Women's Empowerment in Business: A Bibliometric Study

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Abstract. Given its fundamental role in fostering a sustainable global environment, women's empowerment has garnered an extensive corpus of scholarly research aimed at its advancement, including in the field of business. Consequently, a comprehensive review assists researchers in navigating and comprehending the subject matter. This bibliometric study aims to reveal the trends and potential future directions of the field by conducting performance analysis and science mapping of "women empower*" or "female empower*" or "gender empower*" keywords. Utilizing R software's "bibliometrix" package, the study analyzes 640 documents from the Scopus database published from 1992–2024. The findings show a consistent increase in articles, with the highest production in 2024, suggesting its ever-increasing relevance. Notably, the co-occurrence analysis of the author's keywords indicated that sustainability did not emerge as a key focus during the 2015–2019 period despite the introduction of the SDGs. It was only in the 2020–2024 period that "sustainable development" became a prevalent theme. In addition, the analysis suggested the "Sustainable Development Goals", "gender stereotypes", and "social media" to be among potential themes for future explorations.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, SDGs, Gender, Sustainability, Bibliometric Analysis.

1 Introduction

Women's empowerment is widely recognized to be integral to a fair, sustainable world, to the extent that it has become a central theme of the fifth Sustainable Development Goals [1]. Representing fifty percent of the global population, women constitute a substantial proportion of the world's latent capabilities. The failure to empower women, which entails granting them autonomy over their lives [2], means limiting societal progress by half. Indeed, women's empowerment engenders cascading effects that closely interlink with other SDGs. For instance, access to decent work leads to better education, health, and nutrition for women and those who are reliant upon them, advancing not only the achievement of SDG 5, but also SDGs 2, 3, and 4 [3]. Despite its significant implications, gender inequality persists. Issues such as sexual violence and exploitation,

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disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labor, and systemic discrimination continue to pose major obstacles [4]. Consequently, a considerable amount of scholarly research has emerged to investigate and advance women's empowerment, including in the field of business.

Over the past decades, scholars have systematically examined women's empowerment through a business lens, including the barriers, success factors, and outcomes. Studies document persistent barriers such as entrenched societal norms [5], systemic discrimination [6], and the infamous glass ceiling phenomenon [7], which constrain women's professional advancement. Conversely, enabling factors, including policy and institutional support [8], entrepreneurship [9], and education and skills development [10], have been identified. Furthermore, empirical investigations have documented significant impacts of women's empowerment on organizational outcomes, including on business performance [11] and sustainability commitment [12].

These diverse strands of research underscore the need for a comprehensive review. In response, [2] and [3] conducted bibliometric studies. However, the former did not specifically concentrate on the business domain, while the latter restricted its scope within the SDG 5 domain. This investigation aims to enhance the existing body of knowledge by performing a bibliometric analysis of women's empowerment within the business arena, irrespective of its explicit correlation to the SDGs, with different bibliometric approaches. The research questions are articulated as follows:

RQ1. What trends can be observed in the literature of women's empowerment in the business domain?

RQ2. What emerging themes and prospective future trajectories can be identified in the literature of women's empowerment in the business domain?

The subsequent sections of this paper present the methodology employed, followed by the results and discussions. The article will then be wrapped up with concluding remarks.

2 Research Methods

A bibliometric analysis was conducted to address the research questions, comprising two categories: (1) performance analysis, which examines key research elements to identify publication trends thus answering the first question; and (2) science mapping, which investigates the relationships between the elements to answer the second question. Specifically, co-word analysis was chosen for the science mapping as it fits the purpose. In this case, the co-occurrence of author's keywords was examined to uncover emerging themes and potential research trajectories.

Following [2], the study begins with the search for "women empower*" or "female empower*" or "gender empower*" in the article title, abstract, and keywords section of the Scopus database on 28 May 2025. The database was used given its reputation and that it differs from the referenced study. The search was then refined by limiting it to final journal articles in English in the subject areas of business, management, and accounting published until 2024, resulting in 640 documents. The data was then analyzed using R software's "bibliometrix" package.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Performance Analysis

The analysis reveals that the first article in the field was published in 1992. Since then, the number of publications has grown at an average annual rate of 16.02%. A total of 322 journals have contributed, with Feminist Economics publishing the most articles. India emerges as the most productive country, followed by the United States and the United Kingdom. While initial publication growth was slow, a notable surge occurred in 2019, coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic. 2024 sees the highest number of publications, suggesting its ever-increasing relevance.

A total of 1517 authors have contributed, including 141 who published as single authors. Co-authors analysis shows 2.52 co-authors per document with 21.72% international co-authorship. Singh becomes the most prolific contributor with five published articles. Spanning 32 citation years, the publications have an average age of 5.22 years. Overall, 9,859 citations were accumulated, averaging 15.4 citations per document and an H-Index of 50.

3.2 Science Mapping: Co-Word Analysis

Co-word analysis through the co-occurrence of the author's keywords was conducted to uncover the emerging themes and potential future directions in women's empowerment publications in the business field. Figure 1 presents the co-occurrence network, revealing ten clusters labelled according to their dominant keywords. Among them, "women empowerment" and "empowerment" emerge as the most prominent themes.



Fig. 1. Co-occurrence network

In addition, a thematic map divided into four quadrants was laid to reveal the research trajectory. The quadrants were divided based on two dimensions: (1) centrality, indicating a theme's influence within the field, and (2) density, indicating its level of relevance. The quadrants are listed below.

- Q1: motor themes, themes with strong centrality and high density.
- Q2: basic themes, themes with strong centrality but low density.
- Q3: niche themes, themes with weak centrality but high density.
- Q4: emerging or declining themes, themes with weak centrality and low density.

The investigation was restricted to 250 keywords with a minimum cluster frequency of 5 per thousand documents and three labels per cluster. Figure 2 presents the results. The figure indicates "economic empowerment", "social empowerment", and "psychological empowerment" to be among the motor themes. Meanwhile, "women's empowerment" is a part of the basic themes and "Muslim women" is a part of the niche theme. Lastly, "gender empowerment" and "gender stereotypes" are among the emerging or declining themes.

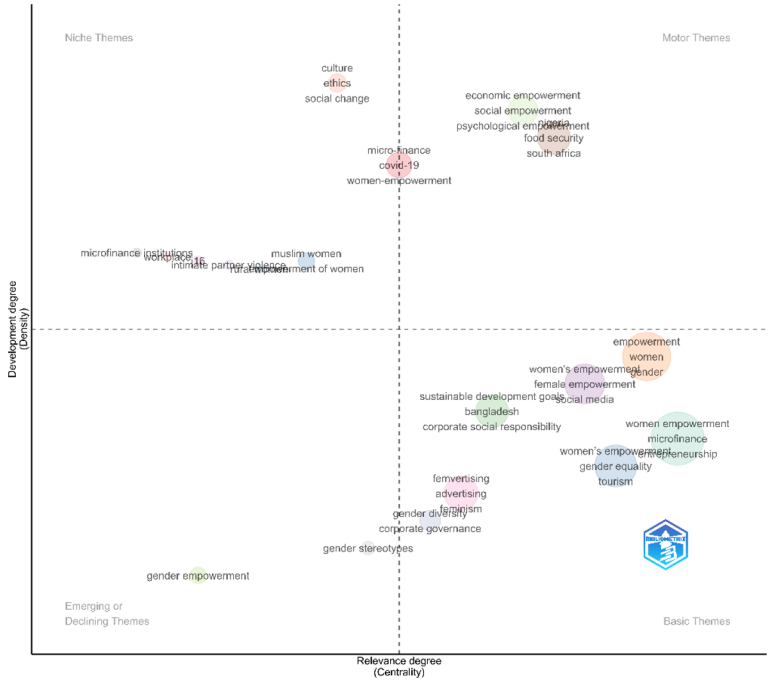

Fig. 2. Thematic map by author's keywords

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the field's evolution, we also performed a chronological-thematic analysis. The timeline was divided into three periods with the introduction of the SDGs and the onset of Covid-19 as key breakpoints. The findings are presented in Figure 3. The alluvial graph illustrates the shifting landscapes of subthemes within the field, showing how they emerge, fade, merge with others, or resurface over time, which will be further explored in Figure 4.

As presented in Figure 4, during the 1992–2014 period women's empowerment was closely linked to economic themes, with "entrepreneurship" among the motor themes and "economic development" and "poverty alleviation" the basic themes. Interestingly, "sustainability" did not emerge as a key focus during the 2015–2019 period (Figure 5),

despite the introduction of the SDGs. It was only in the 2020–2024 period (Figure 6) that "sustainable development" became a motor theme, evolving from earlier discussions on "corporate social responsibility", as depicted in the alluvial graph in Figure 3. This period also saw a significant emergence of new themes, including "multidimensional poverty", "social media", and "education", among others, as the motor themes.

Thematic map illustrates the evolution of the field and offers guidance for future research in which scholars are encouraged to investigate underexplored themes which resides in quadrant 2 and 4 to further advance the field. In this context, "gender stereotypes", "Sustainable Development Goals", and "social media" are among the potential themes. These themes appeared during the 2020–2024 period, which accounts for their relatively underdeveloped status while also highlighting their relevance in the current landscape. "Social media", for example, is deeply embedded in contemporary life, thus investigating the theme may yield valuable insights.

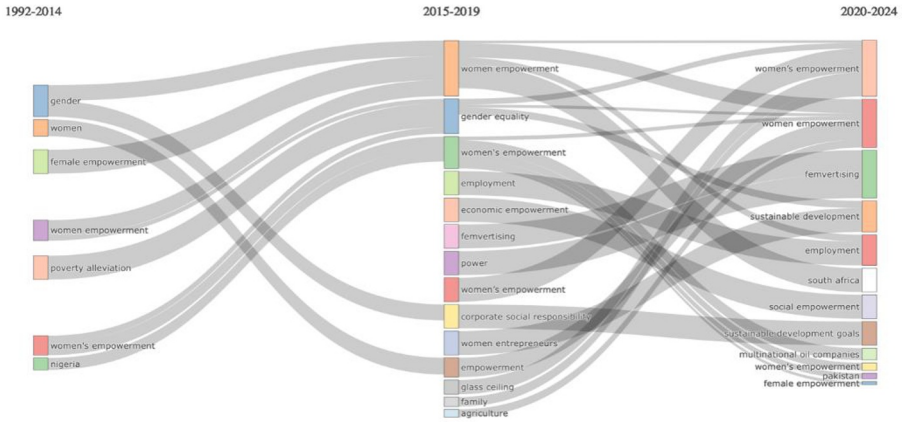

Fig. 3. Thematic evolution by author's keywords

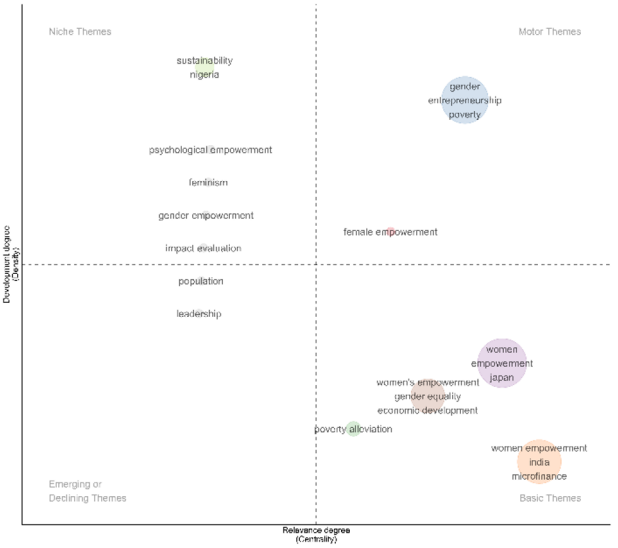

Fig. 4. Chronological thematic map (1992-2014)

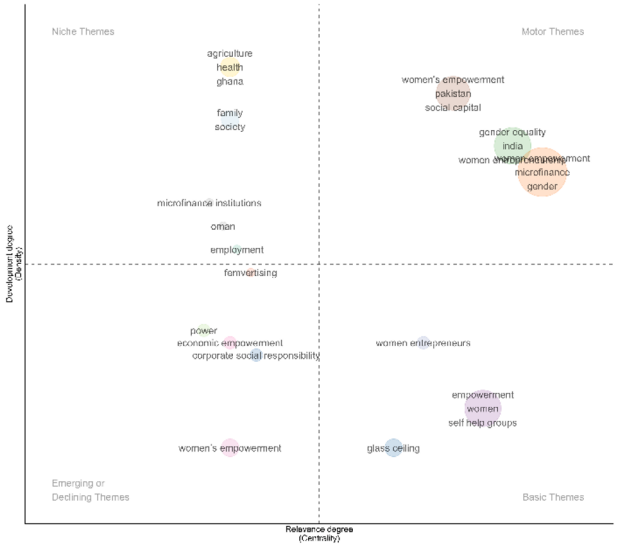

Fig. 5. Chronological thematic map (2015-2019)

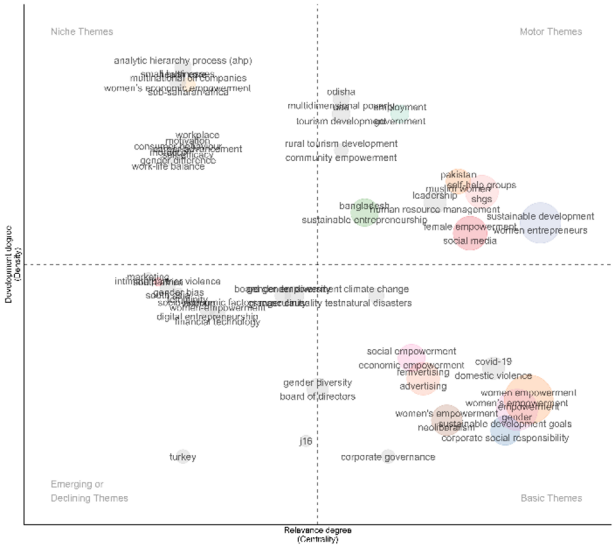

Fig. 6. Chronological thematic map (2020-2024)

4 Conclusion

This study systematically examines 640 articles retrieved from the Scopus database to provide a comprehensive overview of the women's empowerment research landscape. The results indicate an overall upward trend in publications, with the highest growth recorded in 2024, highlighting the field's ever-increasing relevance. Notably, the co-occurrence of the author's keywords indicates sustainability did not emerge as a key focus during the 2015–2019 period, despite the introduction of the SDGs. It was only in the 2020–2024 period that "sustainable development" became a prevalent theme. Furthermore, the analysis suggested the theme, along with "gender stereotypes" and "social media", to be among promising themes for future explorations. While the study offers useful insights for scholars seeking to navigate the literature, several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, the exclusive reliance on the Scopus database constrains the scope of analysis; future research should incorporate multiple databases to enrich the findings. Second, given Scopus' periodic content updates, future assessments may yield different results. Finally, future studies could employ alternative analytical tools and bibliometric techniques to generate deeper insights and more nuanced understanding.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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