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CREATIVE INDUSTRIES INNOVATION DIFFUSION NETWORKS. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. *Research background:* innovation is a key factor in determining the growth of the creative industries sector. However, it also highlights the importance of the creative industries to the broader innovation process within the wider economy. Synergies between the creative industries and companies in other sectors create conditions for the diffusion of new technologies. Creative industries companies typically utilise a large, diverse network of relationships, facilitating easy access to new knowledge and faster assimilation. *Purpose of the article:* the purpose is to present a systematic literature review of research papers on creative industries, innovation diffusion and network analysis, and to identify future research directions. *Methods:* this paper presents the results of a systematic literature review of 54 articles on innovation diffusion networks within the creative industries, as indexed in the Web of Science database. *Findings & Value:* the study reveals that innovation diffusion within the creative industries has positive effects within the sector and across the broader economy. The review also reveals that qualitative and mixed-method approaches dominate the current research landscape, indicating a need for more robust quantitative modelling in future studies. Results from scientific research analysing the impact of innovation diffusion networks on the creative industries sector have shown that existing networks significantly affect the social and economic environment of other industries, regions and the national economy. Although the authors emphasise the importance of networks for the diffusion of innovations in the creative industries sector, few empirical studies have focused on identifying these networks.

Keywords: creative industries, innovation, network, diffusion.

JEL Classification: Z19, O00, D85, L14

Introduction

Innovation is the main factor determining growth in the creative industries sector (Hosseini & Meybodi, 2023). However, it also highlights the importance of the creative industries in the wider innovation process. Bakhshi et al. (2008) found that creative businesses were more innovative than other sectors of the economy. Their analysis of companies' innovation levels showed that those in sectors closely related to creative industries have higher innovation indicators. The collaboration between creative industries and companies in other sectors of the economy fosters the diffusion of new technologies. Companies in creative industries typically employ extensive, diverse networks of relationships, facilitating access to new knowledge and accelerating its adoption (Lee, 2014; Jones et al., 2016; Liu, 2020; Hikmah, 2021; Benghozi & Salvador, 2016; Kirkels & Duysters, 2010; de Koning & Bijl-brouwer, 2024; Di Lodovico & Manz, 2023; Juhasz et al., 2020; Stejskal & Hajek, 2017). This suggests that the value of creative products is influenced by the quality of social networks and connections, both of which play a crucial role in the innovation process (O'Connor, 2009; Hikmah, 2021).

Potts et al. (2008) introduced an alternative conceptualisation of the creative industries, framing them within the context of social network markets. Unlike the prevailing definition, which classifies creative industries based on the creativity of their inputs and the intellectual property status of their outputs, this new approach highlights the crucial role of social networks in shaping production and consumption dynamics. It emphasises the interconnected and mutually reinforcing relationship between the creative industries and other sectors of the economy. It also demonstrates the important role played by innovation and networks in the analysis of the creative industries sector.

There are approximately 180 papers on the diffusion of innovation in the creative industries in the Web

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of Science (WoS) Core Collection. However, there is a lack of systematic review papers related to the performance of innovation diffusion in the creative industries. Zanello et al. (2015) conducted a systematic literature analysis to highlight the dynamics driving the diffusion of innovation in lower-income countries. However, this article does not focus on the creative industries, but instead concentrates on a highly specific dataset derived from low-income countries. Pittaway et al. (2004) conducted a systematic literature review on networking and innovation, but did not focus on the creative industries sector.

This paper presents a systematic review of innovation diffusion and networking in the creative industries. The purpose of this article is to identify the methods used for analysing innovation diffusion in the creative industries, and to establish the effect of innovation diffusion and networking on the creative industries and other sectors.

This paper is organised as follows: the research methodology section presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the four main research questions. The following paper is structured around these questions. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research.

Methodology

For this analysis, papers were selected from the Web of Science Core Collection database. This database comprises high-quality, peer-reviewed articles, making it a reliable source. It is often used by researchers as a primary source when conducting systematic literature reviews.

As suggested by Silva et al. (2023), for creative industries analysis was excluded keyword "cultural industries" was excluded due to the need to narrow results related to creative industries. Papers were selected by searching for keywords *creative industr*, or creative economy* in papers' titles, keywords, and abstracts.

To effectively assess innovation within the creative industries sector, it is insufficient to focus solely on the development of new products and processes. In order to empirically assess the relationship between the creative industries and innovation, the scientific literature has introduced new conceptualisations of innovation, such as artistic innovation (Castañer & Campos, 2002), content innovation (Handke, 2004), hidden innovation (Miles & Green, 2008) and soft innovation (Stoneman, 2009). Considering innovative performance in creative industries, the following keywords were used: *innovat*, or new product, or new process, or design innovation, or hidden innovation, or soft innovation, or aesthetic innovation, or cultural innovation, or organizational innovation* (title, keyword, and abstract).

Keywords used for network analysis: *network*, or relatedness, or chain*, or diffusion* (title, keyword, and abstract).

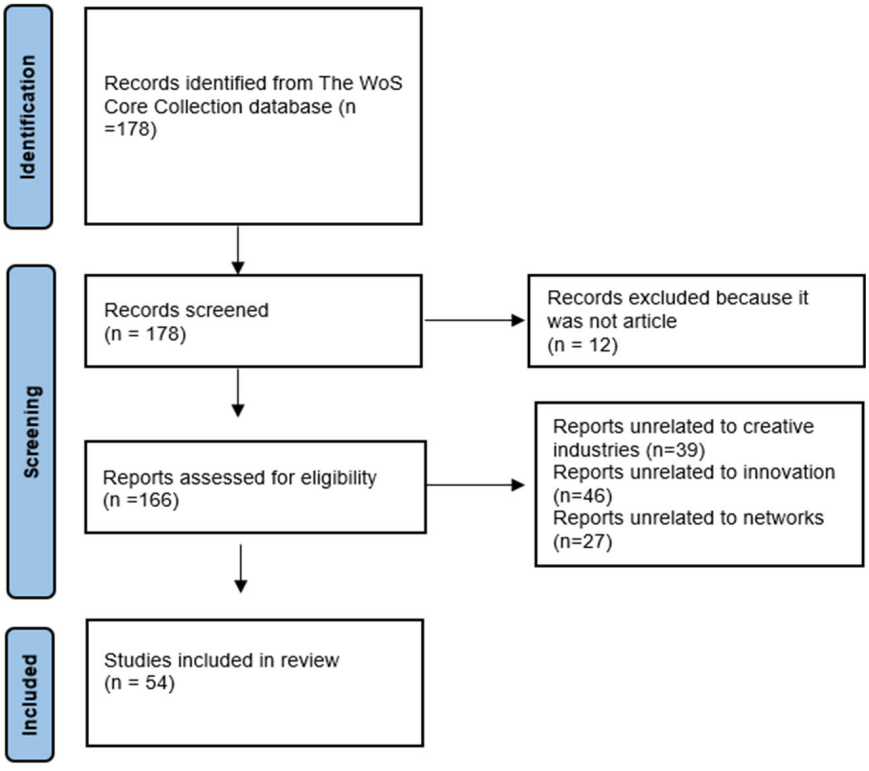

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

Source: prepared by the authors

The inclusion criteria were limited to the following: document type (Articles); category (Business Economics, Social Sciences, Other Topics, Arts and Humanities, Other Studies, Social Sciences Other Topics, Cultural Studies); and language (English). The data source used in this study was created on January 31, 2025. The stages of the article search are shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1).

A total of 178 articles were initially identified. Of these, 12 were excluded as they were not articles; 39 did not address the creative industries; 46 did not focus on innovation (although the keywords were mentioned in the abstract); and 27 did not cover networks. Therefore, 54 articles were deemed relevant and included in the systematic literature analysis.

The systematic literature review aims to answer four questions. The characteristics and comments of the questions are presented in Table 1.

Prevalence of Innovation Diffusion Network Analysis in the Creative Industries Sector

A comprehensive analysis of all 54 research papers was conducted, with each paper analysed according to its respective study design (see Table 1). The results of this analysis are presented in the following sections. The primary research question seeks to deepen understanding of the extent to which the issue of innovation diffusion is examined within the context of the creative industries. The first papers were published in 2007 (Beck, 2007), but since 2016, there has been a growing interest in the topic among academics (Fig. 2). The year with the highest number of publications was 2023, with seven research papers (Huang & Zou; Huang & Hsueh; Hosseini & Meybodi; Dellisanti; Baláz et al.; Butticè et al.; Di Lodovico & Manzi). This demonstrates the innovation of the subject matter.

A total of 6% of research papers were cited less than 10 times (9 articles). Five articles were cited more than a hundred times. The following research papers were identified as the most frequently cited:

1. Potts, J., Cunningham, S., Hartley, J., & Ormerod, P. (2008). Social network markets: a new definition of the creative industries. 296 times cited in the WoS Core Collection database.

2. Santoro, G., Bresciani, S., & Papa, A. (2020). Collaborative modes with Cultural and Creative Industries and innovation performance: The moderating role of heterogeneous sources of knowledge and absorptive capacity. 242 times cited in the WoS Core Collection database.

3. Balland, P.-A., De Vaan, M., & Boschma, R. (2012). The dynamics of interfirm networks along the industry life cycle: The case of the global video game industry, 1987–2007. 175 times cited in the WoS Core Collection database.

4. Kirkels, Y., & Duysters, G. (2010). Brokerage in SME networks. Research Policy. 119 times cited in the WoS Core Collection database.

5. Misfits, Mavericks, and Mainstreams: Drivers of Innovation in Creative Industries. (2011). Organization Studies. 101 times cited in the WoS Core Collection database.

Potts and Cunningham are among the most frequently cited authors for their significant contributions to the analysis of creative industries. Their most widely cited work, *Four models of the creative industries* (2010), has been cited 658 times. In *Social Network Markets: A New Definition of the Creative Industries*, the authors present a methodological analysis based on social network markets in creative industries. The authors highlight the need to redefine creative industries within the context of social media

Table 1
Study design

Research question	Characteristics	Comments
To what extent is the diffusion of innovation analysed in the creative industries sector?	Times cited	This will reveal how popular this topic is.
	Publication year	This will show when this topic was popular.
	Source title	This will demonstrate the range of journals that publish papers on this subject.
	Country or region under investigation	This will reveal the countries in which creative industries innovation diffusion was employed.
	Creative Industries sector	This will demonstrate which sector of the creative industries is given more attention in the analysis of innovation diffusion.
Which indicators are used to measure innovation?	Independent variables	This will demonstrate the range of indicators employed in the evaluation of innovation performance.
	Data sources	This will display the most popular data sources.
Which methods are used to analyse the diffusion of innovation in the creative industries?	Methods/variables	This will demonstrate the various methods employed for the diffusion of innovation among regions, countries and sectors within the creative industries.
	Network methods	How often are networks used to analyse innovation diffusion in the creative industries?
What effect does the diffusion of innovation have?	Positive/negative	This will demonstrate the impact of innovation diffusion on the creative industries sector, region and economy.

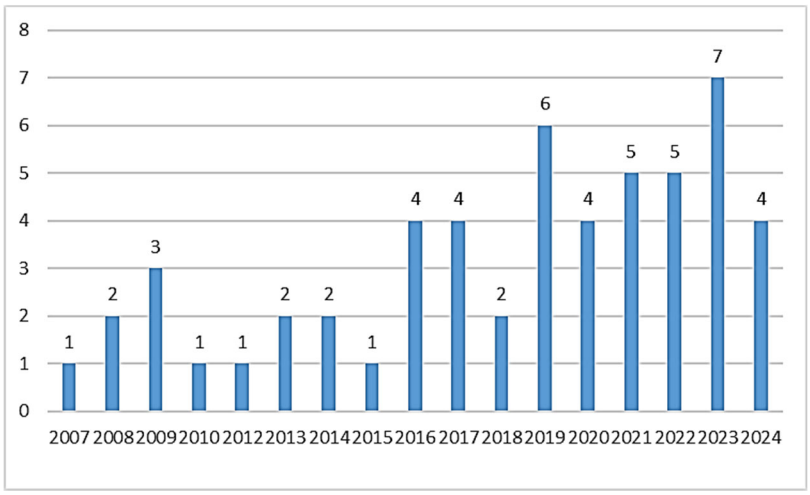

Figure 2. Articles publication year

markets. They emphasise the essential role of social networks in the innovation system, arguing that creative industries are an integral part of it. Santoro et al. examine empirical analyses of collaboration between firms and cultural and creative industries, focusing on informal (ICMs) and formal (FCMs) collaboration in Italy, based on data collected via a questionnaire. The research by Kirkels et al. is also based on data obtained from a questionnaire. The authors concentrate on SME networks of design and high-tech companies in the Netherlands. Balland et al. employed global statistical data to analyse the video games sector. The formation of network ties between firms along the life cycle of a creative industry is a key consideration for authors. Meanwhile, Jones et al. analyse creative industries' design sector collaboration with agents using methodological frameworks. In this analysis, agents are identified as misfits, mavericks and mainstreams.

Research in the field of creative industries and innovation is inherently interdisciplinary in nature. Consequently, the exclusion criteria in this study are not limited to research confined solely to the field of economics. The complex and interdis ciplinary nature of creative industries means that they are examined across a broad range of academic disciplines. The findings of this study reveal a wide diversity of high-quality journals representing various fields of scholarly inquiry. A total of 34 articles were published in various journals, with the distribution of articles published multiple times by a particular journal illustrated in Figure 3. The Industry and Innovation journal contains four articles (the Impact Factor is 3.4). Furthermore, three papers were published in the Journal of Cultural Economics (Impact Factor: 1.9) and three articles were published in the Sustainability journal (Impact Factor: 3.3).

Figure 3. List of journals with a higher number of articles on creative industries innovation diffusion

The diffusion of innovations in the creative industries has been studied in both European and Asian contexts, but European countries dominate the field of research. Although the term "creative industries" was first used in Australia in the 1994 report Creative Nations, it was the United Kingdom that developed the term in 1997 when the government established the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DMCS). The concept of creative industries, as presented in the DMCS, forms the basis of most scientific research. Innovation diffusion in creative industries is frequently analysed, with the United Kingdom (17%), Italy (13%) and Taiwan (6%) being the most common locations.

Several distinct models are employed to classify creative industries, as presented in the scientific literature. The sectors most commonly classified as creative industries are advertising, architecture, crafts, design, art and antiques, fashion, film and video recordings, music, the performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio, and video and computer games. When analysing the diffusion of innovations in creative industries, 43% (23 articles) of the articles analysed the general creative industries sector, 9% (5 articles) were focused on the fashion sector, 7% (4 articles) on the video games sector, and 6% (3 articles each) on the music industry and book publishing. The diffusion of innovations was also analysed in sectors such as choreography (1 article), art (1 article), and museums (1 article). The heterogeneity of the sectoral research field indicates that innovative activity and the diffusion of innovations are significant in all sectors of the creative industries.

Indicators Used for Innovation Measurement in the Creative Industries Sector

According to Bakhshi et al. (2008), the creative industries are more innovative than other economic sectors. However, there are significant differences in how innovation is assessed within the creative industries compared to other sectors of the economy (Huang & Zou, 2023; Montanari, 2016; Klement & Strambach, 2019). Consequently, the literature is evolving to include not only traditional innovation indicators, but also indicators that more accurately capture the unique characteristics of creative industries, which are driven by the synergy between intellectual property and creativity.

A total of 50% (22 articles) of the analysed research papers do not differentiate between distinct types of innovation. Instead, they employ the term "innovation" in a general sense when evaluating innovation performance. 17% (nine articles) use the "new product" indicator, 9% (five articles) use "new process", and 6% (three articles) use "patents". Other indicators used less frequently include open innovation (2 articles), technological innovation (2 articles), artistic innovation (1 article), soft innovation (1 article) and sustainable innovation (1 article). Klement and Strambach (2019) analysed the music sector to identify indicators of innovation performance, using new genres, pioneers, superstars and combinators to assess this performance.

The diverse range of indicators used to analyse innovation performance within the creative industries shows that innovation in this sector is assessed by more than just traditional criteria, such as new products or processes. In order to accurately evaluate innovation within the creative industries or a specific sector thereof, it is essential to define what constitutes innovation in that particular context.

In analyses of innovation diffusion within the creative industries, data obtained through qualitative methods, such as interviews, questionnaires and case studies, predominate. This accounts for 63% of all analysed articles: 18 studies relied on data collected through expert interviews, nine utilised questionnaires and four presented insights derived from case studies. Additionally, three articles employed mixed methods, combining questionnaire data with statistical analysis. Only 17 articles examined the diffusion of innovations in creative industries using statistical data.

Therefore, the variety of data sources used to analyse innovation diffusion in the creative industries highlights the complexity of evaluating this sector. For this reason, researchers often struggle to access relevant statistical information and therefore tend to rely on qualitative data sources.

Methods Used to Analyse the Diffusion of Innovations in Creative Industries

Analysis of the scientific literature reveals a preference for certain methodological approaches when assessing the diffusion of innovation within the creative industries. The most frequently employed methods are those used for qualitative data analysis, such as case studies, regression analysis, the fuzzy Delphi method and various types of network analysis.

The **case study** methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the roles played by different stakeholders, paying particular attention to the contribution of public research organisations (Castro-Martínez, 2013). The case study analysis method is employed when examining specific sectors of the creative industries for which statistical databases typically lack innovation performance data. Such sectors include the music industry (Castro-Martinez et al., 2013; Henriques & Suarez, 2022), the media (Davis et al., 2009; Virta & Lowe, 2017), choreography (Montanari et al., 2016), theatre (Mansell & Foresta, 2016; de Klerk & Hodge, 2021), and video games (Landoni et al., 2019). Davis et al. (2009) analysed the impact of networks on innovation in the media sector of the creative

industries using the HAL method case study. The HAL clustering model, developed by Hickling, Arthurs, Low Corporation for the National Research Council of Canada, has been used to measure the strengths and weaknesses of ten technology-based clusters. Davis et al. (2009) were the first to apply the HAL method to creative industries in the digital media and film–TV sector.

The **Delphi and fuzzy Delphi methods** can serve as tools for policy decision-making. They encompass the identification of key development factors, the formulation of policy alternatives and the evaluation of outcomes. Ongoing communication with experts is essential in order to reach a consensus on the issues identified. Consequently, the selected participants should be subject-matter experts to enhance the study's validity (Liu & Chiu, 2017). These methods have been applied in two articles analysing creative industries in Taiwan (Liu & Chiu, 2017) and Iran (Hosseini & Meybodi, 2023).

Semi-structured interviews are also used for qualitative data analysis (Lin, 2018; Capron & Suire, 2024; Di Lodovico & Manzi, 2023). Both Lin (2018) and Capron & Suire (2024) generated network schemes based on data collected through semi-structured interviews. Lin (2018) analysed the influence of broker networks on business innovation performance using semi-structured interviews with micro high-end designer fashion businesses in London while they showcased their aesthetic product innovations for the upcoming season. Capron and Suire (2024) examined whether innovators attending multiple locations, specifically Montreal, could enhance creativity and support innovation processes. The authors demonstrated that innovation is fostered by the combination of multiple places, forming a network that evolves with each phase of the innovation process. As can be seen from the analysed studies, the semi-structured interview method is used to study more complex or less researched areas and micro-enterprises, for which information about activities is not available in accessible databases.

After examining both qualitative and statistical data, the authors selected a **network analysis** approach for their study. Network analysis was used to analyse the diffusion of innovations in the creative industries sector in 33 per cent (18 articles) of the articles. Twelve articles mapped networks according to interviews or questionnaires, and six used statistical data.

The predominant methodologies employed in network analysis include social network analysis (SNA), semantic network analysis, stochastic actor-oriented models (SAOM) and multiple regression quadratic assignment procedure (MRQAP), among others. The selection of an appropriate methodological approach depends on the research objective and the specific characteristics or focus of the network under investigation. Literature analysis showed that the focus of the network can be divided into 3 groups (Table 2):

Table 2
Methods and objectives of network analysis in the creative industries sector.

Method	Network type/ focus	Aim	Author
PLS-SEM*	Meso	Latent relationship analysis	Anjaningrum et al. (2024)
Ego-network analysis	Micro	Analysis of a specific actor's network	Huang & Hsueh (2023)
SAOM / MRQAP	Micro / dynamic	Dynamic analysis of network evolution over time	Balland et al. (2013)
Semantic network	Text level	Analysis of semantic relationships between concepts in texts	Fu (2022)
Triple Helix	Macro	University-business-government interaction in the context of innovation	Wang et al. (2022)
Social Network Analysis (SNA)	Micro / meso	Identification of structural relationships between actors (central members, clusters)	Chaminade et al. (2021); Aage & Belussi (2008); Martin & Rypestol (2018); Shafi et al. (2019); Henriques et al. (2022); Lee (2014); Shuyu (2018); Baláz et al. (2023)
Relatedness Index	Macro	A measure of the proximity of economic activities based on competence/technology affinity	Innocenti, (2019); Klement & Strambach (2019)
Preferential circulations	Micro / meso	Reflecting the circulation of people, goods, knowledge and ideas, which do not occur randomly, but are based on preference	Capron & Suire (2024)
Cartography of the value chain	Micro	An analytical and visualisation tool that shows the stages of value creation, diffusion, and transformation	Benghozi & Salvador (2016)
Bipartite collaboration network	Micro	This is a two-way network designed to represent co-operation between two different types of units	Juhasz et al. (2020)

*Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

– **Micro** (individuals, organisations, or companies and their specific connections are studied).
– **Meso** (clusters, sub-networks).
– **Macro** (a general/international network and its structural properties).

When studying the diffusion of innovations in creative industries, authors most often choose social network analysis to examine networks at both the meso- and micro-levels (Chaminade et al., 2021; Aage & Belussi, 2008; Martin & Rypestol, 2018; Shafi et al., 2019; Henriques et al., 2022; Lee, 2014; Shuyu, 2018; Baláz et al., 2023). This method can be employed to examine these levels and identify the structural relationships between actors.

The analysis reveals a predominance of studies conducted at micro and meso levels. Relatively few scholars have addressed the fragmentation of creative industries from a macro perspective. For example, Wang et al. (2022) employed the Triple Helix method, while Innocenti (2019) and Klement and Strambach (2019) used the Relatedness Index to study network formation. To examine network dynamics, model actor behaviour and structural configurations, and analyse temporal changes within the network, Balland et al. (2013) employed logistic regression within the framework of a Stochastic Actor-Oriented Model (SAOM). The SAOM approach has been recognised as valuable in economic geography, where it has been used to examine the evolution of global and regional knowledge networks.

For network analyses, Godart (2012) uses a multiple regression quadratic assignment procedure (MRQAP). The results of an MRQAP analysis can be interpreted in a similar way to the results of an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis, as used by Santoro et al. (2020).

The authors also employed methodologies that are not commonly utilised in network analysis, such as preferential circulations (Capron & Suire, 2024), cartography of the value chain in conjunction with the OSI model, which is predominantly employed in the analysis of computer sciences and the internet economy (Capron & Suire, 2024), and bipartite collaboration networks (Juhasz et al., 2020).

Findings

A total of 85 per cent (46 articles) of the studies demonstrate the positive effects of innovation diffusion and network formation. Conversely, two studies report negative effects (Shuyu, 2018; Nogare et al., 2021), while six studies report both positive and negative effects (Santoro et al., 2020; Huang & Hsueh, 2023; Dellisanti, 2023; Salvador et al., 2019; Klement & Strambach, 2019; Shaf, 2019).

Regarding the positive effects, Bakhshi et al. (2008) were the first to analyse the impact of innovation in the creative industries on the broader economy. They observed that innovation is more prevalent in the creative industries than in many other sectors. They also noted the importance of creative supply-chain linkages within creative industries and to many other sectors of the economy. Several scholars, including Innocenti (2019), Hosseini & Meybodi (2023) and Baláz et al. (2023), have also emphasised the importance of the creative industries sector in fostering the development of other economic sectors.

Balland et al. (2013) identified three main drivers of network formation that influence innovation: network endogeneity; forms of proximity (including geographical and cognitive); and the individual characteristics of firms. Research has shown that certain individuals within networks are more likely to have access to innovation-related knowledge, and that effective network connections can stimulate innovation within organisations by providing access to diverse ideas and resources (Lee, 2014; Jones et al., 2016; Liu, 2020; Hikmah, 2021; Benghozi & Salvador, 2016; Kirkels & Duysters, 2010; de Koning & Bijl-brouwer, 2024; Di Lodovico & Manz, 2023; Juhasz et al., 2020; Stejskal & Hajek, 2017). However, co-operation with competitors does not significantly impact product or process innovation (Shafi, 2019). Furthermore, Huang et al. (2023) emphasise that occupying a central position within an industry network does not necessarily enhance innovation performance.

Virta and Lowe (2017), Lorenzen (2019), Landoni et al. (2019) and Capron and Suire (2024) emphasise that combining resources from different places fosters innovation, creating a network that evolves with each phase of the innovation process. Faraone (2022), Dellisanti (2023) and Martin and Rypestol (2018) have also noted the significant role of territorial proximity in the diffusion of innovations. However, Klement & Strambach (2019) found that localisation economies do not promote innovation in the music sector, but rather limit it.

Liu and Chiu (2017), Salder (2021), Wang et al. (2022), Huang and Zou (2023) and Fu et al. (2022) all emphasise the crucial role of the government in facilitating networking and the diffusion of innovation. Davis et al. (2009) observe that the performance of creative clusters is influenced by a much broader social and policy environment than that with which innovation policymakers are accustomed to dealing. Chaminade et al. (2021) observed that regional support infrastructure enhances a firm's network embeddedness at both the local and global levels. Castro-Martinez et al. (2013) and Mansell and Foresta (2016) identify interactions among cultural heritage entities, knowledge production organisations and universities as crucial for innovation.

While analysing the television industry, Tempest (2009) draws attention to the importance of temporary workers, noting that a broader relational network facilitates organisational learning by enabling firms to access knowledge from individuals embedded in diverse production environments. This significantly extends the boundaries of the firm's knowledge base. Audretsch et al. (2024), de Klerk and Hodge (2021) and Casper and Storz (2017) also observed that employment mobility fosters a more dynamic environment for innovation, as firms can learn from each other more effectively.

In their seminal work, Godart (2012), Aage & Belussi (2008), Butticè et al. (2023), and Di Lodovico & Manzi (2023) analysed the fashion sector and identified a positive relationship between networking and the diffusion of innovations. Aage & Belussi (2008) distinguish between two types of strategic networks. Firstly, networks of market actors function as conduits for the dissemination of information on emerging fashion trends. Secondly, networks of creative agents, such as design studios, facilitate the transformation of fashion concepts into tangible products by supporting firms throughout the design process – from initial sketches (schizzi) to prototype development. However, Shuyu (2018) identifies a negative influence exerted by certain agents within the network. For example, a broker may occupy a strategically central position, enabling them to negotiate relationships among connected organisations and thereby exert influence over the interaction dynamics of the broader innovation ecosystem.

Nogare and Murzyn-Kupisz (2021) found negative effects in the museum sector. The authors state that networking with firms in the cultural and creative industries may be overrated for museums because the quantitative dimension of the relationship is often considered more important than the qualitative dimension. Their analysis revealed that, despite the diversity of connections, relationships between museums and CCI firms and institutions were predominantly characterised by weak ties with limited potential to enhance innovation, with substantially more weak ties than strong ones.

Conclusions and Discussion

This paper provides a systematic literature review of innovation diffusion within the creative industries. It focuses on the methods and indicators used to measure diffusion and its effects on the creative sector and the wider economy. The analysis reveals that research into creative industry networks and innovation diffusion has increased significantly over the past two decades, with the majority of studies focusing on European contexts.

The review identifies several key limitations and areas for future research. Firstly, the majority of existing studies rely on expert-based or qualitative data, which may limit the generalisability and scope of the findings. Secondly, many authors do not clearly define innovative activity when using interviews or questionnaires, indicating the need for a more rigorous conceptualisation and measurement of innovation. Thirdly, the narrow scope of many analyses limits their applicability to the entire creative sector, highlighting the need for an empirically based model that can be applied more broadly to examine innovation diffusion. Finally, although micro-level studies provide valuable insights into firm behaviour and collaboration, future research should increasingly focus on macro-level approaches that capture systemic interdependencies across sectors.

The findings of this review confirm that research on the diffusion of innovation within creative industries remains fragmented and uses a variety of methodologies. Although the creative sector is widely recognised as a driver of innovation and regional diversification, the mechanisms through which creative knowledge diffuses across industries remain poorly understood. While most existing studies focus on firm-level networks and creative clusters, macro-level analyses, particularly those employing input–output or inter-industry linkage frameworks, are relatively scarce.

To address these gaps, future studies could integrate network theory and frameworks of relatedness to capture tangible and intangible channels of spillover, such as design, digitalisation and storytelling, that connect sectors that would otherwise be considered unrelated. Furthermore, the growing popularity of quantitative and spatial network models offers fresh opportunities to measure the intensity of innovation diffusion across regions.

From a policy perspective, the results emphasise the significance of creative industries within regional innovation systems and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Integrating creative capabilities into innovation policies can promote knowledge recombination and cross-sectoral learning, thereby fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. To achieve this, future research must provide stronger empirical evidence of how creative networks interact with global value chains and digital ecosystems.

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