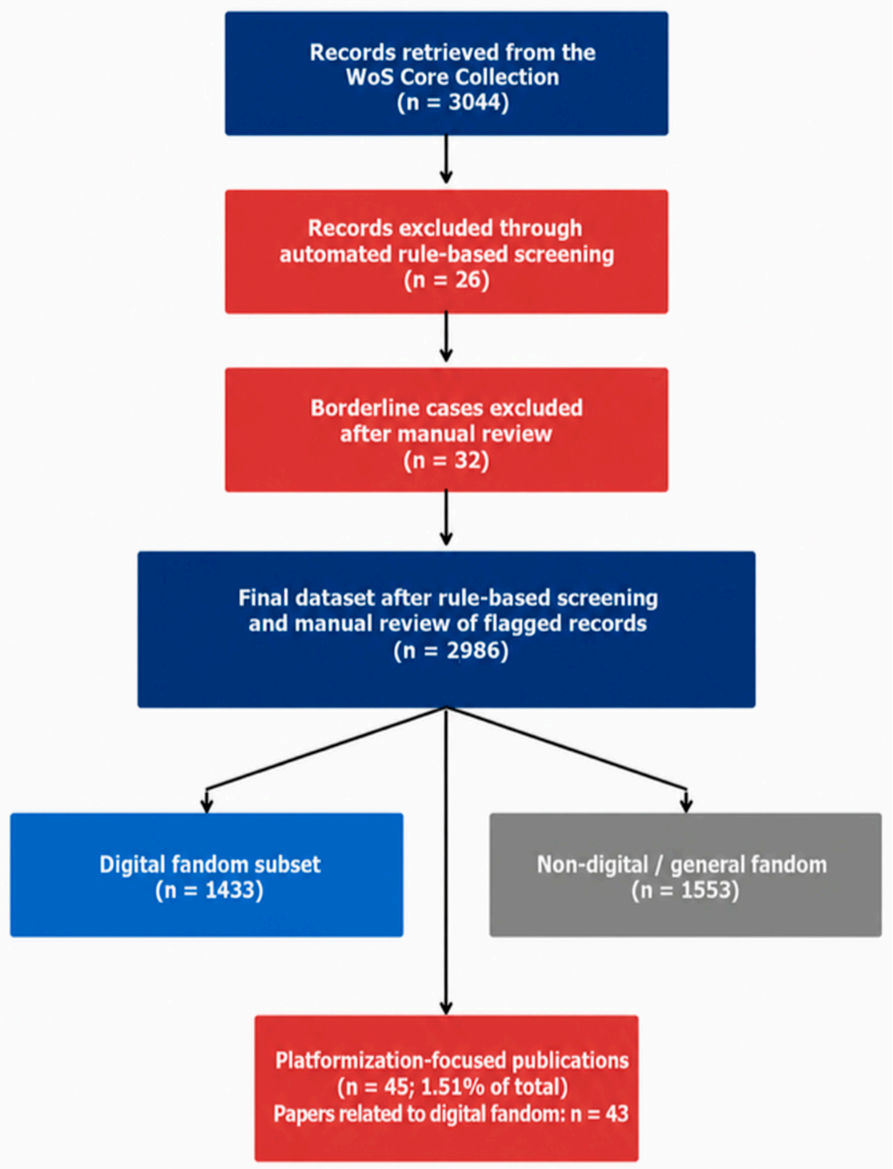


Figure 1. Screening and Coding Flowchart.

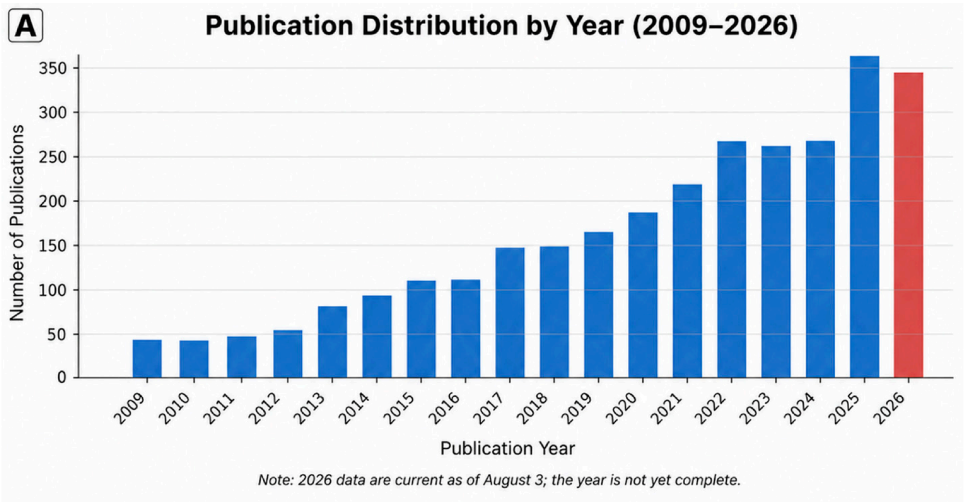


Figure 2. *Cont.*

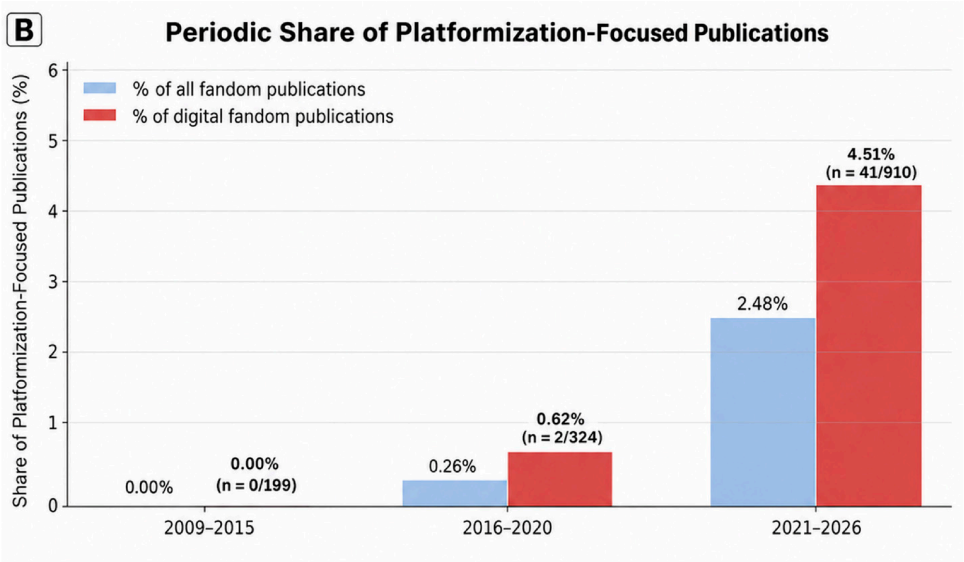


Figure 2. Publication Trends in Fandom Research and the Share of Platformization-Focused Publications: (**A**) Annual distribution of publications (2009–2026; 2026 data extend through 3 August); (**B**) Period-specific share of platformization-focused publications using the overall fandom and digital fandom denominators. In panel A, blue bars indicate complete publication years and the red bar indicates 2026, for which data are incomplete (through 3 August 2026). In panel B, light blue bars show the share within the overall fandom literature and dark red bars show the share within the digital fandom subset.

4.2. Bibliometric Science-Mapping Results

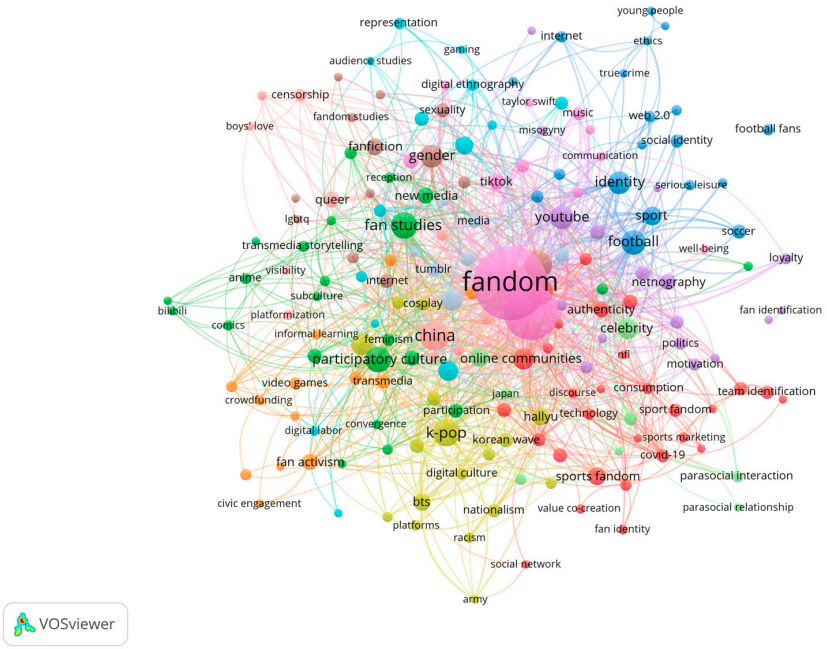
Four separate analyses were conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.21; van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2014) to map the conceptual and citation structures of the digital fandom subset (n = 1433): (a) an author keyword co-occurrence analysis of the full dataset, (b) a co-citation analysis, (c) a document-level bibliographic coupling analysis (Kessler, 1963), and (d) separate author keyword co-occurrence analyses for each of the three periods. The full-counting method was used in all keyword analyses. A term-mapping thesaurus file was applied to merge synonymous terms and spelling variants under the same concept (e.g., "TikTok" and "Tik Tok"; "X/Twitter" and "Twitter").

4.2.1. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis (Analysis A)

A co-occurrence analysis was conducted among author keywords appearing at least five times across the entire digital fandom subset (n = 1433). The analysis included 183 terms distributed across 12 clusters, with 1640 links and a total link strength (TLS) of 2605 (Figure 3A). The nodes with the highest TLS values were fandom (TLS = 631), social media (TLS = 375), and x/twitter (TLS = 115), followed by china, k-pop, fans, gender, television, football, fan studies, celebrity, identity, participatory culture, and youtube.

In the overlay visualization colored by average publication year (Figure 3B), four terms directly related to platformization were positioned at the most recent end of the network: platformization (TLS = 11, average publication year = 2025.1), platform (TLS = 15, average publication year = 2023.9), digital platforms (TLS = 19, average publication year = 2023.1), and platforms (TLS = 14, average publication year = 2022.7). The average publication-year range of these four terms (2022.7–2025.1) places them among the most recent group of the 183 terms. This recency describes when platform-centered vocabulary became frequent enough to enter the keyword co-occurrence network at the applied threshold; it does not indicate when platform-related questions were first raised in fandom research, since earlier work may have addressed comparable concerns using different terminology that this keyword-based measure cannot capture.

(**A**)



(**B**)

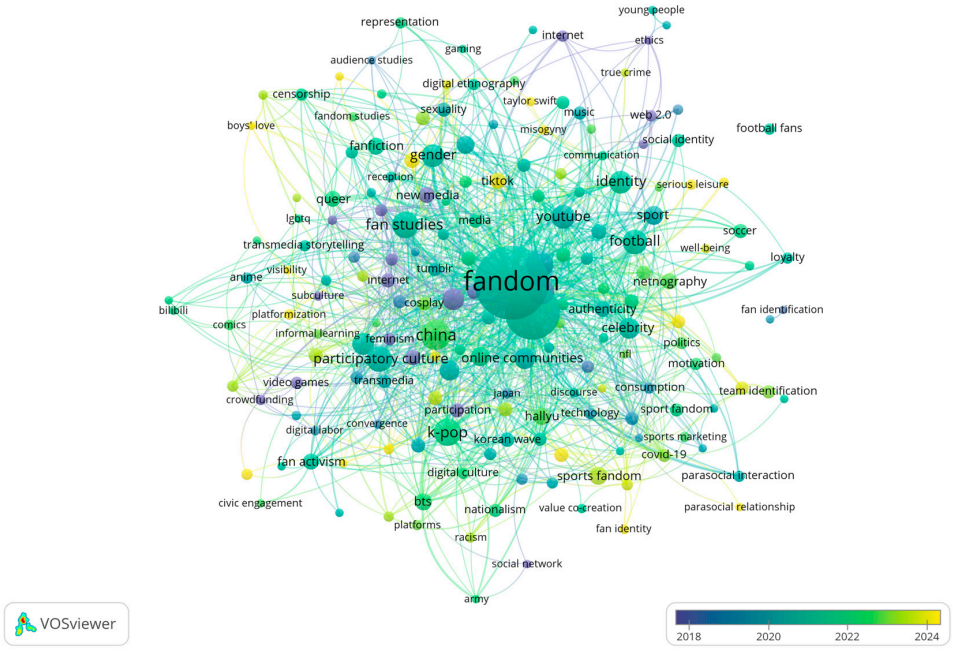


Figure 3. (**A**) Keyword Co-Occurrence Network in the Digital Fandom Subset (n = 1433). (**B**) Overlay Visualization of the Keyword Co-Occurrence Network in the Digital Fandom Subset, Colored by Average Publication Year (n = 1433). In panel (**A**), node colors indicate the 12 clusters. In panel (**B**), node colors indicate average publication year, from dark blue (2018) to yellow (2024), as shown in the color scale.

4.2.2. Co-Citation Analysis (Analysis B)

A co-citation analysis was conducted among the sources cited by publications in the digital fandom subset. Applying a minimum threshold of 20 citations produced a network comprising 74 sources, five clusters, and 1380 links, with a total link strength of 4328 (Figure 4). The nodes with the highest total link strength belonged to the classical fan studies canon: Jenkins's (1992) Textual Poachers (TLS = 672, 230 citations), Hills's (2002) Fan Cultures (TLS = 441, 124 citations), Jenkins's (2008) Convergence Culture (TLS = 385, 138 citations), and Jenkins's (2006) Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers (TLS = 291, 104 citations).

The analysis also revealed a notable pattern: none of the 74 sources contained the term "platform" in its title. Because a title is an imperfect proxy for a source's theoretical orientation, and because influential platform-related theorizing (e.g., work on platform economies, algorithmic governance, or infrastructure studies) may be indexed under different titular vocabulary, this absence is reported descriptively rather than as direct evidence that platform-oriented theory is absent from the field's citation base. With this caveat, the pattern is consistent with an interpretation in which the citation base continues to rest largely on classical and established fan studies literature, and platform-oriented theoretical sources have not yet accumulated citations at a density sufficient to enter the co-citation core at the threshold applied here. As a supplementary check, the within-corpus citation frequency of every reference listed in the cited-reference (CR) field of the digital fandom subset (n = 1459 records) was independently recomputed using an author-year-source matching key, yielding 76 cited sources at the same minimum-citation threshold applied in the primary network (closely approximating the 74-source core reported above) and confirming that no source with "platform" in its title or source field reaches this threshold. The platform-oriented source closest to the threshold was van Dijck's (van Dijck et al., 2018) The Platform Society, cited approximately 14 times within the corpus after consolidating minor author-name formatting variants, still below the threshold of 20 applied here; no other explicitly platform-titled source exceeded single-digit within-corpus citation counts. This supplementary frequency-based check approximates, but does not replace, a full re-clustering of the VOSviewer network at alternative thresholds (see Section 3.9). The publication-level growth of platformization research observed in Table 1 should therefore be interpreted as a trend that has not yet developed into maturation at the levels of citation and canon formation.

Table 1. Share of Platformization-Focused Publications by Period (Using the Overall Fandom and Digital Fandom Denominators).

Period	Overall Fandom	Digital Fandom	Platformization	% Within Overall Fandom	% Within Digital Fandom
2009–2015	485	199	0	0.00%	0.00%
2016–2020	767	324	2	0.26%	0.62%
2021–2026	1734	910	43	2.48%	4.51%

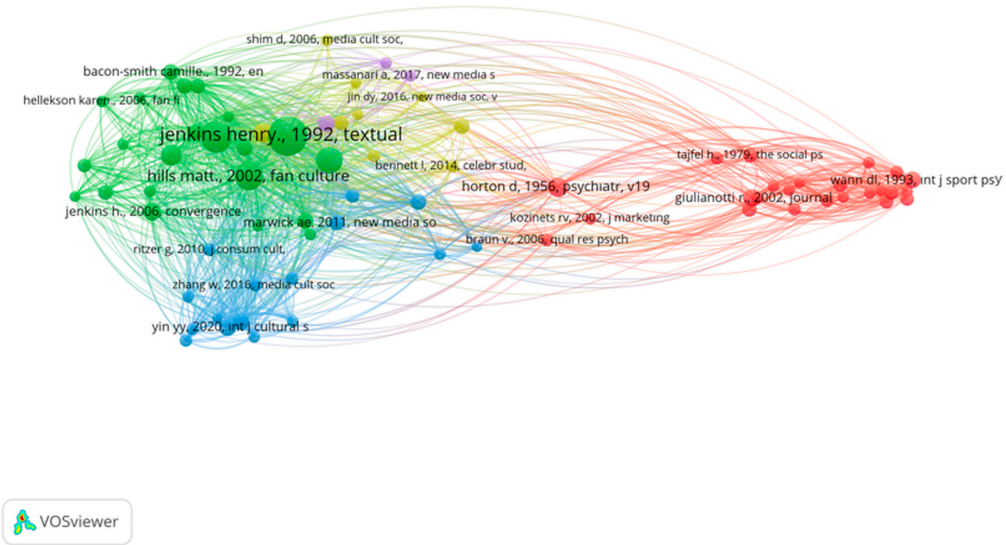


Figure 4. Co-Citation Network (Analysis B, Cited-Reference Level). Nodes represent cited references (labeled with first author, year, and abbreviated source; long labels are truncated by VOSviewer); node size reflects the number of citations; colors indicate the five clusters.

4.2.3. Bibliographic Coupling Analysis (Analysis C)

Two separate document-level bibliographic coupling analyses were conducted to identify research fronts based on shared-reference similarity: (C1) the complete digital fandom subset (n = 1433) and (C2) the subset limited to the 2021–2026 period (n = 910). To prevent the networks from becoming excessively dense, both analyses were limited to the 250 documents with the highest total link strength. The C1 analysis comprised four clusters and 24,749 links, with a total link strength of 41,277. The C2 analysis comprised five clusters and 15,738 links, with a total link strength of 26,165 (Figure 5).

Both maps contained one cluster that was clearly differentiated from the principal clusters: Cluster 4 in C1 (n = 34 documents) and Cluster 3 in C2 (n = 54 documents). A content assessment based on the documents' titles, abstracts, author keywords, and WoS subject categories showed that this structure did not represent an emerging research front centered on platform governance. Instead, it primarily represented approaches related to sports fandom, brand loyalty, team identification, consumer behavior, and marketing.

The document-level content assessment therefore confirmed that the differentiated cluster did not constitute an emerging platform-governance research front. Although the cluster was distinct from the main body of fandom research in terms of content similarity, this differentiation arose primarily from disciplinary and methodological differences-particularly marketing and sport management perspectives-rather than platformization. The bibliographic coupling analysis was therefore treated as a complementary analysis illustrating the different research traditions within the field, rather than as direct evidence of a platformization-oriented shift. This conclusion is bounded by the analytic scope of the coupling network itself: restricting each analysis to the 250 documents with the highest total link strength excludes lower-connectivity documents from cluster formation, so a platform-governance-oriented research front situated outside this high-density core would not have been detected by this method. The principal evidence for the platformization trend was therefore derived from the term-based period-specific shares and keyword analyses, not from the bibliographic coupling analysis.

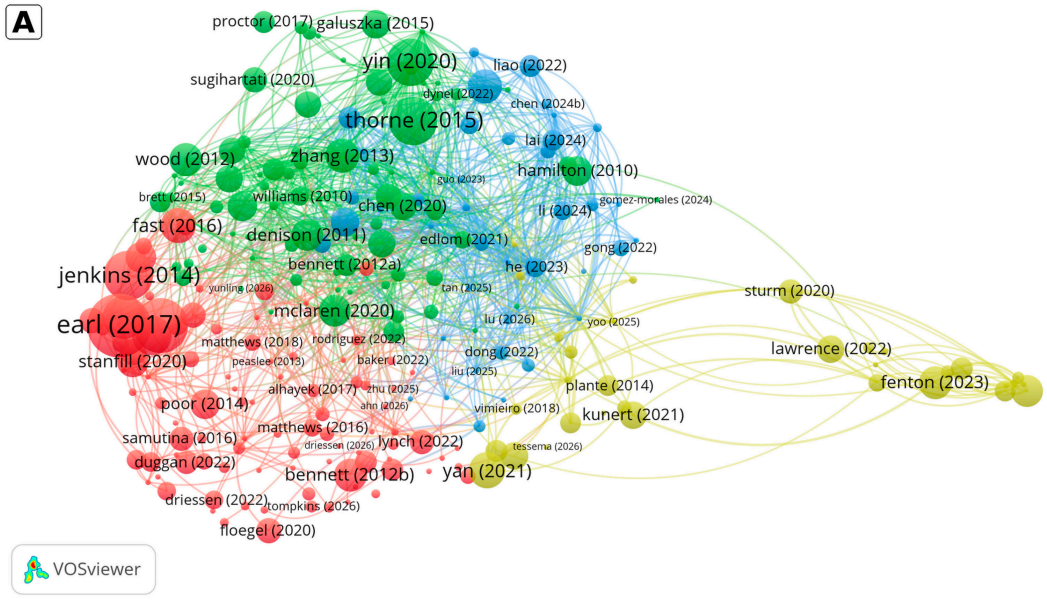


Figure 5. *Cont.*

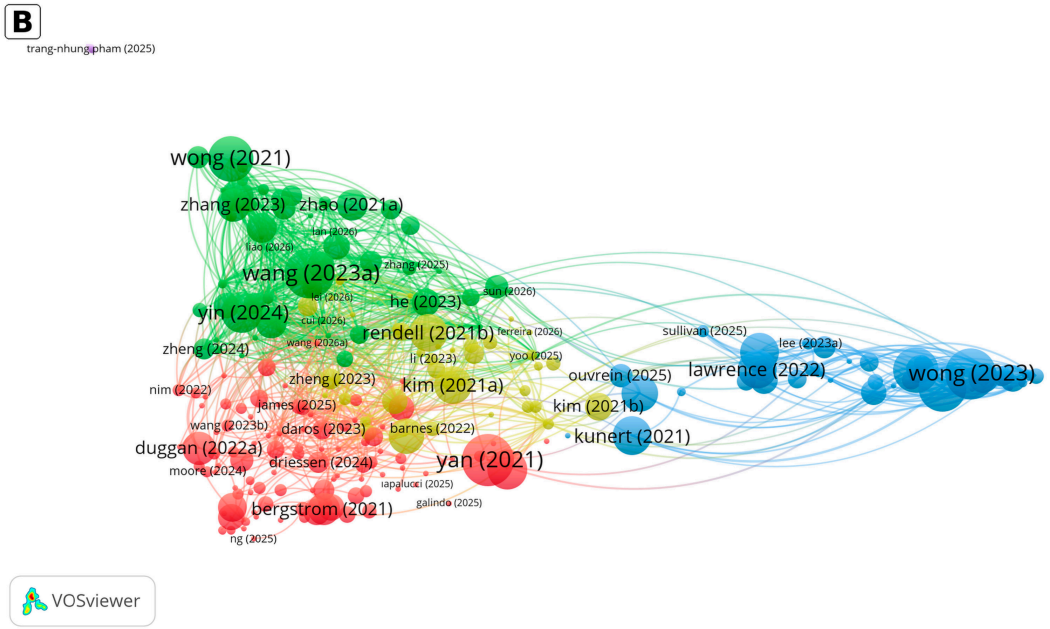


Figure 5. Bibliographic Coupling Networks: (**A**) Full digital fandom dataset (*n* = 1433; 250 documents with the highest TLS); (**B**) 2021–2026 subset (*n* = 910; 250 documents with the highest TLS). TLS = total link strength. Nodes represent the analyzed documents, labeled with first author and publication year (letters distinguish works by the same author in the same year); node size reflects the number of citations; colors indicate clusters. Labels identify documents in the analyzed dataset and are not references cited in this article.

4.2.4. Period-Specific Keyword Analyses

To examine the development of the platformization orientation over time in greater detail, the digital fandom subset was divided into three periods (2009–2015, 2016–2020, and 2021–2026), and a separate author keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted for each period. To account for differences in publication volume across periods, the threshold—the minimum number of term occurrences—was adjusted proportionally to the number of publications in each period. Because the thresholds varied, however, the numbers of terms, clusters, and links are not suitable for direct comparisons of network size across periods. The temporal interpretation was therefore limited to the presence or absence of platform names in the networks and their conceptual patterns. Summary statistics for the analyses are presented in Table 2.

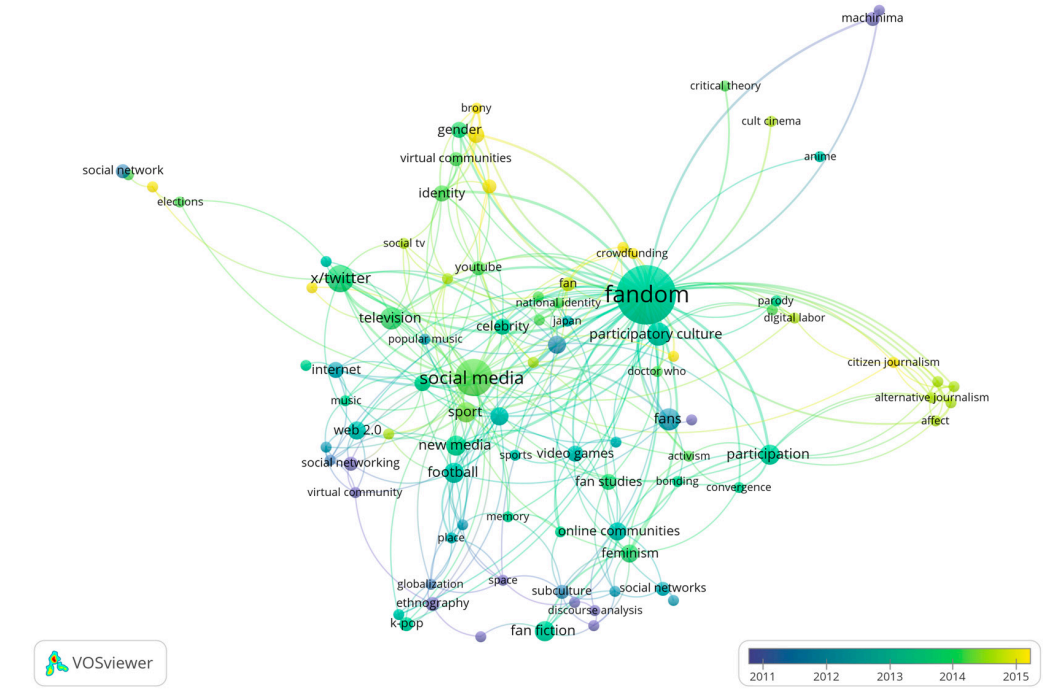
Table 2. Summary Statistics for the Period-Specific Keyword Co-Occurrence Analyses.

Period	*n* (Digital Fandom)	Min. Occurrence Threshold	Number of Terms	Number of Clusters	Number of Links	Total Link Strength
2009–2015	199	2	91	12	325	416
2016–2020	324	3	78	11	302	432
2021–2026	910	9	45	7	266	573

As the thresholds applied across the three periods increased, the number of terms included in the maps decreased from 91 to 45. This change is a natural consequence of the threshold design and should not be interpreted as direct evidence of a decline in conceptual diversity. A more analytically meaningful pattern concerns the presence of platform names across the periods. Term-level verification showed that x/twitter (P1 TLS = 27, P2 TLS = 33, P3 TLS = 24) and youtube (P1 TLS = 11, P2 TLS = 23, P3 TLS = 23) appeared in the networks

for all three periods (Figure 6). By contrast, reddit (TLS = 20) and tiktok (TLS = 15) exceeded the threshold and entered the network only during the 2021–2026 period. This finding does not support the simplistic interpretation that platform names entered the literature only in the most recent period. Instead, the findings indicate an expansion of conceptual interest, with new platform actors (reddit and tiktok) being added to the continuing presence of previously studied platforms (x/twitter and youtube). Because the thresholds varied, TLS values were not used to make direct comparisons of magnitude across periods.

(**A**)



(**B**)

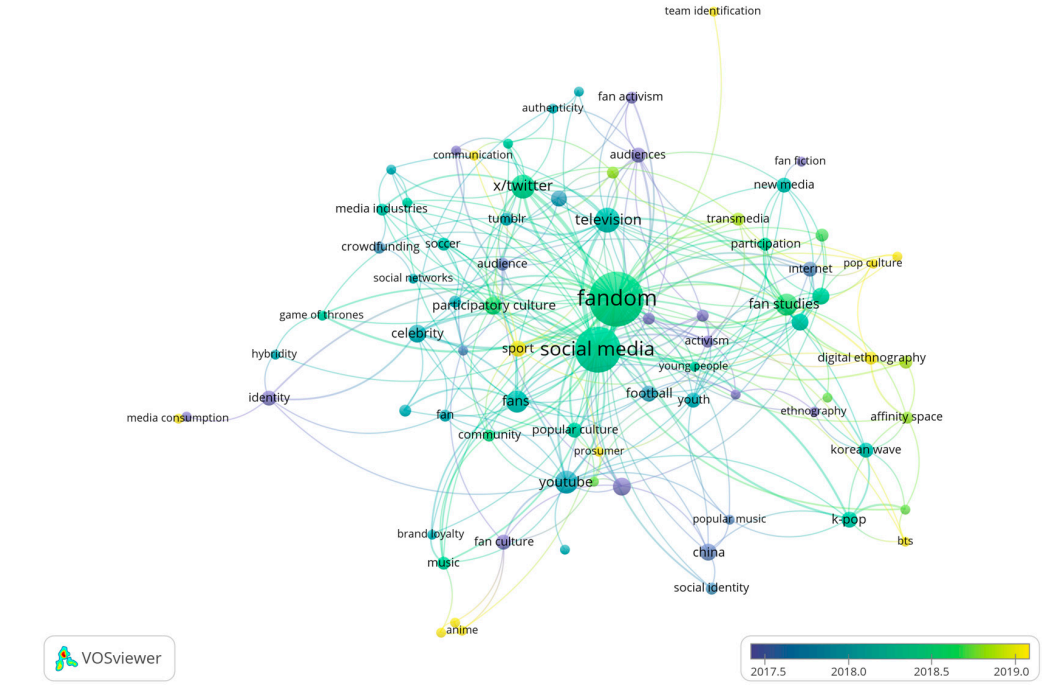


Figure 6. *Cont.*

(**C**)

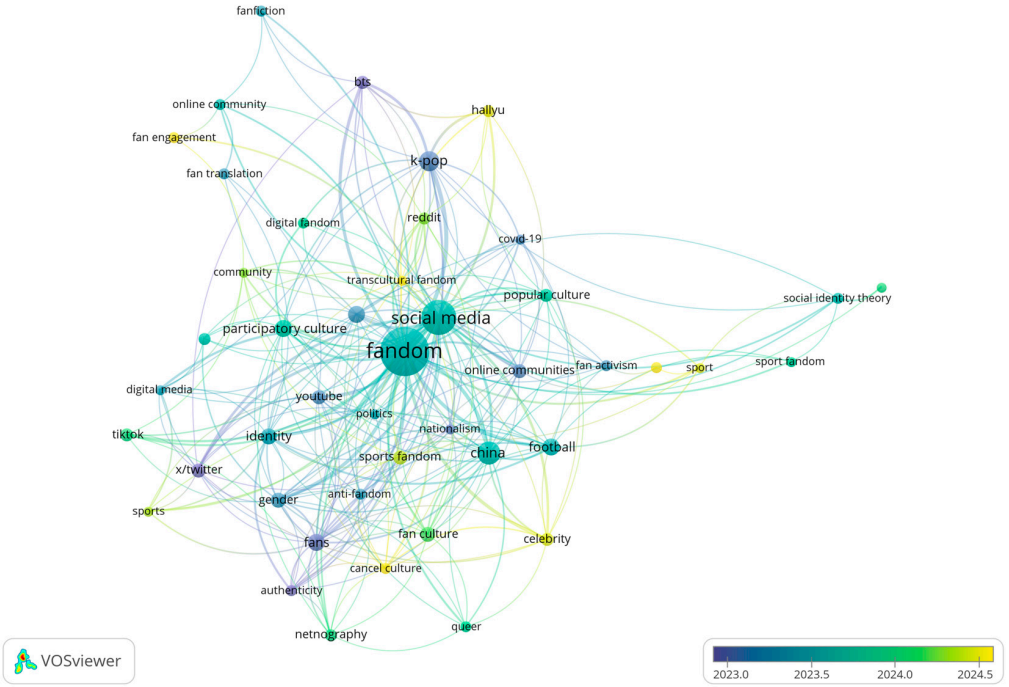


Figure 6. (**A**) Overlay Visualization of the Keyword Co-Occurrence Network, 2009–2015. (**B**) Overlay Visualization of the Keyword Co-Occurrence Network, 2016–2020. (**C**) Overlay Visualization of the Keyword Co-Occurrence Network, 2021–2026.

4.3. Assessment of the Conceptual Orientation

The descriptive findings (see Table 1) show that the relative share of platformization-focused publications followed a statistically significant upward trend across the three aggregated periods (n = 45; Cochran–Armitage trend test: overall fandom denominator, $Z = 4.82$, $p < 0.001$; digital fandom denominator, $Z = 4.19$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates a directional change across the three specified periods rather than uninterrupted year-to-year growth. The bibliometric science-mapping findings partly support this trend while also clarifying its limitations. In Analysis A, platform-oriented terms—platformization, platform, digital platforms, and platforms—were positioned at the most recent end of the network. Moreover, the presence of x/twitter and youtube across all three periods, followed by the addition of reddit and tiktok after 2021, indicates a broadening of conceptual interest. By contrast, in Analysis B, no source containing the term "platform" in its title had entered the co-citation core. In Analysis C, the differentiated cluster represented a sports- and marketing-oriented research tradition rather than platform governance. Together, these findings indicate that platformization has not yet become a canonized and institutionalized subfield at the citation level.

When the four analyses are considered jointly, the data do not support characterizing platformization as a "central paradigm" within digital fandom research. Instead, the findings position platformization as an emerging conceptual orientation whose relative publication share increased across the three aggregated periods and whose visibility expanded at the keyword level, but which has not yet become institutionalized as a distinct research front at the levels of citation and shared-reference similarity. This framing is consistent with the limited yet directional pattern of transformation jointly indicated by the descriptive and statistical findings (Table 1) and the science-mapping results (Figures 3–6).

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the visibility of platformization within fandom research has increased, although it has not yet altered the field's theoretical center. Across the three periods, the share of platformization-focused publications rose from 0.00% to 0.26% and then to 2.48% within the overall fandom literature, and from 0.00% to 0.62% and then to 4.51% within the digital fandom subset. Although both trends were statistically significant, only 45 of the 2986 fandom publications were confirmed as platformization-focused, indicating that this growth occurred from a low baseline. The findings therefore point to an accelerating conceptual orientation whose relative weight remains limited rather than to a central paradigm shift. It should also be recognized that the tests indicate a directional change across three aggregated periods, not uninterrupted year-to-year growth.

This finding is consistent with, rather than a definitive empirical demonstration of, the conceptual distinction between digital fandom and platformization proposed above; a single low-overlap indicator constrains but does not by itself settle a conceptual argument of this scope. Digital fandom scholarship has long examined online communities, networked participation, and digital fan production (Bennett, 2014; Booth, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2013). The platformization approach, however, goes beyond treating the digital environment merely as context by placing platforms' economic models, infrastructural dependencies, data practices, and governance power at the center of analysis (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2021; van Dijck et al., 2018). The fact that only a small proportion of the 1433-publication digital subset met the platformization criteria highlights the difference in scope between these two bodies of scholarship. Examining fan activity on a platform is not analytically equivalent to problematizing how that platform organizes visibility and participation.

The keyword findings indicate that this orientation has become more pronounced in recent years. The average publication years of the terms *platformization*, *platform*, *digital platforms*, and *platforms* ranged from 2022.7 to 2025.1, suggesting that algorithmic ranking, visibility labor, data production, and moderation have entered the contemporary vocabulary of fandom research. This pattern is consistent with scholarship that conceptualizes platforms as actors that classify and govern cultural visibility (Abidin, 2020; Bishop, 2019; Gillespie, 2010, 2014; Yin, 2020; Zhang & Negus, 2020). The continued presence of X/Twitter and YouTube in the period-specific networks, followed by the addition of Reddit and TikTok in the most recent period, likewise suggests a diversification of research objects rather than an abrupt rupture. This diversification is also consistent with the polymedia approach, which argues that users operate within relational media ecologies rather than through a single medium (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Nevertheless, because the period-specific thresholds varied across 2, 3, and 9 occurrences, the numbers of terms and links should not be interpreted as direct measures of growth.

The co-citation analysis reveals a time lag between conceptual renewal and intellectual consolidation. The organization of the 74 sources exceeding the citation threshold around classical fan studies works by Jenkins (1992, 2006, 2008) and Hills (2002) demonstrates that participation, identity, community, and textual productivity remain central to the field's shared intellectual memory. Although the absence of any source containing "platform" in its title from this core suggests that platformization has not yet become a canonical point of reference, this negative finding is sensitive to the citation threshold and title-based criterion employed; a supplementary frequency-based check (Section 4.2.2) indicates that the platform studies text closest to this threshold, van Dijck's (van Dijck et al., 2018) The Platform Society, remains below it, so the core would not admit an explicitly platform-titled source unless the threshold were relaxed further than tested here. A more cautious interpretation is that platformization is adding an infrastructural explanatory layer to the

existing canon rather than replacing it. Fan agency and platform power are therefore not competing explanations: fans retain their capacities for cultural production, while algorithms, metrics, and moderation rules structure the conditions under which that production becomes visible and circulates (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Plantin & Punathambekar, 2019).

The bibliographic coupling results similarly indicate that platformization has not yet formed an independent research front. The clusters differentiated from the main body of research were organized around sports fandom, brand loyalty, team identification, consumer behavior, and marketing approaches rather than platform governance. Because bibliographic coupling identifies current research fronts through shared reference use (Kessler, 1963; Zupic & Čater, 2015), this finding demonstrates that examining the same digital objects does not, by itself, produce a shared theoretical domain. At present, differentiation within the field appears to arise primarily from disciplinary problem definitions and methodological traditions rather than platformization. Future research should examine whether platform power and data production can provide a shared analytical language across these traditions.

This uneven development is interpreted here through the concept of an "institutionalization gap," proposed as an organizing analytical framework for the present findings rather than as an independently validated theoretical construct. The concept refers to the temporal and intensity gap between the emergence of a new vocabulary at the publication and keyword levels and its integration into the co-citation core and research fronts. This framing is related to, but not equivalent to, existing accounts of conceptual diffusion and field formation in the sociology of science: whereas diffusion perspectives typically track the spread of a term's usage across a literature, and field-formation perspectives typically address the emergence of a subfield's autonomous institutions (dedicated journals, conferences, or curricula), the institutionalization gap construct used here targets specifically the lag between a concept's surface-level visibility and its embedding in the field's citation structure. It does not, on its own, indicate whether platformization will consolidate into a distinct subfield or instead persist as a perspective absorbed within existing fandom scholarship. From the perspective of Bourdieu's (1975, 1993) theory of the scientific field, the contemporary use of a concept is insufficient to transform a field's doxa. The concept must be recognized across different research traditions, receive regular citations, and accumulate symbolic capital. The findings suggest that platformization is currently situated at an early or intermediate stage of this process. The "institutionalization gap" should therefore be understood not as evidence of a completed doxic transformation but as an analytical proposition that describes uneven development across bibliometric indicators and requires further empirical testing.

Future research should focus on differences across platforms and contexts. Although transcultural fandom crosses national boundaries, it is constituted within specific cultural and industrial conditions, while censorship, data governance, and state–platform relations do not operate uniformly across different regimes (Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Luo & Li, 2024; Yin, 2020). The recommendation systems, moderation practices, and visibility metrics of environments such as TikTok, YouTube, Reddit, Discord, and Weibo should therefore be compared. Combining bibliometric mapping with ethnography, interviews, interface analysis, and computational trace analysis could also strengthen our understanding of the relationship between conceptual changes in publication networks and fans' everyday experiences.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the study's measurement and scope limitations. The 85.0% accuracy observed in the diagnostic validation of 40 records indicates that the automated digital fandom classification remained susceptible to both false

positives, particularly when terms such as "online" referred only to research methods, and false negatives resulting from terminology not included in the digital fandom dictionary. Although the platformization indicator relied on more specific phrases and all positively identified records were manually validated, the possibility of overlooking relevant publications that employed different conceptual vocabularies could not be entirely eliminated. The restriction of the dataset to Web of Science and English-language publications, the use of varying network thresholds across periods, and the inclusion of incomplete 2026 data retrieved through 3 August also warrant caution. The co-citation analysis was conducted at a single network threshold, and the bibliographic coupling analyses were restricted to the 250 documents with the highest total link strength. Whether the bibliographic coupling cluster structures would remain stable under a less restrictive document threshold was not systematically tested here and should be addressed in future replications. The stability of the co-citation core under a lower threshold was probed through a supplementary frequency-based recount of the cited-reference field (Section 4.2.2); this check confirmed the absence of platform-titled sources at the threshold applied in the primary analysis and identified van Dijck's (van Dijck et al., 2018) The Platform Society, cited approximately 14 times within the corpus, as the platform-oriented source closest to entering the core. Because this check approximates rather than replicates the VOSviewer clustering algorithm, a full re-clustering at alternative thresholds remains a valuable direction for future replication. Despite these limitations, the convergence of evidence across publication shares, keyword structures, co-citation patterns, and bibliographic coupling supports the conclusion that platformization represents not a completed paradigm shift but an emerging orientation that is expanding at the publication and conceptual levels while remaining only partially institutionalized within the field's shared reference system and research fronts.

6. Conclusions

This study examined fandom research published between 2009 and 2026 using a broad corpus that was not predetermined by platform-related search terms. Rule-based screening and manual validation produced an overall fandom dataset of 2986 publications, of which 1433 were classified as digital fandom studies and 45 as platformization-focused studies.

The findings demonstrate that platformization has become increasingly visible at the publication and conceptual levels but has not yet developed into a central paradigm within fandom research. The co-citation structure remains anchored in foundational fan studies scholarship, while sports and marketing traditions continue to predominate within the identified research fronts.

Rather than replacing core concepts such as participation, creativity, identity, and community, the platformization approach makes visible the algorithmic, economic, and governance conditions under which these phenomena are shaped. Platformization should therefore be understood not as a completed doxic transformation but as an emerging research orientation that may become further institutionalized through future multilingual, cross-platform, and mixed-methods research.

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Appendix A

Table A1 disaggregates the period-level counts reported in Table 1 into individual publication years, presented here in response to a reviewer request for a more granular view of the annual distribution underlying the reported trend. The 2026 row reflects records retrieved through 3 August 2026, and therefore represents a partial publication year rather than a completed annual count.

Table A1. Annual Distribution of Platformization-Focused Publications, 2009–2026.

Year	Overall Fandom (N)	Platformization-Focused (N)	% Within Overall Fandom
2009	45	0	0.00%
2010	44	0	0.00%
2011	49	0	0.00%
2012	56	0	0.00%
2013	83	0	0.00%
2014	95	0	0.00%
2015	113	0	0.00%
2016	114	0	0.00%
2017	148	0	0.00%
2018	150	0	0.00%
2019	166	1	0.60%
2020	189	1	0.53%
2021	221	3	1.36%
2022	269	1	0.37%
2023	265	5	1.89%
2024	269	6	2.23%
2025	364	12	3.30%
2026	346	16	4.62%
Total	2986	45	1.51%

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