

Business, Society, and Sustainable Development: A Bibliometric Systematic Review of Global Research Trends and Future Directions

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Abstract

This study provides a bibliometric systematic review of scholarly work on business, society, and sustainable development. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database, where 216 records were initially identified and screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final dataset comprised 92 English language journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. VOSviewer software was used to analyse annual publication trends, leading authors, contributing countries, regional patterns, and keyword co-occurrence networks. The results indicate a clear expansion of research, with publication activity reaching its highest level in 2025. The analysis identifies corporate social responsibility, sustainability reporting, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and corporate sustainability as the main thematic areas. The review shows that scholarly attention has increasingly shifted towards the role of business in addressing social, environmental, and governance concerns. Future research should further investigate developing economies, small firms, greenwashing, measurable sustainability outcomes, and the practical impact of responsible business practices globally.

Keywords: Business and Society; Corporate Social Responsibility; Sustainable Development; Bibliometric Analysis; Sustainability Reporting

Introduction

Business, society, and sustainable development have become areas of debate because firms are expected to support growth, welfare, environmental protection, and responsible governance (Zemigala, 2019; Ye, 2020; Radzi, Yusoff, Mohd Fahmi, & Jasni, 2025). Companies are no longer viewed as profit-making institutions, because their activities influence communities, labour markets, consumption, innovation, climate change, inequality, and wellbeing (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Annarelli, Catarci, & Palagi, 2024; Zervoudi, Moschos, & Christopoulos, 2025). Therefore, business and society have become central to management, governance, business ethics, sustainability reporting, and sustainable development research (Ye, 2020;

Sundarasan, Rajagopalan, & Zyznarska-Dworczak, 2025).

Business has been assigned a greater mandate in furthering priorities set by the Sustainable Development Goals because companies are expected to contribute towards decent work, responsible production, gender equality, climate action, poverty reduction, and accountable institutions (United Nations, 2025; Radzi et al., 2025). Literature published in recent years indicate that while research into how sustainable development goals affect business performance is expanding, it is still fragmented among disciplines, journals, countries, and methods of study (Zemigala, 2019; Radzi et al., 2025). Contributing factors to this increase include the demands placed on companies to align their strategies with the sustainable

development goals and demonstrate contribution through their reporting, governance, innovation efforts, and stakeholder management (Ye, 2020; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

Visible themes include corporate sustainability (Nosratabadi et al., 2019), corporate social responsibility (Ye, 2020), environmental, social and governance criteria (Ye, 20), and sustainable business models (Zervoudi et al., 2025). This implies firms are reported via performance, impact, environmental responsibility, transparency, and accountability (Annarelli et al., 20; Sundarasan et al., 2025). However, symbolic reporting, weak integration, greenwashing, and lack of evidence of contributions to sustainable development persist (Ye, 20; Zervoudi et al., 2025; Radzi et al., 2025). Therefore, this bibliometric review maps trends, authors, countries, journals, citation chains, keyword clusters, themes, and gaps (Zemigala, 2019; Ye, 20; Radzi et al., 2025; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

Literature Review

1. Corporate Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Corporate sustainability emerged as an interesting field of study because firms face pressures to operate on economic, social, and environmental fronts (Zemigala, 2019; Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Annarelli et al., 2024). Studies found that aspects of sustainability relate to governance practices, employee wellbeing initiatives, inclusion, responsible supply chains, and value creation (Annarelli et al., 2024; Sundarasan et al., 2025). Zemigala (2019) discussed that the tangible impacts of sustainable development can be found in management sciences. Firms can act responsibly by engaging in green innovation, eco-efficiency of resources, social investment activities, production choices, and disclosure (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Radzi et al., 2025). While firms recognize the importance of acting

sustainably, tensions exist because being socially and environmentally responsible may require investment, changes in governance, and collaboration (Ye, 2020; Zervoudi et al., 2025). Studies explore how firms enact both shareholder and sustainability performance (Radzi et al., 2025; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

2. Corporate Social Responsibility and Society

Corporate social responsibility theory connects business and society because CSR is defined by how firms respond to social expectations, ethical issues, environmental concerns, and stakeholders (Ye, 2020; Zervoudi et al., 2025). Ye (2020) discovered that CSR is increasingly involved in sustainable development, showing connections with sustainability, development, and accountability. Zervoudi et al. (2025) also stated that CSR has recently shifted to focus on environmental, social, and governance criteria. Some examples of how CSR contributes to sustainable development include corporate engagement, labour practices, environment, consumer issues, and stakeholders' trust (Ye, 2020; Annarelli et al., 2024; Zervoudi et al., 2025). Moreover, CSR can be symbolic if it does not create meaningful change (Ye, 2020; Zervoudi et al., 2025). This connection makes CSR significant to the study because the theory involves argumentation about accountability, transparency, and greenwashing (Ye, 2020; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

3. Sustainable Business Models and Value Creation

Business models provide insight into how organisations create, deliver, and capture value along with acknowledging social impacts (Nosratabadi et al., 2019). Nosratabadi et al. (2019) reviewed applications within innovation, management and entrepreneurship, energy, fashion and retail, healthcare, agri-food, supply chains and the circular economy, construction,

mobility and transport, and hospitality. They integrate sustainability into business strategy rather than sustainability being its own entity within corporations (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Radzi et al., 2025). Helping firms align profitability with stakeholders value, responsibility, and contribution to society (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Annarelli et al., 2024). Leadership, innovation, stakeholder engagement, support and measurement leads to success (Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

4. Sustainability Reporting, ESG, and Governance

Sustainability reporting increased as a governance mechanism due to how it enables firms to report environmental, social, and governance efforts (Sundarasan et al., 2025; Zervoudi et al., 2025). Sundarasan et al. (2025) discovered sustainability reporting served as governance mechanism within SDGs and identified reporting, SDGs, corporate sustainability, and performance accountability themes. ESG research expanded since investors, regulators, consumers, and communities called for measurable evidence of responsible practices (Zervoudi et al., 2025; Sundarasan et al., 2025). Greenwashing continues to be prevalent as irresponsible because misleading claims erode trust and hinder sustainable development efforts (Zervoudi et al., 2025). Future research should explore disclosure quality, credibility of ESG ratings, and outcomes (Annarelli et al., 2024; Zervoudi et al., 2025; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

5. Bibliometric Research Trends and Future Directions

Business, society and sustainable development literature is vast and interdisciplinary which warrants bibliometric investigation (Zemigala, 2019; Ye, 2020; Radzi et al., 2025). Bibliometric review studies reveal studies paying attention to CSR, SDGs, sustainability reporting, ESG

criteria, green innovation and circular economy, stakeholder theory, and performance constructs (Ye, 2020; Radzi et al., 2025; Sundarasan et al., 2025). Radzi et al. (2025) highlighted sustainability reporting, green innovation, stakeholder theory, gender equality and circular economy are themes gaining traction in literature. Future directions point towards contributions from developed vs developing economies, small firms, social versus environmental/fiscal domains of sustainability, gender equality, greenwashing, supply chain justice, digital technologies' sustainability, and impact (Annarelli et al., 2024; Radzi et al., 2025; Zervoudi et al., 2025). Bibliometric review provides opportunity to visualize field of interest and make recommendations towards conducting research responsibly (Zemigala, 2019; Ye, 2020; Sundarasan et al., 2025).

Methodology

A bibliometric systematic review was conducted to search and review the literature related to business, society and sustainable development. We have performed the review using Scopus database because Scopus offers access to peer-reviewed literature in business, management, social sciences, sustainability and related fields. The aim was to identify scholarly publications and analyse worldwide research trends, topics, citations, authors, articles, sources of publications, and future research in regards to business, society and sustainable development.

Preferred search strategy was determined by the aim of the research. Therefore, used keywords were “business and society”, “corporate social responsibility”, “sustainable development”, and “bibliometric”. Only English- language journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 were considered for the analysis. The chosen keywords reflected the main topics of the current review while the time span was determined by the recent trends in the field of

business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric.

Data Collection

Data collection was performed using Scopus database searching. A specific set of keywords was searched to obtain publications. Boolean operators were applied to ensure better search results. In this regard, AND operator and OR operator were used. The OR operator was applied between related concepts. Besides, the AND operator was placed among the study's main concepts.

The final search string used in the Scopus database was as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("business and society" OR "corporate social responsibility") AND "sustainable development" AND bibliometric*)

In this search string, “business and society” and “corporate social responsibility” were joined by OR because they are synonyms that all relate to business’ relationship with society. “Sustainable development” was joined by AND to limit publications to only those that focus on sustainable development. bibliometric* was used to capture publications using bibliometric analysis, bibliometric review, or other similar forms of bibliometrics. An asterisk was used to include both bibliometric and bibliometrics.

The year range searched was between 2015 and 20 25. Inclusion criteria was English language journal publications. We excluded non-journal publications and non-English language publications. This helped ensure consistent quality, consistency and relevance.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure a focused and relevant review, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- **Keywords:** The selected keywords used for the search strategy were “business and society,” “corporate social responsibility,” “sustainable development,” and “bibliometric.” This combination of

keywords was chosen to encompass papers that explore business, society, corporate social responsibility, and sustainable development through bibliometric methodology.

- **Year Range:** Only publications published between 2015 and 2025 were included. This time period was selected to cover recent research trends and contemporary academic discussion in the field.

- **Peer-Reviewed Journals:** The review included only journal-based publications indexed in Scopus. This criterion was used to maintain the academic quality and reliability of the selected literature.

- **Language:** Only English-language publications were included to ensure consistency in interpretation and analysis.

To refine the dataset, the following exclusion criteria were applied:

- **Non-Journal Publications:** Publications other than journal articles, including conference papers, book chapters, editorials, notes, letters, and other non-journal documents, were excluded.

- **Non-English Language:** Publications written in languages other than English were excluded to avoid language and translation-related issues.

- **Irrelevant Publications:** Publications that did not directly focus on business and society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, or bibliometric analysis were excluded during the screening process.

Screening and Eligibility

The number of records retrieved from Scopus was 216 using the selected search string. Titles, abstracts, and keywords of all 216 records were screened. Publications were screened for relevancy to business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis.

After inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, 124 records were excluded due to failing to meet one or more criteria (i.e., journal source type, English language, keyword correspondence, relevancy to research focus, etc.). Following this process, we screened 92 full-text articles for eligibility.

Full-text eligibility assessment. After full-text review, all 92 articles met our eligibility criteria for inclusion in the review (none were excluded at this stage). In total, we identified 92 studies which are included for bibliometric systematic review and analyses below. The set of 92 included studies were analysed to identify publication trends, key author output, most productive journals, regional distribution, most cited publications and cocited clusters, and keyword clusters on business, society and sustainable development topics.

PRISMA Protocol

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses protocol was followed to ensure transparency and clarity in the selection of studies. The steps undertaken in the review process were as follows:

1. **Identifying the Research Question and Developing the Protocol:** The research topic was identified as business, society, and sustainable development. The protocol was developed by defining the database, search string, year range, inclusion criteria, and exclusion criteria.
2. **Literature Search:** A systematic search was conducted in the Scopus database using the search string: TITLE-ABS-KEY (("business and society" OR "corporate social responsibility") AND "sustainable development" AND bibliometric*).
3. **Screening:** The identified records were screened according to titles, abstracts, and keywords. This step

helped to remove publications that were not relevant to the main focus of the review.

4. **Eligibility Assessment:** The remaining publications were assessed according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The eligibility assessment focused on year range, language, journal source type, and relevance to business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis.
5. **Final Inclusion:** After screening and eligibility assessment, 92 studies were included in the final review. These studies formed the final dataset for bibliometric and systematic analysis.
6. **Data Synthesis:** The selected studies were analysed to identify publication trends, leading authors, major journals, productive countries, citation patterns, and thematic clusters. VOSviewer was used for bibliometric mapping, while Microsoft Excel was used for organising and presenting descriptive results.
7. **Reporting:** The findings were reported according to the PRISMA structure. The final PRISMA process included records identified from Scopus, records screened, records excluded, full-text articles assessed for eligibility, full-text articles excluded, and studies included in the review.

The PRISMA process for the present study is summarised as follows: 216 records were identified from the Scopus database. All 216 records were screened. A total of 124 records were excluded after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The remaining 92 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. No

full-text articles were excluded at the full-text stage. Finally, 92 studies were included in the bibliometric systematic review.

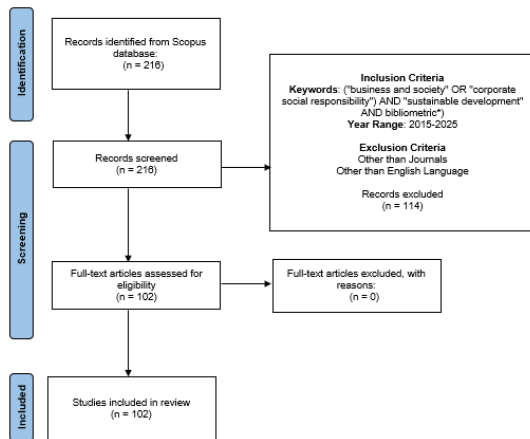


Figure 1: PRISMA Process

Results and Analysis

The ninety-two articles collected from worldwide were published between 2015-2025 and included academic manuscripts written from numerous countries, journals, and research settings. Business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis were primarily topics that had been examined. Business and sustainable development have become inextricably linked research themes in recent years, as organisations are expected not just to grow economically but also to promote societal welfare, environmental responsibility, ethics, stakeholder value, and good governance. By looking over the literature that was reviewed for this study, it is discovered that the majority of studies focused on exploring the trend of publications, authors, productive journals, citations, countries, and clusters on business and sustainability.

The theme analysis demonstrates corporate social responsibility as one of the most prevalent themes across reviewed studies. Corporate social responsibility was often articulated as an important strategy by which

businesses answer social expectations, environmental concerns, community welfare, ethical obligations and stakeholder demands. Sustainable development was also prominent due to it offering an umbrella concept for understanding ways business activities contribute towards long-term social, economic and environmental objectives. The results suggest that business research has slowly shifted from focusing on profit-maximizing models to broadening its view to expect corporations to behave in a manner beneficial to society and the environment.

Furthermore, it can be seen from the selected articles that themes such as sustainability reporting, corporate sustainability, stakeholder engagement, environmental social and governance (ESG) practices, and sustainable business models have shown an increase in attention. The variety of themes displayed suggests that literature on business and society has expanded beyond just discussions of corporate responsibility and moves toward quantifiable and strategic themes of sustainability. Bibliometric analysis allows us to see the connection between themes by visualizing keyword co-occurrence, citations, author collaborations, and country-based networks. Therefore, visualization programs like VOSviewer can assist with identifying the intellectual development, theme orientation, and structure of research within a chosen field.

The review also notes some significant gaps in literature. While much of the literature showcases business as a positive force behind sustainable development, issues surrounding greenwashing, ineffective implementation of sustainability plans, inadequate stakeholder engagement, and a lack of connection between sustainability reporting and social impact suggest that businesses need to do more than just pay lip service to responsibility.

From this examination of ninety-two studies it can then be seen that business, society and

sustainable development has evolved into an emerging and multidisciplinary field of research. It can thus be concluded from the results of this paper that more research should focus on developing countries, SMEs, social sustainability, digital sustainability, responsible supply chains and corporate sustainability outcomes.

Bibliometric Analysis of Literature

Chronological Analysis

The bibliometric study conducted focuses on publications spanning the years 2015 to 2025, which discuss topics related to business, society, corporate social responsibility and sustainable development. The yearly document analysis indicates that there hasn't been a consistent increase in publications throughout the selected time period. Instead, there has been a gradual uptick in the number of documents published within this topic over time. This suggests that authors have only more recently begun to value researching topics concerning the role of business entities in sustainable development, stakeholder value, and social responsibility.

The year with the maximum number of publications is 2025 with 30 papers. This indicates that research interest in the domain of bibliometric analysis on business, society, and sustainable development has seen a substantial increase. The sharp upsurge in publications in 2025 may be attributed to the widespread attention towards sustainable development goals, corporate social responsibility, sustainability reporting, ESG practices and businesses' role in mitigating social and environmental issues. It also depicts that scholars are utilizing bibliometric approaches to determine the prolific sources, keyword clusters, author collaborations, country-wise contributions and potential avenues for future research on this topic.

Nonetheless, during the first years of the defined timeframe few publications were released. Lowest publication outputs were

noted in 2015 and 2017 with one paper published each year. In addition, no papers were published in both 2016 and 2019. Therefore, bibliometric analysis in business, society, and sustainable development topic areas was scarce at the beginning of the analysed period.

This temporal analysis therefore presents a clear movement from limited early research activity towards stronger academic engagement in recent years. Chronological Analysis is shown in Figure 2.

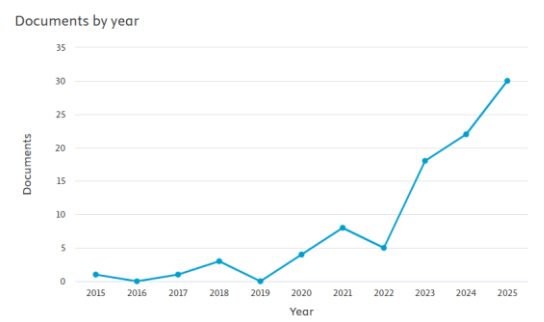


Figure 2: Chronological Analysis

Author Analysis

The bibliometric mapping has been studied by many researchers in fields such as business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis. The following articles provide valuable insights into publication patterns, themes, collaboration networks, and future research trends in business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis. According to author analysis (figure 3), Hyk, V. and Vysochan, O. are the most productive authors with three documents each. Their research primarily focused on sustainability reporting and bibliometric analysis. Hyk, Vysochan, and Vysochan (2023) conducted sustainability reporting research trends through systematic literature network analysis explaining research on sustainability reporting using Scopus-indexed publications.

Sustainability reporting research is significant for this study because it has been linked to corporate responsibility and stakeholder accountability, sustainable development.

Meseguer- Sánchez, V. and Molina- Moreno, V. were also retrieved as relevant authors according to Scopus author analysis with 2 documents. Their participation is justified based on the study conducted by Meseguer- Sánchez, Gálvez- Sánchez, López- Martínez, and Molina- Moreno (2021) where they determined the interrelationship between corporate social responsibility and sustainability based on bibliometric terms. Their publication related to this review as it discussed CSR and sustainability and all of its subcategories including social sustainability, economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability along with bibliometric mapping. Their research assists this review by aiding the background information of how CSR and sustainability have been established as interrelated fields of research.

Abad-Segura, E. yet another Author contributing their research to this study. Abad-Segura, Cortés-García, Belmonte-ureña, 2019 investigated sustainable corporate social responsibility and performed a bibliometric study using analysis worldwide. They analyzed CSR from the point of view of sustainability and proposed future trends in CSR research. This was a great contribution as it highlighted how CSR became one of the largest channels through which corporations respond to social responsibilities along with environmental and stakeholder responsibilities.

Moving forward, Abdelhaq, T. is another author visible in the author analysis. Ashurov, Musse, & Abdelhak (2024) reviewed corporate social responsibility towards sustainable development and social welfare. This article adds context to the field of research under analysis by illustrating how

CSR may intersect with development and social welfare at an organisational and social level. Another author seen within this author analysis is Abid, G. who is connected to research regarding social sustainability. Overall, Contreras & Abid (2022) completed a bibliometric mapping of social sustainability research in business and management using VOSviewer. The selected article relates to the topic analyzed as it is bibliometric research that centers around social sustainability as a topic of research in business and management.

Author Abrahamsen, L. M. appears included in author analysis. Jaganjac, Abrahamsen, Olsen, and Hunnes (2024) explored whether business ethics education should try to reestablish itself on firmer ethical ground. This paper was primarily focused on business ethics education; however, it is applicable to this review because business ethics correlates directly with responsible business, CSR, and sustainable development.

Figure 4 VOSviewer map of authors confirms that Hyk, Vasyl and Meseguer- Sánchez, Víctor are visible on the map. Node size represents authorship strength and the colours represent clusters of authors and collaboration patterns. Author analysis concludes that business, society and sustainable development research area is led by scholars focusing on sustainability reporting, CSR, social sustainability, business ethics and bibliometric mapping analyses. Author analysis was presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

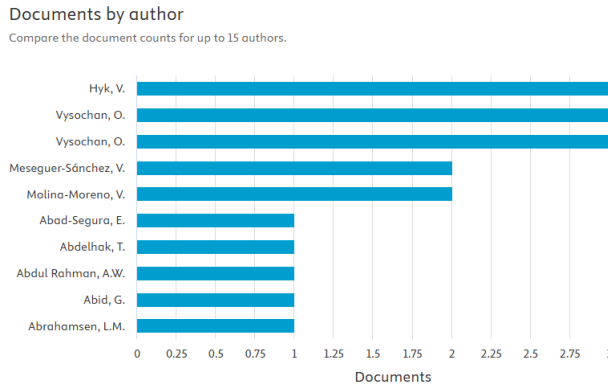


Figure 3: Documents by Authors; Scopus

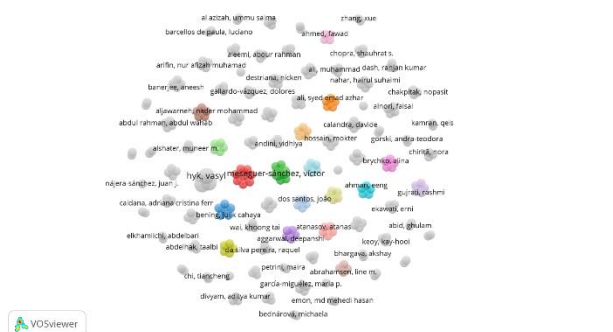


Figure 4: Documents by Authors; VOSviewer

Regional Analysis

From Scopus sources, as well as the visualization from VOSviewer, it can be concluded that China, India, Malaysia, and Spain are the predominant countries which appear in the literature of business, society, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and bibliometric analysis, as each have published 11 documents. This indicates that interest in this field of research is broad, and spread across Asia and Europe. The prevalence of China and India indicates an increasing interest in Asian countries in sustainable development, corporate responsibility, and business-society. Malaysia also indicates an increase in research focused on sustainability, governance and corporate social responsibility in emerging countries.

Spain appears once again as one of the leading countries with 11 publications,

showing great interest among academic institutions related to research on sustainability and bibliometric analysis. Indonesia is very close with 10 publications, which suggests that sustainable development and CSR is becoming widely discussed in Asian scientific literature. Ukraine had 7 publications and the United Kingdom had 6 publications. Pakistan and Poland both contributed 5 publications and Brazil came in with 4 publications. This goes to show that this field of research is spread throughout Asia, Europe, Latin America and other countries.

Regional map of countries is provided based on VOSviewer also described collaboration between countries. While China, Malaysia, Pakistan and Italy seems to form one cluster that can be seen from the network, India and Indonesia also show strong collaboration. Spain seems to be a hub connecting to Qatar, Portugal, Peru and Ukraine demonstrating international research ties. Ukraine can be seen nearby countries Poland, Brazil, Portugal, Germany and Slovakia forming visible cluster.

As can be seen in Figures 5 and 6. The percentage spread shows that Business, Society and Sustainable Development is a global issue garnering research interest. Developed and developing countries alike participated showcasing that the topic of business' role in solving issues surrounding sustainability has gained academia-wide attention. Figure 5 and Figure 6 show the Regional Analysis.

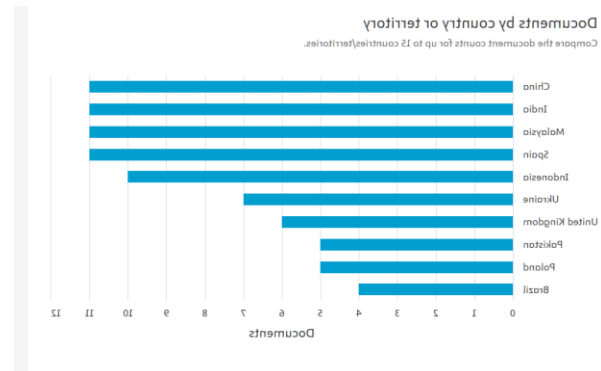
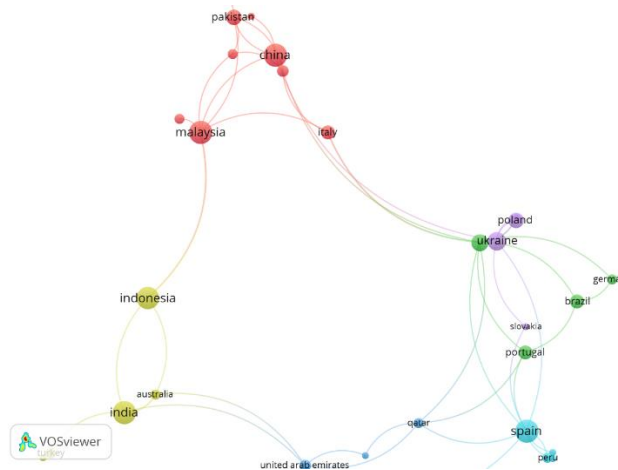


Figure 5: Regional Analysis; Scopus**Figure 6:** Regional Analysis; VOSviewer
Cluster Analysis

Keywords examined using VOSviewer and mentioned most often in articles addressing business, society, corporate social responsibility, and sustainable development concepts form four major clusters. These groups help to determine overall ideas, related research, and trajectories for future study. Based on the map produced, articles included in this review span topics in stakeholder engagement, corporate sustainability, environmental disclosure, sustainability reporting, accountability, bibliometric databases, and applied sustainability research.

Cluster 1 Themes (Red): Stakeholder and Corporate Sustainability

The red cluster centers around stakeholder relationship, corporate sustainability, organisational decision making and strategic integration. Key words: stakeholder, corporate sustainability, relationship, gap, company, organization, industry, decision making, integration, SDG, circular economy.

Stakeholder: This theme indicates that businesses are expected to act on behalf of communities, customers, employees, investors, regulators, and society as a whole. Meseguer-Sánchez et al. (2021) states

corporate social responsibility and sustainability were closely related because firms are expected to link responsibility with social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Corporate Sustainability: The existence of corporate sustainability indicate that firms are being researched in connection to sustainability pillars, value creation in the long-run, sustainable business strategy and responsible organisational behaviour. Nosratabadi et al. (2019) found that sustainable business models allow firms to generate economic, social and environmental value at the same time.

Strategic Integration: Terms like decision making, integration and gap indicate that researchers are looking at how sustainability factors into managerial decision-making/business strategy. This means sustainability is starting to be viewed as a pragmatic business issue as opposed to strictly an ethical one.

Cluster 2 Themes (Green): Environmental Disclosure and Cleaner Production

The green cluster on the right concerns itself with environmental disclosure, cleaner production, mapping, and systematic review. Keywords consist of cleaner production, disclosure, environment, environmental impact, systematic review, map, keyword, science, web, United Kingdom, United States, Italy and Germany.

Environmental Disclosure: This theme captured how reporting environmental and social data to stakeholders is becoming essential. Hyk et al. (2023) demonstrated that sustainability reporting had grown into a significant field of study and that future trends and directions could be discovered through network-based analysis.

Cleaner Production: The term *cleaner production* shows that scholars are concerned with how firms reduce waste, improve resource efficiency, and minimise

environmental harm. This theme links business activity with environmental protection.

Systematic Review and Mapping: The presence of *systematic review*, *map*, *keyword*, and *science* shows that many studies use bibliometric and review-based methods to understand the structure and development of sustainability-related research.

Cluster 3 Themes (Blue): Accountability and Sustainability Reporting

Words that fell into the third cluster, highlighted in blue, are primarily associated with accountability, sustainability reporting, governance, economic growth, and future direction of research. Representative words include accountability, sustainability reporting, government, economic growth, role, importance, factor, CSR activity, future research direction.

Accountability: This theme shows that businesses are expected to justify their social, environmental, and governance practices. Accountability is central because firms are increasingly judged by their contribution to sustainable development.

Sustainability Reporting: Reporting on sustainability seems to be prevalent in this cluster. Sundarassen et al. (2025) discovered that sustainability reporting acts as a governance mechanism of Sustainable Development Goals and linked corporate accountability and broader development agendas.

Government and Economic Growth: The terms *government* and *economic growth* suggest that business sustainability is linked with public policy, national development, and institutional governance.

Cluster 4 Themes (Yellow): Database, Data, and Applied Sustainability Research

Topics associated with cluster 4 (colored in yellow) mostly concern bibliometric methods and applied sustainability research. Keywords: database, data, citation, content

analysis, finance, education, university, sample, accounting, practitioner.

Database and Data: This theme shows that bibliometric studies rely heavily on structured databases such as Scopus to analyse publication trends, citation patterns, and research clusters.

Citation and Content Analysis: Citation analysis and content analysis show readers conduct quantitative and qualitative research to understand literature. Abad-Segura et al. (2019) conducted bibliometric analysis on international CSR research trends and foresights.

Finance and Education: Words like finance, education and university demonstrate sustainability research is growing towards applied and organizational fields. Taken together, the current cluster analysis indicates that the field is widespread, interdisciplinary, and linked to both scholarly and applied issues. Figure 7 contains the cluster analysis.

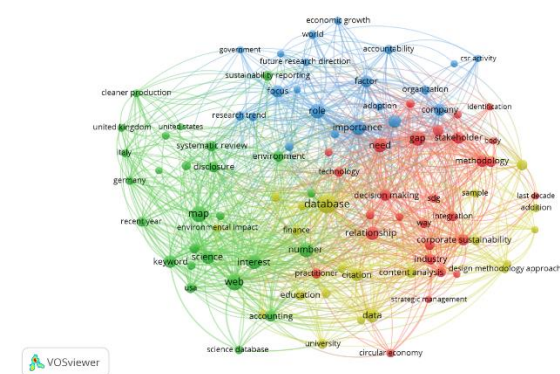


Figure 7: Cluster Analysis; VOSviewer

Discussion

Topics of Business, society, and sustainable development have been well expressed throughout most of the literature reviewed. These themes have shown great significance through topics that were studied such as corporate social responsibility, stakeholder, sustainability reporting, corporate sustainability, and bibliometric. Through this ninety-two review, we can acquire general

knowledge on how business research has expanded from merely focusing on firm-level performance to a broader focus on society, planet and transparency (governance). Findings concluded that business organizations are now being looked at more in-depth as social institutions that can affect communities, markets, natural resources, job creations, and development. This will lead to further conversation on the implications of our findings and how future research can help improve the relationship between business, society, and sustainable development.

Bridging the Gap: From Corporate Responsibility to Sustainable Development

Corporate social responsibility is revealed as being one of the most central topics within reviewed literature. Literature represented CSR as one way for firms to account for social expectations placed on them, environmental pressures, ethical behaviour and stakeholder expectations. It also noted that CSR activities alone are meaningless unless aligned with Sustainable Development impacts. There are many companies still utilising CSR as merely a reporting tool/reputation booster whilst their true impact on society/environment continues as before. As such, the dilemma lies within closing the gap between responsibility and Sustainable Development related outcomes.

The bibliometric results show how themes have shifted from reactionary ones to more strategic ones, including corporate sustainability, sustainability reporting, ESG, circular economy and stakeholder accountability. This reflects how sustainability has begun to be recognised not just as voluntary corporate practices, but as a development imperative. Themes like stakeholder, accountability, disclosure, corporate sustainability, and environmental impact demonstrates how scholars are trying to understand ways companies can make authentic contributions to social and

environmental wellbeing. However, there is still a need for more empirical evidence demonstrating whether sustainability in business practices lead to actual improvements in communities, labour practices, environmental conservation, and shared economy.

Navigating Accountability: Transparency and Trust in Business Sustainability

Research exploring sustainability as a component of business and society has focused considerable attention on accountability and transparency. Reviewing the literature reveals that sustainability reporting and disclosure are common themes among the selected articles. Disclosure and reporting allow firms to report environmental, social, and governance activities to stakeholders. However, to gain confidence rather than skepticism reporting must have quality, accuracy, and credibility. Without these qualities reporting can be symbolic or created to mislead stakeholders creating suspicion rather than confidence if it becomes too selective or decoupled from practice.

This issue is closely related to greenwashing. Sustainability in business research addresses this ongoing concern. Companies can proclaim themselves sustainable and responsible yet only make nominal efforts to change practises. This leads to a disconnect between what a company publicly states and how the organisation acts. Transparency is more than just publishing a sustainability report. It should involve measurable indicators, third party verification, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with sustainable development goals. Business will have to prove that they are not just talking about sustainability reporting but that they are doing it in a way that minimizes harm and creates social value.

Future Horizons: Towards Collaborative Business-Society Sustainability

Business, Society and Sustainable Development research need to collaborate between business and industry, government and regulators, academic institutions, Civil society, and the communities we live in. From the literature reviewed, firms are unable to implement sustainable development on their own. Government offers up policy and guidelines, businesses act on creating sustainable development, communities are affected by the change, and researchers can use empirical evidence to gauge how far we have come. For future research to occur, these relationships should be further researched in a holistic manner.

Findings also suggest the need for greater attention on developing economies, SMEs and vulnerable social groups. Large firms and developed-country contexts still dominate much of sustainability research. Yet challenges to sustainable development are often greater in emerging economies. Weak institutions, resource constraints, informality and inequality may impact business practices. We thus encourage future research to consider local contexts and sectoral nuances as well as firm-level constraints to adopting sustainable practices.

Policy Implications

The outcomes of this review help shape policy decisions. Government bodies and regulators should aim to increase policy efficiency for corporate sustainability reporting, CSR monitoring, ESG disclosure and stakeholder protection. Policies should not only incentivise firms to disclose sustainability information but mandate quality assured, comparable and verifiable disclosures. This is crucial as ambiguous policies allow firms to publish broad sustainability claims while failing to reflect true advancements.

Policy makers should facilitate companies' alignment with sustainable development. This could encompass targeted guidelines and principles for corporate sustainability

within sectors, incentives for green innovation, responsible supply chain financing, and stricter enforcement against greenwashing. This enabling policy environment will matter most in developing economies where firms often operate with less capital, information, and institutional support to understand and implement sustainable business practices. Public policy can help establish a landscape in which responsible business conduct is actionable, measurable, and mutually profitable for firms and society.

Practical Implications

The implications for managers, business leaders, sustainability officers, and consultants from this review include that businesses should re-think how they approach CSR. Move away from symbolic CSR and fully embed sustainability in business strategy, operations, reporting, and decision-making. Make sustainability everyone's responsibility. Don't have a sustainability department or an annual sustainability report. Build sustainability into products and services, supply chain, employees, community relations, finance, and governance.

Management should also practice stakeholder engagement. Businesses should determine what stakeholders including employees, customers, local communities, regulators, investors and suppliers expect from them. Better stakeholder engagement can lead to clearer identification of social and environmental risks, as well as designing more responsible business practices to address them. Businesses can improve the quality of their sustainability reports by implementing clear sustainability indicators, targets that can be measured and transparent language. Improving sustainability reporting can increase credibility and avoid greenwashing. Training employees, commitment from leadership, properly resourcing initiatives and internal

accountability are some of the things needed for implementation.

Theoretical Implications

The review findings also contribute to the theoretical foundations of business and management research. Business performance has been historically defined by many researchers through financial impacts, competition advantage, and shareholder value. As demonstrated by this review, business research tends to align with broadened theoretical frameworks that consider social responsibility, stakeholder value, institutional accountability, environmental impact and sustainable development.

This evolution will also demand more robust theories that explain how business activity affects society. Stakeholder, institutional, legitimacy, and corporate sustainability perspectives will likely continue to provide insight into corporate sustainability; however, future research should integrate these theories to better explain corporate responses to sustainability challenges. For instance, stakeholder theory may be used to understand why firms react to social pressures, institutional theory could explain government regulations and industry norms affecting sustainability actions, legitimacy theory could be deployed to understand corporate use of sustainability reporting to demonstrate responsible corporate citizenship, and corporate sustainability models could be used to determine whether corporate actions truly support sustainable development. Scholars need theories and models that explicate the relationship between business practices (including strategy, responsibility, governance) and sustainable development.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, it considers only Scopus-indexed studies. Second, although Scopus has good coverage

for academic literature, some potentially relevant studies indexed on other databases like Web of Science or Google Scholar might have been missed. Third, we limited our search to English-language journal publications from 2015 to 2025. This means we potentially excluded relevant non-English language studies and studies published outside of this date range. Finally, searching on bibliometric-adjacent keywords means that our dataset reflects the studies that use bibliometric or review-based methods to examine the literature, not all research on business, society, and sustainable development published in that timeframe.

Keeping these limitations in mind, future research should incorporate additional database coverage (Web of Science or other academic sources). Future studies could contrast bibliometric results from different databases to compare variations in publication trends, country contributions, and citation network structures. Furthermore, additional empirical studies are required to measure the actual impacts of corporate sustainability efforts on society and the environment. Finally, future research should place more emphasis on developing countries, SMEs, informal enterprises, gender issues, social sustainability, responsible supply chains, sustainability in the digital space, and critical perspectives on greenwashing, weak reporting, and the gap between corporate sustainability and impacts.

Conclusion

The present bibliometric systematic literature review indicates that business, society, and sustainable development have indeed become increasingly interrelated topics. Based on the ninety-two studies included from 2015 to 2025, topics such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability reporting, corporate sustainability, ESG, stakeholder engagement, and accountability were some of the most prevalent topics found in the reviewed literature. The reviewed literature

suggests that the research focused on business is no longer hyper-focused on profit margins but now includes social, environmental, and governance factors as well.

Nevertheless, the review indicates that critical issues persist. Companies need to overcome greenwashing and tokenism to show how business operations are contributing to sustainability. Challenges including greenwashing, stakeholder tokenism, weak accountability, and disconnects between reporting and impact still need further academic and policy attention. The results highlight the need for stronger policy and reporting frameworks, improved stakeholder engagement, and continued evidence-based research to inform future advances.

To summarize, business organisations can have a significant positive impact towards sustainable development if their involvement is visible, quantifiable, and conscious of social responsibility. Future research in this area should focus on producing works that help businesses, governments, and society visualize how corporate initiatives can generate authentic and long-term value to people and the planet, rather than simply mapping out trends in publications.

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