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CONTRIBUTION OF PUNJABI SINGERS IN RESURGENCE OF PUNJABI CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

The resurgence of Punjabi cinema over the past two decades is closely intertwined with the creative and industrial contributions of Punjabi singers who transitioned into film performance, production, and music-driven storytelling. After a prolonged phase of decline marked by limited budgets, weak narratives, and restricted audience reach, Punjabi cinema experienced a renewed cultural and commercial vitality in the early 21st century. A significant catalyst in this transformation has been the active participation of singers who expanded their artistic presence into cinema, thereby reshaping both its aesthetic appeal and market dynamics. Artists such as Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal, and Amrinder Gill have played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between Punjabi music culture and cinematic expression. Their established musical popularity provided a ready audience base, enabling films to achieve wider domestic and global reach, particularly among the Punjabi diaspora. These singer-performers contributed not only as lead actors but also as cultural producers who integrated contemporary music trends, folk traditions, and emotionally resonant narratives into mainstream cinema. The strong integration of soundtrack-driven storytelling elevated the commercial viability of films and reinforced music as a central narrative device. Furthermore, their cross-media presence helped modernize the image of Punjabi cinema, aligning it with global production standards while retaining regional authenticity. The synergy between the Punjabi music industry and cinema has thus produced a sustainable model of cultural production, where singers function as influential cultural intermediaries. This dynamic has significantly contributed to the revitalization, global recognition, and economic expansion of Punjabi cinema in the contemporary era.

KEYWORDS: Punjabi Cinema, Singer-Actors, Cultural Resurgence, Music-Driven Storytelling, Diaspora Audiences, Regional Film Industry.

INTRODUCTION:

The development of Punjabi cinema is best understood as a layered cultural process shaped by historical interruptions, evolving audience sensibilities, and the gradual reconfiguration of its industrial base. For much of the late twentieth century, Punjabi cinema remained on the margins of India's larger film economy, often constrained by limited financial backing, uneven production quality, and a narrow distribution network that restricted its reach beyond regional

audiences. Despite possessing a rich linguistic and cultural heritage, the industry struggled to sustain momentum and often found itself overshadowed by mainstream Hindi cinema. Yet, the early twenty-first century witnessed a remarkable resurgence, one that cannot be explained solely through economic revival or technological advancement, but must be understood through the cultural convergence of music and cinema, particularly through the emergence of Punjabi singers as central cinematic figures.

In the Punjabi cultural imagination, music has always occupied a deeply embedded and emotionally resonant space. It functions not merely as entertainment but as a living archive of memory, identity, and collective experience. Folk traditions, contemporary pop, devotional expression, and diasporic nostalgia all converge within Punjabi musical practices, making singers culturally significant beyond the boundaries of performance. When established singers transitioned into cinema, they carried with them this dense emotional and cultural capital, allowing them to bridge the gap between a struggling film industry and a highly engaged, globally dispersed audience. Their entry into cinema therefore represented not an external intervention but an organic extension of Punjabi cultural expression into visual form.

The rise of singer-actors such as Gurdas Maan, Harbhajan Maan, Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal, Babbu Maan, Amrinder Gill, Ranjit Bawa, Gurnam Bhullar, Ammy Virk, Tarsem Jassar, Ninja and Amrit Maan etc. marks a decisive transformation in the star system and narrative economy of Punjabi cinema. These artists entered the film industry with pre-established popularity, which not only ensured immediate audience attention but also redefined the parameters of cinematic success. Their films were no longer dependent solely on traditional promotional structures; instead, their musical identity itself became a powerful marketing tool. As a result, Punjabi cinema began to expand its reach across borders, particularly among diaspora communities in Canada, the United Kingdom, and other regions where Punjabi identity remains culturally active and emotionally significant.

This transformation also influenced the aesthetic and narrative grammar of Punjabi films. Storytelling increasingly began to revolve around music-driven structures, where songs were not inserted as interruptions but integrated as essential narrative devices that deepen character development and emotional expression. Themes such as migration, rural transformation, youth aspirations, and diasporic longing became central motifs, often articulated through lyrical sequences that blur the line between dialogue and music. This shift contributed to the emergence of a hybrid cinematic form that is simultaneously rooted in folk sensibilities and shaped by global cinematic trends, allowing Punjabi cinema to develop a distinctive yet adaptable identity.

At an industrial level, the involvement of singers in cinema also contributed to the professionalization and globalization of the Punjabi film sector. Their dual roles as performers and cultural entrepreneurs encouraged investments in higher production values, more strategic marketing approaches, and a stronger engagement with digital platforms such as YouTube and streaming services. This digital visibility further strengthened the global circulation of Punjabi films, enabling them to reach audiences far beyond traditional theatrical spaces. Consequently, Punjabi cinema has evolved into a transnational cultural industry, deeply connected to diaspora networks and digital consumption patterns.

Against this backdrop, the resurgence of Punjabi cinema can be understood as a multidimensional process in which singers have acted as cultural intermediaries, industrial catalysts, and narrative innovators. Their contribution extends beyond performance into the

broader restructuring of cinematic culture, where music, identity, and storytelling intersect in powerful ways. This study therefore situates the phenomenon within wider academic discussions on regional cinema, cultural hybridity, and globalization, examining how the creative agency of Punjabi singers has reshaped both the form and future of Punjabi cinema.

Literature Review

The study of Punjabi cinema has increasingly attracted scholarly attention within cultural studies, media studies, and diaspora research due to its rapid transformation from a struggling regional industry into a globally visible cultural economy. Early academic discussions position Punjabi cinema as an industry historically marked by instability, limited institutional support, and competition from dominant Hindi cinema. However, contemporary scholarship highlights a decisive shift in its trajectory, particularly from the early 2000s onward, when music-driven narratives and singer-actors began to reshape its industrial and aesthetic foundations. Researchers such as Dudrah (2012) argue that Punjabi cinema must be understood within broader South Asian popular media systems where cultural identity is continuously negotiated through music, performance, and transnational circulation. He emphasizes that Punjabi cinematic expression is deeply embedded in musical aesthetics, where songs are not supplementary but central to meaning-making.

Building on this cultural framework, Thandi (2015) and Roy (2013) extend the discussion into diaspora studies, highlighting how Punjabi cinema functions as an emotional bridge between homeland and migrant communities. These studies collectively demonstrate that Punjabi identity is not territorially fixed but culturally mobile, sustained through songs, films, and digital circulation. Music, in particular, emerges as a key emotional medium that maintains cultural continuity among diaspora populations. Roy (2013) further notes that Punjabi films successfully construct diasporic imagination through music-led storytelling, where emotional nostalgia and familial belonging become central cinematic themes.

In a similar vein, Judge (2018) examines the production of Punjabi identity through popular culture and argues that globalization has significantly transformed regional cultural expressions. Punjabi cinema, in his analysis, reflects hybrid cultural processes where traditional narratives are reworked through modern aesthetics and digital platforms. He emphasizes that singer-actors play a crucial role in this transformation, as they merge musical authority with cinematic visibility, thereby strengthening emotional engagement with audiences. This observation aligns with Govil's (2016) broader argument that regional film industries increasingly operate within global media economies where celebrity branding, music circulation, and digital dissemination converge to produce hybrid cultural products.

A significant strand of literature focuses specifically on the evolution of Punjabi film music and its integration into cinematic storytelling. Grewal (2020) highlights the structural transformation of film songs from decorative sequences into narrative-driving elements. This shift is particularly evident in contemporary Punjabi cinema, where songs function as emotional extensions of character development rather than interruptions. Singer-actors, in this context, become central to narrative coherence because they possess both musical and performative authority, enabling a seamless fusion of sound and story. This integration has also contributed to the global popularity of Punjabi cinema, as music serves as a universally accessible cultural form.

The role of digital platforms in reshaping Punjabi cinema has been widely discussed in recent studies. Kaur (2021) argues that platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and OTT services have transformed the production and consumption of Punjabi films by amplifying the visibility of singer-actors. Their pre-existing musical fan base allows films to gain immediate traction, making digital circulation a key factor in cinematic success. This digital ecosystem reinforces the interdependence between music and cinema, where promotional content, music videos, and film narratives circulate in interconnected loops of visibility and engagement.

Another important dimension is the industrial and commercial expansion of Punjabi cinema. Kaur (2024) and related ShodhKosh studies observe that the industry has undergone a significant restructuring, where singer-actors have become dominant forces in shaping casting practices, narrative themes, and audience expectations. While this has contributed to commercial growth and global recognition, scholars also caution against the repetitive reliance on musical celebrities, which may limit artistic diversity and reinforce gender imbalance within the industry. Nevertheless, the commercial success of this model is undeniable, as it has repositioned Punjabi cinema within global entertainment circuits.

The cultural centrality of singer-actors is further reinforced in newspaper and industry analyses such as Kapoor (2011), which highlight the rise of singers as box-office drivers in Punjabi cinema. These studies emphasize that audience familiarity with musical personalities translates into cinematic trust and emotional attachment. Singer-actors such as Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal, and Amrinder Gill exemplify this phenomenon, where pre-established musical fame directly contributes to cinematic success and global reach.

Across the reviewed literature, a consistent theoretical pattern emerges: Punjabi cinema's resurgence is deeply rooted in the convergence of music and film, where singers function as cultural intermediaries, industrial catalysts, and narrative anchors. Music is not treated as an accessory but as a structural foundation of cinematic storytelling. Moreover, the diaspora plays a crucial role in sustaining this ecosystem, as emotional nostalgia and cultural memory significantly shape audience engagement across global spaces.

However, despite extensive discussion on music and diaspora, there remains a noticeable gap in research that critically examines the *mechanisms* through which singer-actors influence narrative construction, genre evolution, and audience psychology in Punjabi cinema. Most existing studies focus either on cultural identity or industrial growth but rarely integrate textual film analysis with audience reception studies. Additionally, there is limited scholarly attention on gendered dimensions of singer-actor dominance and the underrepresentation of female musical performers in leading cinematic roles. Another underexplored area is the long-term artistic implications of over-reliance on singer-driven star systems, particularly in relation to narrative diversity and cinematic experimentation.

Research Gaps:

This study positions itself within the following research gaps:

- Most existing literature treats Punjabi cinema either as a cultural phenomenon or as an industrial success story, but rarely integrates both perspectives in a unified analytical framework. This creates a gap in understanding how cultural identity and commercial expansion interact in shaping its resurgence.

- A significant portion of research focuses on the role of music in Punjabi cinema in a general sense. However, there is limited critical examination of how *singer-actors specifically* function as transformative agents within cinematic production, narrative construction, and audience reception.
- While diaspora audiences are frequently discussed as key contributors to the global success of Punjabi cinema, fewer studies investigate how singer-actors actively mediate and strengthen this transnational connection through pre-established musical popularity.
- Gendered dimensions of Punjabi cinema remain underexplored, particularly the uneven visibility and representation of female singers and actresses compared to male singer-actors who dominate cinematic space and commercial success.
- There is limited research on the long-term artistic implications of the singer-actor model, especially regarding whether this trend enhances or restricts creative diversity, experimental storytelling, and the emergence of non-musical acting talent in the industry.
- Few studies critically examine audience psychology and emotional engagement mechanisms in relation to singer-actors, particularly how pre-existing musical fandom influences cinematic reception and box-office performance.

Therefore, this study positions itself within this gap by critically examining how Punjabi singers have contributed to the resurgence of Punjabi cinema not only as performers but as transformative cultural agents. It seeks to integrate cultural, industrial, and narrative perspectives to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how music-driven stardom has reshaped the identity and global trajectory of Punjabi cinema.

Objectives of the Research:

- To critically examine the role of Punjabi singers in the revival and resurgence of Punjabi cinema as a commercially and culturally significant regional film industry.
- To analyze how singer-actors contribute to the transformation of narrative structures in Punjabi cinema, particularly through the integration of music as a central storytelling device.
- To explore the impact of Punjabi singer-actors on audience engagement, with specific attention to domestic viewers and global Punjabi diaspora communities.
- To investigate the industrial and cultural implications of music-driven stardom in Punjabi cinema, focusing on how it has reshaped production practices, marketing strategies, and the global identity of the industry.

Hypotheses of the Research:

H1: The rise of Punjabi singer-actors has significantly contributed to the commercial resurgence of Punjabi cinema.

H2: Punjabi films featuring established singers in lead roles achieve higher audience engagement compared to films without singer-actors.

H3: Music-driven storytelling in Punjabi cinema enhances emotional connection and narrative effectiveness among audiences.

H4: The popularity of Punjabi singers has played a major role in expanding the global reach of Punjabi cinema, especially among diaspora communities.

H5: The integration of singers into acting roles has led to a stronger fusion of music and narrative structure in Punjabi films.

H6: Despite commercial success, the dominance of singer-actors may limit diversity in acting talent and narrative experimentation within Punjabi cinema.

Research Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach to examine the contribution of Punjabi singers in the resurgence of Punjabi cinema. The study is primarily based on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, newspaper reports, film industry analyses, and credible online databases. The literature is systematically reviewed to understand the historical evolution of Punjabi cinema and the gradual emergence of singer-actors as central cultural and industrial figures. A thematic analysis method is used to identify recurring patterns related to music-driven storytelling, star power, diaspora engagement, and the commercial transformation of the industry. Prominent singers such as Gurdas Maan, Harbhajan Maan, Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal, Babbu Maan, Amrinder Gill, Ranjit Bawa, Gurnam Bhullar, Ammy Virk, Tarsem Jassar, Ninja and Amrit Maan etc. are also considered for contextual interpretation of narrative and musical integration within cinematic structures.

In addition to textual analysis, the study employs a conceptual framework drawn from cultural studies, diaspora theory, and media convergence theory to interpret the interplay between music and cinema in Punjabi cultural production. The research also incorporates comparative insights from regional and global film industries to position Punjabi cinema within broader patterns of transnational media flow. Since the study is interpretive in nature, no primary field survey or experimental design is undertaken; instead, emphasis is placed on critical synthesis and theoretical interpretation of existing knowledge. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of how singer-driven stardom functions as a transformative force in reshaping the identity, structure, and global trajectory of Punjabi cinema.

DISCUSSION:

The resurgence of Punjabi cinema is best understood not as a sudden industrial success, but as a slow emotional rebuilding of an entire cultural system where music, memory, and storytelling converge. At the centre of this transformation stands Gurdas Maan, whose contribution cannot be limited to performance alone but must be seen as the ethical and emotional foundation of modern Punjabi cinema. His films such as *Shaheed-E-Mohabbat Boota Singh*, *Des Hoyaa Pardes*, *Waris Shah: Ishq Daa Waaris*, and *Sukhmani* reflect a cinema deeply rooted in historical consciousness, particularly Partition trauma, displacement, and the fragile construction of identity in postcolonial Punjab. What makes Gurdas Maan's role significant is his ability to merge folk musical sensibility with cinematic realism, where songs do not decorate the narrative but carry its emotional burden. His work helped reposition Punjabi cinema from a marginal entertainment form into a serious cultural archive that could hold collective pain, memory, and moral reflection.

In a similar but commercially more accessible register, Harbhajan Mann played a decisive role in re-establishing Punjabi cinema during its revival phase in the early 2000s. His films such as *Jee Aayan Nu*, *Asa Nu Maan Watna Da*, *Dil Apna Punjabi*, *Mitti Wajaan Maardi*, and *Jag Jeondeyan De Mele* created a new emotional vocabulary centred on migration, diasporic longing, and the tension between homeland and foreign settlement. These films resonated strongly with

Punjabi families abroad, particularly in Canada, the UK, and Australia, where cinema functioned as a symbolic return to cultural roots. Harbhajan Mann's significance lies in how his star image as a singer translated into cinematic trust—audiences did not just watch a film; they followed a voice they had grown up listening to. This continuity between music and cinema became a defining feature of Punjabi cinematic revival.

The cinematic intensity and raw emotionality introduced by Babbu Maan further expanded the expressive boundaries of Punjabi cinema. His films, including *Hashar*, *Ekam – Son of Soil*, *Kabaddi Once Again*, and *Banjaran*, often move away from polished romantic narratives and instead engage with anger, social frustration, and rural existential struggle. Babbu Maan's cinema reflects the psychological turbulence of Punjabi youth, especially those negotiating unemployment, migration pressure, and socio-political disillusionment. His storytelling is deeply lyrical yet grounded in realism, where songs often function as direct emotional outbursts rather than narrative bridges. This blend of musical rebellion and cinematic realism helped Punjabi cinema explore darker, more socially reflective themes.

A major commercial and global breakthrough came with Diljit Dosanjh, whose career represents the full internationalisation of Punjabi cinema. Films such as *Jatt & Juliet*, *Jatt & Juliet 2*, *Punjab 1984*, *Sardaar Ji*, *Sardaar Ji 2*, *Super Singh*, *Shadaa*, and *Honsla Rakh* demonstrate an extraordinary range, from comedy and romance to historical trauma and fantasy storytelling. *Punjab 1984*, in particular, stands as a landmark film addressing the violent complexities of militancy in Punjab, while *Shadaa* and *Honsla Rakh* reflect modern relationship dynamics and urban emotional confusion. Diljit's global musical fame also amplifies his cinematic reach, allowing Punjabi films to penetrate digital platforms and international theatres with unprecedented visibility. His presence has effectively turned Punjabi cinema into a transnational entertainment product rather than a purely regional industry.

Alongside this expansion, Gippy Grewal has played a dual role as both creative performer and industrial architect. His films such as *Carry On Jatta*, *Carry On Jatta 2*, *Carry On Jatta 3*, *Manje Bistre*, *Manje Bistre 2*, *Ardaas*, *Ardaas Karaan*, and *Lucky Di Unlucky Story* illustrate his ability to move between comedy, spirituality, and social realism. *Carry On Jatta* redefined Punjabi comedic cinema by introducing situational humour and ensemble chaos narratives that became box-office benchmarks, while *Ardaas* and *Ardaas Karaan* introduced a morally reflective and socially conscious dimension rarely explored in mainstream Punjabi films. As a producer, Gippy Grewal also contributed to improving production infrastructure, distribution networks, and genre diversification, making Punjabi cinema more institutionally stable and commercially ambitious.

In a contrasting but equally significant emotional tone, Amrinder Gill has shaped Punjabi cinema through subtlety, restraint, and lyrical storytelling. His films such as *Angrej*, *Love Punjab*, *Lahoriye*, *Chal Mera Putt*, *Chal Mera Putt 2*, *Chal Mera Putt 3*, and *Ashke* emphasize everyday emotional experiences rather than exaggerated dramatic structures. *Angrej* stands out as a historically textured narrative set in pre-Partition Punjab, capturing innocence, love, and social simplicity, while the *Chal Mera Putt* series reflects migrant life with humour, warmth, and emotional realism. Amrinder Gill's cinema feels grounded in lived experience, where silence, gesture, and minimal dialogue often carry as much weight as music, making his contribution essential in balancing the commercial excesses of the industry.

Gurnam Bhullar's journey in Punjabi cinema reflects a steady evolution from a singer to a prominent actor with a strong emotional screen presence. He made his early on-screen

appearances with *Afsar* (2018) in a special role, followed by his acting debut as a lead in *Guddiyan Patole* (2019), which established him as a new romantic hero in the industry. In the same year, he appeared in *Surkhi Bindi* (2019) in a supporting role and also featured in *High End Yaariyaan* (2019). He continued his growth with *Sohreyaan Da Pind Aa Gaya* (2020) and *Fuffad Ji* (2021), both of which strengthened his image in family-oriented and comedic narratives. The year 2022 marked his major breakthrough with multiple films including *Main Viyah Nahi Karona Tere Naal*, *Lekh*, *Kokka*, and *Jind Mahi*, where *Lekh* stood out for its emotional depth and tragic romance. In 2023, he appeared in *Nigah Marda Ayi Ve*, *Parinda Paar Geyaa*, and *Superstar*, further consolidating his position in romantic and youth-centric cinema. In 2024, he continued with *Khadari* and *Rose Rosy Te Gulab*, maintaining his presence in emotionally driven storytelling, while his upcoming project *Ishqan De Lekhe* (2026), where he is also associated as a producer, indicates his gradual move towards creative and production roles within Punjabi cinema.

Ammy Virk has established himself as one of the most versatile singer-actors in contemporary Punjabi cinema through a diverse filmography that balances romance, tragedy, comedy, and historical narratives. He gained strong recognition with *Angrej* (2015), where his performance in a pre-Partition romantic setting highlighted his natural screen presence, followed by *Bambukat* (2016), which further strengthened his image in period drama storytelling. He achieved massive popularity through the commercially successful *Nikka Zaildar* series (2016, 2017, 2018), which cemented his position as a romantic-comedy hero. His emotional depth became especially evident in *Qismat* (2018) and its sequel *Qismat 2* (2021), both of which are considered landmark Punjabi romantic tragedies. Ammy Virk also delivered strong performances in *Harjeeta* (2018), a biographical sports drama, and *Muklawaa* (2019), which explored cultural traditions and marriage rituals in rural Punjab. In recent years, he has continued to diversify his roles with films like *Saunkan Saunkne* (2022), a family comedy exploring complex marital relationships, and ensemble projects such as *Chhalle Mundiyan* (2022), showing his adaptability across genres. Through these films, Ammy Virk has become a key figure in shaping emotionally rich and commercially successful Punjabi cinema.

Ranjit Bawa, Tarsem Jassar, Amrit Maan, and Ninja have all contributed to the diversification of contemporary Punjabi cinema through distinct but overlapping cinematic choices rooted in music-driven stardom. Ranjit Bawa's notable films include *Vekh Baraatan Challiyan* (2017), *High End Yaariyaan* (2019), *Ik Sandhu Hunda Si* (2020), *Daddy Cool Munde Fool 2* (2021), and *Lahoriye* (2017 appearance in music/association space), where he often portrays youth-centric, action-oriented, and friendship-based narratives. Tarsem Jassar has built a strong identity through socially grounded and culturally reflective films such as *Rabb Da Radio* (2017), *Afsar* (2018), *Sardar Mohammad* (2017), *Uda Aida* (2019), and *Rabb Da Radio 2* (2019), focusing on rural life, education, and generational conflict. Amrit Maan, while more selective in acting, has appeared in films such as *Chal Mera Putt 2* (2020), *Chal Mera Putt 3* (2021), and *Aate Di Chidi* (2018), often contributing to ensemble storytelling and diaspora-centered narratives. Ninja, similarly, has appeared in emotionally intense films like *Channa Mereya* (2017), *High End Yaariyaan* (2019), and select supporting roles that reflect heartbreak, romance, and youth emotional struggles, collectively showing how these singer-actors extend their musical identity into cinematic storytelling across romance, social themes, and diaspora experiences.

Taken together, these artists demonstrate that Punjabi cinema today operates as an emotionally integrated system where music and narrative are inseparable. Songs are no longer decorative

interruptions but structural elements that guide emotional rhythm, character psychology, and audience engagement. The industry's resurgence is therefore not merely a commercial phenomenon but a cultural reconfiguration in which singers act as storytellers, emotional translators, and cultural anchors. Yet this very success also creates a dependency on music-based stardom, raising questions about narrative experimentation and the emergence of non-musical acting traditions. Even so, the collective contribution of these singer-actors has fundamentally reshaped Punjabi cinema into a globally resonant cultural form that continues to evolve through sound, emotion, and shared memory.

CONCLUSION:

The discussion clearly demonstrates that the resurgence of Punjabi cinema is deeply rooted in the creative and commercial contributions of singer-actors who have reshaped the industry's identity from within. From pioneering figures such as Gurdas Maan and Harbhajan Mann, who established the emotional and diasporic foundations of modern Punjabi cinema, to influential voices like Babbu Maan, who expanded its thematic intensity, the industry has consistently evolved through the fusion of music and storytelling. This transformation was further accelerated by commercially powerful and globally visible stars such as Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal, and Amrinder Gill, whose films brought scale, diversity, and international recognition to Punjabi cinema. Collectively, their work demonstrates that music is not an auxiliary element but the structural core of Punjabi cinematic expression.

At the same time, the newer generation including Ammy Virk, Gurnam Bhullar, Ranjit Bawa, Tarsem Jassar, Ninja, and Amrit Maan has further diversified Punjabi cinema into multiple emotional and thematic directions, ranging from romance and tragedy to rural realism and diaspora narratives. Their collective contributions highlight that Punjabi cinema today functions as a hybrid cultural system where music, identity, and storytelling are inseparably linked. However, while this singer-driven model has ensured global visibility and commercial success, it also raises important questions about creative diversity and long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, it is evident that singer-actors have not only revived Punjabi cinema but have fundamentally redefined its emotional language, narrative structure, and global cultural positioning.

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary narrative studies, 'Durandhar: The Revenge' offers a rich site for semiotic exploration, where meaning is constructed through layered sign systems, cultural codes, and narrative oppositions. This paper undertakes a semiotic reading of the text, drawing on classical and post-structural frameworks to examine how visual, linguistic, and symbolic signs generate ideological and emotional resonance. Central to the analysis is the protagonist Durandhar, whose representation oscillates between heroism and moral ambiguity, thereby functioning as a polysemic sign within the narrative structure. The study also investigates recurring motifs of revenge, justice, and memory, interpreting them as signifiers that mediate between personal trauma and collective cultural consciousness. Through close reading of cinematic or textual elements such as color palettes, spatial composition, dialogue patterns, and symbolic objects, the paper argues that meaning in the work is not fixed but continuously deferred through intertextual references and cultural signification. Furthermore, the antagonistic forces are examined as constructed binaries that reflect broader socio-political tensions, revealing how the narrative encodes issues of power, ethics, and identity. By situating the text within a semiotic framework, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between signifier and signified, ultimately demonstrating that 'Durandhar: The Revenge' operates as a complex system of meaning-making rather than a linear revenge tale. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary storytelling mobilizes signs to engage audiences in interpretive participation and ideological reflection. The paper positions the film as an evolving semiotic field where audience interpretation actively shapes narrative meaning and ideological significance construction.

KEYWORDS: *Semiotic Analysis, Narrative Studies, Cultural Codes, Ideological Representation, Visual Symbolism, Intertextuality.*

INTRODUCTION:

This study begins from a simple but important assumption: a film is never just a story on screen, but a system of meanings that is built through signs. *Durandhar: The Revenge* offers a particularly interesting case for such an inquiry because its narrative depends heavily on symbolism, emotional suggestion, and visual coding rather than direct explanation. Semiotics, in this sense, provides a useful entry point to understand how the film communicates ideas that are not always spoken but are consistently implied through cinematic form.

Semiotics, as developed in modern film and cultural theory, focuses on how meaning is produced through signs and how those signs are interpreted within specific cultural contexts. In cinema, these signs are not limited to language; they include gestures, framing, colour palettes, sound design, costume, and even silence. When applied to *Durandhar: The Revenge*, this approach allows the researcher to move beyond what happens in the plot and instead ask how what is shown comes to mean something for the viewer.

The value of this approach lies in its ability to slow down the act of viewing. Instead of treating the film as a continuous flow of events, semiotic reading breaks it into meaningful units where each detail contributes to a larger structure of interpretation. This becomes particularly relevant in a film that revolves around emotionally charged themes such as revenge and justice, where meaning is often constructed indirectly through repetition, contrast, and visual emphasis rather than explicit narration.

In *Durandhar: The Revenge*, the central idea of revenge can be understood as more than a narrative trigger. It operates as a sign that shifts meaning depending on context—at times appearing as personal loss, at other times as moral correction or social resistance. Characters, in this framework, do not function only as psychological individuals but also as positions within a system of meaning, where each figure represents a set of values, conflicts, or ideological tensions.

At the same time, semiotic analysis acknowledges that meaning does not remain fixed within the film itself. The audience plays an active role in interpretation, drawing from personal experience, cultural background, and social awareness. This makes the film a site of negotiation rather than transmission. What one viewer reads as justice, another may interpret as violence or moral instability, and this variation is precisely what makes semiotic reading necessary.

The significance of studying *Durandhar: The Revenge* is also connected to its visibility and reception in popular culture. While reported commercial figures differ across sources, the film is widely recognized for its strong audience engagement and box office presence. This popularity is not treated here as a final measure of value, but as an indication that its sign systems are widely circulated and actively interpreted. The present study, therefore, aims to understand how these systems operate and how meaning is produced, sustained, and reworked through cinematic signs.

Review of research:

1. Siddhant Adlakha in ‘The New York Times’ interprets *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as a hyper-violent spy narrative that gradually abandons emotional grounding in favour of political spectacle. The review highlights that the film’s extended runtime and fragmented structure weaken its narrative discipline, making it increasingly difficult for viewers to sustain interpretive engagement. From a critical standpoint, Adlakha suggests that the film’s depiction of nationalism and counter-terror operations becomes ethically ambiguous, as violence is repeatedly aestheticised rather than contextualised. The analysis positions the film within contemporary political-action cinema where ideological intensity often overrides narrative coherence.

2. Nicolas Rapold in ‘The New York Times’ reads the film as a product of its geopolitical moment, arguing that it reflects contemporary anxieties surrounding surveillance, terrorism, and state power. The review suggests that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs a world where moral certainty is continuously destabilised, yet ultimately leans toward a structured ideological position. Rapold emphasizes that the film’s scale and intensity are inseparable from its political

messaging, making it less of a conventional thriller and more of a commentary on modern conflict representation in cinema.

3. **Shubhra Gupta** in ‘**The Indian Express**’ critically evaluates the film’s use of extreme violence, arguing that repetition of brutality reduces emotional impact over time. The review notes that the audience becomes desensitised as the film progresses, which weakens its intended dramatic effect. From a formal perspective, Gupta highlights that the mise-en-scène and background score often dominate narrative subtlety, resulting in a sensory overload that challenges interpretive clarity. The review situates the film within a trend of contemporary action cinema where shock value increasingly substitutes for narrative depth.

4. **Rohan Naahar** in ‘**The Hindu**’ provides a more interpretive critique, arguing that the film’s politics cannot be separated from its cinematic form. The review suggests that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* actively constructs a worldview in which violence becomes narratively justified through emotional framing and character motivation. This creates an interpretive tension where audiences are encouraged to simultaneously question and accept the moral logic of the film. The analysis positions the film as ideologically loaded cinema that resists neutral reading.

5. **Radhika Menon** in ‘**Decider**’ characterises the film as excessively long and structurally overloaded, arguing that its narrative ambition exceeds its storytelling clarity. The review notes that while individual sequences demonstrate technical competence, the overall structure suffers from lack of restraint. Menon also critiques the film’s gratuitous violence, suggesting that it risks undermining viewer engagement. However, she acknowledges that the film reflects a specific trend in modern streaming-era cinema where scale and intensity are prioritised over concision.

6. **Shalini Langer (2026)** offers a critical reading of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as an ambitious yet uneven spy thriller that struggles to maintain narrative cohesion across its extended runtime. The review highlights that the film introduces multiple subplots involving political networks, criminal ecosystems, and personal revenge arcs, but these narrative strands do not always integrate seamlessly. Langer observes that while the film succeeds in creating a dense cinematic universe, its pacing becomes inconsistent, particularly in the second half. The protagonist’s journey, although emotionally charged, is often overshadowed by excessive exposition and rapid tonal shifts. The review ultimately positions the film as a work that is conceptually strong but structurally overextended.

7. **Vineeta Kumar (2026)** interprets the film as a politically infused action narrative that foregrounds power, ideology, and emotional rupture. The review emphasizes Ranveer Singh’s performance as the central force driving audience engagement, noting that the narrative often orbits around his character’s emotional and ideological transformation. Kumar argues that the film deliberately amplifies intensity through visual scale, sound design, and narrative escalation. However, she also notes that this intensity occasionally results in narrative saturation, where emotional weight competes with spectacle. The review situates the film within contemporary Indian cinema’s increasing tendency to merge political subtext with mainstream entertainment.

8. **Anuj Kumar (2026)** provides a more formal critical analysis, focusing on the film’s ideological undertones and visual excess. He observes that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs a cinematic world where violence becomes both narrative device and aesthetic strategy. According to Kumar, the mise-en-scène and background score frequently dominate storytelling, sometimes reducing character motivation to visual spectacle. The review suggests that the film’s

engagement with political conflict raises interpretive questions regarding representation and justification of violence. Despite these concerns, Kumar acknowledges the technical precision of certain sequences, particularly in action choreography and cinematography.

9. **Saibal Chatterjee (2026)** describes the film as a high-voltage espionage thriller that prioritizes intensity over restraint. The review highlights the director's attempt to construct a large-scale narrative involving espionage, betrayal, and moral conflict. Chatterjee notes that while the film achieves moments of strong dramatic impact, its overall structure is weighed down by excessive layering of incidents and characters. He further observes that the emotional arc of the protagonist is compelling but occasionally diluted by the film's insistence on constant escalation. The review situates the film within a broader trend of contemporary Indian action cinema that privileges scale and emotional intensity.

10. **Sukanya Verma (2026)** evaluates the film through its performance dynamics and emotional structure. The review argues that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* relies heavily on its lead actor's screen presence to maintain narrative engagement. Verma highlights that while the film is visually ambitious, its storytelling occasionally becomes secondary to performance spectacle. She also notes that the emotional core of the narrative is effective in isolated sequences but loses consistency across the broader runtime. The review ultimately frames the film as a performance-driven spectacle that succeeds intermittently but lacks sustained narrative discipline.

11. **The Bollywood Hungama Critical Consensus** presents a balanced evaluation, acknowledging both strengths and limitations of the film. Critics note that *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* is technically well-mounted, with strong production design, effective background scoring, and impactful action sequences. However, they also highlight issues related to runtime, narrative density, and repetitive structural patterns. The review panel suggests that the film is most effective in its first half, where narrative momentum and emotional stakes are tightly controlled. In contrast, the latter portions are described as stretched and structurally uneven. Despite these criticisms, the film is recognized as a significant commercial and cinematic spectacle within contemporary Bollywood action cinema.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine how *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs meaning through visual, auditory, and narrative signs, with specific attention to symbols, motifs, and cinematic techniques that shape audience interpretation.
2. To analyse the representation of key themes such as revenge, justice, power, and morality in the film, and to understand how these themes operate as sign systems within a semiotic framework.
3. To explore how character construction and narrative structures in the film function as signifiers that produce ideological and emotional meanings beyond the surface-level storyline.
4. To investigate the role of audience interpretation in decoding the film's semiotic codes, focusing on how different viewers may construct varied meanings based on cultural, social, and contextual factors.

Hypotheses:

1. The film *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* constructs meaning primarily through a complex system of visual and narrative signs, where symbolic elements such as colour, framing, and mise-en-scène play a dominant role in shaping audience interpretation.
2. The representation of revenge, justice, and power in the film operates as a semiotic structure that encodes ideological meanings, often producing moral ambiguity rather than a fixed or singular interpretation.
3. The characterisation and narrative progression in *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* function as signifying systems in which characters represent ideological positions rather than purely psychological individuals.
4. Audience interpretation of the film's semiotic codes varies significantly depending on cultural background and socio-political context, leading to multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings of the same cinematic text.

Research Methodology:

The methodology adopted in this study is primarily qualitative in nature, grounded in semiotics analysis as the central interpretive framework. Rather than treating *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* as a straightforward narrative, the film is approached as a system of signs where meaning is constructed through a combination of visual, auditory, and narrative elements. This approach allows for a closer reading of how the film communicates ideas indirectly through symbols, patterns, and stylistic choices, rather than through explicit dialogue alone. The focus is on understanding how meaning is produced within the film and how it may shift depending on interpretation.

The analysis is carried out through careful viewing and repeated close reading of selected sequences from the film. Particular attention is given to cinematographic choices such as framing, lighting, colour use, and camera movement, as these contribute significantly to the film's symbolic language. Alongside this, narrative structure is examined to understand how events are arranged and how meaning is built through progression, repetition, and contrast. Character representation is also considered, especially in terms of how individuals in the film often function as carriers of broader ideas such as revenge, justice, power, and moral conflict.

The study includes an examination of sound design, background score, and dialogue delivery, since these auditory elements play an important role in shaping emotional and interpretive responses. Recurring motifs and symbolic references are also identified and interpreted to understand how they contribute to the film's overall meaning-making system. Taken together, these elements are analysed in relation to each other, allowing the film to be understood not just as a story, but as a layered semiotic structure that invites multiple readings from its audience.

DISCUSSION:

The semiotic reading of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* begins with its narrative structure, which is intentionally layered, emotionally non-linear, and psychologically fragmented. The plot does not unfold in a smooth chronological order; instead, it constantly shifts between past trauma, present confrontation, and imagined recollections. This movement itself becomes a sign of the protagonist's unstable emotional condition, where memory is not a passive recollection but an active force shaping behaviour. The film repeatedly returns to certain moments, not for

clarification, but for emotional reinforcement, suggesting that the past is never fully resolved. In semiotic terms, this structure transforms time into a symbolic device, where repetition signifies trauma and disruption signifies internal collapse. The narrative therefore operates less as a linear revenge story and more as a mapping of psychological deterioration shaped by loss and unresolved conflict.

The central theme of revenge is constructed in the film as a multi-layered sign rather than a simple narrative goal. Revenge is visually and emotionally coded through darkness, silence, abrupt cuts, and tightly controlled framing, all of which create an atmosphere of emotional suffocation. However, the film does not present revenge as purely destructive; it also frames it as a distorted form of justice, where personal grief merges with ideological motivation. Justice, in contrast, is represented through more structured environments such as institutional buildings, uniformed authority figures, and symmetrical compositions, creating a clear visual opposition between order and chaos. This binary, however, is not stable; the film frequently blurs it, suggesting that justice itself can become violent when filtered through political or personal agendas. As a result, revenge emerges not as a single idea but as a shifting metaphor that absorbs themes of identity crisis, moral uncertainty, and emotional breakdown.

The film's use of signs and symbols is deeply embedded in its *mise-en-scène*, where even minor objects carry interpretive weight. Weapons are not merely tools of violence but symbolic extensions of memory and trauma, often appearing in moments that connect past and present emotional states. Broken objects, blood-stained surfaces, and repeated visual fragments such as photographs or names serve as reminders of loss and unresolved history. Silence, too, functions as a powerful semiotic element, often appearing at moments of emotional intensity where language becomes insufficient. Even pauses in dialogue or prolonged stillness in framing act as meaningful absences, suggesting emotional repression or psychological overload. Through these accumulated signs, the film constructs a dense symbolic environment where meaning is never directly stated but continuously implied and reconstructed by the viewer.

The locale and spatial design of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* play a crucial role in shaping its semiotic identity. Urban landscapes are often portrayed as congested, shadowed, and fragmented, reflecting internal psychological conflict and social instability. In contrast, institutional or politically significant spaces are presented with rigid geometry, controlled lighting, and structured movement, symbolising systems of power and authority. The shifting geography between confined interiors and expansive external environments mirrors the protagonist's evolving mental state, moving between psychological entrapment and outward confrontation. Even transitional spaces such as corridors, staircases, and abandoned zones carry symbolic meaning, often representing moments of decision, hesitation, or transformation. In this way, location is not simply a backdrop but an active participant in meaning-making.

Costume and makeup further deepen the film's semiotic layering by visually tracking transformation and identity breakdown. The protagonist's costumes shift from structured, clean, and formal attire to more rugged, disordered, and emotionally worn appearances, visually marking the progression from control to chaos. This transformation is not abrupt but gradual, suggesting psychological erosion over time. Makeup details such as shadows under the eyes, facial scars, and minimalistic styling reinforce themes of emotional exhaustion and lived trauma. Supporting characters are also visually coded through costume choices that signal ideological positioning—authority figures in rigid uniforms, antagonistic forces in darker tones, and neutral

characters in muted palettes. These visual distinctions help construct a semiotic map of power relations and moral positioning within the narrative world.

Music, lyrics, and sound design operate as an emotional semiotic system that guides interpretation without explicitly dictating meaning. The background score alternates between heavy, rhythmic intensity during action sequences and softer, lingering tones during reflective or emotional moments. This contrast not only shapes mood but also signals shifts in narrative meaning, preparing the viewer for emotional escalation or reflection. Where lyrics are used, they rarely function as literal narration; instead, they extend emotional states, often reinforcing themes of loss, betrayal, and unresolved anger. Sound effects such as gunfire, breathing, silence, and environmental noise are deliberately amplified to create sensory immersion, making the viewer experience tension physically as well as emotionally. Together, these auditory elements function as signs that deepen the emotional texture of the film.

Acting and performance are central to the semiotic system of the film, as they translate internal emotional states into visible and interpretable signs. The protagonist's restrained expressions, controlled gestures, and sudden emotional ruptures create a dual-layered performance that reflects both suppression and eruption of trauma. Eye movements, pauses, and physical stillness often communicate more than dialogue, turning performance into a silent language of meaning. Supporting characters are similarly constructed as symbolic figures rather than purely psychological individuals, often representing ideological positions such as authority, resistance, loyalty, or moral ambiguity. Their interactions with the protagonist are not only narrative exchanges but also symbolic confrontations between competing value systems. Through performance, the film continuously externalises internal conflict, making emotion visually readable.

The direction of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* integrates all these semiotic layers into a cohesive yet interpretively open cinematic experience. The director's emphasis on visual density, controlled pacing, and symbolic repetition ensures that meaning is never fixed but constantly evolving through viewer engagement. Long takes, abrupt transitions, and carefully staged compositions encourage the audience to actively participate in constructing meaning rather than passively consuming it. The film ultimately communicates that revenge, identity, and justice are not stable or singular concepts but fluid sign systems shaped by memory, perception, and ideology. In doing so, it transforms itself from a conventional narrative into a semiotic field where every element—visual, auditory, and performative—contributes to an ongoing process of interpretation.

CONCLUSION:

The semiotic analysis of *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* reveals that the film operates as a complex system of interconnected signs where meaning is constructed through visuals, sound, narrative structure, performance, and symbolic detail rather than explicit storytelling alone. Across its treatment of revenge, justice, identity, and power, the film consistently relies on layered signification that invites multiple interpretations instead of a single fixed meaning. The study shows that characters, spaces, costumes, and even silence function as meaningful signifiers that shape the audience's emotional and ideological understanding of the narrative. Ultimately, the film demonstrates how contemporary cinema can extend beyond conventional storytelling to become a semiotic field in which meaning is continuously produced through the interaction between text and viewer interpretation.

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HELLO SOCIAL: INTELLECTUAL TRANSITIONS IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GENERATIVE AI, AND SOCIETY - A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS (1972–2026*)

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ABSTRACT

*Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved beyond a predominantly technical field into an increasingly interdisciplinary domain with significant societal implications. This study presents a scientometric mapping of intellectual transitions in Artificial Intelligence, Generative AI and society over the period 1972–2026. Using about 29,000 bibliographic records from **Scopus and OpenAlex**, the study identifies AI publications demonstrating explicit societal relevance through the terms society, social, societal, and societies. The analysis combines quantitative text mining, text cleaning, normalisation, TF–IDF, topic modelling, network analysis and temporal trend analysis to examine the changing intellectual structure of AI–society scholarship. Titles, abstracts and keywords/concepts are used to identify dominant themes, conceptual relationships and patterns of societal engagement. Results indicate that societal AI research constitutes a relatively small component of the overall AI literature but has expanded substantially, particularly since the late 2010s and during the 2020s. Social concerns dominate the thematic structure, accompanied by ethics, public issues, policy, governance, trust, sustainability and inequality. The conceptual and disciplinary analyses reveal strong linkages among Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Engineering and Social Sciences. Generative AI emerges as an important recent inflection point in this intellectual transition. The study provides evidence-based insights into the evolving AI–society interface and its relevance to responsible AI, public policy and societal well-being.*

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence; Ai–Society; Scientometric Analysis; Generative Ai; Intellectual Transitions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved from a predominantly technical and computational field into a broad interdisciplinary domain with increasingly significant societal dimensions. Contemporary AI research encompasses questions extending beyond algorithms, computation and technological innovation to include social systems, governance, ethics, public policy, sustainability, human well-being and applications across diverse sectors. However, the societal dimensions embedded within the expanding AI knowledge domain remain comparatively under-examined when viewed through large-scale bibliometric evidence. The present study addresses

this dimension through a scientometric mapping of AI–society research published between 1972 and 2026* (till January’ 2026).

The study draws upon two major scholarly databases, Scopus and OpenAlex, to identify AI-related publications with explicit societal relevance. Publications containing terms such as society, social, societal, and societies are examined through quantitative text-mining and network-based approaches. Titles, abstracts and keywords/concepts are processed using cleaning, normalisation and Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequency (TF–IDF) techniques, followed by topic modelling, network analysis and temporal trend analysis. The resulting intellectual-space maps, thematic structures and temporal patterns provide an empirical view of how societal engagement has developed within AI scholarship. By tracing intellectual transitions, conceptual relationships and emerging thematic structures, the study contributes evidence for understanding the changing relationship between AI and society and provides a basis for discussions surrounding responsible AI, public policy and societal well-being.

2. Background

Bibliometric analysis is the quantitative study of scholarly publications using statistical and mathematical techniques to examine patterns in scientific literature (Pritchard, 1969). It analyses authors, citations, journals, keywords, affiliations and publication trends to identify research productivity, influential contributions, collaboration structures and knowledge development (Zupic&Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021). Contemporary bibliometric research increasingly combines science mapping, network analysis and thematic analysis to identify intellectual and conceptual structures (Aria et al., 2024; Tomczyk et al., 2024). Effective bibliometric studies also require systematic data cleaning, integration and tool selection (Lim et al., 2024; Öztürk et al., 2024). Such methods can reveal knowledge flows and the evolution of scientific communities (Aman & Gläser, 2024).

AI broadly refers to machine-based systems capable of generating outputs such as predictions, recommendations or decisions from given inputs, with varying levels of autonomy and adaptiveness (OECD, 2024). The concept originated in early work on the possibility of computationally simulating intelligent behaviour (McCarthy et al., 1955). Contemporary AI encompasses machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, computer vision, robotics and generative AI, with applications extending across scientific, economic and social domains (Russell & Norvig, 2021; Triguero et al., 2024). Recent scholarship also highlights continuing conceptual debate concerning what constitutes intelligence in artificial systems (Ishii et al., 2024). Alongside technological opportunities, AI introduces questions concerning transparency, accountability, safety, human values and societal impacts, necessitating approaches to responsible development and governance (UNESCO, 2021; NIST, 2023).

OpenAlex is a fully open scholarly knowledge graph that provides interconnected information on research works, authors, sources, institutions, concepts and citations, and was developed as a successor to the Microsoft Academic Graph (Priem et al., 2022). Its freely accessible API and downloadable data infrastructure support large-scale, reproducible bibliometric and scientometric research (Harder, 2024; OpenAlex, 2026). Studies have demonstrated its usefulness for bibliometric mapping at author, institutional and national levels (Haunschild&Bornmann, 2024) and have examined its coverage relative to established databases such as Scopus and Web of Science (Culbert et al., 2024; Alperin et al., 2024). Comparative assessments also indicate strong coverage of research entities (Delgado-Quirós& Ortega, 2025),

while recent review work highlights both its growing importance and continuing metadata limitations (Forchino & Torres-Salinas, 2026).

3. Aim and Objectives

Aim

To map the intellectual transitions and societal engagement of Artificial Intelligence research from 1972 to 2026, using large-scale scientometric, text-mining and network-based analysis of Scopus and OpenAlex publications.

Objectives

- To identify AI publications demonstrating explicit societal relevance through the occurrence of terms including society, social, societal and societies.
- To examine the temporal development of AI–society scholarship and identify periods of changing research intensity.
- To analyse titles, abstracts and keywords/concepts using text cleaning, normalisation and TF–IDF procedures.
- To identify major thematic dimensions and conceptual structures through topic modelling.
- To investigate relationships among concepts and societal terms through network and co-word analysis.
- To map the evolving intellectual space of AI–society research and examine transitions between technical and interdisciplinary research domains.
- To identify patterns of societal engagement in AI scholarship and generate evidence relevant to responsible AI, public policy and societal well-being.

4. Data Sources and Methodology

The study adopts a scientometric methodology to investigate the intellectual development of AI–society research during 1972–2026. Two bibliographic databases, Scopus and OpenAlex, constitute the principal data sources. The presentation reports approximately 25,000 AI-related documents in Scopus and 3,074 AI documents in OpenAlex, from which publications containing explicit societal references were identified. The societal filtering incorporated the terms society, social, societal and societies. The presentation reports approximately 1,250 societal AI publications in the broad results summary and approximately 184 OpenAlex records with direct society/societies mention; the Scopus panel reports around 1,300 such records.

The methodological workflow consists of four principal stages. First, AI-related publications were filtered for societal relevance. Second, textual information from titles, abstracts and keywords/concepts was processed through cleaning, normalisation and TF–IDF procedures. TF–IDF is a statistical text-mining technique used to assess the importance of a term within a document relative to its occurrence across a collection of documents. TF measures how frequently a term occurs within an individual document, whereas ID assigns lower weights to terms occurring across many documents and relatively higher weights to terms that are more distinctive. The combined weighting scheme helps identify terms that are particularly representative of specific documents or thematic groups (Salton & Buckley, 1988). TF–IDF weights can also be interpreted in relation to the relevance and discriminative value of terms

within information retrieval and text analysis (Wu et al., 2008). In bibliometric research, TF-IDF is therefore useful for identifying salient keywords, concepts and thematic vocabulary from titles, abstracts and keywords.

Third, analytical techniques including topic modelling, network analysis and temporal trend analysis were applied to identify thematic structures, conceptual associations and changes through time. Topic modelling and co-word/network approaches were used to characterise the intellectual space and thematic transitions.

Finally, the outputs were interpreted through intellectual-space maps, thematic transitions and societal engagement patterns. The presentation combines temporal graphs, heatmaps, keyword/concept frequency plots, co-word networks, conceptual-flow diagrams, cluster distributions and bibliographic profiles as can be seen in Figure 1.

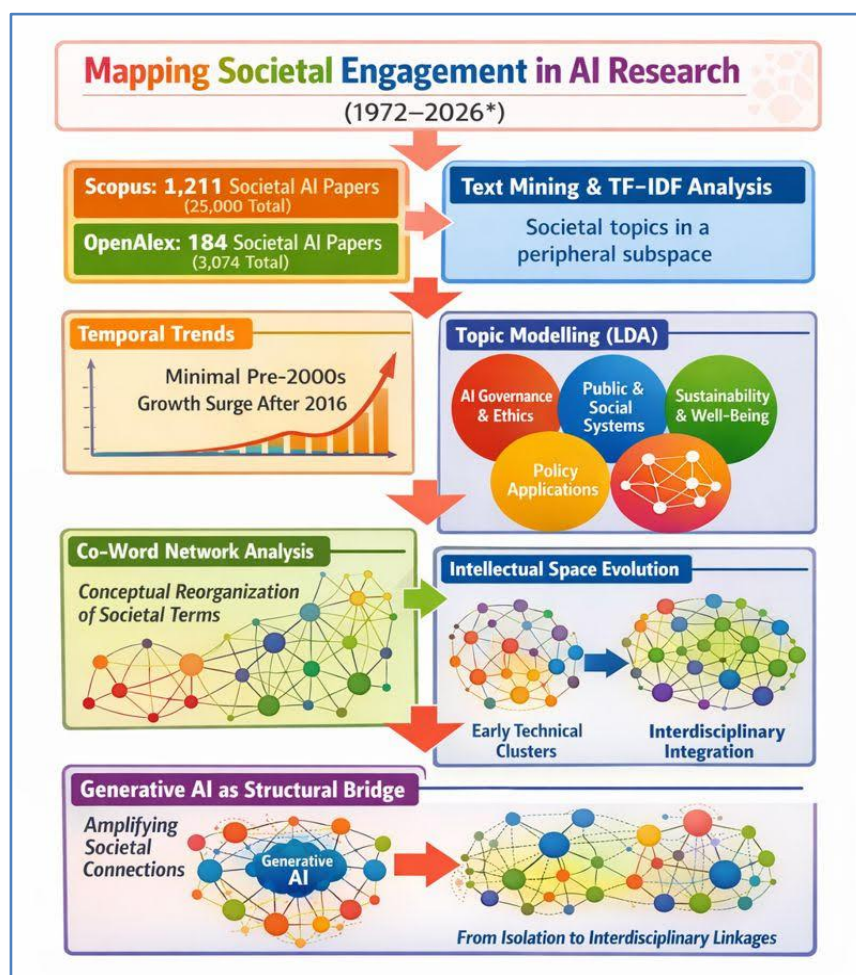


Figure 1. Mapping Societal Engagement in AI Research (1972–2026)

Source- Author, 2026

This framework provides the overall conceptual and methodological architecture of the study. It positions societal engagement within the much larger AI publication universe and connects data filtering with text mining, TF-IDF analysis, topic modelling, co-word network analysis and intellectual-space evolution. The framework also identifies major thematic areas—AI

governance and ethics, public and social systems, sustainability and well-being, and policy applications. A further component presents Generative AI as a structural bridge capable of amplifying societal connections and interdisciplinary linkages. Thus, the figure establishes a progression from bibliographic identification and quantitative text analysis to interpretation of intellectual transitions, showing how technical AI research can be examined through a broader societal lens.

5. Results

Following outputs were obtained:

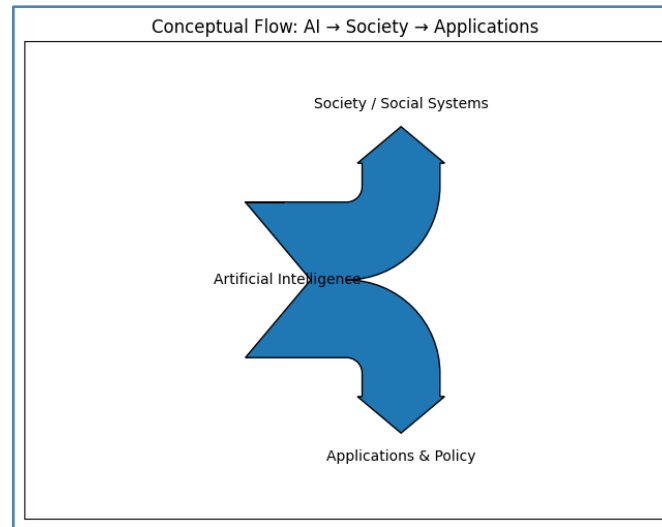


Figure 2. Conceptual Flow: AI → Society → Applications

Source- Author, 2026

The conceptual-flow diagram places Artificial Intelligence at the centre of a relationship linking Society/Social Systems with Applications and Policy (Figure 2). The visual structure represents AI as an intermediary between societal contexts and practical or policy-oriented outcomes. This is consistent with the study framework, where AI is examined not simply as a technological domain but as a knowledge field interacting with social structures. The upper component, Society/Social Systems, represents the societal context in which AI develops and operates, while Applications & Policy represents downstream areas of use and governance. The figure therefore provides a compact conceptual representation of the movement from technological knowledge toward societal application and institutional engagement.

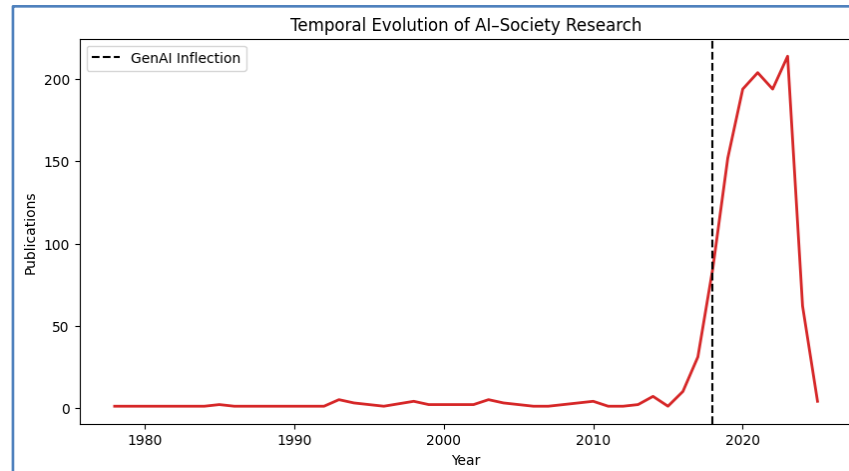


Figure 3. Temporal Evolution of AI-Society Research — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

In Figure 3., the temporal series shows relatively low AI-society publication activity across the earlier decades, followed by a sharp increase after the mid-2010s. Output accelerates strongly around the late 2010s and reaches more than 200 publications in the early 2020s. The vertical marker identifies a “GenAI inflection”, highlighting the period associated with the recent transformation of AI research. The final observations show a sharp fall in the last displayed year, which should be interpreted cautiously because 2026 represents an ongoing publication period. Overall, the figure provides temporal evidence that societal engagement in AI has become substantially more visible during the contemporary phase of AI development.

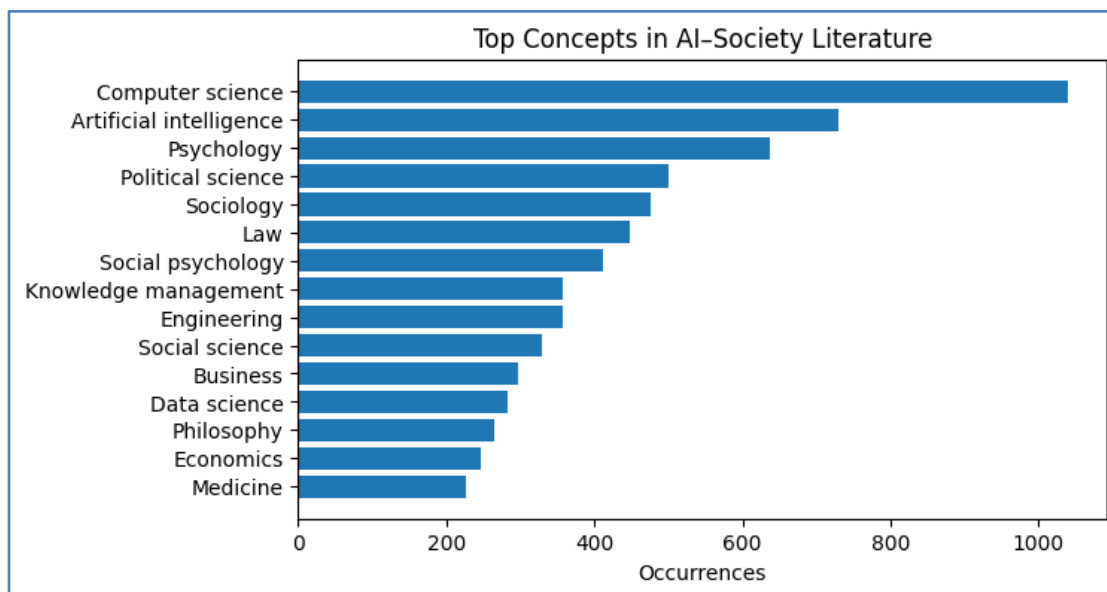


Figure 4. Top Concepts in AI-Society Literature — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The concept-frequency distribution is headed by Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, demonstrating that the societal literature retains a strong computational foundation (Figure 4.).

Psychology is the next prominent domain, followed by Political Science, Sociology and Law. Social Psychology and Knowledge Management form additional substantial components, with Engineering, Social Science, Business, Data Science, Philosophy, Economics and Medicine also represented. The distribution demonstrates considerable disciplinary breadth. While Computer Science and AI remain the core conceptual categories, the strong presence of psychology, political science, sociology and law indicates increasing engagement with human behaviour, institutions, regulation and social consequences. The figure therefore illustrates the interdisciplinary expansion of AI–society scholarship.

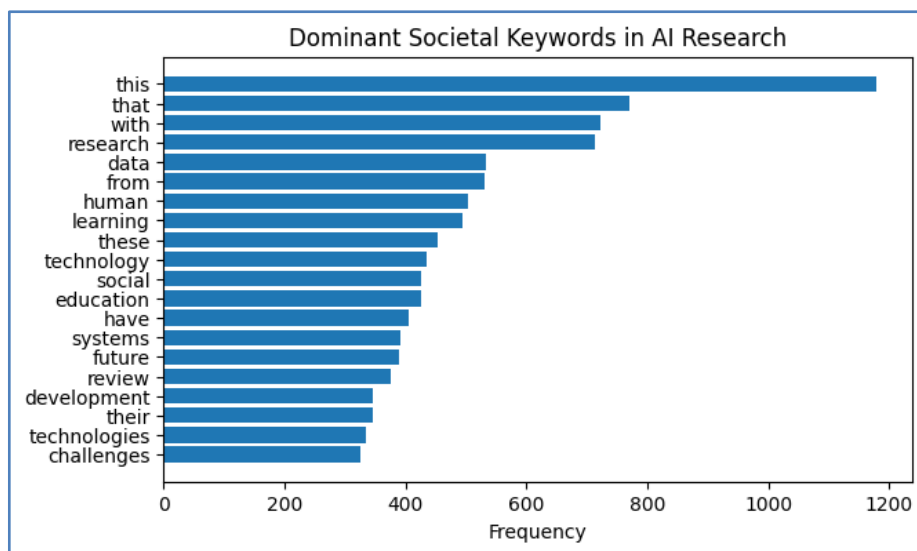


Figure 5. Dominant Societal Keywords in AI Research

Source- Author, 2026

The keyword-frequency graph in Figure 5. shows a broad vocabulary surrounding societal engagement in AI research. High-frequency terms include “research”, “data”, “human”, “learning”, “technology”, “social”, “education”, “systems”, “future”, “development”, “technologies” and “challenges”, alongside common textual terms. The substantive vocabulary is significant because it connects technical AI processes with human and institutional settings. In particular, the appearance of human, social, education and challenges indicates that the literature addresses AI beyond computational performance alone. The frequency distribution therefore reflects a research environment in which technical terminology coexists with human-centred and societal concerns, supporting the study’s interpretation of an expanding AI–society knowledge domain.

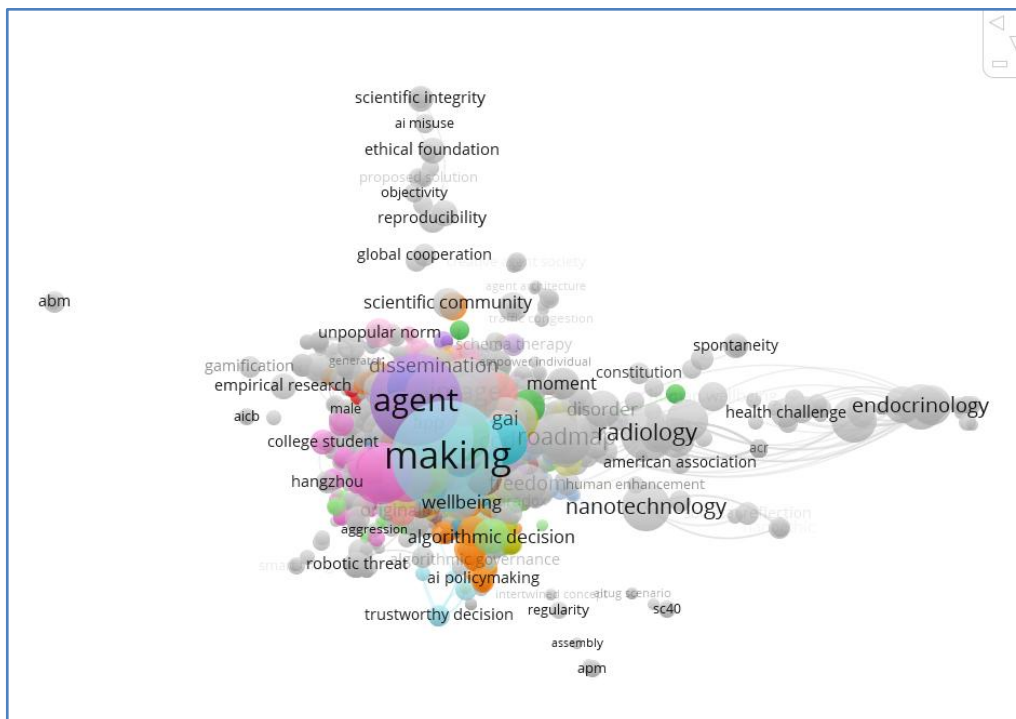


Figure 6. Conceptual Network of AI-Society Research — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The network visualisation in Figure 6. presents a dense web of concepts associated with AI and society. The central region contains highly interconnected terms, while peripheral concepts extend outward through multiple links. The structure indicates that technical AI concepts are connected with social, human-centred and application-oriented terminology rather than forming isolated research compartments. The density of the network is particularly important because it visually demonstrates conceptual integration across different areas of scholarship. The network also supports the intellectual-space interpretation adopted in the study: AI-society research contains a shared conceptual core but simultaneously incorporates specialised topics. The figure therefore provides network-level evidence for the interdisciplinary character of contemporary AI-society scholarship.

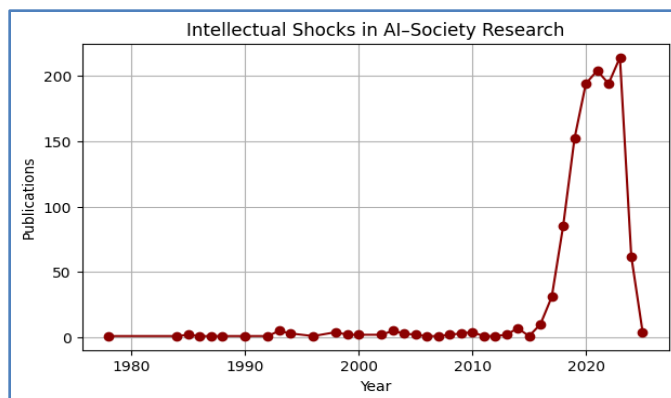


Figure 7. Intellectual Shocks in AI-Society Research

Source- Author, 2026

The time-series representation of intellectual shocks shows a long period of comparatively low publication activity followed by a pronounced acceleration during the late 2010s and early 2020s. In Figure 7., the curve rises rapidly and reaches its strongest values in the most recent part of the series. This pattern indicates that the AI-society knowledge domain experienced a relatively recent structural expansion rather than a uniformly gradual increase across the entire study period. The concentration of activity in the contemporary period is consistent with the wider temporal results in the presentation. The figure therefore identifies a clear phase of intensified intellectual production and provides temporal context for subsequent thematic and network analyses.

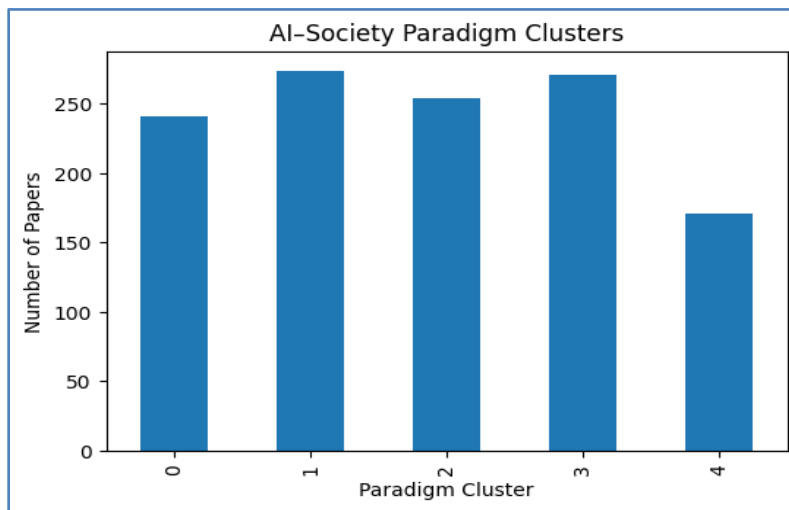


Figure 8. AI-Society Paradigm Clusters

Source- Author, 2026

The cluster chart in Figure 8. identifies five paradigmatic groupings, numbered 0 to 4, with different levels of representation. Clusters 1 and 3 are the largest, each approaching or exceeding approximately 270 papers, while Cluster 2 contains slightly more than 250. Cluster 0 contains around 240 papers and Cluster 4 is smaller, at roughly 170 papers. The distribution indicates that AI-society scholarship is not concentrated within a single intellectual paradigm. Instead, several

substantial clusters coexist, suggesting differentiated research configurations within the broader field. The comparatively smaller fifth cluster may represent a more specialised component. Overall, the figure demonstrates internal diversification of the AI–society research landscape.

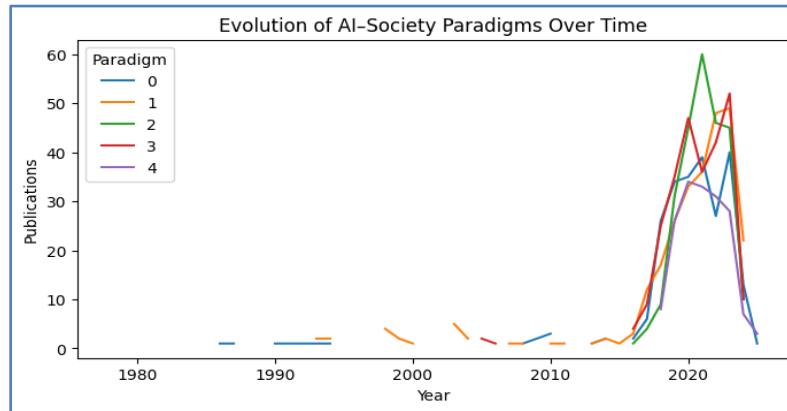


Figure 9. Evolution of AI–Society Paradigms Over Time

Source- Author, 2026

The temporal cluster plot in Figure 9. shows that the identified paradigms have little representation during much of the earlier period but become increasingly visible during the 2010s and rise sharply in the early 2020s. The different coloured trajectories indicate that the paradigms do not develop identically: some reach stronger peaks at particular years, while others show smaller or later increases. The convergence of several trajectories during the recent period indicates simultaneous expansion of multiple research configurations. This pattern supports the interpretation that the growth of AI–society scholarship has involved diversification rather than the emergence of a single dominant theme. The figure therefore links cluster structure with its temporal evolution.

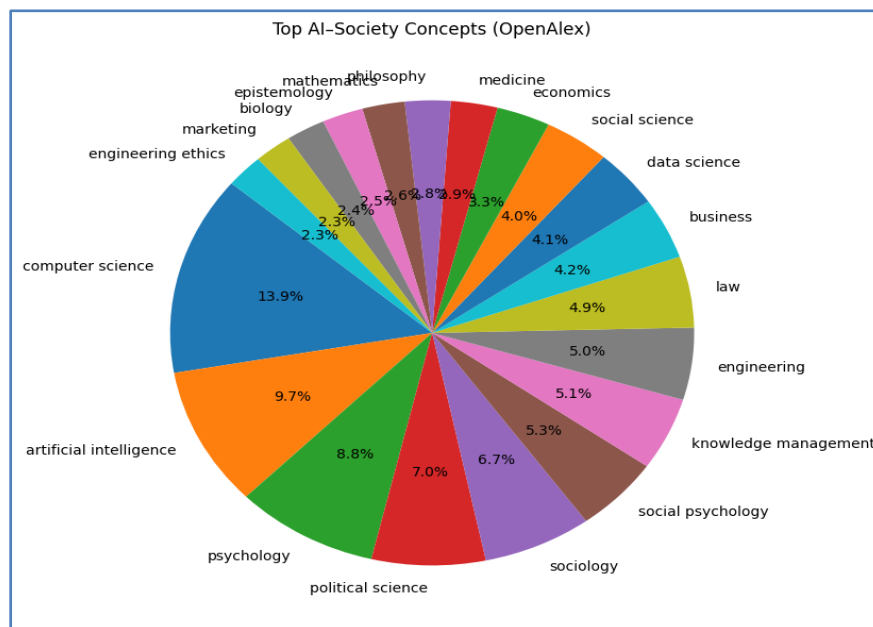


Figure 10. Top AI–Society Concepts — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The pie chart in Figure 10. provides a proportional view of the principal concepts represented in the OpenAlex AI–society literature. Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence occupy the largest sectors, confirming their foundational position. Psychology, Political Science and Sociology form prominent social-science components, while Law, Social Psychology, Knowledge Management, Engineering, Social Science and Business contribute additional shares. Data Science, Philosophy, Economics and Medicine are also represented. The visual balance between technical and social-science domains demonstrates that societal AI research remains anchored in computation while simultaneously drawing on multiple fields concerned with people, institutions and social systems. The chart therefore complements the frequency bar graph by showing the relative distribution of disciplinary concepts.

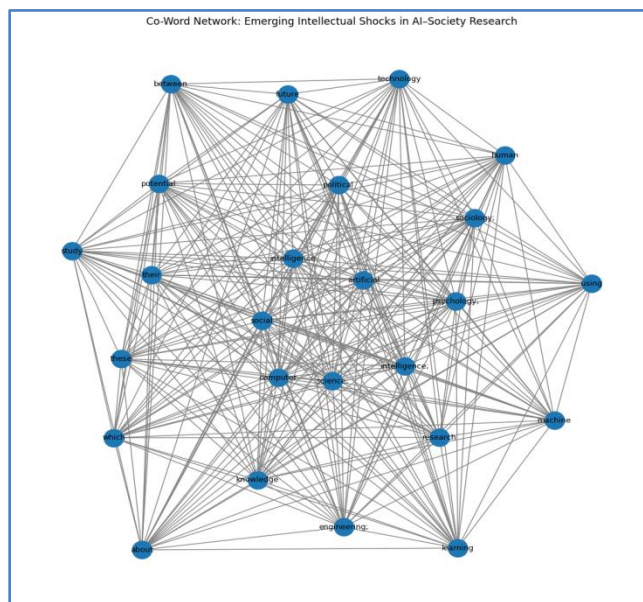


Figure 11. AI–Society Conceptual Network

Source- Author, 2026

The co-occurrence network shows numerous interconnected nodes distributed across a compact intellectual structure. The network contains central concepts with several links to surrounding nodes, indicating that the most visible ideas are repeatedly associated across publications. The interconnected structure suggests that AI–society research combines technological concepts with social, behavioural and application-related concerns as shown in Figure 11. Rather than producing isolated thematic islands, the network shows considerable overlap among concepts. This supports the interpretation that the field is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. The network also provides a visual basis for identifying central and peripheral concepts, with central nodes representing ideas that participate in multiple conceptual relationships across the literature.

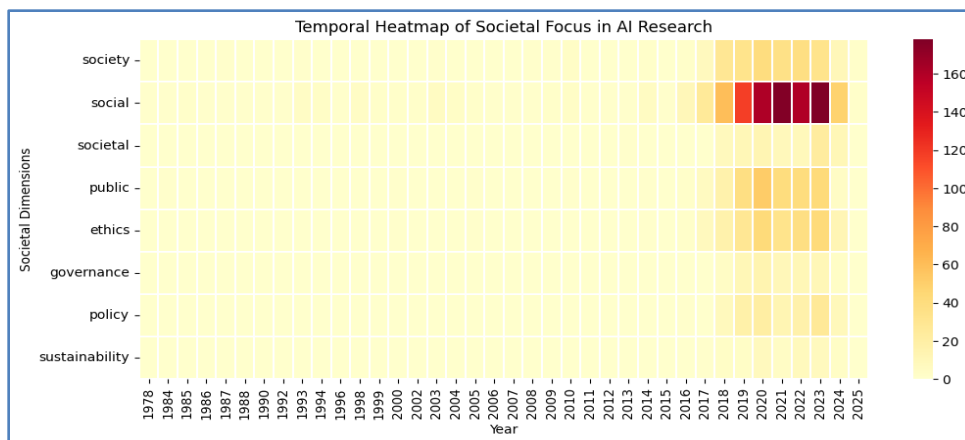


Figure 12. Temporal Heatmap of Societal Focus in AI Research — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The heatmap (Figure 12.) shows weak societal-term intensity across much of the earlier study period, followed by a clear increase toward the right-hand side of the timeline. The strongest concentration occurs during the recent years, particularly for the social dimension. Society, societal, public, ethics and governance also become increasingly visible, although at different intensities. Sustainability remains comparatively weaker across the displayed period. The figure is valuable because it combines temporal and thematic information in a single representation: it shows not only that societal research increased, but also that different societal dimensions emerged with varying strengths. The recent concentration supports the broader finding of intensified societal engagement in AI scholarship.

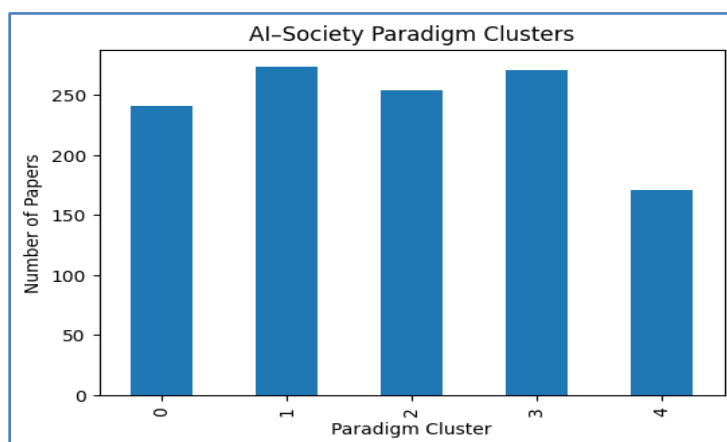


Figure 13. AI-Society Paradigm Clusters — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The second cluster representation confirms the five-cluster structure identified in the analysis. In Figure 13., Clusters 1 and 3 are again the largest groups, followed by Cluster 2 and Cluster 0, while Cluster 4 is distinctly smaller. The similarity of the distribution across the two visual representations strengthens the consistency of the clustering result. The five-group configuration indicates that AI-society research consists of several substantial intellectual configurations rather than one homogeneous body of literature. Differences in cluster size show that some paradigms

have accumulated more publications than others. However, all five groups contribute to the overall intellectual structure and should be viewed as components of a diversified research landscape.

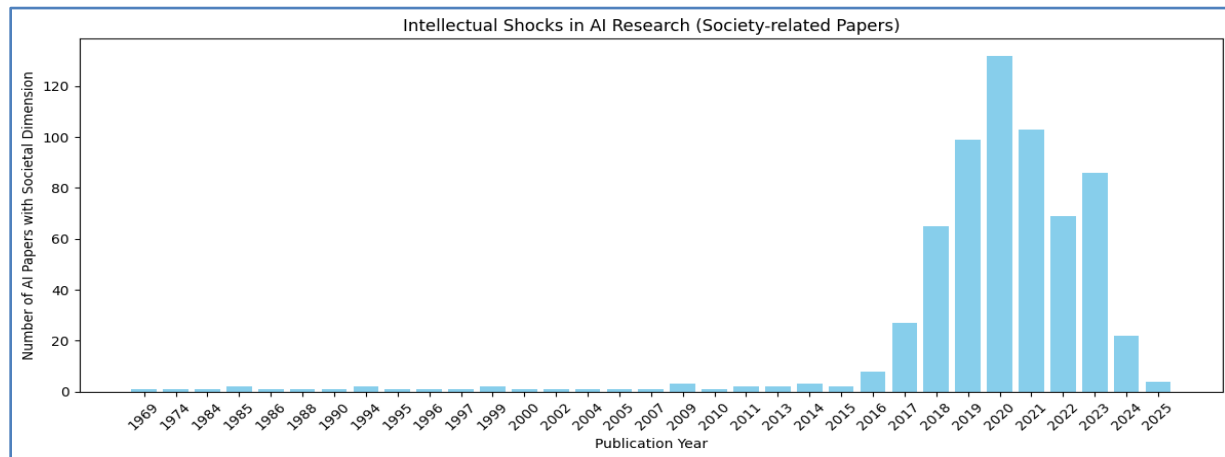


Figure 14. Intellectual Shocks in AI–Society Research — Temporal Distribution

Source- Author, 2026

This publication-frequency in Figure 14. provides another temporal representation of the intellectual expansion identified in the study. The early part of the series remains close to the baseline, with relatively little activity visible across the decades. A strong concentration appears in the later years, with a sequence of rapidly increasing observations followed by a decline at the end of the series. The shape indicates that the growth of AI–society scholarship is highly concentrated in the contemporary period. It also reinforces the need to distinguish complete historical years from the incomplete final year when interpreting the apparent decline. The figure provides a concise temporal summary of the field's recent acceleration.

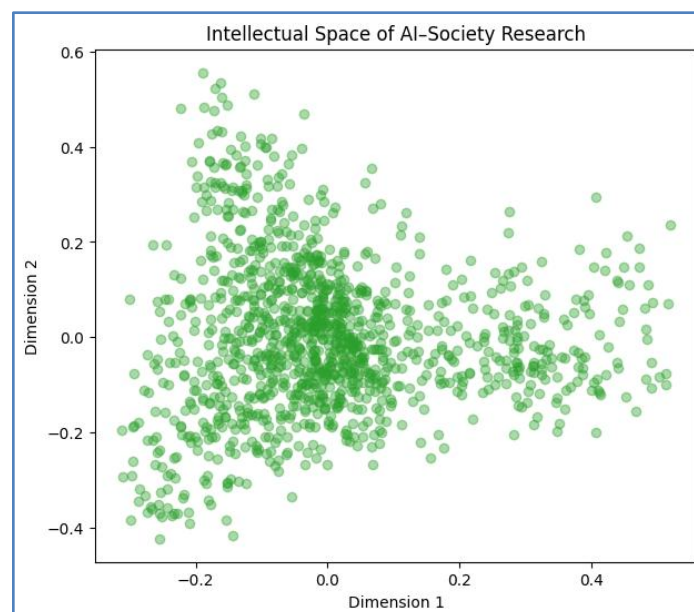


Figure 15. Intellectual Space of AI–Society Research — OpenAlex

Source- Author, 2026

The two-dimensional intellectual-space plot shows a large concentration of observations within a broad central region, with additional observations extending along both dimensions. The distribution does not form sharply isolated groups; instead, substantial overlap occurs around the central area. Figure 15. suggests the presence of a shared conceptual core within AI–society research alongside specialised thematic or disciplinary extensions. The peripheral observations indicate additional areas of intellectual differentiation. The plot therefore complements the cluster analysis by representing the continuous spatial relationship among publications rather than only assigning them to discrete groups. Overall, it portrays AI–society scholarship as a connected but multidimensional knowledge space.

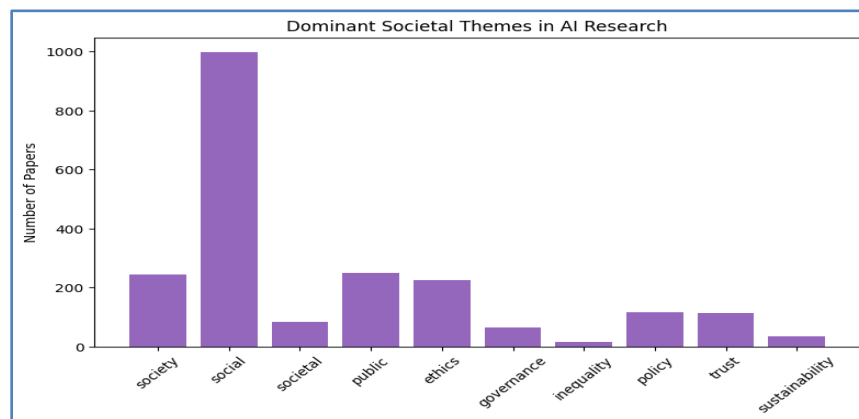


Figure 16. Dominant Societal Themes in AI Research

Source- Author, 2026

The thematic-frequency graph shows a very strong dominance of the social dimension, with approximately 1,000 papers in the displayed results. Society and public themes occur at considerably lower but still substantial levels, followed by ethics as is visible in Figure 16. Policy and trust occupy intermediate positions, while governance, sustainability and inequality are represented by smaller counts. The distribution indicates that broad social engagement forms the largest thematic component, while more specific institutional, ethical and developmental concerns constitute smaller thematic spaces. Importantly, the presence of ethics, policy, trust and governance demonstrates that societal AI scholarship extends beyond generic references to society and incorporates concerns about institutions, responsibility and the consequences of AI deployment.

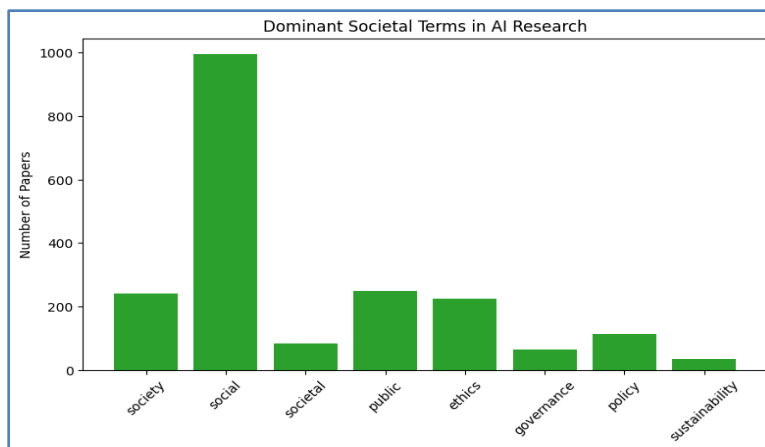


Figure 17. Dominant Societal Terms in AI Research

Source- Author, 2026

The bar chart in Figure 17. confirms the strong predominance of the term “social”, which approaches approximately 1,000 papers in the displayed results. Society and public occur at roughly similar, substantially lower levels, while ethics also has a strong presence. Policy, societal, governance and sustainability appear progressively lower in the distribution. This result demonstrates that broad societal terminology dominates the identified corpus, but the literature also contains more specific concepts relating to ethics and governance. The distinction among social, society and societal is analytically useful because it shows that societal engagement is expressed through several linguistic forms. The figure therefore reinforces the thematic concentration identified in the accompanying analysis.

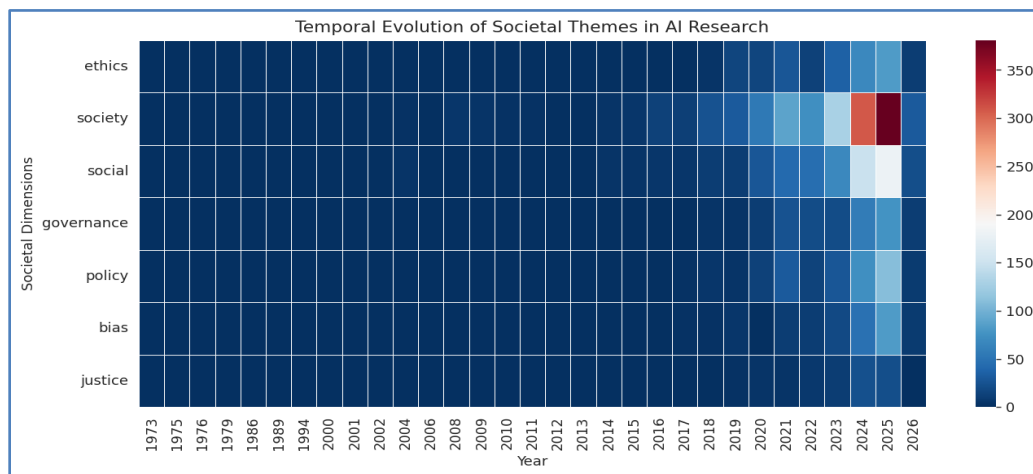


Figure 18. Temporal Evolution of Societal Themes in AI Research — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The Scopus heatmap shows very limited societal-term intensity during the earlier decades, followed by a pronounced increase toward the most recent years. In Figure 18., the strongest values occur in the late 2010s and 2020s, particularly for social and society. Ethics, governance, policy, bias and justice also become more visible toward the end of the timeline. The pattern indicates a broadening of societal concerns: the literature moves from general social terminology toward more specific ethical, institutional and justice-related themes. The concentration of strong

values in the recent period corresponds with the overall publication expansion and demonstrates that the growth of AI–society scholarship has also involved diversification of societal themes.

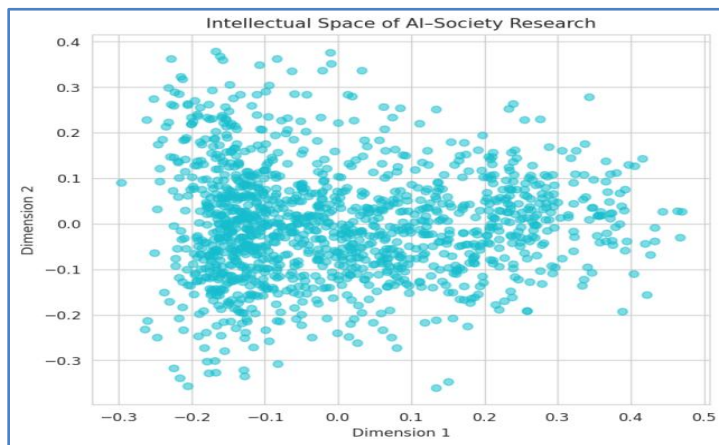


Figure 19. Intellectual Space of AI–Society Research — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The Scopus intellectual-space plot contains a large concentration of observations distributed across two dimensions, with a broad central and left-of-centre cluster and additional observations extending toward positive Dimension 1 values. The points overlap substantially, indicating that the intellectual structure is connected rather than divided into completely separate thematic islands in Figure 19. The broad distribution reflects the incorporation of multiple disciplinary and application-oriented perspectives into the AI–society literature. The figure therefore complements the OpenAlex intellectual-space analysis while providing a Scopus-based representation. Together, the two databases indicate that AI–society scholarship occupies a multidimensional conceptual environment characterised by a common core and diversified extensions.

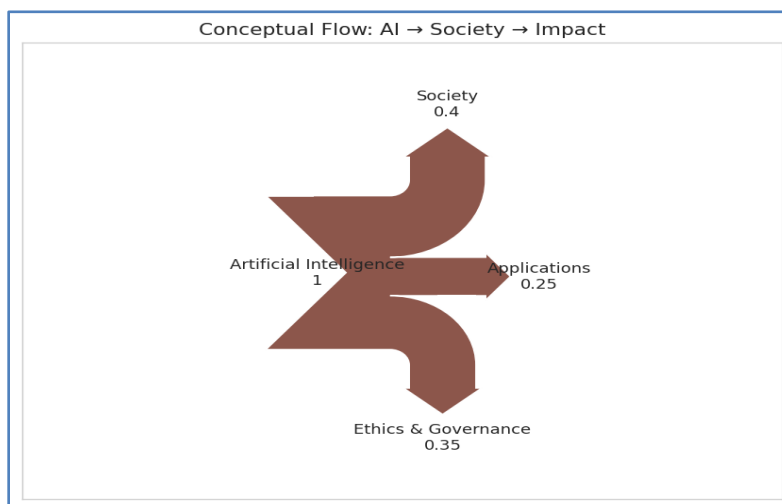


Figure 20. Conceptual Flow: AI → Society → Impact — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The Scopus conceptual-flow diagram in Figure 20., places Artificial Intelligence at the centre of three displayed dimensions: Society, Applications, and Ethics & Governance. The weights

shown in Figure are 0.40 for Society, 0.25 for Applications and 0.35 for Ethics & Governance. The values sum to 1.0 and indicate the relative conceptual emphasis represented by the diagram. Society is the largest component, followed by Ethics & Governance and Applications. The visual therefore presents AI as a central mechanism connecting social systems, practical applications and normative or institutional concerns. It provides a compact synthesis of the Scopus results and supports the broader interpretation of an increasingly societal and governance-oriented AI knowledge domain.

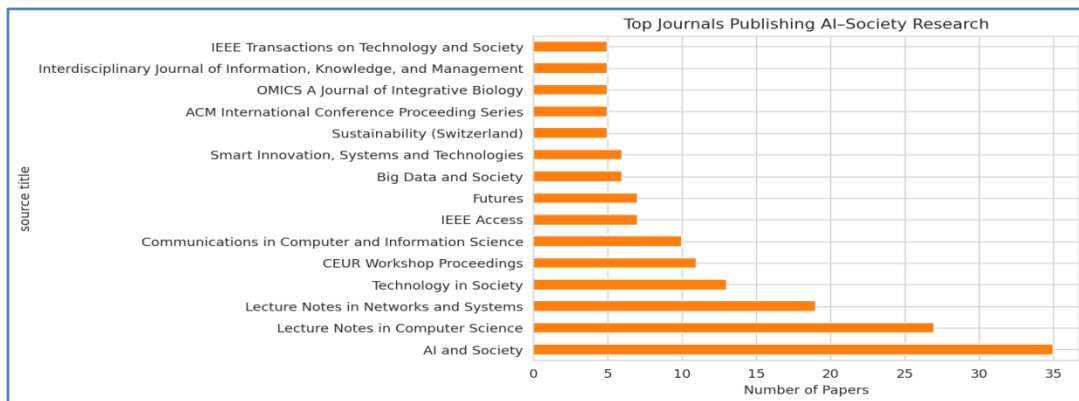


Figure 21. Top Journals Publishing AI-Society Research — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The journal distribution identifies AI and Society as the leading displayed outlet, with approximately 35 papers. Lecture Notes in Computer Science follows with around 27 papers, while Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems contributes approximately 19. Technology in Society, CEUR Workshop Proceedings and Communications in Computer and Information Science also appear prominently, followed by IEEE Access, Futures, Big Data and Society, Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies and Sustainability. The distribution in Figure 21. demonstrates that AI-society research is communicated through both specialist society-oriented journals and technically oriented computing outlets. This combination is consistent with the interdisciplinary structure of the field and its connection between technological research and societal inquiry.

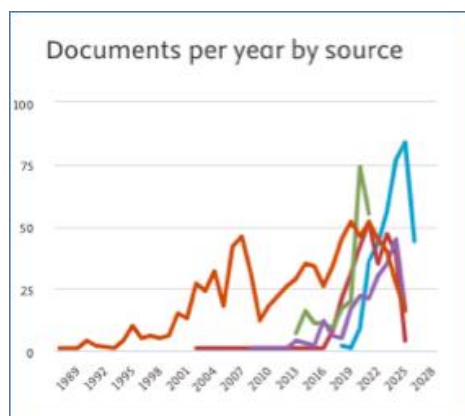


Figure 22. Documents per Year by Source

Source- Author, 2026

The source-wise temporal graph (Figure 22.) illustrates increasing publication activity across the contributing sources, particularly during the 2010s and early 2020s. The individual source trajectories differ considerably: some show earlier growth, while others begin rising more strongly after approximately 2015. Several series reach pronounced peaks around 2020–2025, with the highest displayed trajectory approaching the mid-80s. The variation demonstrates that the expansion of AI–society scholarship has occurred across multiple publication streams rather than through a single source. At the same time, differences in source trajectories indicate that publication activity is not uniform through time. The figure provides a source-level view of the field’s recent expansion.

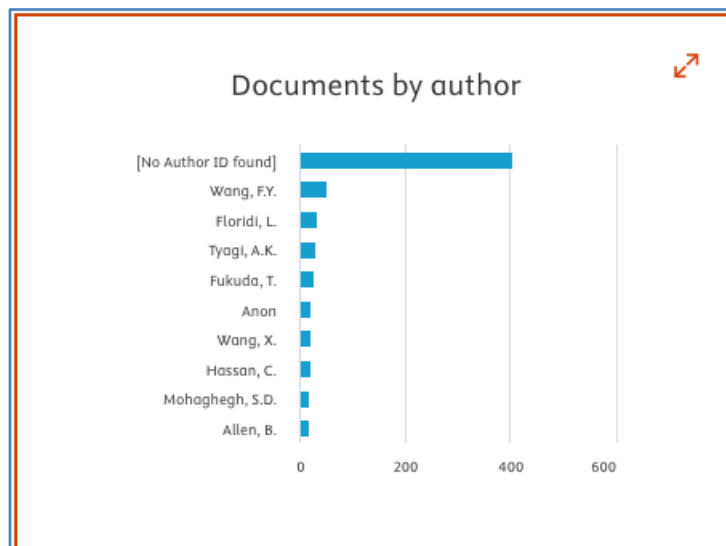


Figure 23. Documents by Author

Source- Author, 2026

The author distribution is strongly influenced by the “No Author ID found” category, which is substantially larger than the named authors in the displayed chart. Among identified contributors, Wang, F.Y. is the most visible, followed by Floridi, L., Tyagi, A.K., Fukuda, T. and others with much smaller counts. This pattern indicates that the literature is dispersed across many individual contributors rather than concentrated among a small group of highly prolific authors. The large unidentified category is also methodologically important because incomplete author identifiers can affect productivity calculations. Consequently, Figure 23. is best interpreted as a bibliographic profile of the available records rather than a definitive ranking of author influence.

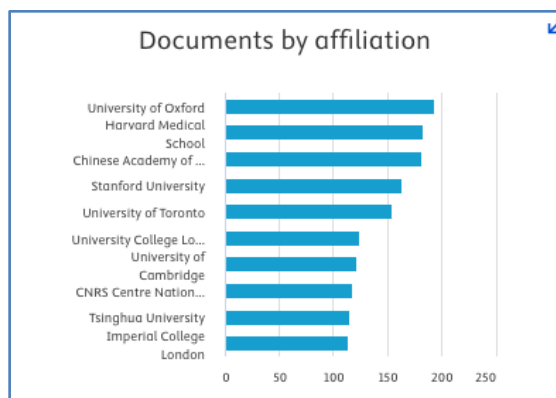


Figure 24. Documents by Affiliation

Source- Author, 2026

The affiliation graph shows substantial representation from internationally prominent academic institutions. The University of Oxford occupies the highest displayed position, followed closely by Harvard Medical School and the Chinese Academy of Sciences or related Chinese institutional grouping. Stanford University and the University of Toronto are also prominent, followed by University College London, the University of Cambridge, CNRS-related institutions, Tsinghua University and Imperial College London. The pattern indicates that AI–society scholarship is institutionally diverse and strongly connected with major research universities and organisations. The distribution also demonstrates international participation across North America, Europe and Asia, consistent with the global character of contemporary AI research in Figure 24.

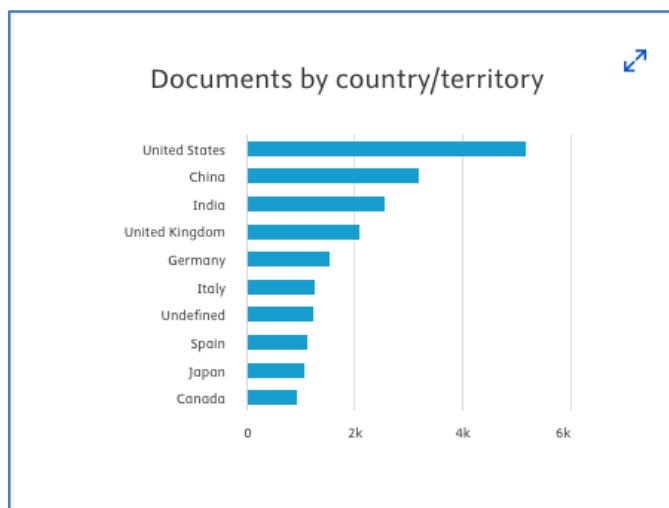


Figure 25. Documents by Country/Territory

Source- Author, 2026

The country distribution places the United States at the highest level, followed by China and India. The United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, an Undefined category, Spain, Japan and Canada form the remaining displayed group. The United States exceeds 5,000 documents in the chart, while China and India follow at lower levels. India's position among the leading displayed contributors is notable within the corpus represented by the analysis. The geographical

distribution demonstrates that AI research is internationally dispersed, with strong contributions from North America, East and South Asia and Europe. Figure 25. should be read as a database-based publication distribution rather than as a measure of national research quality or impact.

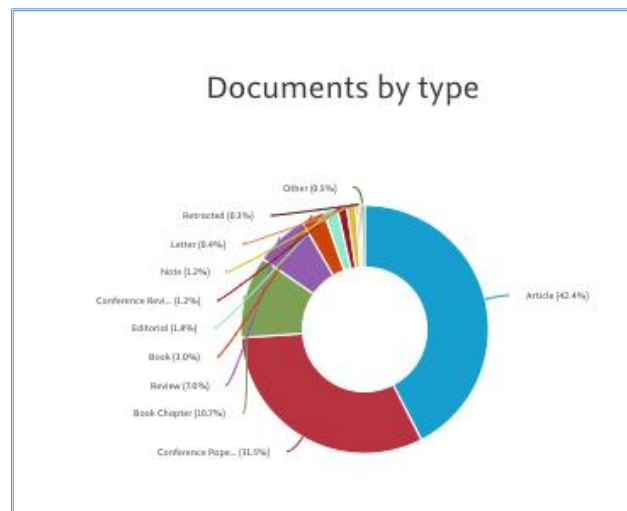


Figure 26. Documents by Type

Source- Author, 2026

Figure 26. as the document-type chart shows articles as the largest category, accounting for approximately 42.4% of the displayed records. Conference papers form another major component at about 31.5%, followed by book chapters at approximately 10.7%. Reviews, editorials, books, conference reviews, notes, letters, retracted documents and other categories make up smaller shares. The substantial conference-paper component is consistent with the computational and technological foundations of AI research, where conference communication has historically played an important role. At the same time, the strong article share indicates extensive journal-based scholarship. The distribution therefore demonstrates that AI–society research is communicated through multiple scholarly formats rather than a single publication channel.

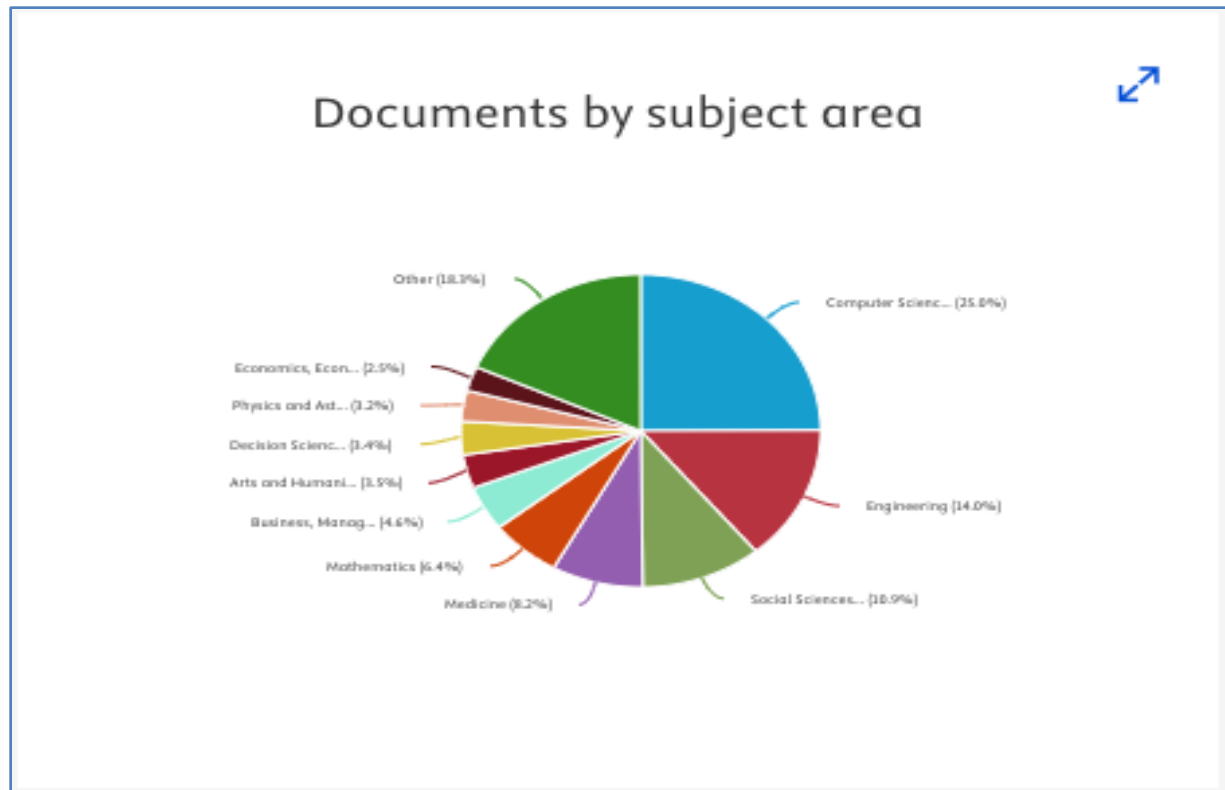


Figure 27. Documents by Subject Area

Source- Author, 2026

The subject-area distribution is led by Computer Science at approximately 25%, followed by Engineering at around 14%. Social Sciences and Medicine also represent substantial components, while Mathematics, Business and Management, Arts and Humanities, Decision Sciences, Physics and Economics contribute smaller shares. The Other category forms a considerable additional component. This distribution provides direct evidence of interdisciplinarity: although Computer Science remains central, the corpus extends into social sciences, medicine, management, humanities and quantitative fields. The result is important for the study because it demonstrates that societal AI scholarship is not confined to technical disciplines. Instead, it connects computational knowledge with fields concerned with people, institutions, health, economics and social systems in Figure 27.

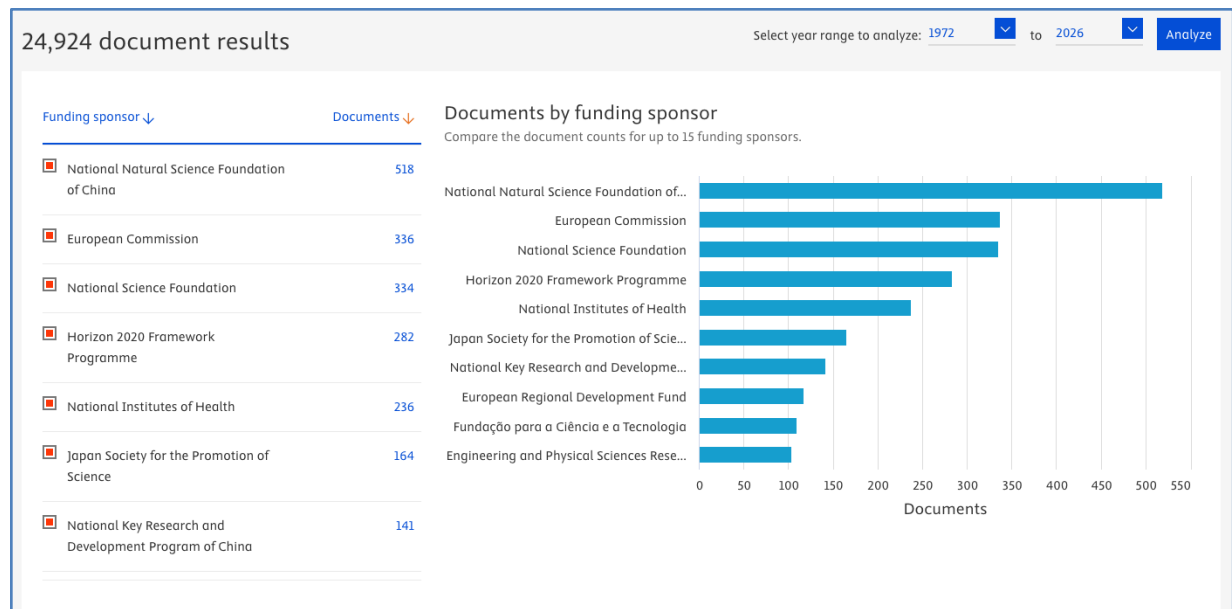


Figure 28. Documents by Funding Sponsor

Source- Author, 2026

The funding-sponsor panel reports 24,924 document results for the selected period and identifies the National Natural Science Foundation of China as the largest displayed sponsor, with 518 documents. The European Commission and National Science Foundation follow with 336 and 334 documents respectively, while the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme accounts for 282 and the National Institutes of Health for 236. Other visible sponsors include the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and the National Key Research and Development Program of China. Figure 28. demonstrates the role of major national and international funding agencies in supporting the research corpus and shows that AI scholarship has a substantial institutional funding infrastructure.

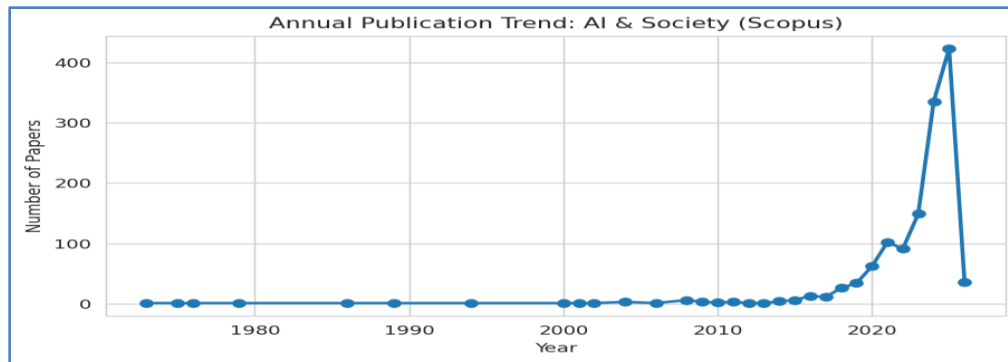


Figure 29. Annual Publication Trend: AI & Society — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The annual publication trend in Figure 29. shows a long period of very limited output followed by rapid expansion in the late 2010s and especially the 2020s. Publication counts begin rising noticeably around the late 2010s, increase sharply after 2020 and reach a peak of approximately 425 papers near the end of the displayed period. The final year shows a strong decline. Because the dataset extends to 2026, the last observation may represent an incomplete publication year and should not be interpreted as a completed annual total. The overall trajectory nevertheless demonstrates a major recent expansion of AI-society publications within the Scopus-based corpus.

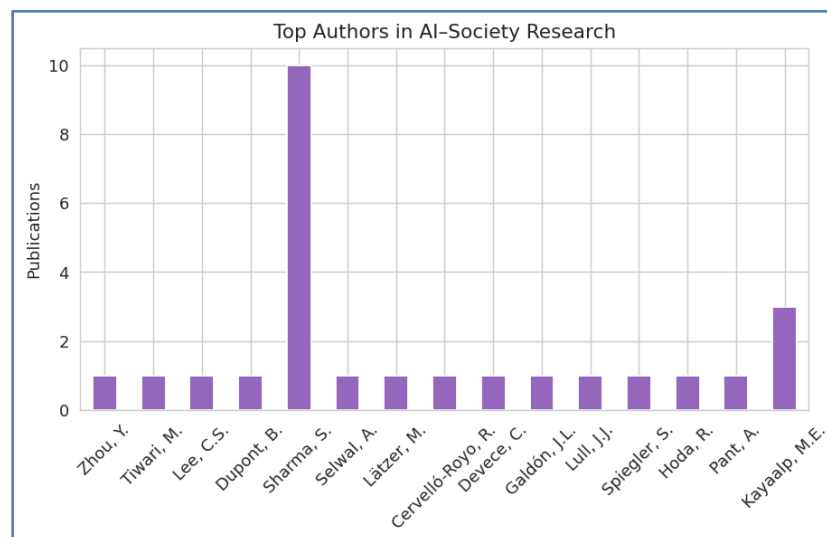


Figure 30. Top Authors in AI-Society Research — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The author graph in Figure 30. shows one particularly prominent contributor with approximately 10 publications, while most of the other displayed authors have around one publication and one contributor has approximately three. This produces a highly uneven author-output distribution in the displayed Scopus subset. The pattern indicates that the field includes a broad contributor base but comparatively few authors with repeated publication presence. The graph should be understood as a productivity profile within the selected records rather than as a measure of

A peer reviewed journal

The keyword-frequency graph is dominated by “AI and policing”, which exceeds 1,000 occurrences in the displayed chart. Other visible terms occur at much lower frequencies and include artificial intelligence, financial crime, future crime, technology-facilitated crime, deep learning, explainable AI and generative AI. The distribution therefore reveals a strong application-oriented component in the displayed Scopus keyword set, particularly around policing and crime-related contexts. At the same time, the presence of deep learning, explainable AI and generative AI demonstrates continued connection with technical developments. Figure 32. illustrates how computational concepts and socially consequential applications coexist within the selected AI–society literature.

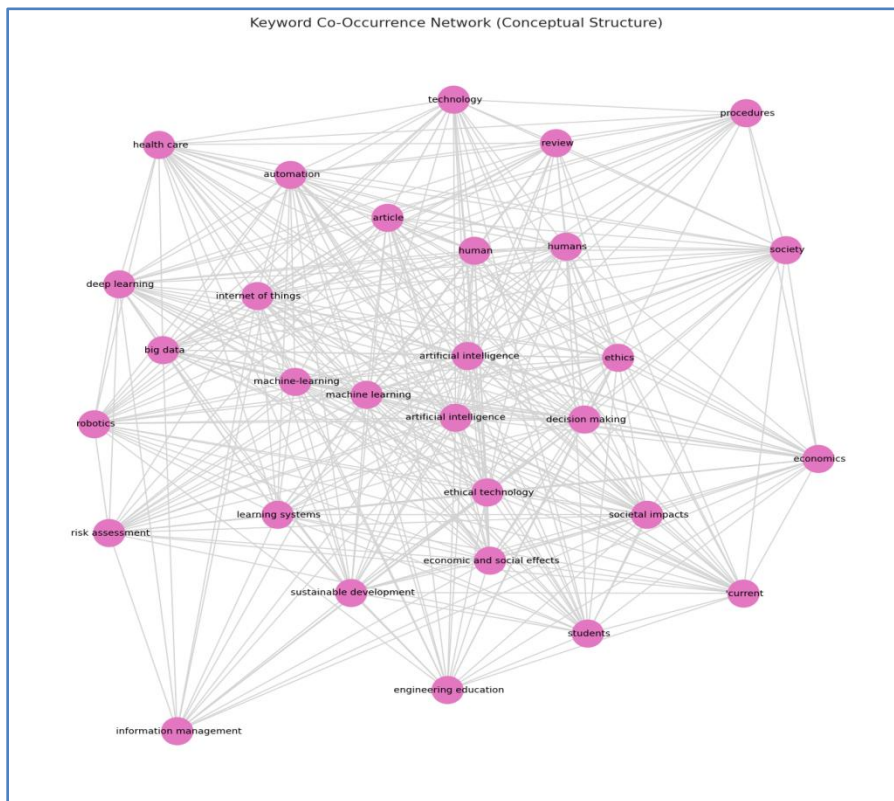


Figure 33. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network — Scopus

Source- Author, 2026

The final network visualisation presents a dense set of keyword relationships, with multiple central nodes linked to surrounding concepts. The network structure indicates that the principal terms do not occur independently but are repeatedly associated across the literature. Technical AI concepts are connected with themes involving society, ethics, human impacts, applications and governance-related concerns. The density of the network reflects conceptual overlap and supports the interpretation of an integrated research field. Peripheral nodes represent more specialised topics, while central nodes connect several thematic areas. Figure 33. therefore provides a network-level summary of the intellectual structure identified in the Scopus corpus and complements the frequency-based keyword analysis.

6. Results Synthesis

Taken together, the results demonstrate a pronounced transformation in the intellectual structure of AI–society research. The bibliographic evidence shows that societal engagement represents a relatively small component of the overall AI literature, yet this component has expanded rapidly, particularly after the late 2010s. Both OpenAlex and Scopus show strong concentrations of recent publications, with the most substantial growth occurring during the 2020s. The thematic results demonstrate that social, society, public and ethics constitute important dimensions, while governance, policy, sustainability, inequality, trust, bias and justice form additional thematic extensions.

The conceptual and network analyses reveal increasing interconnection among computer science, artificial intelligence, psychology, political science, sociology, law, engineering, business, medicine and social sciences. The intellectual-space maps similarly indicate a shared conceptual core accompanied by expanding interdisciplinary components. The five paradigm clusters further indicate that AI–society research contains multiple intellectual configurations rather than one homogeneous research stream. Generative AI is represented in the temporal framework as an important recent inflection point and as a bridge linking AI with wider societal and interdisciplinary concerns.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The scientometric evidence presented in this study indicates that the relationship between Artificial Intelligence and society has undergone substantial intellectual expansion, particularly during the recent phase of AI development. Although societal terminology represents only a fraction of the much larger AI publication universe, the temporal patterns in both Scopus and OpenAlex demonstrate a strong increase in AI–society research during the late 2010s and especially the 2020s. This expansion corresponds with the increasing incorporation of questions concerning social systems, ethics, governance, policy, public applications and human well-being into AI scholarship.

The thematic results show that social constitutes the dominant societal dimension, while society, public concerns and ethics form additional major components. Governance, policy, trust, sustainability, inequality, bias and justice occupy smaller but analytically important spaces. This suggests that societal engagement is not restricted to a single concern but encompasses multiple dimensions ranging from broad social relationships to institutional and normative questions. The disciplinary evidence further demonstrates that AI–society research remains rooted in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence while simultaneously incorporating Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Engineering, Social Sciences, Business, Medicine and other fields. The co-word networks and intellectual-space maps reinforce this interdisciplinary structure by showing extensive connections among technical and societal concepts. The five paradigm clusters further indicate that the field contains multiple intellectual configurations rather than one dominant structure.

Generative AI emerges in the temporal analysis as an important recent inflection point, coinciding with a pronounced acceleration in societal AI publications. Its representation as a structural bridge in the conceptual framework reflects the increasing interaction between AI technologies and wider societal systems.

Overall, the study demonstrates a transition from predominantly technical AI scholarship toward a more interdisciplinary and societally engaged intellectual landscape. The findings provide an empirical basis for understanding thematic and conceptual transitions in AI research and support continued attention to responsible AI, governance, public policy and societal well-being. The results should nevertheless be interpreted in relation to database coverage, keyword-based societal filtering and the possibility of incomplete records for the latest publication years.

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