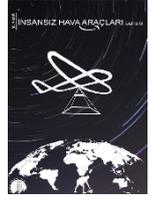




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A Systematic Literature Analysis of the Public Perception of UAVs

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a systematic literature review of the public perception of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) used in various fields. The research seeks to understand public attitudes toward UAVs and the underlying reasons for these attitudes. The study did a detailed search using specific keywords in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. The search strings used for database queries were determined, and exclusion criteria for article screening were established. Records were identified through database searches, and duplicates were removed following the PRISMA flow diagram. Articles were re-evaluated for eligibility, and the studies included in the synthesis were identified. The study yielded important findings for understanding the societal impact of UAV technology and its future trajectory. Various factors affect the public perception of UAVs, and the consequences of this perception are directly related to how individuals and societies adopt the technology. In this respect, it is evident that stakeholders should consider public perceptions when making decisions regarding UAV usage. Given that privacy concerns surrounding UAVs may lead to public debate, managing risks and developing communication strategies with the public may also be beneficial.

Keywords: Privacy, unmanned aerial vehicles, public perception, risk management, societal acceptance,

Toplumun İHA'lara Karşı Algısının Sistemik Literatür Analizi

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Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, çeşitli alanlarda kullanılan İnsansız Hava Araçları (İHA) hakkındaki toplumsal algıya ilişkin sistemik bir literatür taraması yapmaktır. Araştırma, İHA'lara yönelik toplumsal tutumları ve bu tutumların altında yatan nedenleri anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında, Scopus ve Google Akademik veri tabanlarında belirli anahtar kelimeler kullanılarak ayrıntılı bir arama yapılmıştır. Veritabanı sorguları için kullanılan arama dizeleri belirlenmiş ve yayın taraması için dışlama kriterleri oluşturulmuştur. Kayıtlar veritabanı aramaları yoluyla belirlenmiş ve PRISMA akış şeması izlenerek tekrarlar kaldırılmıştır. Yayınlar uygunluk açısından yeniden değerlendirilmiş ve senteze dahil edilen çalışmalar belirlenmiştir. Çalışma, İHA teknolojisinin toplumsal etkisini ve gelecekteki yörüngesini anlamak için önemli bulgular ortaya koymuştur. İHA'lara ilişkin toplumsal algı çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenmektedir ve bu algının sonuçları, bireylerin ve toplumların teknolojiyi nasıl benimsediğiyle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Bu bağlamda, paydaşların İHA kullanımına ilişkin kararlar alırken toplumsal algıları dikkate almaları gerektiği açıktır. İHA'lara ilişkin mahremiyet endişelerinin kamuoyunda tartışmalara yol açabileceği göz önüne alındığında, risklerin yönetilmesi ve toplumla iletişim stratejilerinin geliştirilmesi de faydalı olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gizlilik, İnsansız hava araçları, kamu algısı, risk yönetimi, sosyal kabul.

1. Introduction

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) represent aircraft that do not have a crew or passengers inside, have technically diverse equipment such as cameras, fertilizer nozzles, lidar, sensors etc. can be remotely controlled, or have the ability to fly autonomously. UAVs exhibit significant variations in terms of size, range, weight, engine type, and performance to accommodate various payloads, including communication devices, navigation equipment, sensors, and cameras. (Elmeseiry et al., 2021; Mohsan et al., 2022, 2023).

UAVs have started to be used in commercial and private areas, especially with technological advancements in recent years. Furthermore, this developing technology has also caused an increase in the areas of use of UAVs. UAVs are utilized in agricultural activities, aerial imaging, cargo transportation, and search and rescue activities. For example, considering search and rescue activities, it can be said that not only activities aimed at finding are carried out, but also the number of people at risk during a disaster is conveyed, and actions are taken accordingly (Mohamed et al., 2020).

UAVs also significantly affect public acceptance. Various factors influence the perception that society develops toward UAVs, and the consequences of this attitude are closely related to how individuals and societies adopt the technology (Sabino et al., 2022).

Studies in the literature examine the perception of UAVs in numerous dimensions, such as safety concerns, privacy, ease of access, societal acceptance, and technological innovation. These studies explain essential results for understanding the public attitudes toward UAVs and the reasons for these attitudes. Nevertheless, the available literature on the effects of UAVs on society and how these effects are perceived is still not at the desired level. Therefore, the analysis of the current literature is one step ahead to systematically examine the public perception of UAVs (Wang et al., 2023).

The present study aims to be pioneering for future research on the societal acceptance of UAVs and to guide researchers and decision-makers on the use of UAVs by indicating the factors affecting the benefits and risks perceived by society. This study aims to present the results in a clear and reproducible way through literature analysis. In this respect, it is aimed to inform researchers, carry thoughts about the dominant perspectives and attitudes to the upper level, and contribute by expressing the possible knowledge gaps in the literature on the societal acceptance of the comprehensively advancing technology.

This study aims to systematically analyze the existing literature on public perception of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), focusing particularly on societal acceptance, privacy concerns, attitudes, and related regulatory and operational dimensions. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to classifying and synthesizing recent studies using the PRISMA 2020 methodology, which ensures transparency and replicability. Unlike prior fragmented reviews, this study consolidates diverse perspectives and highlights existing research gaps, offering a clearer roadmap for future academic work and policymaking.

The paper is structured as follows: Following the introduction, Section 1 presents the research methodology, including the selection process and inclusion/exclusion criteria. Section 2 provides the results of the literature review, highlighting key statistics and trends in publication. Section 3 discusses the thematic clusters related to public perception, such as regulatory, operational, external, and economic factors. Finally, Section 4 presents the conclusions and implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

2. Method

The current study, which addresses research on a systematic literature analysis of the public perception of UAVs, employed the meta-analysis method, one of the systematic review approaches. A meta-analysis statistically combines many independent studies and findings regarding the determined subject or research question. It aims to yield reliable results by systematically analyzing the data from various studies (Göktaş, 2018).

The PRISMA 2020 (The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) used in meta-analysis studies was adopted in the research process. PRISMA 2020 represents the guide used to ensure the transparency of meta-analysis studies and to report findings in a standard manner. According to the said guide, the research questions and subjects are clearly defined. Then, records are determined using the PRISMA flow chart, which involves the process of determining, selecting, and including articles with reviews. In the present study, the data selection and search strategy and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were established with the PRISMA model (Pençe, 2024).

2.1. Research Question and Research Terms

Within the scope of the above-mentioned method, the main research question in our literature review was determined as follows:

“What is known about the societal acceptance factors regarding the public perception of UAVs?”

The four basic concepts related to our main research question specified in Table 1. are UVAs, Societal Acceptance, Attitude, and Privacy. These research concepts alone or UAV ‘AND’ Societal Acceptance ‘AND’ Attitude ‘AND’ Privacy were identified as the search concepts. The concepts of Equipment ‘AND’ military ‘AND’ security ‘AND’ power ‘AND’ resolution specified in Table 2. were the strings excluded when searching with these research concepts in literature.

Table 1. Search strings included in the study.

Search Option	Search String
All Fields (Anywhere in the article)	*UAV and *public perception and *attitude and * privacy

Table 3. Exclusion criteria for the literature review.

Central Concept	Exclusion Criteria
Unmanned Aerial Vehicles	A. Information on UAVs is included but is outside the scope of the article. For example, subjects related to technical information (development of the UAV test setup, etc.).
	B. The article generally includes technological perceptions but does not directly address UAVs.
Societal Acceptance	C. Although the concept of societal acceptance is included in different sections of the article, it is not discussed in detail.
Attitude	D. Although the themes of societal acceptance with regard to the technology are addressed, UAVs are not examined in a special section.
Privacy	E. Not the attitude toward the use of UAVs but the attitude observed when purchasing UAVs is addressed.
	F. Privacy issues are indicated when manufacturing UAVs. Privacy regarding images is not discussed.
Technical Criteria	G. Full text is unavailable for high-level evaluation.
	H. The article is not in English.

2.2. Selection of Articles

Articles published in English between 2015 and 2024 in the academic search engine Google Scholar (Google Scholar, 2024) and the academic database Scopus (Scopus, 2024) were included in the literature review. The articles obtained at the first stage were compiled by conducting a similarity scan. Among the remaining articles, those eligible for our subject were selected, and similar ones were removed again. After

Studies on civilian areas of use of UAVs were addressed to concretize the public perception of UAVs and make them more understandable. In this regard, studies on military use were excluded with concepts indicated in Table 2. Additionally, technical studies in this field were excluded to reach studies on the public perception of UAVs, the subject of the current work, more clearly. Thus, studies on UAVs' communication or UAV equipment and similar studies were excluded from the review's scope.

Table 2. Search strings excluded from the study.

Search Option	Search String Excluded
All Fields (Anywhere in the article)	*equipment and *military and *security and *power and *resolution

Table 3. specifies the exclusion criteria for the literature review within certain concepts from A to H. Information is provided about the results that can be considered negative when evaluated in terms of eligibility for our research subject, even if the search is done with these central concepts.

three rounds, 55 articles were evaluated according to their eligibility. Duplicates, studies not eligible for the research subject, those not in English, and those in abstract form (full text unavailable) were excluded.

As seen in Figure 1, there are many duplicates based on the PRISMA flowchart (Prizma, 2024) applied as a research method in the study. When reviewing the studies, duplicates were excluded. Afterward, studies directly integrated with the subject were selected. After excluding similar articles and examining the

publications in terms of their eligibility for the subject, the results regarding 55 articles were reported in the current study.

Additionally, in searches through Google Scholar and Scopus, although the search is done with the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Google Scholar, articles not displaying integrity with the subject are frequently encountered. Accordingly, more studies that could be examined regarding eligibility for the subject were found when we applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria in searches through Scopus.

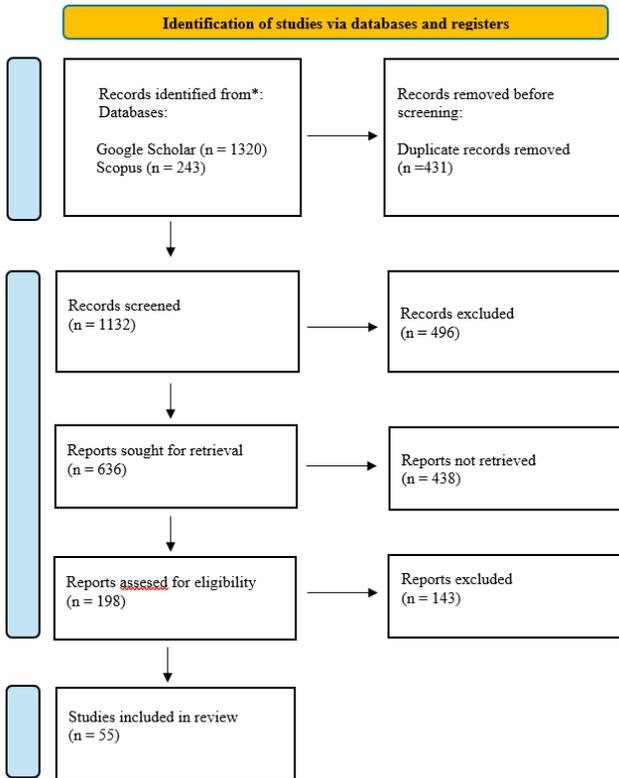


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart.

3. Results

Considering the distribution of the articles reviewed by years, most studies were conducted in 2024 (Table 4). Against the 15 articles published in 2024, there is one study in 2015 and one study in 2017.

Figure 2. shows the count of articles according to the study's geographic location on the world map. Among the 55 studies included in the review, a maximum of 20 and a minimum of 1 study were published in different countries. The highest number of studies was conducted in the United States with 20 articles, followed by Germany with 7 articles, China with 5 articles, India with 4 articles, and Malaysia with 4 articles.

Table 5. contains the list of journals where the 55 articles included in the review were published. The table shows that most articles were published in the journal "Technology in Society."

Table 4. Distribution of selected articles by years.

Year When the Article Was Published	Count of Articles
2015	1
2016	2
2017	1
2018	2
2019	2
2020	4
2021	7
2022	14
2023	7
2024	15

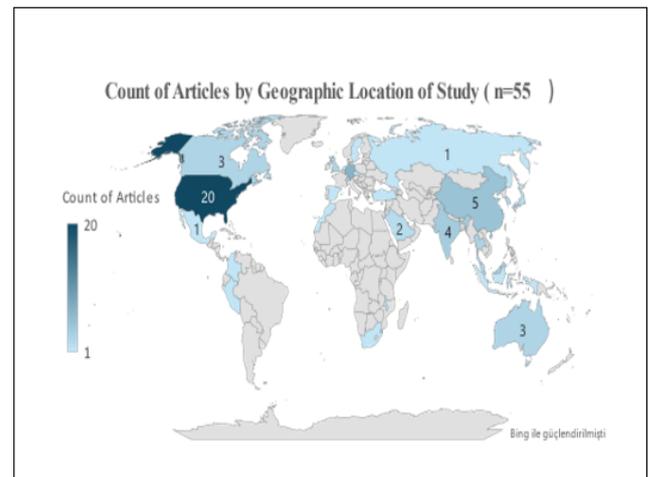


Figure 2. Count of articles according to the study's geographic location.

Table 5. Journals where the selected articles were published the most.

Journal Name	Count of Articles
Technology in Society (Technology in Society, 2024)	10
Drones (Drones,2024)	4
Cogent Business and Management (Cogent Business & Management Taylor & Francis Online, 2024)	2
International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications (International Journal of Logistics Research & Applications, 2024).	2
Others	37

Table 6. shows the subject distribution of the studies included in this review. The definitions of the subject areas were developed based on the information from the Scopus database and the Google Scholar search engine.

It was noted that the articles subject to our research could fall into more than one subject area in the database, as specified in the table of article distribution by subject area. In this respect, the subject distribution of the studies is more comprehensive.

Note: Certain articles are included in more than one subject category.

Table 7. shows the citation status of the reviewed articles. As seen in the table, the article by Chung et al. (Chung et al., 2020) titled "Optimization for drone and drone – truck combined operations: A review of the state of the art and future directions" was the most cited one.

Table 6. Distribution of the selected articles by subject.

Subject Area	Count of Articles
Social Sciences	24
Business, Management, and Accounting	21
Engineering	14
Computer Science	14
Decision Sciences	8
Environmental Sciences	3
Medicine	3
Earth and Planetary Sciences	3
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	2
Mathematics	2
Psychology	2
Economics, Econometrics, and Finance	2
Others	2

Table 7. Articles with the highest number of citations.

Document Title	Authors	Year	Source
Optimization for drone and drone-truck combined operations: A review of the state of the art and future directions (Chung et al., 2020).	Chung, S.H., Sah, B., Lee, J.	2020	246
The societal impact of commercial drones (Rao et al., 2016).	Rao, B., Gopi, A.G., Maione, R	2016	236
Drones for parcel and passenger transportation: A literature review (Kellermann et al., 2020)	Kellermann, R., Biehle, T., Fischer, L.	2020	208
Drone delivery: Factors affecting the public's attitude and intention to adopt (Yoo et al., 2018).	Yoo, W., Yu, E., Jung, J.	2018	190
Public acceptance of drones: Knowledge, attitudes, and practice (Aydin, 2019)	Aydin, B.	2019	132
Analysis of barriers to implement drone logistics (Sah et al., 2021)	Sah, B., Gupta, R., Bani-Hani, D.	2021	99
Public acceptance of drone applications in a highly urbanized environment (Tan et al., 2021)	Lin Tan, L.K., Lim, B.C., Park, G., Low, K.H., Seng Yeo, V.C.	2021	64
The acceptance of civil drones in Germany (Eißfeldt et al., 2020)	Eißfeldt, H., Vogelpohl, V., Stolz, M., (...), Belz, J., Kügler, D.	2020	64
Critical factors characterizing consumers' intentions to use drones for last-mile delivery: Does delivery risk matter?(Osakwe et al., 2022)	Osakwe, C.N., Hudik, M., Říha, D., Stros, M., Ramayah, T.	2022	62
The View from Above: A Survey of the Public's Perception of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Privacy (Nelson et al., 2019)	Nelson, J.R., Grubestic, T.H., Wallace, D., Chamberlain, A.W.	2019	41

4. Discussion

With technological developments, societies also adapt to these developments positively or negatively. The use of UAVs, which have become a symbol of these technological developments, increases every year. Therefore, the number of studies on public perceptions

of UAV use increases steadily with the rise in their use (Nelson et al., 2019).

The current section explains the factors affecting the public perception of UAVs, revolving around thematic clusters. In this regard, Table 8. presents the thematic clusters related to the public acceptance of UAVs based on the publications reviewed.

Table 8. Thematic classification of the factors related to the public perception of UAVs.

Category	Theme
Regulatory Factors	Privacy
	Security
	Safety
Operational Factors	Purpose and Place of Use
External Factors	Media Use
	Source and Impact of Information
Economic Factors	Usefulness
	Related Infrastructure and Services

4.1. Regulatory Factors

Upon reviewing the studies on the public perception of UAVs, the violation of private life, privacy concerns, and safety and security risks come to the forefront because the risk perception regarding UAVs can be expressed as physical security concerns. In this regard, two different thoughts can be established. The first is the unlimited use of UAVs, and the other is the use of UAVs for the public good (Komasová et al., 2020). The public perception of UAVs also varies according to the areas of use of these vehicles. However, even if the efficient areas of use are given as examples and the evaluation is performed accordingly, the results change (Del-Real and Díaz-Fernández, 2021).

4.2. Operational Factors

Nowadays, UAVs are utilized primarily for surveillance and analysis purposes, particularly for aerial imaging and image analysis. They are used in diverse areas, such as aerial imaging, search and rescue, fire extinguishing, traffic inspections, agricultural activities, and for hobby and commercial purposes. Aerial photography is widely used among these. When examined in terms of operational factors, the public approaches the use of UAVs more positively in terms of their use for the public good. Although society displays a positive attitude toward the use of UAVs for the public good, the most significant concern here is individuals' privacy concerns. Moreover, the easy accessibility of UAVs is another source of concern for society (Rao et al., 2016).

4.3. External Factors

The way the media depicts UAVs considerably impacts the public perception of UAVs. The media is one of the most important and effective elements forming the image of UAVs perceived by society.

Positive or negative news about UAVs influences or changes the level of knowledge and attitude of the public toward these vehicles. Negative depictions concerning security may cause fear and anxiety about UAVs; however, positive examples, such as search and rescue scenarios, may bring the advantages of these technologies to the forefront (Richards, 2018).

4.4. Economic Factors

Economic studies on the public perception of UAVs have usually included the acceptance of their delivery and commercial services. When considered in logistic terms, distribution centers located far from the city make delivery challenging. While the delivery of cargo by UAVs directly to the address may create problems that can affect society, the desire for fast delivery without being stuck in traffic flow has caused the public's thoughts to differentiate. It would be beneficial to indicate that there are still question marks about privacy among positive thoughts (Toraman and Öz, 2023).

5. Conclusion

The current study presents a systematic literature review on the perceptions of individuals, commercial organizations, states, and researchers regarding the use of UAVs between 2015 and 2024 and focuses on how this perception is understood in literature sources.

The study attempts to eliminate research gaps. In this respect, our study can help researchers analyze the current situation on the issue and then contribute to future research (Mohsan et al., 2022). Considering the public perceptions of UAVs, it is seen that studies have been conducted on factors, such as privacy, attitude, concern, risk, and acceptance. It is thought that policymakers and other stakeholders will benefit from these concepts in making decisions about the future (Nakamura & Kajikawa, 2018).

While numerous studies have investigated public perception of UAVs in specific contexts or applications, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the literature that synthesizes these diverse findings across domains remains limited. Prior studies typically focus on narrow aspects such as particular applications (e.g., delivery services, as in Yoo et al., 2018), specific geographical contexts (e.g., urban environments, as in Tan et al., 2021), or individual factors affecting acceptance (e.g., privacy concerns, as in Nelson et al., 2019).

The existing literature lacks a holistic framework that integrates these disparate findings into a coherent understanding of the multidimensional factors influencing public perception of UAVs. Specifically,

the following gaps are addressed by our systematic review:

Integration across application domains: Unlike previous reviews that concentrate on single application areas, our analysis synthesizes findings across diverse UAV applications, from agricultural use to urban delivery to emergency response.

Temporal evolution analysis: This study uniquely tracks how public perception has evolved from 2015 to 2024, capturing the trajectory of societal attitudes as UAV technology has become more prevalent.

Thematic classification framework: We develop a novel classification scheme (regulatory, operational, external, and economic factors) that provides a structured approach to understanding the multifaceted nature of public perception toward UAVs.

Geographical perspective: By analyzing studies across different countries and regions, our review offers insights into how cultural, regulatory, and societal contexts influence UAV acceptance patterns globally.

Interdisciplinary synthesis: This study bridges disciplinary boundaries by synthesizing research from technical fields (engineering, computer science), social sciences, business studies, and environmental research.

By addressing these gaps, our systematic literature analysis contributes to the field by establishing a foundation for future research on UAV societal acceptance. It provides stakeholders—including policymakers, UAV manufacturers, service providers, and researchers—with a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional factors that shape public perception, enabling more informed approaches to UAV implementation, regulation, and community engagement.

Upon examining the issues related to how the public perception of UAVs is understood in the literature, it was seen that the application or use of UAVs, even for the public good, currently creates a risk in society. It can be said that thoughts about using UAVs for the public good, such as search and rescue, fire extinguishing, or border security, change with a change in demographic factors. It is evident that the public is concerned about the use of these vehicles for hobby or commercial purposes outside of public interest, particularly aerial imaging. It would be beneficial for the competent authorities to improve their work by taking these concerns into account in the future.

Authors' Contribution

The authors declare that they have contributed equally to the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study has been conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics

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