

## A CONTENT ANALYSIS ON WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP

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### Abstract

In recent years, there has been a rise in research on workplace friendship; however, no study has been found in the literature that specifically evaluating workplace friendship related studies based on certain criteria in terms of content. In this context, the purpose of this study is to examine articles related workplace friendship by using content analysis method. For this purpose, total of 106 articles on workplace friendship were found in the web of science core collection database. These articles were examined and analyzed in terms of content. In the findings, it was determined that the "Frontiers in Psychology" was the most widely published journal, and most studied variables together with workplace friendship were gender, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. As a variable type, workplace friendship was used predominantly as an independent variable and moderator variable in the articles. Also, the findings reflect that the majority of the studies were conducted in the China, the most preferred article type was the quantitative method article and the most preferred data collection tool was the survey technique. The sample size between 251-500 was preferred in the majority of the studies and the finance&banking, education, information technology sectors were the most preferred sectors in the studies. Finally, the scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) was mostly preferred scale to measure workplace friendship in the articles.

**Keywords:** workplace friendship, content analysis, positive work climate

### İŞYERİ ARKADAŞLIĞINA İLİŞKİN BİR İÇERİK ANALİZİ

### Özet

Son yıllarda işyeri arkadaşlığı üzerine yapılan araştırmalarda bir artış olmasına rağmen, literatürde belirli ölçütlere göre işyeri arkadaşlığı ile ilgili çalışmaları içeriksel olarak değerlendiren bir çalışmaya rastlanılmamıştır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı, içerik analizi yöntemi kullanarak işyeri arkadaşlığı ile ilgili makaleleri incelemektir. Bu amaçla, Web of Science Core Collection veritabanında işyeri arkadaşlığı ile ilgili toplam 106 makale bulunmuştur. Bu makaleler içeriksel açıdan incelenmiş ve analiz edilmiştir. Bulgulara, en çok yayın yapılan derginin "Frontiers in Psychology" olduğu, işyeri arkadaşlığı ile birlikte en çok çalışılan değişkenlerin cinsiyet, örgütsel bağlılık ve işten ayrılma niyeti olduğu belirlenmiştir. Makalelerde değişken türü olarak işyeri arkadaşlığı, ağırlıklı olarak bağımsız değişken ve moderatör değişken rolünde kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca bulgular, çalışmaların çoğunlukla Çin'de yapıldığını, en çok tercih edilen makale türünün nicel yöntemli makale türü olduğunu ve en çok tercih edilen veri toplama aracının anket tekniği olduğunu yansıtmaktadır. Çalışmaların çoğunluğunda örneklem büyüklüğü olarak 251-500 arasında bir örneklem büyüklüğü tercih edilmiştir. İşyeri arkadaşlığı ile ilgili yapılan çalışmaların en çok hangi sektörlerde yapıldığı incelendiğinde, finans&bankacılık sektörünün, eğitim sektörünün, bilgi teknolojileri sektörünün en çok tercih edilen sektörler arasında olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Son olarak, işyeri arkadaşlığını ölçmek için çalışmaların çoğunda Nielsen vd. (2000) tarafından geliştirilen ölçeğin kullanıldığı saptanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** işyeri arkadaşlığı, içerik analizi, pozitif çalışma iklimi

### Introduction

It can be argued that the time we spend with people at work is more than the time we spend with our family and loved ones, and the quality of this time spent has a significant impact on our general life and mental health. Especially the relationships established with the people we work with in the same environment at the workplace and working environment created together with the people we work with can lead to the time spent at work to be pleasant or to become unpleasant. In this direction, it can be stated that the friendships we establish at the workplace, workplace friendship, is an important concept both in terms of the quality of time spent at the workplace and positive mental reflection of business life on our general life. In addition, the relationship between workplace friendship and variables such as performance, commitment, job satisfaction and well-being is an indication that workplace friendship is one of the important antecedents of organizational growth (Berman et al., 2002).

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Social ties established through workplace friendships in organizations can contribute to the formation of a supportive work environment by encouraging loyalty and reducing burnout (Morrison, 2004). Today, It might be claimed that organizations are focused towards human resources in order to gain competitive advantage, and they think that they can gain competitive advantage with effective human resources and achieve the intended goals. At this point, it can be said that encouraging workplace friendships in organizations can be seen as a strategic resource that can be used by organizations to gain competitive advantage by increasing employee loyalty, satisfaction and performance. It is also possible to say that in team-based organizations, workplace friendship could help to form more effective teams and increase the efficiency of teams (Nielsen et al., 2000).

In recent years, it is observed that there has been an increase in studies on workplace friendship in the related literature. Although there are meta-analysis studies on workplace friendship in the literature, it is seen that there is no content analysis study on workplace friendship. In this context, this study aims to conduct a content analysis of studies in the workplace friendship literature in order to determine the general trend in the workplace friendship literature and to guide researchers who have interest to study with the relevant concept in the future. In this direction, at this study, workplace friendship articles were analysed content-wise according to journal names, variables used together with workplace friendship, variable role, type of article, data collection tool, used scale, countries, sample size, sector and the gap (lack of content analysis) in the literature has been tried to be filled.

### **1. Workplace Friendship: Conceptual Framework**

The existence of informal groups within formal groups and social relations between employees at work were first revealed in the Hawthorne studies at the neoclassical management approach. In these researches, it was understood that it is inevitable that informal relationships take place in organizations and social relationships which employees establish with each other are important for organizations. In addition, the needs of individuals in Maslow's hierarchy of needs such as establishing relationships and feeling belonging to a group are among the factors that trigger the establishment of informal relationships in the work environment. In this respect, it can be said that workplace friendship, which is defined as informal, voluntary, sincere relationships established between two or more people in a workplace rather than business relationships (Berman et al., 2002; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018; Zarankin & Kunkel, 2019), is one of the important issues both individual and organizational perspectives.

Workplace friendship is built on values such as reciprocity, trust, commitment, positive affect, support and information sharing between individuals. (Huang, 2016; Zarankin & Kunkel, 2019). Studies show that workplace friendship has positive effects on employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment and overall job performance (Methot et al., 2016; Morrison, 2009a; Potgieter et al., 2019; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). Friendship relationships enable employees to feel more trust in each other, while at the same time strengthening social support mechanisms in the workplace (Sias et al., 2012). Workplace friendship increases positive interaction and strengthens employees' perceptions and beliefs that they are in a good working environment (Huang, 2016). Friendship relationships have a positive effect on organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Morrison, 2004) by increasing individuals' social interactions at work (Kanten et al., 2020).

Another important aspect of workplace friendship is that it reduces employees' turnover intentions. Researchers have found that strong friendship relationships reduce employees' turnover intentions (Nielsen et al., 2000; Ozbek, 2018; Wu et al., 2023). In addition, it has been determined in conducted studies that workplace friendship reduces the stress levels of individuals and increases the general well-being level of individuals (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019; Shin & Lee, 2016). Also, it can be stated that workplace friendship supports positive

working environment by facilitating and increasing information sharing among employees (Helmy et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). However, workplace friendships can also have some negative consequences. In their studies, Morrison (2009b) and Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) state that workplace friendship can sometimes be distracting, distract employees from their work-related tasks, and this can negatively affect job performance. The empirical research conducted by Morrison and Nolan (2007) also supports these thoughts. Morrison and Nolan (2007) found that workplace friendship blurs the formal and informal boundaries at work, distracts employees from the work they need to do, and states that workplace friendship makes employees' work more difficult. Moreover, Berman et al. (2002) emphasise that workplace friendship can lead to gossip and disloyalty. Therefore, it can be stated that workplace friendship is a concept with a complex relationship dynamic that can have both positive and negative consequences (Methot et al., 2016).

## 2. Research Questions

In this study, it was aimed to conduct a content analysis of the articles published related to workplace friendship according to certain criteria. It is matter of curiosity in which journals the studies on workplace friendship are mostly published, what are the most preferred types of articles, what are the most preferred data collection tools in the articles, which scale is used more in the articles, which countries the researches in the articles are carried out in, the sample size of the researches in the articles and the sectors in which the researches is conducted. In addition, it is important to summarise the studies conducted on these curious topics in a systematic way in order to guide future researchers and make their research more qualified. Furthermore, one of the aim of this study is to assist researchers who want to conduct research on workplace friendship in designing their studies and contributing to detecting gaps&research area in the literature by seeking answers to the questions of which variables were mostly used together with workplace friendship and how frequently they were used and in which variable role workplace friendship was mostly used.

The questions mentioned in the above explanations are presented below as research questions;

- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to the journals in which they are published?
- Which variables were mostly used together with workplace friendship and how frequently they were used in the articles?
- Which variable role was workplace friendship most frequently used in the articles?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to types of articles?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to data collection tools?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to the scales used in the studies?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to the countries where the researches was conducted?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to sample sizes?
- How is the distribution of articles on workplace friendship according to the sectors in which the studies were conducted?

## 3. Method

In this study, the articles related to workplace friendship were analysed using descriptive content analysis method. The aim of descriptive content analysis is to systematically analyse the contents of the studies conducted on the concept in order to determine the general tendency and to guide the researchers who intend to conduct studies with the related concept in the future (Ültay vd., 2021). In this direction, the articles to be used for content analysis were

found using EndNote programme. The search was made in the web of science core collection index at the EndNote programme on August 2024. In this index, the concept of workplace friendship was searched in the title category and a total of 126 studies were found. Out of 126 studies, 11 studies were conference papers, 6 studies were book chapters, 3 studies were not related to concept of workplace friendship. After excluding these studies (11 conference papers, 6 book chapters, 3 not related to workplace friendship), content analysis was performed on the remaining 106 articles. These 106 articles were evaluated according to journal names, variables used together with workplace friendship, variable role, type of article, data collection tool, used scale, countries, sample size, sector.

#### 4. Findings

In this study, 106 articles related to workplace friendship were analysed by using content analysis method based on journal names, variables used together with workplace friendship, variable role, article type, data collection tool, used scale, country of the research, sample size and sector of the research. The findings of the analyses are presented in tables.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Articles According to Journal Names

List of Journals	Frequency	Percent
Frontiers in Psychology	6	5,66%
Current Psychology	5	4,72%
Sustainability	4	3,77%
Employee Relations	3	2,83%
Psychological Reports	3	2,83%
International Journal of Hospitality Management	3	2,83%
Journal of Social and Personal Relationships	2	1,89%
Journal of Human Resource Management	2	1,89%
Human Relations	2	1,89%
Personnel Review	2	1,89%
Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2	1,89%
SA Journal of Human Resource Management	2	1,89%
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights	2	1,89%
Journal of Behavioral Science	2	1,89%
International Journal of Conflict Management	2	1,89%
Leadership & Organization Development Journal	2	1,89%
Others*	62	58,49 % (each one has 0,94%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Published only one article journals was expressed together

Table 1 shows the distribution of the articles according to the names of the journals in which they were published. Articles were mostly published in the journals of psychology, sustainability and human resources fields. As seen in Table 1, the most published articles on workplace friendship were found in the “Frontiers in Psychology”, “Current Psychology”, and “Sustainability” journals.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Variables Used Together with Workplace Friendship

Variable Names	Frequency	Percent
gender	11	5,5%
organizational commitment	10	5,0%
turnover intention	9	4,5%
job satisfaction	7	3,5%
work engagement	7	3,5%
job performance	7	3,5%
well-being	7	3,5%
psychological safety	7	3,5%
innovative behavior	7	3,5%
gossip	6	3,0%
organizational citizenship behavior	6	3,0%
task interdependence	6	3,0%
leadership types (ethical, transf, altruistic, resonant, wise, benevolent)	6	3,0%
workplace bullying	6	3,0%
abusive supervision	5	2,5%
age	5	2,5%
knowledge sharing	4	2,0%
knowledge hiding	4	2,0%
emotional exhaustion	4	2,0%
psychological contract violation	4	2,0%
job insecurity	4	2,0%
incivility	4	2,0%
personality	4	2,0%

positive & negative emotions	4	2,0%
job embeddedness	3	1,5%
organizational level	3	1,5%
communication	3	1,5%
political skill	3	1,5%
organizational & coworker support	3	1,5%
empowerment	3	1,5%
workplace deviance behaviour	3	1,5%
shared tasks, values, interests	3	1,5%
team climate & culture	2	1,0%
role ambiguity	2	1,0%
job involvement	2	1,0%
leader-member exchange	2	1,0%
trust	2	1,0%
education level	2	1,0%
career concerns	2	1,0%
marital status	2	1,0%
social capital	2	1,0%
job crafting	2	1,0%
motivation	2	1,0%
organizational identification	2	1,0%
voice behavior	2	1,0%
burnout	2	1,0%
workplace fun	2	1,0%
collectivism	2	1,0%
TOTAL*	200	100

\*In some articles, more than one variable was used in the same article with workplace friendship. Therefore, the total number of frequencies in here differs from the total number of articles.

Table 2 lists the distribution of the variables used together with workplace friendship in the articles. As can be seen in Table 2, the variables most frequently used together with workplace friendship in the articles are gender (5,5%), organizational commitment (5%), turnover

intention (4,5%), job satisfaction (3,5%), work engagement (3,5%), job performance (3,5%), well-being (3,5%), psychological safety (3,5%), and innovative behavior (3,5%). Variables that were used only once in all analysed articles are not included in the table. It was determined that 84 different variables were used only once in the articles. Since the frequency number of these 84 variables is 1, they are not shown separately in the Table 2. Some of these 84 variables are as follows; skill variety, task identity, emotional stress, workgroup cohesion, bureaucracy, organizational politics, perceived job significance, perceived politeness, role clarity, work ethic, employee silence, compulsory citizenship behavior.

**Tablo 3.** Distribution of Articles According to Workplace Friendship's Variable Role

Variable Role	Frequency	Percent
Independent variable role	37	42,53%
Moderator variable role	24	27,59%
Dependent variable role	18	20,69%
Mediator variable role	8	9,20%
TOTAL*	87	100

\*Since there are also qualitative and theoretical articles, the total number here is less than the total number of articles (In qualitative and theoretical articles, there is no independent, dependent, moderator, mediator variable roles/types).

Table 3 shows the distribution of articles according to workplace friendship's variable role. Workplace friendship has been used different variables role such as independent variable role, moderator variable role, dependent variable role, mediator variable role in the articles. As seen in Table 3, the most preferred variable role in workplace friendship was independent variable role. Researchers have mostly used the workplace friendship as an independent variable (42,53%) and as a moderator variable (27,59%) in their studies. It was observed that the least preferred variable role in workplace friendship was the mediator variable role (9,20%).

**Tablo 4.** Distribution of Articles According to Article Types

Article Types	Frequency	Percent
Quantitative	83	78,30%
Qualitative	11	10,38%
Theoretical	9	8,49%
Mix method (quantitative & qualitative)	3	2,83%
TOTAL	106	100

Table 4 presents distribution of articles according to article types. As seen on the Table 4, the most preferred article type is quantitative (78,30%). In the studies related to workplace friendship, qualitative, theoretical, and mix method article types were not preferred as much as quantitative article type.

**Tablo 5.** Distribution of Articles According to Data Collection Tool

Data Collection Tool	Frequency	Percent
Survey	83	83%
Interview	13	13%
Document review	2	2%
Secondary data, panel data	2	2%
TOTAL*	100	100

\*Since some articles do not specify the data collection tool or use any data collection tool, the total number of frequencies here differs from the total number of articles.

Table 5 demonstrates distribution of articles according to data collection tool. Survey and interview were used as data collection tool in the majority of articles on workplace friendship. As seen on the Table 5, survey (83%) was the most used tool for gathering data for workplace friendship studies.

**Tablo 6.** Distribution of Articles According to Used Scale

Used Scales	Frequency	Percent
Nielsen et al.'s (2000) scale	72	90%
Sias et al.'s (2003) scale	2	2,5%
Omuris' (2019) scale	2	2,5%
Hackman and Lawler's (1971) scale	1	1,25%
Baron and Podolny's (2004)	1	1,25%
Morris et al.'s (1997)	1	1,25%
Sias et al.'s (2012)	1	1,25%
TOTAL*	80	100

\*Since some articles (qualitative article, theoretical article, meta-analysed article, etc.) did not use any scale, the total number of frequencies here differs from the total number of articles.

Table 6 reflects distribution of the articles according to used scale in the studies. In the articles, Nielsen et al.'s (2000) workplace friendship scale stands out as the most preferred scale (90%). In the majority of the studies, workplace friendship was measured with 12-item Scale of Workplace Friendship created by Nielsen et al. in 2000. This 12-item scale has two dimensions: 6 items for friendship prevalence and 6 items for friendship opportunity.

**Tablo 7.** Distribution of Articles According to Countries

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
China	20	20,20%
Taiwan	16	16,16%
United States of America	14	14,14%
India	8	8,08%
United Kingdom	7	7,07%
Turkey	5	5,05%
Pakistan	4	4,04%
Egypt	3	3,03%
Indonesia	3	3,03%
New Zealand	3	3,03%
South Africa	3	3,03%
Australia	2	2,02%
Holland	2	2,02%
Iraq	2	2,02%
Canada	1	1,01%
Libya	1	1,01%
Malaysia	1	1,01%
Nigeria	1	1,01%
Oman	1	1,01%
South Korea	1	1,01%
Vietnam	1	1,01%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Since some of the articles do not specify any country name or some of the articles are theoretically based, the number of countries in here differs from the total number of articles

Table 7 presents the distribution of articles according to the countries where the studies have been conducted. As seen on the Table 7, among the countries, the most studies about workplace friendship have been conducted in the China (20 articles; 20,20%). After the China, the most studies among the articles were conducted in the Taiwan (16 articles; 16,16%) and USA (14 articles; 14,14%), respectively. Apart from China, Taiwan and the USA, the number

of studies on workplace friendship in India, the United Kingdom and Turkey is higher than the number of studies on this subject in other countries.

**Table 8.** Distribution of Articles According to the Sample Size

Sample Size	Frequency	Percent
1-150	15	15,63%
151-250	16	16,67%
251-500	51	53,13%
501-1000	13	13,54%
1001-2000	1	1,04%
TOTAL*	96	100

\*Since the theoretical articles do not include a sample size, the total number of frequencies here differs from the total number of articles.

Table 8 shows the distribution of articles according to their sample size. Within the scope of sample size, number of participants was taken as the basis in the studies using survey, the number of participants who participated in the interview was taken as the basis in the studies using interviews, and the number of examined studies was taken as the basis in meta-analysis studies. The most preferred sample size is 251-500 (53,13%) at the articles. It is observed that the sample size generally does not exceed 500 in the majority of the articles.

**Table 9.** Distribution of Articles According to Sectors

Sectors	Frequency	Percent
finance, banking, accounting	27	13,50%
education	26	13,00%
information technology, high technology	21	10,50%
healthcare	19	9,50%
hospitality	17	8,50%
manufacturing	16	8,00%
retail, trading	12	6,00%
public, governmental	10	5,00%
media, communication, telecommunication	8	4,00%
social service, social work	8	4,00%
marketing, advertising, sales	7	3,50%
insurance	6	3,00%

consultancy	4	2,00%
technical service, engineering	4	2,00%
transportation	3	1,50%
automotive	2	1,00%
aviation	2	1,00%
medicine, medical equipment	2	1,00%
real estate	2	1,00%
art	2	1,00%
travel, tourism	1	0,50%
agriculture	1	0,50%
TOTAL*	200	100

\*Since some articles (theoretical articles, meta-analyses) do not specify any sector and some articles conduct research in more than one sector, the total number of frequency here differs from the total number of articles.

Table 9 reflects the distribution of articles according to sectors that the studies have been conducted. It is seen that studies on workplace friendship have been conducted in various sectors. As seen in Table 9, the most preferred sectors in the studies are finance, banking, accounting sector (13,50%) and education sector (13%). After the finance, banking, accounting and education sectors, the most preferred sectors among articles are technology, healthcare and hospitality, respectively.

## Discussion & Conclusion

This study is significant because it provides information on how the concept of workplace friendship is examined, which variable role it is used, how it is measured and what kind of research particularly in terms of methodology has been conducted on the concept in the workplace friendship literature. In this study, 106 articles related to workplace friendship were analysed by using content analysis method. These 106 articles were evaluated in terms of journal names in which they were published, variables used together with workplace friendship, variable role, type of article, data collection tool, used scale, country of the research, sample size and the sector in which the research was conducted. When the results were examined, it was observed that the articles related to workplace friendship were mostly published in the journals of psychology, sustainability and human resources fields and it was determined that the examined articles were mostly published in the “Frontiers in Psychology” journal. Researchers who will conduct studies on workplace friendship are advised to submit their studies to journals in psychology, sustainability and human resources fields for publication. In the analysed articles, the variables most frequently used together with workplace friendship are gender, organizational commitment, turnover intention, job satisfaction, and work engagement. It was determined that the variables related to the field of psychology and organizational behaviour were mostly used in the examined articles.

It was found that workplace friendship was mostly used in the role of independent variable and moderator variable in the articles. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers who would like to conduct studies on this topic may consider the workplace friendship variable in the role of independent variable and/or moderator variable. It was determined that the majority

of the articles related to workplace friendship were quantitative method articles. On the other hand, the number of qualitative and theoretical articles among the analysed articles is quite low. It is recommended that future researchers can design their studies qualitatively or theoretically in order to increase the number of qualitative and theoretical articles in the workplace friendship literature. The findings show that the survey is the most preferred data collection tool in the analysed articles. Despite the frequency of use is not as high as the survey, it was found that interviews were also preferred as a data collection tool in the articles. Secondary data as a data collection tool are mostly preferred in meta-analysis studies on workplace friendship studies.

Obtained findings in terms of the used scales in the articles indicate that the 12-item workplace friendship scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) was used in 90 percent of the articles. In other words, it can be stated that the most commonly used scale in the articles is the workplace friendship scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000). While future researchers may prefer the Nielsen scale, they may also develop new sector-specific scales on workplace friendship as Omuris (2019) did. The majority of the studies on workplace friendship in the reviewed articles were conducted in China, Taiwan, and USA. This shows that studies on workplace friendship are mostly conducted in the Asia and the North America continents. In this framework, it can be stated that there is a lack of studies in Africa, Europe, and South America continents, and it is important to conduct future studies in these continents for the development of the workplace friendship literature. Especially in Europe, except for a few countries such as UK and Holland, there are no research on workplace friendship in other countries on the European continent. It is recommended that academics/researchers in these countries where any studies related to workplace friendship have not yet been conducted, doing empirical studies on the workplace friendship at these countries.

It was determined that the researchers who conducted studies on workplace friendship mostly preferred the sample size between 251-500. Also, it is observed that the sample size generally does not surpass 500 in the majority of the articles. In this direction, it can be said that a sample size between 250 and 500 may be sufficient for researchers who will conduct studies on workplace friendship. When the sectors in which the studies conducted were analysed, it was found that the majority of the studies were conducted in the finance&banking&accounting, education, and information technology&high technology sectors. In addition to these sectors, it has been observed that significant number of workplace friendship studies have been carried out especially in the healthcare and hospitality sectors. In this direction, it is recommended that future researchers carry out their studies in other service sectors in order to make sectoral comparisons.

This study, like many studies, has some limitations. The biggest limitation of this study is that only the articles in the web of science database are discussed and analysed, and other databases are not examined. Future researchers are recommended to increase the number of databases to be addressed. In this study, content analysis was conducted by selecting various criteria such as journal names, variables used together with workplace friendship, variable role, type of article, data collection tool, used scale, country of the research, sample size and the sector in which the research was conducted. It can be suggested that future researchers may conduct their studies by selecting other criteria such as statistical analyses performed in the studies, software programmes used in the studies, etc. Another limitation is that only content analysis method was used in this study. Future researchers can enrich their studies with other analyses like social network analysis.

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