A Scoping Review of Queer Paradox and Community in Online Spheres between 2015 and 2025

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Abstract

This study presents a systematic scoping review of research on queer paradox and community in online spheres published between 2015 and 2025. The review interrogates how digital platforms simultaneously function as emancipatory spaces that enhance queer visibility and as sites of surveillance, exclusion, and normative reproduction, thereby constituting the "queer paradox." Guided by PRISMA protocols, 72 peer-reviewed articles were analyzed through thematic synthesis, focusing on the construction of queer identities, intersectional negotiations, and the dynamics of empowerment and oppression across digital environments. Findings reveal a significant growth of queer subculture scholarship, particularly in non-Western contexts, where digital technologies facilitate micro-communities that resist North-Atlantic paradigms of queerness. The review highlights three critical trends: the expansion of queer studies into diverse geographies, the predominance of qualitative methodologies such as thematic and discourse analysis, and the increasing scholarly attention to intersectionality, particularly regarding race, class, and gender modality. Nonetheless, the field remains constrained by methodological fragmentation, limited representation of transgender and nonbinary experiences, and Western dominance in knowledge production. This review underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary, context-sensitive approaches to theorizing digital queer cultures, with particular attention to ethical and political implications. By synthesizing empirical research across global contexts, the study contributes to developing more inclusive theoretical frameworks and provides directions for future scholarship, policy, and digital interventions aimed at fostering equitable queer participation in online spaces.

Keywords: Algorithmic profiling, Digital media, Intersectionality, Queer paradox, Queer subcultures

INTRODUCTION

Studies of queer subcultures became an object of attention in the early 1980s and transformed into a general instrument of identity and group relations study. There has been a tendency to focus on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people moving through and trying to be in control of their otherness in a world that is aggressively hostile or heteronormatively oblivious to their non-belonging. First analyses were conducted through health surveys and ethnography that analyzed sexual identity, laws, and policies through the movement of money, media, and political ideas that flow into such cities as London, San Francisco, and Sydney [1], [2]. In more contemporary times, queer studies have been extended to other territories like China [3], India [4], and Zambia [5] to illustrate the weakness of queer practice and identity as a monolithic Western model. This

444

growth has made queer studies the current topic of social research. This evolution is centered around the queer theory that criticizes set categories of identity and emphasizes performance of norms as a challenge to the gender and sexuality normatives. Post-colonial criticisms go on to complement the discipline by commenting on how Euro-American ideologies prevail and influence the world on the construction of sexualities [6], [7]. Intersectionality shows how sexuality is negotiated along the lines of race, class, gender, and geography as factors that are presupposed to generate how queer lives are experienced in the globalized environment of technologies, media, and power [8], [9].

The emergence of online platforms has greatly transformed the visibility of queer where the queer persons have a platform to express their boundaries and to relate with queer-minded individuals. Nonetheless, the effects of this digital turn make the queer visibility scene more difficult, fueling more regionalized platforms, particularly in non-Western environments, which contest the traditional visions of queerness in the West and facilitate a wider variety of expression. These platforms enable queer communities of Global South to express their identities in a manner that did not follow the North-Atlantic paradigm, underlining the function of digital realities in enhancing and complicating queer identities [10], [11]. Digital technologies have converged with queer identity building to provide a platform in which there has been a flourishing of micro-communities formed around their special taste, political group, or mixed cultural backgrounds [12]. The new forms of subcultures create difficulties for researchers who wish to classify queer identities, and new paradigms of analysis are needed that will be more dimensional and open. The increased fluidity of queer identities and expressions confuses and deviates from accepted research taxonomies, and it is time to create frameworks that may embrace both the fluidity of queer identities and power relations that determine access to digital spaces and whether individuals remain as figures of visibility or invisibility [4], [13]. Instead, the emergence of greater forms of diversity in queer subcultures, especially online, highlights the need to use interdisciplinary methods of examining the complexity of queer identities as well as the structural disparities in such areas. However, even though the research on queer subcultures has increasingly expanded throughout the years, it has been observed that there is a considerable lack of systematic syntheses to combine this knowledge, which hinders the accumulation of theory and empirically based policy; future research may then be able to fill these gaps.

Besides the fact that it is necessary to develop a more integrated way of approaching queer digital cultures, there exist serious methodological issues in the study of queer digital cultures. The numerous published quantitative studies conducted on a range of issues of LGBTQIA+ research between 2011 and 2022 quite frequently found usage of older numerical techniques, in particular, T-tests, and ANOVA, which are not ideal in research due to the complexity of queer identities and their intersectionality [14]. Moreover, the lack of transgender people in the multiple studies limits the possibility of the scholars to represent the variety of experiences on queer. Study have indicated that in psychology there is a lack of synthesized studies on microaggressions experienced in sub-populations in the queer community [15], whereas there exist disjointed understandings of resilience in lesbian, gay, and bisexual people [16]. Such criticisms are repeated in other areas, such as human resource development [17], information science [18], and consumer research [19], where the limitations of methodology make study comparability and generalizability between sampled queer subpopulations difficult. Therefore, any scholarly

research requires a type of research that is also integrative, yet not too generalized to be applicable to queer intersectional real lives, especially within the digital domain.

These gaps in queer studies are starting to be filled with systematic literature reviews (SLRs), documents that provide reproducible and transparent methods of reducing the existing body of research [20]. As an example, the work [21] resulted in a thorough study, a refinement of search terms used in LGBTQIA+ health, which led to an increase in search precision in literature. The Queer Literacy Framework transformed into teacher-practitioner literature assessment, which shows how disciplinary locks impede reform [22]. Hall used meta-analytical methods to explore development stages of sexual-orientation identity [23], marking a worthy starting point of clinical treatment. Such works highlight the importance of SLR approaches to producing rigorous knowledge, as well as highlighting that there are very major gaps in its production, specifically around the sociocultural examination of digital queer cultures, nonbinary experiences, and queer research on the global south. The present review will help to fill these gaps in the literature by integrating the empirical observations on queer digital subcultures with a more careful focus on non-Western contexts and intersectionality.

This paper adds to the current literature on the topic in four major ways. First, it offers a synthesis of the current empirical research in queer digital subcultures that is based on multidisciplinary, cross-lingual, and multiregional research available in the period between 2015-2025. Second, it adopts an intersectional approach to discussing the digital participation role of such dimensions as race and ethnicity, gender modality, and socioeconomic status, addressing the accusations of race and trans exclusion in previous reviews [14], [24]. Third, it charts theoretical and methodological fashions, noting convergence and divergence in the field, and suggestions are offered about how to help promote dialogue between paradigms. Eventually, it presents a prospective research plan reflecting an ethical, methodological, and practical study of marginalized communities in the continually more data-driven social places. This study aims to build the capability of academic researchers, policymakers, and community advocates who could develop digital interventions that would not only validate the queer multiplicity of existing lives but defy the hierarchies that exist in norms.

Following the agendas of queer, feminist, and critical race theorists, this review places the analysis of queer digital cultures within the larger structures of power, inequality, and technological change [6], [13]. The purpose of this work is to connect academic curiosity with real-life applications as knowledge production has practical implications on the lives of people whose identities overlap with systems of oppression. Through the analysis of changes in queer identities during the digital era, this paper provides a much-needed scholarly response to the deficiency in the literature, leading to the creation of more inclusive and fair digital environments for queer people in different countries across the world.

METHOD

This systematic review was based on the PRISMA guidelines [25] to find research studies about queer subcultures, especially in digital space, and understand the queer paradox, i.e., the digital space as an emancipatory arena and oppressing queer people's space. An accurate search approach consisting of such keywords as "queer subculture" and "queer paradox" was applied to obtain available studies regarding the process of building up and negotiating queer identities in

online environments. Thematic analysis was applied in the analysis of the studies as it has the capacity of establishing patterns and themes or structures in the acquired qualitative data. To provide analysis consistency and validity, the Watase Uake system [26] was used, and it allowed analysing such key issues as the construction of queer identities, empowerment and oppression on digital platforms, and the importance of intersectionality in the construction of queerness.

The reason why the Scopus database is considered as the main one is that it has a very strict procedure of indexation, and therefore, high-quality peer-reviewed journals can be found [27]. It was favored compared to Google Scholar, where the articles may be duplicated or unreliable, including the predatory [28]. The first search provided 142 articles, all of which fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Out of all the selected articles, 34 were blocked after the screening process because some were not available, 19 were rejected because they were published after 2015, and others were rejected because they did not match the recommended quality level (Q1, Q2, Q3). It reduced the number to 108 articles that are to be evaluated. In the stage of eligibility, 34 articles were excluded because of accessibility, and two other articles were dropped out of the analysis because of the corrupted files, and 72 remaining articles were subjected to the final analysis. Each of the studies that were included conformed to the inclusion criteria and applied the right research methodologies.
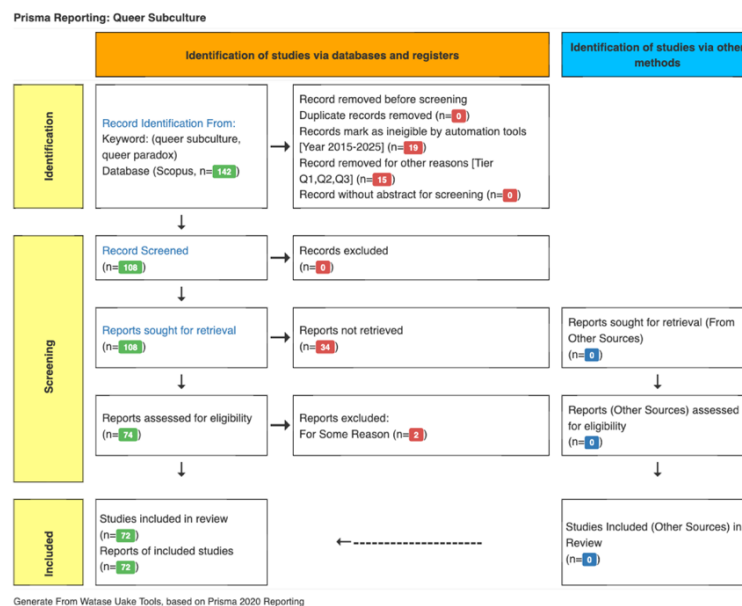

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Studies Identification and Screening

The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) presented below shows the identification, screening, and inclusion process of the studies that participated in this review visually. The flow map illustrates the process reflected in the systematic review, starting with study identification with the help of databases to final selection depending on the eligibility. The scheme will be used to increase transparency and reflect the expertise and uniformity of the review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specified study fits the scope of the current literature on queer studies with an overall focus on the increasing role played by queerness, sexuality, and their cross-section with technology and activism [2], [12], [29]. It also indicates the emergence of new practices like queer and technology [30], [31] and queer activism [6], [7] as the results of more general macro-social changes. Explorations of these complexities are in most cases cast in qualitative research [32], [33], [34], which is facilitated by the persistence of queer theory [35], [36]. The paper illustrates that queer research is now geographically more inclusive and intersectional [1], [5], [32] and involves non-Western experiences offered mainly by Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The increased number of scientific works also shows that the nature of queer issues is changing and requires further research in the exciting direction [1], [6], [12].

Number of Publications Year-Wise
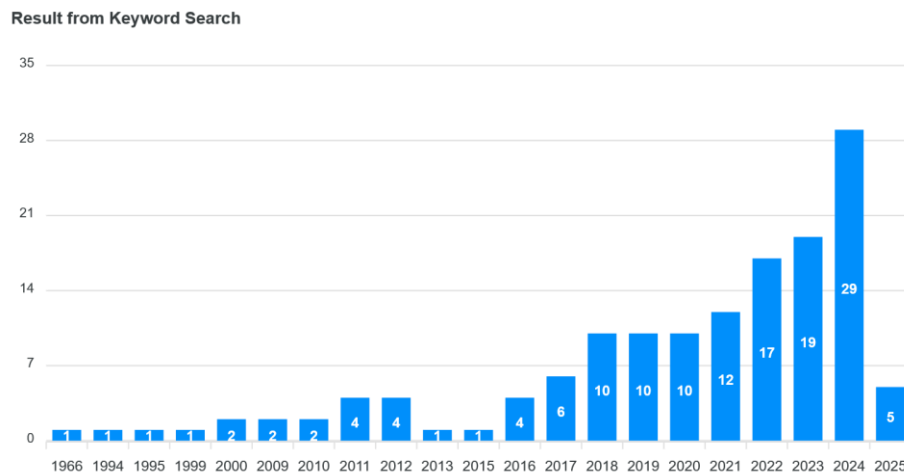
**Figure 2. Number of Research Keyword Searches Over Time**

Consideration of the publication distribution of the theme of queer research and subcultures in various countries and time periods shows that there has been a drastic increase in the number of publications about this theme in recent years. The years of the maximum number of publications were 2023 and 2024 (Figure 2), and many of them covered the topics of queer subcultures [33], [37], queer identities [34], [38], and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on queer communities [39]. This outpouring of research can be aligned with the fact that queer studies have come to be even richer and more inclusive during the last few years [40], [41]. It demonstrates that queer subculture research is currently undergoing dramatic growth, with its focus devoted to numerous different dimensions like identity, behavior, and health [12]. In the meantime, the studies [32], [37] note that the relevance of queer subculture research in the Asian region extended to China in recent years.

Scholars whose studies have gained the greater number of citations have become the most influential in terms of their contribution to the development of this field of knowledge; in particular, these scholars work examine queer subcultures and identities and their implications in

448

society [29], [42]. The tendencies detected on the basis of these results imply that queer studies have gained an additional range and breadth with the increased diversity of the areas of investigation, such as identity, behavior, and health. In the future, the study on queer subcultures cannot be discarded, as there is a need for further research to understand queer subcultures and their identities further, along with their social ramifications. The further study may help to understand the queer issues and subcultures better, as well as promote the creation of strategies aimed at increasing awareness and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in the society [43], [44].

Country Wise Study
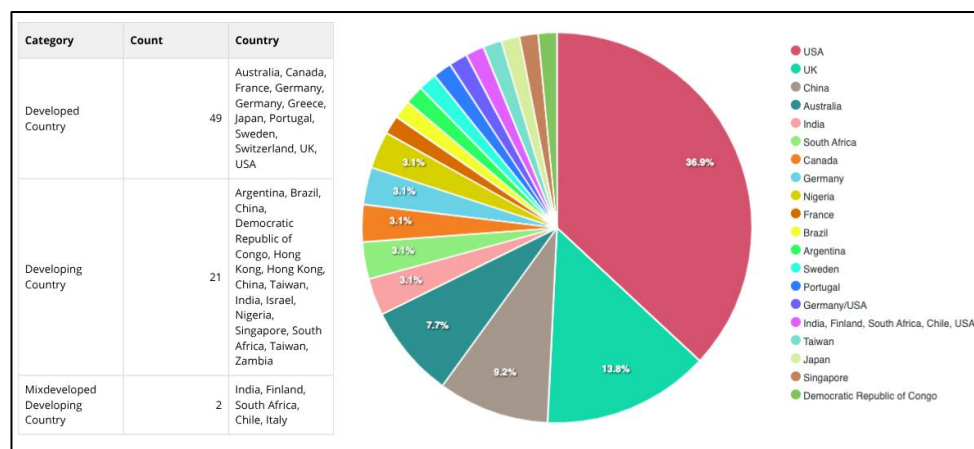
Figure 3. Country Classification

The presented chart (Figure 3) describes different works revolving around the themes of queer and subculture and indicates their great diversity in terms of geographical destination. The chart shows that there is no doubt that the main place of research was the United States (USA) and numerous prominent studies were carried out there, too, such as [45], [46], [47]. Not only the USA, but also other nations like Australia, United Kingdom and China, have gained prominence as the sites of queer studies. As an example, studies in Australia in general, including those of [2], [34], focus on the gay subcultures and the queer identities. In the meantime, the works of scholars in the UK deal with such matters as queer pastimes and lesbian knitting and show a wider approach to queer culture in daily use [48], [49].

The citation distribution indicates that studies from the USA have had a substantial impact on queer studies, with research by [45], [46] being frequently cited in other studies. This highlights the relevance and contribution of American research in shaping our understanding of queer subcultures and identities. The implications of this geographical trend suggest that queer studies continue to be dominated by Western perspectives, particularly those from the USA. This dominance may affect our understanding of queer subcultures and identities in different cultural and geographical contexts. Therefore, future queer studies must consider a more diverse and inclusive range of contexts, expanding the scope of topics and research methodologies. Geographically and culturally diverse research could help us understand the complexities of queer

449

subcultures and identities across the world [5], [6]. It is essential that future research incorporates a broader and more inclusive perspective to address the challenges and opportunities faced by queer communities globally.

Methods Classification
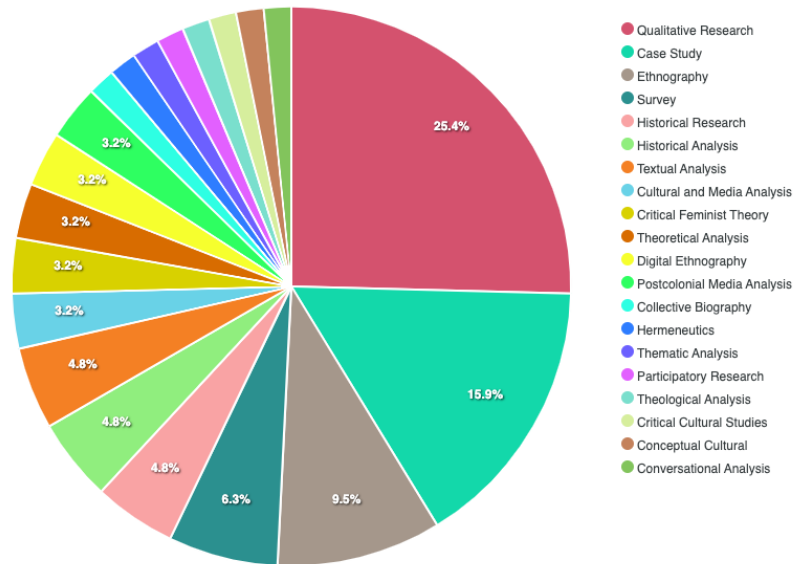
Figure 4. Methods Classification

According to Figure 4, the qualitative orientation has proven to be the most common research strategy used in scholarly investigations of voluntary subcultures with a variety of designs entailed, such as semi-structured interviews [30], [33], [34], [46], ethnographic research [4], [42], [50], [51], [52], [53], text analysis [8], [41], [54], [55], [56]. Quantitative research is also frequently used, especially through surveys [2], [12], [47], [57]. Historical research plays a significant role in understanding the legacy and historical context of voluntary subcultures [29], [31], [41], [48], [58]. The implication of this trend is that a detailed comprehension of voluntary subcultures can be dependent on qualitative techniques to investigate subjective and individual experiences of participants. Researching history and surveys are also essential elements to give their historical context and quantitative data to back up qualitative evidence.

There is a necessity to have a world view in the study of voluntary subcultures where research is not confined to areas that have open minds on matters of sexual identities. The assessment of the topicality of this research topic in relation to the future challenges and opportunities reveals that a more comprehensive knowledge about voluntary subcultures is important in benefiting the rights and well-being of voluntary audiences. Also, such cognition of voluntary community subcultures in countries with high rates of stigmatization regarding sexual identities can create new possibilities to inspire a drive towards the global trends of language and the necessity to address the rights of voluntary communities [4], [42]. Nevertheless, some obstacles to this study exist that cannot be disregarded, such as the participation and access of participants and

approaches to capture the variety of subcultural experiments [59], [60]. Thus, different studies and different methods will still be required to learn more about the mechanics of voluntary subcultures as time goes on. Extensive consideration of social and cultural contexts may create room to induce the positive sphere of energy, ideas, and activity, which is based on diversity and well-being of voluntary communities [30], [34].

Analysis Techniques
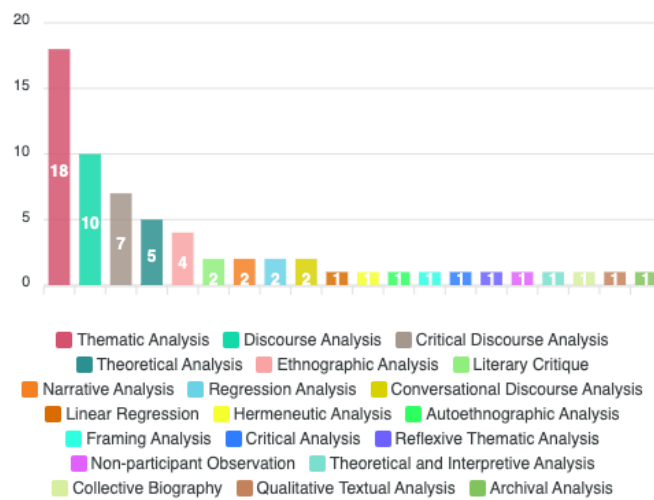
Figure 5. Bar Chart of Analysis

CONCLUSION

Queer paradox has especially been studied in digital contexts, and specifically how queer identity and community are constructed and maintained in them, in the past decade. The existing studies show a tendency to shift queer collectivities to the digital space, which became a place of resistance, the creation of new identity, and cultural expression. With the transition of geographical places into virtual arenas, there is a paradox: the same technologies that locked LGBTQIA+ away or spied on them in the past now become places of self-representation and group solidarity. The use of social media and the wider online community has enabled the rise of queer identity, which disrupts the dominance of dominant discourses, hence creating the sense of belonging and connection among community members.

However, the same online spaces bring large-scale issues such as uneven technological access, the loss of privacy, and a growth of exclusionary norms. This contradiction is the outline of the queer paradox, the combination of freedom and obligation online. With the development of studies of the inter-floodings of queer identity and digital technologies, these complex relationships need to be considered by future studies using interdisciplinary approach that explains the mechanisms through which digital subcultures affect the changing concepts of queer identity and community building. An even more detailed analysis of the various ways in which queer individuals navigate identity, space, and time online will help to better understand the paradoxical nature of such experiences and its implications to queer activism, community

451

creation, and performance of self in the next decade.

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