

Digital Trust and Legacy: Mapping the Intersection of Inheritance Systems and Emerging Technologies (2010–2025)

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Abstract—Inheritance systems worldwide are undergoing a paradigm shift evolving from manually administered processes to technologically enabled platforms for managing both tangible and digital assets. Yet, the scholarly understanding of how technologies ranging from information systems to blockchain have transformed inheritance management remains underexplored and fragmented. This study aims to trace the evolution of inheritance systems from 2010 to 2025, with a particular focus on the digitalization of inheritance management, emerging technologies and governance models. Using a bibliometric approach, 229 documents were initially retrieved from the Scopus database. After removing irrelevant records, a refined dataset of 81 publications was analyzed using Excel and VOSviewer. The analysis included performance metrics (e.g., publication growth, citation trends, and country output) and science mapping (keyword co-occurrence and clustering). Findings reveal a significant rise in publications post-2020, coinciding with increased attention to digital assets, data privacy laws (e.g., GDPR) and emerging technologies such as blockchain. The most active contributors were from the United States, China and the United Kingdom. Highly cited articles discuss themes such as digital legacy, legal frameworks, asset authentication and ethical considerations. Thematic clustering revealed four research domains: digital legacy and estate transition, digital transformation and trust, digital asset structuring and fraud prevention in social media inheritance. This study contributes a comprehensive overview of the field's conceptual landscape by highlighting the uneven yet accelerating integration of digital tools in inheritance systems. It also underscores the urgent need for inclusive, interdisciplinary frameworks that accommodate diverse legal, cultural and technological contexts for future inheritance governance.

Keywords—Inheritance systems; digitalization; secure data; trust; technologies; digital legacy; blockchain; digital assets

I. INTRODUCTION

The administration of inheritance has long been anchored in traditional legal, religious, and institutional frameworks which often involve handwritten wills, notarized documents and in-person court procedures [1], [2]. These systems were designed for a paper-based world, emphasizing tangibility, permanence and hierarchical authority [1]. However, in the past two decades, the global proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally disrupted how personal data, assets and identities are created, stored and transmitted across

generations [3], [4].

At the same time, governments, legal institutions and private sectors have begun to digitally transform inheritance-related services. For instance, the emergence of e-probate systems, blockchain-based wills, digital vaults and GDPR-driven data succession laws has opened new avenues for modernizing estate management [5], [6]. These transformations are not merely administrative but structural, demanding new ways of thinking about trust, consent, privacy, and control in the digital afterlife. Legal scholars such as in research [7] have voiced growing concerns about the fragmentation of regulatory approaches to digital inheritance especially in cross-border data access, authentication of post-mortem rights and platform-level inconsistencies. Similarly, technological researchers such as [8] have highlighted the role of AI, encryption and predictive systems in managing succession processes and safeguarding digital legacies.

Despite this interdisciplinary momentum, the field remains conceptually fragmented and empirically under-mapped. Studies are often siloed within either legal discourse, technological development or social computing without a unified understanding of how digital trust and inheritance intersect in practice. This gap is especially visible in emerging economies and inheritance systems, where cultural, legal and technological dynamics intersect in complex ways.

To address this gap, this study applies bibliometric analysis to trace how inheritance systems have evolved in scholarly research alongside emerging technologies from 2010 to 2025. By examining publication patterns, citation influence, author contributions and keyword networks. We aim to uncover the institutional, thematic and conceptual structures underpinning this transformation. The dataset draws from Scopus-indexed publications using keywords such as inheritance, estate planning, succession law, digital legacy, blockchain wills, and data protection. This allows for a comprehensive cross-disciplinary review.

To guide the analysis, this study poses the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the publication trends and scholarly impact patterns in digital inheritance research between 2010 and 2025?

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RQ2: Which countries and authors have made the most significant contributions to the field, and how has global participation evolved?

RQ3: What are the most highly cited works in this domain, and what insights or innovations do they introduce?

RQ4: What are the emerging research hotspots and thematic clusters identified through keyword co-occurrence analysis?

By answering these questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how the inheritance ecosystem is transforming under digital disruption and offering strategic insights for scholars, policymakers, technologists and legal practitioners alike.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section II details the bibliometric methodology and screening strategy. Section III presents the results and analysis. Section IV discusses the findings in relation to existing literature. Finally, Section V concludes with implications and future research directions

II. METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive and exploratory research design grounded in bibliometric methodology. The methodological framework is divided into two main components: the first involves bibliometric analysis to uncover the intellectual and conceptual structure of the research domain. The second details the procedural aspects of data collection, preprocessing and tool deployment [9].

A. Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric component applies various quantitative indicators and science mapping techniques to examine productivity, influence and thematic development within the field of digital inheritance systems. To assess productivity and impact, this study analysed annual publication output to determine research growth trends over time. Country-level contributions were examined to identify the most active and influential nations in this area of study. Additionally, citation analysis was conducted to highlight the most highly cited publications to gain insight into foundational works and influential ideas that have shaped the discourse.

To identify emerging research themes, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed using both author keywords and indexed terms. This analysis revealed dominant thematic clusters and provided insight into research hotspots and future directions. A threshold-based clustering approach was employed in VOSviewer to visualize these relationships and interpret the underlying structure of the field.

B. Procedural Analysis

The procedural analysis outlines the systematic steps involved in the retrieval and preparation of bibliographic data as well as the tools used for analysis. Scopus was selected as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across multiple disciplines. A tailored Boolean search query was developed to reflect the intersection of inheritance-related legal terminology and digital transformation concepts. The final search string incorporated

terms such as “inheritance,” “succession,” “will and testament,” and “digital estate,” among others and was limited to occurrences within the document title. The query targeted publications from 2010 to 2025 and restricted to English-language documents classified as articles or reviews. The data were retrieved on 4 August 2025 to ensure reproducibility and consistency with the research timeframe.

Following retrieval, the metadata were exported from Scopus in CSV format. The exported fields included the document title, abstract, author names and affiliations, author keywords, publication year, source title and citation count. This dataset served as the foundation for both the bibliometric and thematic mapping analyses. The record selection strategy and scope of inclusion are further detailed in Section II(C) and illustrated in Fig. 1.

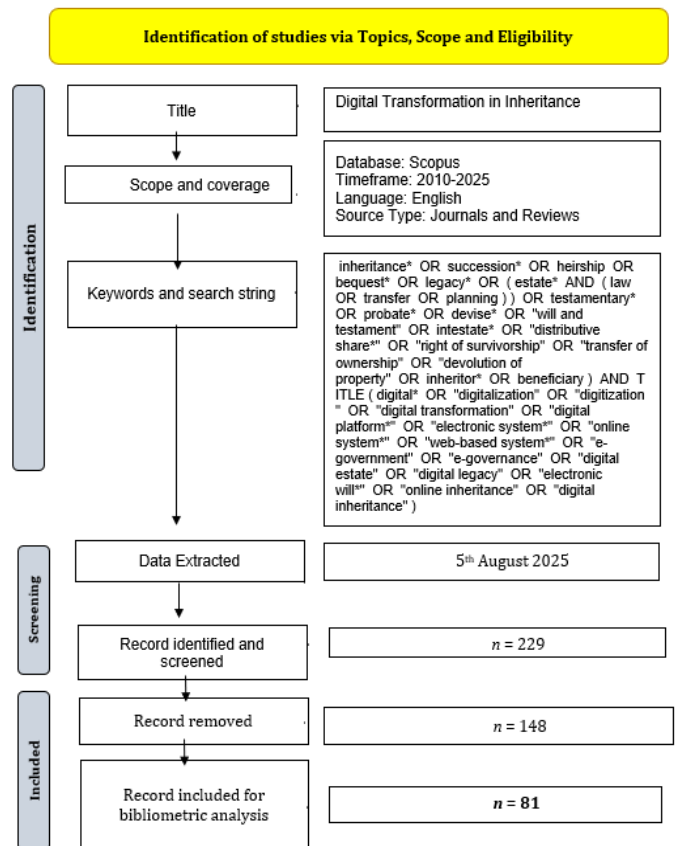


Fig. 1. Study flowchart.

All mapping and visualization tasks were conducted using VOSviewer version 1.6.20, released in late 2024. Developed by [10], VOSviewer is widely used for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks including co-authorship, citation and keyword co-occurrence maps. The software was instrumental in generating thematic clusters and visual overlays that reveal the structural and temporal evolution of the research field.

C. Scope of Inclusion and Screening Strategy

Fig. 1 illustrates the PRISMA-based identification and screening process adopted to ensure that the final dataset aligns with the objectives of this study, titled “Digital Trust and

Legacy: Mapping the Intersection of Inheritance Systems and Emerging Technologies (2010–2025).” The scope of this research centres on the transformation of inheritance practices in response to technological advancements which include those that introduce new models of trust, asset control and data governance. The analysis emphasizes how various forms of assets whether tangible (such as property or wealth) or digital (such as online accounts, cryptocurrencies, or cloud-stored documents) are planned, managed, secured and transferred through digitally mediated systems. The inclusion criteria targeted publications that explored legal frameworks, digital estate planning tools, security infrastructures (e.g., blockchain, authentication protocols) and emerging governance models surrounding succession and beneficiary rights.

Conversely, studies focusing exclusively on cultural, symbolic or intangible heritage such as music, oral traditions, crafts or historical memory were excluded as they fall outside the asset- and system-oriented lens of this study. From an initial set of 229 records retrieved from Scopus using a comprehensive Boolean search strategy, 148 records were removed for not meeting the inclusion criteria. The final dataset includes 81 documents deemed directly relevant to the digital transformation of inheritance systems that form the empirical basis for the subsequent bibliometric mapping and thematic analysis.

III. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the bibliometric analysis based on the four research questions that guided the study. It covers the publication trends over time, the most active countries contributing to the field, the most highly cited works and their thematic focus, and the key research hotspots identified through keyword co-occurrence and overlay visualizations. Each subsection provides a focused analysis supported by visual data, offering a comprehensive overview of how research on digital inheritance systems has evolved from 2010 to 2025.

A. Publication Trends and Growth Patterns (RQ1)

The analysis (Fig. 2) reveals a notable growth trajectory in scholarly attention to the intersection of inheritance systems and emerging digital technologies. Early years in the dataset (2011–2015) show minimal activity, with annual publication counts (TP) ranging from 0 to 2. This suggests the domain was relatively underexplored during the initial phase.

From 2016 onwards, a gradual increase in publication output is observed. This marked by consistent contributions through 2018–2020. The year 2021 represents a significant turning point, with a dramatic surge to 17 publications which is the highest in the dataset. This spike indicates a period of heightened academic interest and possibly reflects broader global shifts toward digital estate planning and the legal implications of digital assets. Following the 2021 peak, publication levels stabilized but remained elevated compared to the pre-2020 period. Between 2022 and 2025, annual outputs ranged from 8 to 12 papers. This suggests sustained research engagement and possibly the establishment of a new research niche.

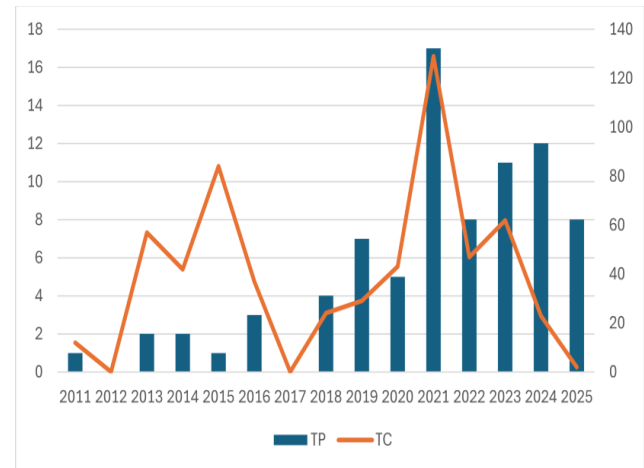


Fig. 2. Total publication and total citation.

Citation counts (TC) also provide insight into the influence and maturity of the field. Although early publications were few, but some received substantial citations. For instance, a single publication in 2015 accrued 84 citations, and two papers in 2013 earned 57 citations collectively and indicate that foundational works from earlier years had long-term scholarly impact. The highest citation activity occurred in 2021, coinciding with the publication spike. With 129 citations, this year not only marked a volume peak but also a qualitative impact peak, potentially due to high relevance, interdisciplinary reach or pandemic-driven digitalization themes. By contrast, recent publications in 2024 and 2025 show lower citation counts, which is expected given their recency and limited citation window. However, sustained output in these years points to an ongoing momentum and further opportunities for citation accumulation. The data indicate a transition from an emerging to an accelerating field. The early phase (2011–2015) was formative, the middle years (2016–2020) marked exploratory expansion and the recent period (2021–2025) reflects consolidation and growth.

B. Global Contributions and Geographic Distribution (RQ2)

Table I present the distribution of total publications by country from 2010 to 2025. The United States recorded the highest number of publications with 43 followed closely by China with 42. The United Kingdom ranked third with 27 publications. Other contributing countries included India (10 publications) and Brazil (9 publications). Five countries which are Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Spain each produced 8 publications.

Fig. 3 illustrates this data using a world map, where darker shades represent higher publication output. The map shows the concentration of research activities across North America, Europe and parts of Asia. The top ten countries collectively account for a significant portion of the total global output in the field of digital inheritance systems during the study period.

C. Most Cited Articles and Influential Themes (RQ3)

Table II presents the top ten most cited publications in the domain of digital inheritance systems between 2010 and 2025. The analysis of the most highly cited publications from 2010 to 2025 reveals a rich diversity of perspectives on digital

inheritance, ranging from legal frameworks to socio-technical systems.

The top-cited work by Jackson & Dunn-Jensen [11] (59 citations) underscores the strategic role of data and predictive analytics in succession planning within the digital economy which positioning leadership transition as an emerging concern in organizational inheritance processes. Closely following, Doyle & Brubaker [12] (26 citations) conceptualize a digital legacy lifecycle model by examining how personal data persists posthumously and is shaped by intergenerational identity management [13].

Several studies focused on public digital infrastructure and governance. For instance, Abu Bakar et al. [14] with 13 citations provided a citizen-centric blueprint for legacy system modernization in public institutions which contributing to discussions on digital transformation in government services. Similarly Pöschl & Freiling [15] examined the role of external succession in family-owned businesses by showing how managerial priorities affect long-term digital investment.

Legal and regulatory dimensions formed a significant thematic cluster. Paul-Choudhury [16] was among the earliest to articulate the personal and emotional implications of digital death by urging formal mechanisms to manage digital assets such as social media accounts. A notable contribution from Cahn & Law [6] highlights legislative gaps in U.S. probate law concerning digital property succession and reinforcing calls for digital estate law reform.

TABLE I. TOP 10 MOST PRODUCTIVE COUNTRIES IN PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO DIGITAL INHERITANCE SYSTEMS (2010–2025)

Country	Total Publication
United States	43
China	42
United Kingdom	27
India	10
Brazil	9
Canada	8
France	8
Germany	8
Italy	8
Spain	8

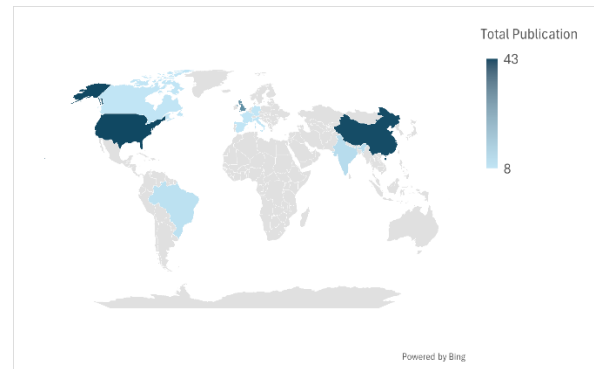


Fig. 3. Mapping total publication by country.

TABLE II. HIGH-IMPACT PUBLICATIONS ADDRESSING LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS FOR DIGITAL INHERITANCE

Authors	Year	Citations	Insights	Themes / Technologies Used
[11]	2021	59	Proposes a framework for succession planning in the digital economy, emphasizing the role of data and predictive analytics in talent alignment.	Leadership succession, digital transformation, big data, predictive analytics
[12]	2023	26	Presents a lifecycle model of digital legacy, identifying how personal data is encoded, accessed, and disposed after death. Highlights multi-generational digital identity challenges.	Digital legacy, identity management, lifecycle of data, social computing
[14]	2022	13	Offers a comprehensive guideline for modernizing legacy IT systems in public sector governance. Emphasizes the alignment of modernization with citizen-centric digital transformation goals.	Legacy system modernization, digital government, citizen-centric services, qualitative methodology
[15]	2020	13	Examines how external succession in family businesses influences digitalization priorities. Found that short-term efficiency often outweighs long-term digital innovation during transitions.	Family business succession, SME digitalization, management buy-in, qualitative case study
[16]	2011	12	Discusses the personal and emotional implications of digital death, urging the development of tools and policies to manage social media accounts and online identities post-mortem.	Digital legacy, online identity, end-of-life planning, social media inheritance
[6]	2014	10	Analyzes how federal U.S. probate law lacks provisions for digital assets, highlighting the legal gap in handling digital property within estate law and succession.	Probate law, digital estate, legal reform, asset succession
[17]	2021	9	Explores Brazil's legal framework on digital inheritance and data protection. Emphasizes legal rights of heirs to access digital assets and the evolving interpretations under civil law.	Data protection law, civil code, digital inheritance rights, Brazilian legal framework
[18]	2021	9	Investigates user perceptions toward using technology in managing digital inheritance. Findings show growing acceptance but concern about privacy and clarity of ownership.	Digital inheritance, user perception, technology adoption, privacy concerns
[13]	2021	8	Explores the psychological and motivational drivers for elderly individuals to engage in digital inheritance planning, particularly through intergenerational knowledge transfer.	Digital inheritance motivation, intergenerational communication, aging and digital literacy
[5]	2019	7	Legal analysis of Italy's GDPR-aligned reform for post-mortem digital data rights; comparative EU focus (e.g., BGH Facebook case); advocates legal clarity and digital wills.	GDPR Art. 2-terdecies, digital inheritance law, posthumous privacy, data access protocols

Regionally focused legal analyses also emerged. Beppu et al. [17] explored Brazil's evolving data protection regime and advocating for clearer rights of heirs in accessing digital content. In the Middle East, Yousef et al. [18] reported increasing user readiness to adopt digital inheritance solutions even though albeit tempered by privacy concerns. Likewise, Oh & Kang [13] contributed insights into motivational factors influencing elderly engagement in inheritance planning which focus on intergenerational communication.

A pivotal European legal perspective was offered by Bartolini & Patti [5]. Their work examined Italy's implementation of GDPR Article 2-terdecies and emphasizing the need for legal recognition of posthumous privacy rights and proposing digital wills as a formal succession mechanism. This article gained traction for bridging comparative EU jurisprudence, including the landmark BGH Facebook case in Germany.

Together, these studies delineate a multidisciplinary field concerned with not only the technological management of digital assets but also the ethical, legal and emotional frameworks needed to govern inheritance in an increasingly digital world.

D. Emerging Research Hotspots and Thematic Clusters (RQ4)

To explore the conceptual structure and thematic evolution of research on digital inheritance systems, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted using author-supplied

keywords. This technique identifies the frequency and strength of co-appearance between terms across the literature thereby revealing latent thematic clusters and emerging research hotspots. The analysis was performed using VOSviewer which enables visual mapping of semantic relationships within the dataset.

Out of a total of 871 unique keywords, a minimum occurrence threshold of 3 was applied to ensure analytical relevance while reducing semantic noise. This resulted in 27 keywords that met the threshold and were included in the final map generation. The selected terms reflect the most actively discussed and conceptually significant topics within the field between 2010 and 2025.

The co-occurrence network visualization is structured into distinct clusters each representing a thematic focus area such as digital legacy management, privacy and identity, trust in digital systems and digital asset inheritance. These clusters provide insight into the current direction of the field and point to opportunities for future research, especially in interdisciplinary domains where legal, technological, and societal issues intersect.

This filtering resulted in 27 relevant keywords, which were grouped into four distinct thematic clusters based on their co-occurrence relationships. These clusters are visualized in Fig. 4 and reflect the underlying conceptual structure of the field between 2010 and 2025.

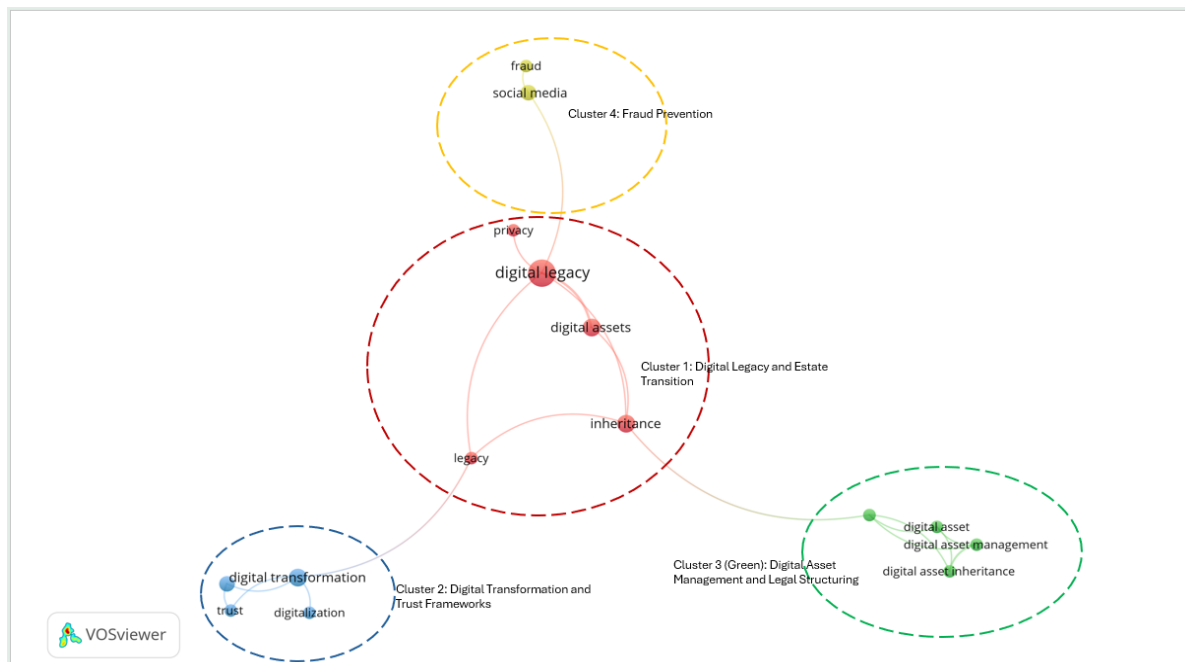


Fig. 4. Network visualization based on cluster.

The first cluster, represented in red, centers on the theme of digital legacy and estate transition. It includes terms such as "digital legacy," "inheritance," "digital assets," and "privacy." This cluster reflects foundational concerns in the literature regarding how digital identities and possessions are handled after death. It addresses both the emotional and ethical aspects

of posthumous data management, as well as the legal ambiguity surrounding access rights to online accounts. A key article representing this cluster is the work by [12] who conducted a systematic review of digital legacy scholarship and proposed a lifecycle model that outlines the encoding, access and disposal of personal data after death. Their work

emphasizes intergenerational identity management and the evolving practices associated with post-mortem data governance.

The second cluster, shown in blue, focuses on digital transformation and trust frameworks. Keywords such as “digital transformation,” “digitalization,” and “trust” are indicative of this cluster’s emphasis on the modernization of legal and institutional systems to support digital estate planning. The scholarly focus here has expanded toward understanding how public and private institutions are transitioning from legacy practices to digitally enabled platforms. One prominent contribution in this space is the article by [11] which proposes a framework for succession planning in the digital economy. Their model highlights the role of data analytics and predictive tools in aligning leadership transitions with organizational readiness thereby emphasizing the integration of digital governance and institutional trust.

Cluster three, highlighted in green, is oriented toward digital asset management and legal structuring. This cluster comprises keywords such as “digital asset,” “digital asset inheritance,” and “digital asset management.” The focus here is more operational, concerned with the technical and legal frameworks necessary for securely managing and transferring digital property. A representative article in this domain is by [14] who conducted a qualitative study on legacy system modernization within public sector organizations. Their research highlights how digital infrastructure upgrades are essential for enabling transparent and accountable digital asset governance, especially in citizen-centric services.

The fourth and smallest cluster delineated in yellow comprises the keywords “fraud” and “social media.” This cluster highlights a niche research area concerned with the risks of digital fraud particularly in the context of social platforms and identity exposure. Rather than focusing directly on digital inheritance, this theme explores how fraudulent activities, misinformation and unauthorized access proliferate in digital spaces especially after an individual’s death, when digital identities may remain unattended. The inclusion of “social media” suggests that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and others are being examined for their vulnerability to impersonation, data breaches, and fraudulent claims. Although not a dominant research stream, the cluster underscores the growing academic concern for developing robust governance mechanisms including platform policy reforms, posthumous account handling and legal safeguards to mitigate fraud risks in digital estates.

To further examine the temporal dynamics of these clusters, an overlay visualization was generated (Fig. 5). This visualization assigns colors to keywords based on their average publication year. This allowing for an analysis of thematic evolution from 2020 to 2024. Terms that were more prevalent in earlier years, such as “digital legacy,” “privacy,” and “social media,” appear in darker shades of blue and purple, thus suggesting they were central to early explorations of the field. These foundational themes reflect the initial scholarly response to the growing need for managing digital identities after death including concerns over access rights, emotional closure and data control.

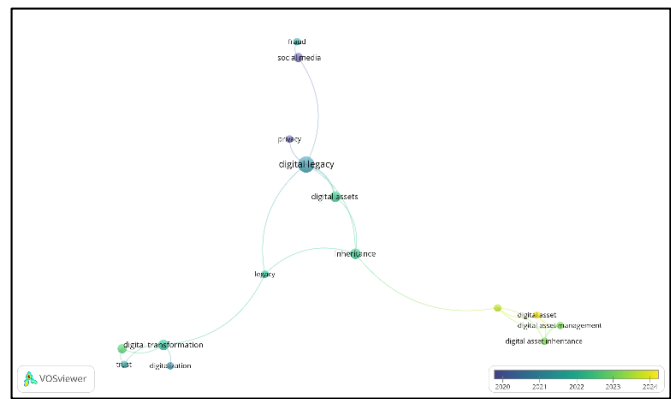


Fig. 5. Overlay visualization.

In contrast, keywords such as “digital asset,” “digital asset management,” and “digital asset inheritance” appear in lighter hues of green and yellow signalling their recent emergence as active research fronts. These terms began to gain prominence around 2022 and are likely to continue shaping the future trajectory of the field. This indicates a shift from conceptual and ethical considerations toward more structured, technical and policy-oriented solutions for managing digital estates.

The keywords “digital transformation” and “trust,” located in intermediate green tones, illustrate their sustained relevance across the observed time frame. This consistency suggests that modernization and institutional trust remain central pillars in the transition from analog to digital estate management systems.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study explored the intellectual development of digital inheritance systems across four dimensions: publication growth, geographic distribution, citation impact and thematic evolution. The findings reveal a research field undergoing rapid expansion and conceptual diversification, though not without fragmentation and regional disparities.

A. Publication Trends and Citation Growth (RQ1)

The publication trajectory from 2010 to 2025 reveals three clear phases: early conceptual exploration (2010–2015), gradual thematic expansion (2016–2019) and sharp acceleration post-2020. The spike in 2021 coincides with global digital adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting heightened awareness of digital succession, identity continuity and online asset control. While early contributions were few, their relatively high citation counts suggest foundational status, shaping subsequent research directions. Recent publications, though less cited due to temporal proximity, point to diversification and growing scholarly momentum. These trends are consistent with broader bibliometric patterns observed in digital law and governance wherein reactive scholarship often trails behind disruptive digital transformations [19]. The current trajectory suggests the field is entering a phase of institutional maturity but remains in need of cohesive theoretical integration.

B. Global Contributions and Research Disparities (RQ2)

Geographic analysis highlights a strong North Atlantic and East Asian research presence with the United States, China and the United Kingdom accounting for a substantial share of output. These nations have early-stage policy interventions, digital infrastructure, and legal debates around digital estates, explaining their leadership in scholarly contributions. The inclusion of India and Brazil suggests a growing foothold of digital succession scholarship in emerging markets where legal modernization meets rapid digitalization. However, notable underrepresentation exists in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa regions where customary or religious inheritance frameworks (e.g., faraid or intestate succession) coexist with digital estate challenges. The absence of these perspectives narrows the global relevance of the field and calls for inclusion of plural legal models and sociotechnical conditions. Without this, the field risks being shaped disproportionately by Western normative frameworks.

C. Influential Contributions and Interdisciplinary Anchors (RQ3)

The most highly cited publications reveal an interdisciplinary backbone that cuts across human-computer interaction, legal reform, and organizational strategy. Doyle & Brubaker [12] advance a model of digital legacy that extends inheritance beyond material transfer to encompass digital identity, lifecycle management and social memory. Similarly, Jackson & Dunn-Jensen [11] apply predictive analytics to succession planning, indicating a shift from static inheritance models toward dynamic, data-driven foresight. These contributions illustrate a move away from inheritance as a strictly legal function, toward a socio-technical and emotional process mediated by platforms, policies, and behavioral norms. However, the field remains heavily qualitative and conceptual, highlighting the need for empirically grounded research including cross-national legal analysis, user behavior studies and policy implementation evaluations.

D. Thematic Clusters and Emerging Research Hotspots (RQ4)

Keyword co-occurrence and overlay mapping revealed four dominant thematic clusters: digital legacy and estate transition, digital transformation and trust, digital asset management, and social media inheritance with fraud prevention. The red cluster (digital legacy, privacy) dominated early discourse and reflects long-standing ethical and legal debates on posthumous digital rights. The overlay visualization shows these keywords peaking before 2022, indicating thematic saturation. Conversely, keywords related to digital asset management such as digital asset inheritance and digital asset management appear prominently in 2023–2024 marking them as active research frontiers. These reflect a shift toward procedural and operational concerns: how digital assets are stored, classified, and legally transferred across platforms and jurisdictions. Abu Bakar et al. (2022) exemplify this trend by emphasizing legacy system modernization in public estate governance.

The consistent appearance of “trust” across multiple clusters suggests a cross-cutting concern yet its minimal co-occurrence with “fraud” or “privacy” reveals conceptual silos. This signals the need for integrated approaches that bridge

technological infrastructure with regulatory safeguards and user confidence. The social media cluster, while smaller, addresses a growing concern around identity theft, unauthorized access and ambiguous platform policies. Despite its importance, few studies systematically examine platform-level succession mechanisms, therefore indicating a critical gap in platform accountability and interface design for posthumous data management.

Across all four research questions, the field emerges as both vibrant and fragmented. While conceptual richness abounds especially in foundational themes, methodological coherence and global inclusivity remain limited. There is a need to move beyond reactive scholarship toward anticipatory frameworks that address upcoming challenges such as AI-driven will execution, cross-border data inheritance, decentralized identity ownership and digital vault standardization. Additionally, there is a pressing need for culturally responsive research that incorporates non-Western, pluralistic and religious inheritance systems into the digital age. Integrating Islamic jurisprudence, customary rights and hybrid succession models into digital platforms would expand both the theoretical and applied reach of the field. Digital inheritance is no longer a niche concern. It is now embedded in broader discourses on digital governance, platform ethics, legal innovation and personal identity. Future research must rise to the challenge of unifying these strands to support coherent, inclusive and secure digital futures.

V. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a steady growth in scholarly attention to digital inheritance from 2011 to 2025 with a notable surge after 2020. The United States, China and the United Kingdom emerge as leading contributors. Highly cited publications focus on legal reforms, digital legacy management and governance mechanisms while keyword co-occurrence clustering highlights dominant themes including digital assets, privacy law, social media inheritance and regulatory adaptation. These patterns suggest that academic interest has largely responded to technological developments such as blockchain integration, GDPR implementation and the increasing ubiquity of digital platforms.

Despite this progress, the field remains fragmented and reactive with evident gaps in areas such as Shariah-compliant inheritance frameworks, indigenous legal traditions and cross-border estate governance. To move beyond jurisdictional silos and legal patchworks, future research must adopt interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate legal scholarship, information systems, public policy and ethical governance. Incorporating grey literature, legal instruments and institutional reports will also be essential for developing inclusive, context-sensitive models of digital inheritance and for fostering digital trust across diverse socio-legal environments.

Beyond mapping current research trends, this study highlights the pressing need for actionable strategies in digital inheritance governance. Future scholarship and policymaking should be guided by a conceptual framework that integrates legal harmonization, technological infrastructures (e.g., blockchain, AI-driven authentication), cultural/religious contexts and governance models that build digital trust. Such

an interdisciplinary approach would not only address existing research gaps but also support the design of inclusive, secure and adaptable inheritance systems for diverse societies in the digital era.

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