



Bibliometric Analysis of Human Capital and Digital Employee Integration to Enhance Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

This study investigates the intellectual structure of research on human capital and workforce digitalization integration as a foundation for sustainable competitive advantage, analyzed through a strategic marketing lens. Employing a quantitative bibliometric approach, it maps the evolution, conceptual trends, and collaboration networks within this interdisciplinary domain. A systematic analysis was conducted on 202 Scopus-indexed documents published between 2012 and 2025 using Bibliometrix R and Biblioshiny software. Performance analysis and science mapping reveal a significant surge in scholarly output post-2019, underscoring the rising urgency of digital transformation in human resource management. Thematic and keyword analyses identify five dominant research streams and trace the evolution of core concepts, including "strategic human resource management," "digital employee integration," and "dynamic capabilities." Furthermore, collaboration network mapping highlights influential author clusters and reveals structural gaps in cross-regional research partnerships. The study concludes that the synergy between human capital development and technological integration constitutes not merely a strategic imperative but a critical dynamic capability essential for organizational resilience in a disruptive era. As its primary original contribution, this research provides the first comprehensive empirical map that systematically connects the discourses on human capital, workforce digitalization, and competitive advantage, thereby outlining a forward-looking research agenda and offering a robust empirical basis for developing adaptive HR strategies in the digital age.

Keywords: *Human Capital; Digital Employee Integration; Sustainable Competitive Advantage; Strategic Human Resource Management; Bibliometrics; Strategic Marketing*

Introduction

The changes in the global business landscape due to the 4.0 industrial revolution, digitalization, and increasingly intense market competition have forced organizations to reassess the foundations of their competitive advantage. As recent strategic analysis concludes, sustainable advantage now stems from an organization's capacity for rapid strategic reconfiguration and business model innovation (Sjödin et al., 2021). Organizations are no longer solely relying on physical assets; they are now required to manage strategically valuable internal resources, especially human resources and

digital capabilities. In the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework, sustainable competitive advantage can only be achieved by utilizing dynamic digital resources and data-driven capabilities that are valuable, rare, and protected by isolating mechanisms in fast-evolving ecosystems (Khin & Ho, 2022).

Human capital and technology-based HR management systems become crucial components in this context (Crook et al., 2011; Kiilu et al., 2024). Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, competencies, and personal attributes possessed by individuals within an organization that can create added value for the company. Contemporary analysis posits that human capital, particularly in the digital age, must be developed as a dynamic and adaptable asset, with technology serving as a key enabler for unlocking its strategic value and fostering innovation (Kianto et al., 2023). This strategic role is amplified as human capital is reconceptualized from a static asset into the core driver of organizational agility and resilience, directly fueling sustainable growth (Ferreira et al., 2021). Crook et al., (2011) found that employee performance is the primary determinant of service quality and operational efficiency in the service-based sector. Kiilu et al., (2024) added that service quality, safety, and customer satisfaction heavily depend on workforce performance in the aviation industry.

However, the potential of human capital does not always immediately result in a competitive advantage without an organizational strategy capable of maximizing the contribution of human resources (Paulus, 2017). Therefore, strategic human resource management (SHRM) has become critical. SHRM integrates HR functions with the organization's strategic direction, creating alignment between internal capabilities and long-term goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992). In the current volatile landscape, SHRM is fundamentally recast as a dynamic capability, essential for building organizational resilience and enabling the agile reconfiguration of human assets to meet strategic demands (Strohmeier, 2020). Hamadamin & Atan, (2019) show that SHRM practices directly influence human capital development and indirectly increase employee commitment. Nazneen, (2024) reinforces these findings by explaining that employee commitment is a mediator between SHRM and achieving strategic outcomes. High employee commitment results in consistent performance, loyalty, and innovative drive. This strategic impact is most potent when SHRM practices are implemented as a synergistic system, creating causal ambiguity and thus forming a more durable source of competitive advantage (Obeidat & Tarhini, 2021).

As digital technology advances, the landscape of HR management is also transforming. The utilization of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, and cloud systems in HR practices has given rise to the concept of digital HR (Fenech et al., 2019; Nyathani, 2022). Nathan states, The HR realm is transcending traditional boundaries, embedding technologically driven approaches into its core. HR digitalization accelerates operational efficiency while simultaneously enhancing employee work experience.

This transformation requires moving beyond mere technology adoption to cultivating a digital mindset, building data literacy across the organization, and redesigning HR processes to be inherently digital (Vrontis et al., 2022). Parry & Battista, (2019) remind us that readiness for a digital culture, enhancement of HR technology competencies, and a change in managerial mindset are necessary to achieve this. Especially in SMEs or developing countries, technology integration still faces infrastructure barriers and resistance to change (Kiilu et al., 2024). These contextual challenges underscore that the strategic payoff of digital HR is contingent upon overcoming significant organizational and socio-technical barriers, often leading to a 'digital divide' in HR capabilities (Malik et al., 2022).

However, the interconnection between human capital, digital HR, and SHRM in creating competitive advantage is rarely studied. Especially from the strategic marketing perspective, how HR management can enhance customer value, brand positioning, and competitive differentiation has not yet

become the primary focus of empirical studies. RBV provides a relevant framework for examining the potential integration of these internal resources.

This study offers a holistic approach to integrating human capital and digital transformation of HR as the foundation for strengthening the organization's competitive advantage. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How has the literature on human capital, strategic HRM, and digital employee integration evolved in supporting competitive advantage, viewed through publication trends, author contributions, and geographical and institutional influences?

RQ2: What are the main research streams emerging at the intersection of strategic HRM and digitalization in the context of organizational competitiveness?

RQ3: What are the potential areas for further research that have not been extensively explored in this field, particularly from the perspective of strategic marketing? To answer these questions, this research adopts a mixed-method approach, which combines bibliometric analysis.

Method

This research uses a quantitative bibliometric approach to explore and map the scientific developments related to human capital and digital employee integration to enhance competitive advantage through a strategic marketing perspective. This approach was chosen because it can identify intellectual structures, publication trends, collaboration networks, and the dynamics of research topics that develop systematically and measurably. This method is supported by various previous studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of bibliometrics in revealing patterns and directions of research within a scientific domain (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021). Specifically, its capacity to provide a rigorous, data-driven panorama of a field's evolution, core themes, and emerging frontiers makes it exceptionally suitable for investigating interdisciplinary and rapidly evolving domains such as strategic human resource management and digital transformation (Kumar et al., 2023; Linnenluecke et al., 2020).

Secondary data were obtained from the Scopus database, which is recognized as one of the most credible sources of scientific literature in management and business. The literature search was conducted on May 2, 2025. The literature search was conducted using a combination of keywords: ("human capital" OR "digital employee" OR "digital workforce" OR "employee digital skills" OR "HR analytics" OR "employee integration" OR "digital talent") AND ("competitive advantage" OR "strategic marketing" OR "business performance" OR "digital transformation"). These keywords are applied to the TITLE, ABSTRACT, and KEYWORDS columns (TITLE-ABS-KEY) the initial search results in 2,048 documents. After the filtering process based on publication year (2012–2025), language (English), document type (journal articles, proceedings, and book chapters), and field relevance (Business, Management and Accounting), 202 documents suitable for further analysis were obtained.

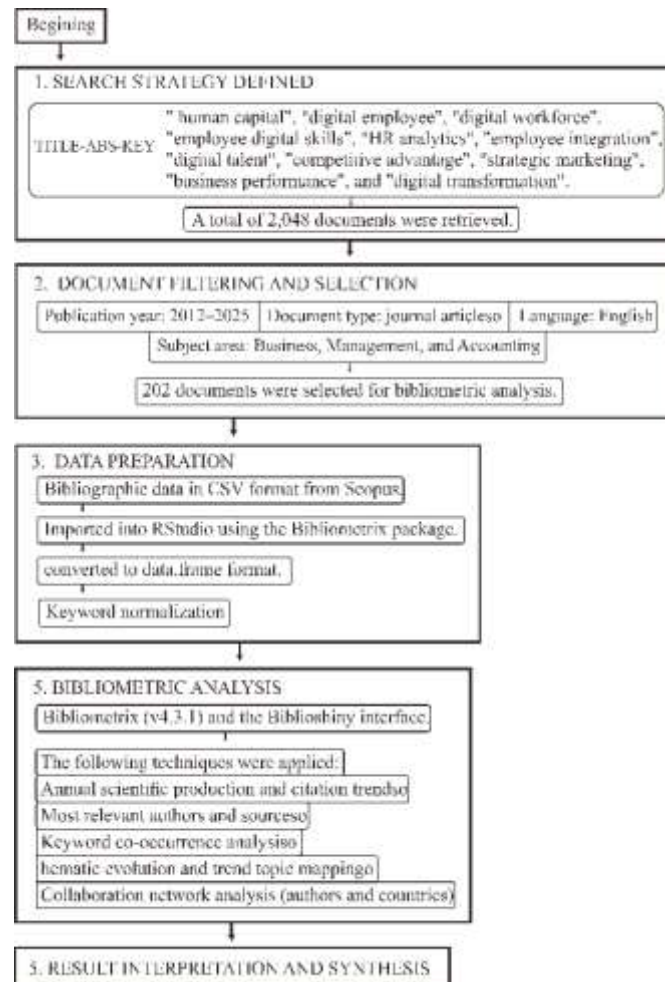
All data were analyzed using RStudio software with the support of the Bibliometrix package version 4.3.1 and the interactive biblioshiny interface. The analysis used key techniques such as annual scientific production and citations, identifying the most relevant authors and sources, co-word analysis, thematic evolution and trend topics, and mapping author and country collaborations.

Visualization is carried out using bibliophily in the form of bar charts, conceptual maps, network visualizations, and evolution graphs. The analysis begins with importing data from Scopus in CSV format, followed by conversion to data frame format, metadata cleaning, and keyword

normalization to avoid redundancy. Data validity is maintained through consistent terminology adjustments, such as merging the terms "digital employee" and "digital workforce" into a single analytical entity. This quantitative bibliometric approach enables the identification of existing knowledge patterns and lays the conceptual foundation for future research relevant to developing marketing strategies based on digital human capital.

The data collection, filtering, and processing process is detailed in Figure 1 below. (Jabbour & de Sousa Jabbour, 2016).

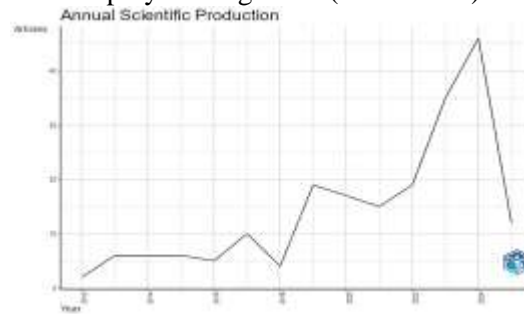
Figure 1. Stages of Bibliometric Analysis



Results and Discussion

As an initial step in examining research developments, publication and citation trends related to human capital and digital employee integration in the context of organizational competitive advantage were mapped.

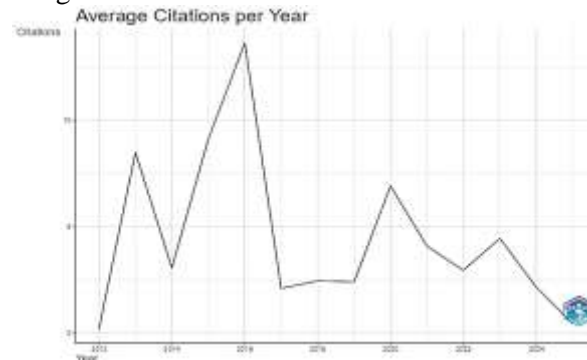
Figure 2. Trend in the Annual Number of Scientific Publications on Human Capital and Digital Employee Integration (2012–2025)



Based on data from Scopus (2012–2025), the publication growth graph shows a significant increasing trend since 2018, peaking in 2023 with 45 publications. The average annual growth recorded was 18.7%, indicating the increasing scientific relevance of this topic.

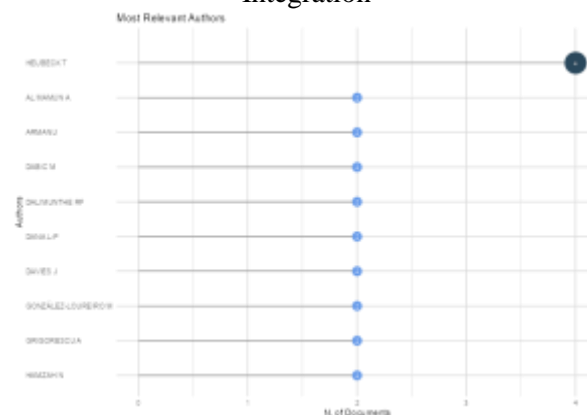
The average number of citations per year also fluctuated, with the highest peak in 2016 (more than 13 citations) and another surge in 2020, in line with the increasing attention to digital transformation post-pandemic. This trend indicates that earlier publications have a strong conceptual influence.

Figure 3. Average Annual Citations of Scientific Documents (2012–2025)



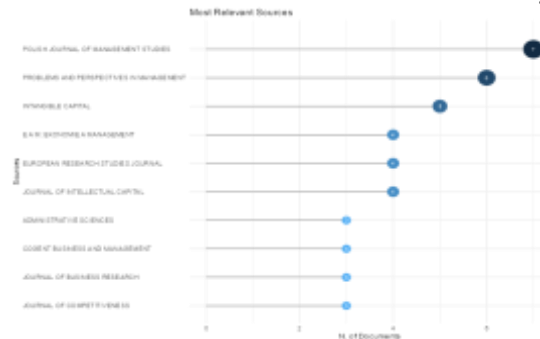
These findings support the studies by Sousa, M. J., & Rocha, (2019) and (Margherita & Braccini, 2021), which assert that the global crisis has accelerated digital adoption in the human resources sector. This change makes the digitalization of HR a pillar in the organization's strategy.

Figure 4. The Ten Most Productive Authors on the Topic of Human Capital and Digital Employee Integration



Analysis of the authors' contributions shows that Heubeck T is the most productive author during the study period, with four publications. Other influential authors include Al Mamun A, Dana LP, and Dalimunthe RF, each with two contributions. The dominance of specific authors indicates the presence of research specialization and the formation of scientific leadership in this sub-field.

Figure 5. The Ten Most Relevant Journals in Publications on Digital Human Capital



Meanwhile, from the perspective of publication sources, the Polish Journal of Management Studies is recorded as the most productive journal (7 documents), followed by Problems and Perspectives in Management (6) and Intangible Capital (5). Interestingly, journals such as the Journal of Business Research and the Journal of Intellectual Capital are also noted as important sources, indicating that the discourse on HR digitalization has become integral to cross-disciplinary strategic management.

Their success in building scientific influence also marks the importance of a cross-disciplinary approach, combining perspectives from human resource management, marketing, and technological innovation (Tambe et al., 2019). These findings are consistent with Singh et al., (2020) view that the dominance of key authors and selected sources marks the formation of an epistemic structure in cross-disciplinary strategic research.

Figure 6. Map of Collaboration Network Among Authors



The visualization of the authors' collaboration network shows a pattern that is still fragmented. Most collaborations occur in small clusters of two to four authors, with the leading collaborative group being Dana LP, Ng W, and Haq M. Meanwhile, the mapping of international collaboration shows that the United States and England are the centres of global connectivity, followed by Malaysia, Portugal, and Indonesia. The connection lines indicate dominant bilateral relations but with limitations on extensive transcontinental networks.

Figure 7. Map of International Collaboration in Human Capital Research and HR Digitalization

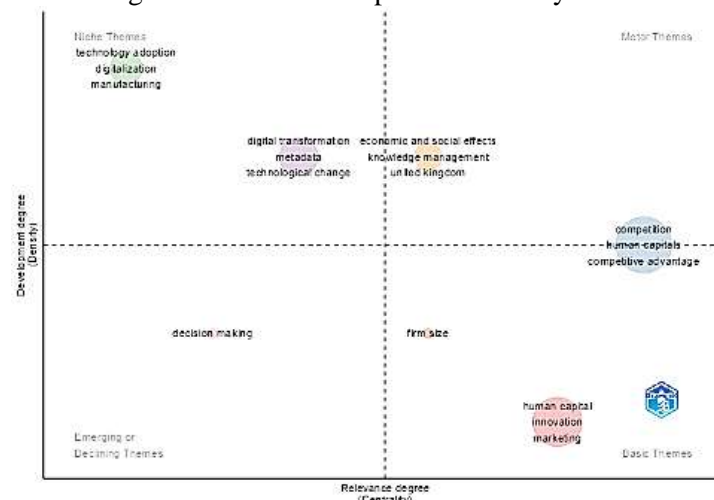


Inkinen, (2016) emphasizes the importance of collaboration networks in accelerating the diffusion of knowledge. In this context, the limited connections between developing and developed countries indicate an opportunity to expand international networks to enrich perspectives and the quality of research.

Recent studies in scientometrics affirm that international research collaboration remains a critical catalyst for knowledge diffusion, innovation, and scientific impact, particularly in tackling complex global challenges (Hosseini et al., 2022). In this context, the limited connections between developing and developed countries indicate an opportunity to expand international networks to enrich perspectives and the quality of research. This structural gap in the global knowledge network not only limits the flow of ideas but also represents a significant untapped potential; strategic North-South and South-South collaborations are proven to enhance research relevance, diversity of thought, and equitable scientific progress (Adams & Gurney, 2018; Zaugg et al., 2023).

Co-word analysis is an important technique in bibliometrics for identifying the main research streams in the study of the integration of human capital and workforce digitalization. This study, based on data from 202 documents, found that the most frequently used keywords are competition (9), followed by human capital (8), human capital (7), innovation (7), and digital transformation (6). The thematic map divides the keywords into four quadrants based on two main dimensions: centrality (connectivity) and density (depth of development).

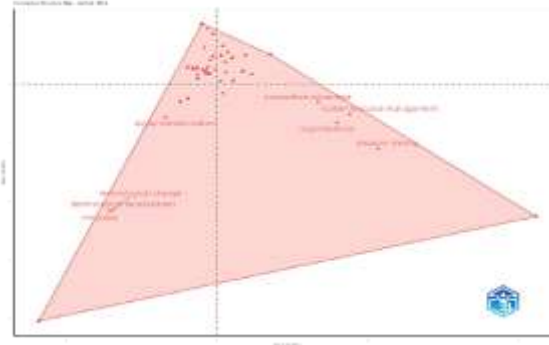
Figure 8. Thematic Map of Author Keywords



Themes such as competition, human capital, and competitive advantage are classified as "motor themes" that occupy important positions and are strongly developing in the literature. Human capital, innovation, and marketing emerge as "basic themes" with a broad reach but are still open for conceptual strengthening. Themes such as technology adoption and digitalization fall into the "niche themes" quadrant, indicating a narrow but technically necessary focus. At the same time, decision-making is categorized as an "emerging or declining theme," suggesting a potential decline or transformation in the approach to that study.

These findings align with the study by Margherita & Braccini, (2021), which emphasizes that the literature on digital HR continues to transform from a functional basis to a strategic and technology-centric focus.

Figure 9. Conceptual Structure Map (MCA – Multiple Correspondence Analysis)



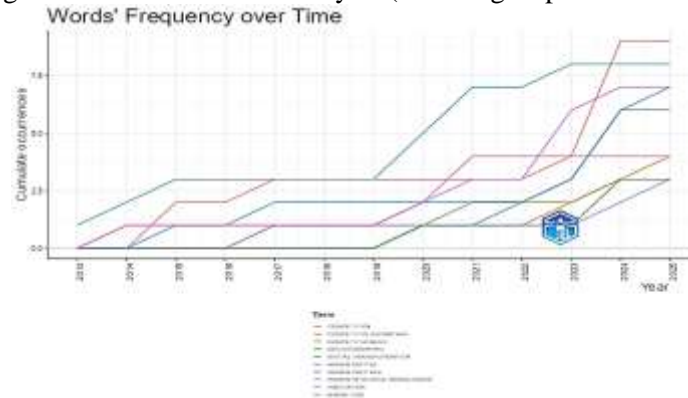
The conceptual structure map plots keywords into two main clusters. The first cluster consists of human capital, innovation, knowledge management, and competitive advantage, representing the conceptual basis of knowledge-based human resource management (knowledge-based HRM). The second cluster features keywords such as digital transformation, technology adoption, and employee integration, which reflect the technological dimension of organizational adaptation to the digital era. This pattern shows that the scientific discourse has evolved from traditional managerial approaches towards strategic integration between digital technology and human resource capacity development.

These findings indicate that the academic literature in this field has a relatively polarized yet mutually reinforcing structure between the cluster of knowledge-based organizational capabilities and technology-based digital innovation. The position of keywords such as competitive advantage at the intersection of the clusters indicates that competitive advantage is understood as the result of the synergy between these two forces. This reinforces the previous findings of Singh et al. (2020) and Rehman et al., (2023) that strategic HR management based on innovation and supported by digitalization is the key to building organizational competitiveness in the transformation era.

Analysis of topic trends shows a shift in the literature's focus from a technological approach to a strategic one, placing digital transformation, human capital, and employee engagement at the centre of attention. Since 2020, digital transformation has dominated, reaching eight occurrences by 2025, indicating the importance of digitalization in shaping sustainable competitive advantage, particularly in response to global disruptions (Soto-Acosta, 2020).

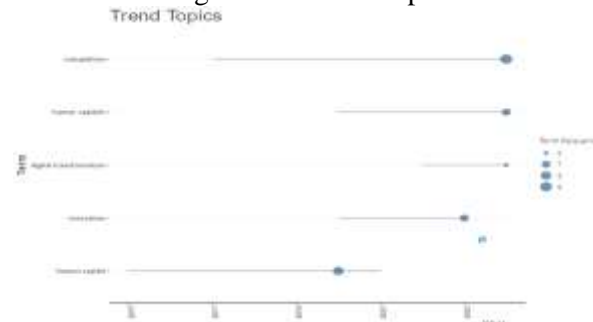
Parallely, the consistent improvement in human capital, strategic management, and decision-making shows the connection between HR management and data-driven and innovation-based marketing strategies (Margherita & Bua, 2021; (Kwon & Kim, 2020).

Figure 10. Word Growth Analysis (Trending Topics Over Time)



This visualization shows a drastic increase in the use of terms like digital transformation and AI, with peaks in occurrence during 2023–2025. On the other hand, keywords such as human capital, employee engagement, and competitive advantage show a relatively stable but declining trend, indicating a shift in scientific focus from HR issues towards the integration of technology in the organizational context.

Figure 11. Trend Topics



The topic trend map reinforces the observation by showing how strategic terms like decision-making, innovation, and strategic management evolve alongside digital terminology. This parallel emergence indicates that competitive advantage is no longer sufficient to rely solely on internal capabilities but must also be driven by adaptive abilities and technology-based marketing strategies.

Figure 12. Co-word Network Map



The keyword network shows a close relationship between human capital, digital transformation, and knowledge management, which are connected to supporting terms such as technology adoption, employee performance, and organizational capability. This network structure indicates the presence of a mutually supportive conceptual ecosystem, where digital integration in human resource management becomes a central element in achieving competitive advantage.

From the perspective of temporal dynamics, many important terms, such as competitive advantage, human resource management, and innovation, have consistently begun to appear in the post-2020 literature. External pressures such as digital disruption and the need for strategic responses to global market dynamics have triggered the shift in research focus. Meanwhile, the declining trend of several traditional HR terms in 2023–2024 indicates the need to redefine the concept of human capital to remain relevant in the increasingly technology-centric organizational framework (Margherita & Braccini, 2021).

The literature has conceptualized an integrative foundation between marketing strategy, HR management, and digital transformation. However, there are still several gaps that offer opportunities for future research. (1) Further research needs to examine how the digital capabilities of human resources empirically drive the effectiveness of marketing strategies, including in the context of service personalization, brand positioning, and customer loyalty. (2) Currently, most studies focus on the high-tech sector and developed countries. Future research is advised to explore integrating digital human resources in the agriculture, manufacturing, or public service sectors, as well as in developing countries that face different structural challenges. (3) To capture the dynamics of concept evolution over time, longitudinal studies are needed to understand how the approach to digital human capital changes with the evolving social and technological context. (4) Models such as RBV, TAM, or the TOE framework can be modified to illustrate the relationship between digital human capital, technology integration, and marketing excellence within the digital ecosystem.

Future research should also focus on (5) ethical aspects in employee data management, algorithmic bias, and the role of digital leadership and change management in creating inclusive transformation. Moreover, (6) integrating quantitative analysis (co-word, bibliographic coupling) and qualitative thematic exploration is needed to build a more in-depth and reflective conceptual mapping of scientific developments. Thus, the direction of future research is wide open and demands a multidisciplinary approach that combines perspectives from human resources, strategic marketing, technology, and innovation management.

The findings of this study substantially underscore the importance of digital transformation that not only focuses on technology adoption but also on empowering human capital as a strategic factor in creating sustainable competitive advantage. The sharp increase in the frequency of keywords such as digital transformation, human capital, and employee engagement indicates that organizations in the digital era can no longer rely on conventional structural approaches. On the contrary, companies must design adaptive, data-driven human resource management policies and practices that align with the needs of technological transformation and the expectations of the digital generation workforce.

The first practical implication is the need to reorient the role of the HR function from administrative to strategic. Human capital is not only positioned as the executor of digital initiatives but also as the primary driver of innovation, cross-functional collaboration, and the creator of new value. In this context, investment in digital skills training, strengthening employee engagement, and developing an innovation-based organizational culture are the main prerequisites for long-term competitiveness. Practices such as digital onboarding, learning agility programs, and people analytics become relevant to support more predictive and precise managerial decision-making.

Second, integrating human capital and strategic marketing is becoming increasingly crucial. Co-word analysis and thematic evolution show a close relationship between employee engagement, strategic marketing, and brand positioning. This indicates that employee experience now has a direct impact on brand reputation and performance in the market. Therefore, a collaboration between HR and marketing functions is essential for internal communication and building a cohesive organizational value proposition from the inside out. Employer branding, corporate storytelling based on employee

experiences, and reinforcing organizational cultural values are strategic elements that support the organization's positioning in the digital market.

Third, the mapping of global collaboration, which is still fragmented, implies that companies, especially in developing countries, must actively build cross-institutional and cross-country partnership networks. Knowledge exchange, benchmarking against best practices, and engagement in international collaborative research will enhance the organization's capabilities to respond to external environmental changes more quickly and accurately. This is also important to promote inclusivity and reduce the digital divide, which remains challenging in various regions.

Fourth, as decision-making, AI, and strategic agility become more prominent, organizations must develop decision-making systems based on data and predictive analytics. Using technologies such as business intelligence, machine learning, and intelligent HR information systems has become an essential means of strengthening an organization's ability to respond to market dynamics in real time. However, the implementation of this technology must be accompanied by ethical considerations, including the management of employee data privacy, transparency in algorithm-based evaluation systems, and fairness in the distribution of access to digital resources.

Finally, organizations' success in the digital era is determined not only by the speed of technology adoption but also by their ability to build a resilient, collaborative, and sustainable digital HR ecosystem. Therefore, transformative leadership, adaptive learning systems, and inclusive organizational change governance become increasingly important. This study recommends that organizations focus on technological efficiency and build a human foundation capable of supporting adaptive and visionary business strategies.

Conclusion

This research examines the scientific landscape and conceptual trends related to integrating human capital and workforce digitalization in shaping sustainable competitive advantage from a strategic marketing perspective. The results obtained from the bibliometric approach based on Scopus data (2012–2025) indicate that this topic has experienced a significant increase both in publication volume and thematic depth, especially since 2020.

This study successfully identified the intellectual structure, main research streams, and thematic dynamics that show a close relationship between digital HR management and organizational competitive strategies. Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that organizations' success in achieving competitive advantage now and in the future is determined not only by adopting digital technology but also by the organization's ability to align digital transformation with business strategies.

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