

Transforming Producer Companies into Sustainable Social Enterprise: A Management Innovation Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: The transformation of Producer Companies (PCs) into sustainable social enterprises represents a critical pathway for achieving inclusive and equitable rural development. While this intersection of cooperative structure, social mission, and market-based solutions has gained scholarly attention, the research domain is fragmented. A systematic, quantitative synthesis is necessary to map the intellectual structure and evolution of this field.

Methods: This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of literature published between 2015 and 2025. Data from 58 documents retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection were analyzed using bibliometric tools. The analysis encompassed performance analysis to assess productivity and impact, and science mapping (including co-occurrence network and thematic map analyses) to elucidate the conceptual and intellectual structure of the field.

Results: The analysis reveals a fluctuating but overall growing publication trend, with a significant peak in 2024. Key findings identify the most influential sources (e.g., Journal of Business Ethics), prolific authors (e.g., Lyulyov O), and leading countries (China and the United Kingdom) in this domain. The conceptual structure is dominated by core themes such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability, innovation, and firm performance, often studied in the context of SMEs. Thematic evolution indicates that while themes like management and impact are well-developed, sustainability and innovation remain foundational and dynamically evolving.

Conclusion: This study provides a data-driven overview of the scholarly landscape, clarifying the interconnections between management innovation, social responsibility, and sustainability in the transformation of Producer Companies. The findings offer a valuable foundation for scholars by identifying key research fronts and collaboration opportunities, and for practitioners by highlighting the integrated strategic levers essential for a successful transition to a sustainable social enterprise model.

Keywords: Producer Companies; Social Enterprise; Bibliometric Analysis; Sustainability; Management Innovation; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Web of Science.

INTRODUCTION

The global economic landscape is undergoing a significant paradigm shift, moving beyond the traditional profit-centric model towards a more inclusive framework that integrates social equity and environmental stewardship. This transition is encapsulated in the concept of sustainable development and the rise of hybrid organizations like social enterprises, which explicitly aim to solve social problems through market-driven approaches (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). Within this evolving context, Producer Companies (PCs)—member-owned entities designed to empower primary producers—present a unique and potent model for achieving sustainable rural development. Their inherent structure, which prioritizes member welfare and community development, positions them as potential vehicles for a bottom-up transformation into sustainable social

enterprises. However, this transformation is not automatic; it requires significant management innovation to navigate the complexities of balancing commercial viability with a social and environmental mission.

While a growing body of literature has begun to explore the intersection of producer companies, social enterprise, and sustainability, the research domain remains fragmented. Studies are published across disparate fields including agricultural economics, management studies, and sustainability science, leading to a lack of a cohesive understanding of the fields intellectual structure. A systematic, quantitative synthesis is necessary to map the scholarly landscape, identify the core themes, and trace the evolution of this critical discourse. This study addresses this gap by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the literature from 2015 to 2025. By leveraging the robust citation data from the Web of Science database, this research aims to provide a data-driven overview, illuminating the key contributors, influential publications, collaborative networks, and the dynamic conceptual structure that defines the research on transforming Producer Companies into sustainable social enterprises.

Background of the Study

This study originates at the intersection of three pivotal academic and practical advancements: the worldwide momentum toward sustainability, the maturation of social enterprise frameworks, and the innovative emergence of Producer Companies. The United Nations' formal endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 issued a global imperative, compelling businesses across sectors to integrate their operations with overarching societal and environmental objectives. Concurrently, the concept of the social enterprise matured from a niche idea to a mainstream organizational form, recognized for its ability to create blended value (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

In parallel, particularly in emerging economies like India, the Producer Company model was legally institutionalized to enable smallholders and artisans to pool their resources for enhanced market access and bargaining power. Early research on PCs, such as that by Trebbin (2014), rightly focused on their immediate socio-economic impacts, including rural development and agricultural efficiency. However, their potential to operate as fully-fledged social enterprises—entities that could systematically address issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change within their operations—was an underexplored frontier.

Research Questions

1. To systematically map the research landscape on transforming Producer Companies into sustainable social enterprises from a management innovation perspective.
2. What are the performance characteristics (e.g., annual growth, key sources, influential authors, leading countries, and citation impact) of the literature on Producer Companies as sustainable social enterprises?
3. What is the conceptual and intellectual structure of this field, as revealed through keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping, and co-authorship networks?

How have the research themes and focus evolved over time, and what are the emerging and declining areas of interest within this domain? The post-2015 period saw these threads begin to intertwine. Scholars started investigating the mechanisms and challenges of this transformation, highlighting the critical role of management innovation in developing new governance, strategic, and operational processes suitable for a hybrid organization (Lyulyov et al., 2021). Core management concepts like corporate social responsibility (CSR) were reframed not as external obligations but as integral components of strategy, directly linked to organizational performance and sustainability (Xie et al., 2019). Furthermore, enablers such as social capital and green innovation have been identified as critical mediators in achieving sustainable outcomes (Kumar et al., 2022). Despite this progress, the literature is characterized by disparate studies, necessitating a holistic review to consolidate knowledge and chart a course for future research. A bibliometric analysis is uniquely suited for this task, offering an objective, quantitative method to map this complex and emerging field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The transformation of traditional business structures into entities that prioritize social and environmental value alongside economic viability represents a significant evolution in modern organizational theory. The concept of the social enterprise, while gaining contemporary prominence, has historical roots in critiques of pure capitalism and the search for alternative, more equitable economic models (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017).

Initially, scholarly discourse often positioned social enterprises as distinct from conventional for-profit firms, focusing on non-profits adopting market-based strategies. However, the early 2010s saw a growing recognition that hybrid models could emerge from within the commercial sector itself, seeking to reconcile profit motives with social purpose.

Concurrently, the Producer Company (PC) model emerged, particularly in contexts like India, as a vehicle for empowering primary producers through collective action and market access. Early research on PCs primarily focused on their role in rural development, agricultural efficiency, and improving farmer incomes (Trebbin, 2014). The potential of PCs to inherently function as social enterprises, given their member-owned and community-oriented structure, was a latent theme but not the central focus. During this period, the field of social enterprise and cooperative studies evolved in parallel, with limited explicit connection.

The period from 2015 onwards marked a significant convergence of these research streams, driven by escalating global sustainability challenges and the formal adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Scholars began to explicitly investigate how established cooperative structures, including PCs, could be intentionally transformed into sustainable social enterprises. Research started to highlight the unique challenges in this transition, such as governance complexities, the need for professional management, and balancing member interests with broader social missions. As Lyulyov et al. (2021) explored in the context of SMEs, management innovation—including novel strategic, operational, and governance practices—became critical for navigating these hybrid objectives. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has transitioned from a marginal pursuit to a central strategic pillar, seamlessly embedded in the business models of these evolving entities and demonstrably boosting organizational performance through accountable practices.

In recent years, the discourse has become increasingly sophisticated, focusing on the mechanisms that enable this transformation. Innovation, particularly green innovation and sustainable business model innovation, is now recognized as a central driver (Xie et al., 2019). The literature emphasizes that for Producer Companies, sustainability is not merely an add-on but a foundational principle that requires embedding into supply chains, product development, and member engagement. Furthermore, the building of social capital and the adoption of robust performance management systems are identified as critical factors that mediate the relationship between management innovation and sustainable outcomes (Kumar et al., 2022). This body of work suggests that the successful transformation of a Producer Company into a sustainable social enterprise hinges on a synergistic integration of ethical management (CSR), strategic innovation, and a deep commitment to measurable social and environmental impact.

Despite this growing body of literature, the field remains fragmented, with studies published across diverse journals in management, sustainability, and development studies. A comprehensive, systematic synthesis of the intellectual structure and evolutionary trajectory of this specific research domain is lacking. This bibliometric analysis aims to fill this gap by mapping the scholarly landscape, identifying key contributors, influential publications, and the dynamic interconnections between core themes such as sustainability, management innovation, and CSR within the context of Producer Companies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes quantitative bibliometric analysis to delineate the intellectual landscape and emergent trends in research on re-engineering producer companies as sustainable social enterprises, viewed through the lens of management innovation. Bibliometric analysis is a robust methodological approach that utilizes statistical and

computational techniques to quantitatively analyze large volumes of scholarly data, allowing for the objective identification of patterns, relationships, and the scientific development of a field (Donthu et al., 2021). The data for this analysis was sourced exclusively from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database, a premier and widely recognized repository of high-quality, peer-reviewed literature known for its comprehensive coverage in the social sciences and management disciplines (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

Data Collection and Source Selection

The data for this analysis was retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database. Web of Science was selected as the primary data source due to its high-quality, curated index of multidisciplinary research, which is widely regarded as a gold standard for bibliometric studies (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). This approach guarantees that only documents from credible, peer-reviewed journals are included, thereby bolstering the reliability and validity of the findings. A comprehensive search strategy was designed and executed to capture the relevant literature. The search query was built using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to encompass the core concepts of the study = (producer company OR producer enterprise) AND (social enterprise OR social business) AND (sustainable OR sustainability) AND (management innovation OR organizational innovation). The search was confined to the time span of 2015 to 2025 to capture the most recent decade of scholarly activity in this evolving field.

The retrieved dataset, comprising 58 documents, was subsequently processed and analyzed using specialized bibliometric software tools, which are standard in the field for handling such data (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis was conducted on several dimensions to provide a holistic overview. Performance analysis was undertaken to quantify the productivity and impact of key constituents within the literature. Analyses encompassed annual scientific output to detect growth patterns, average citations per year to assess publications' temporal influence, and rankings of top sources, authors, affiliations, and countries by publication and citation volume. Furthermore, a science mapping analysis was performed to elucidate the intellectual connections and conceptual structure of the research field. Techniques such as keyword co-occurrence analysis were used to visualize the network of relationships between frequently used terms, revealing central themes like corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and innovation. Thematic evolution was charted to distinguish between well-developed, foundational, and emerging or declining research themes, providing insight into the dynamics of the field. Through this rigorous methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive, data-driven overview of the scholarly landscape, highlighting the key contributors, collaborative networks, and conceptual trajectories that define the discourse on producer companies as sustainable social enterprises.

Bibliometric analysis

Main Information



Figure 1: main information

This image presents a bibliometric summary for a research domain from 2015 to 2025. It lists 27 sources and 58 documents contributed by 176 authors, with 36.21% involving international co-authorship. On average, there are 3.21 co-authors per document, but only 6 documents were single-authored. The set includes 212 distinct author keywords, and the average document age is 4.41 years. Each document receives about 57.09 citations, but the annual growth rate is 0%, indicating publication activity has not increased during the period. Notably, no references are listed in this summary.

Annual Scientific Production

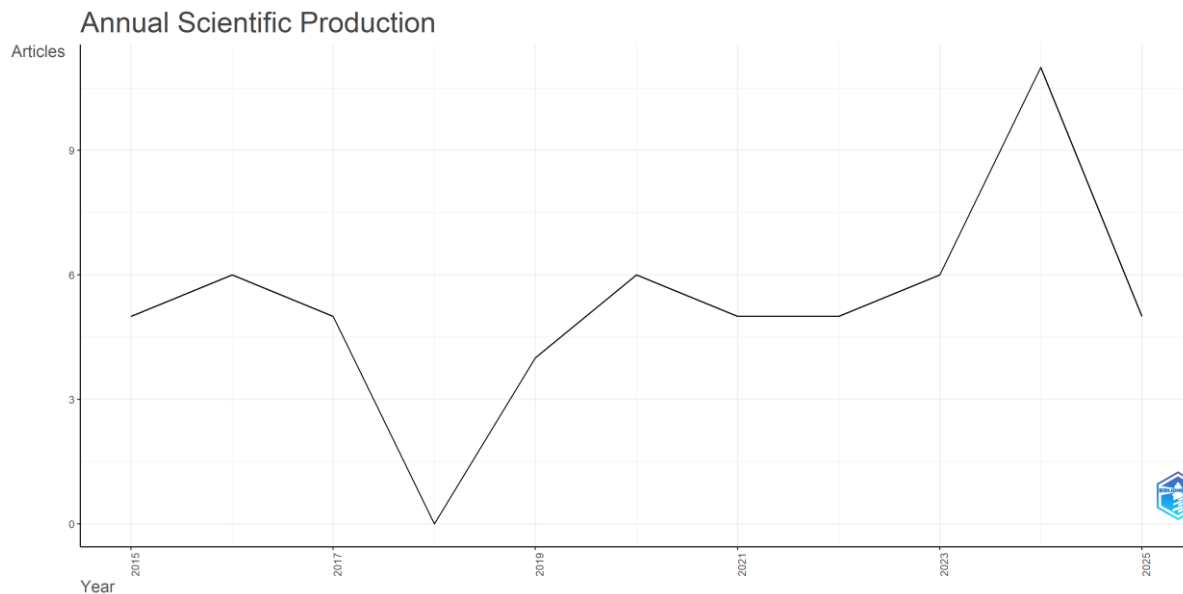


figure2: Annual scientific production

The chart shows yearly scientific article production from 2015 to 2025. Output fluctuates, starting at moderate levels, dipping sharply in 2018, and then rising again. A steady increase occurs after 2019, peaking significantly in 2024, which marks the most productive year. In 2025, production declines but stays above earlier lows. Overall, the trend reflects irregular growth with a major spike before a slight recent drop

Average citation per year

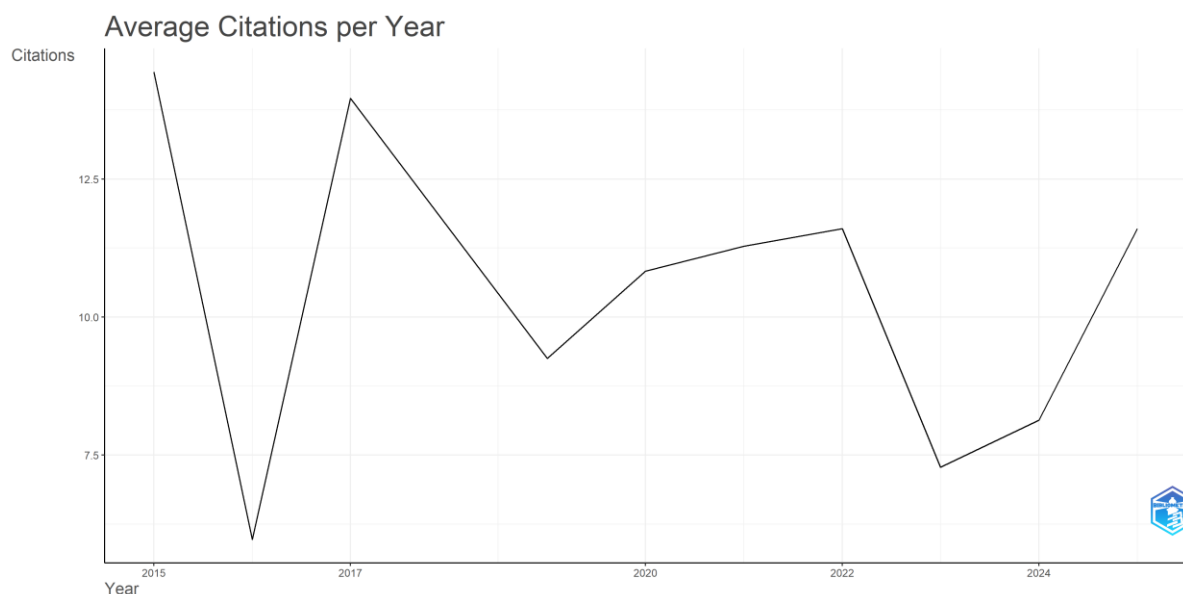


figure3: average citation per year

The graph presents the average citations per year from 2015 to 2025. Citations peak strongly in 2015, fall sharply in 2016, and rise again to a high point in 2017. After a gradual decline until 2019, citations steadily improve through 2022. A noticeable drop appears in 2023, followed by moderate recovery in 2024 and a sharper rise in 2025. Overall, the trend shows fluctuating citation impact with periods of recovery and renewed growth.

Most relevant sources

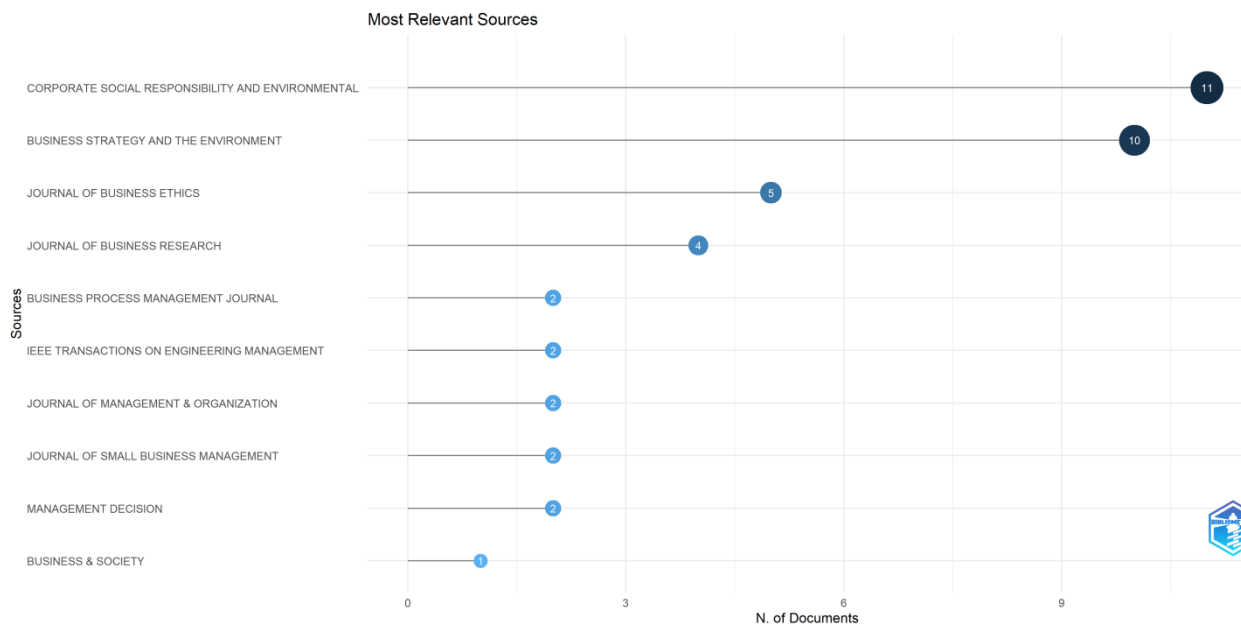


figure4: Most relevant sources

This image appears to be a list of the most relevant academic journals in business and management. The titles, such as Journal of Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental, suggest a focus on sustainable and ethical business practices. The numbered list from 0 to 10 at the bottom likely corresponds to these sources, indicating they are ranked or coded for reference in a research context, such as a literature review or citation analysis.

Most relevant authors

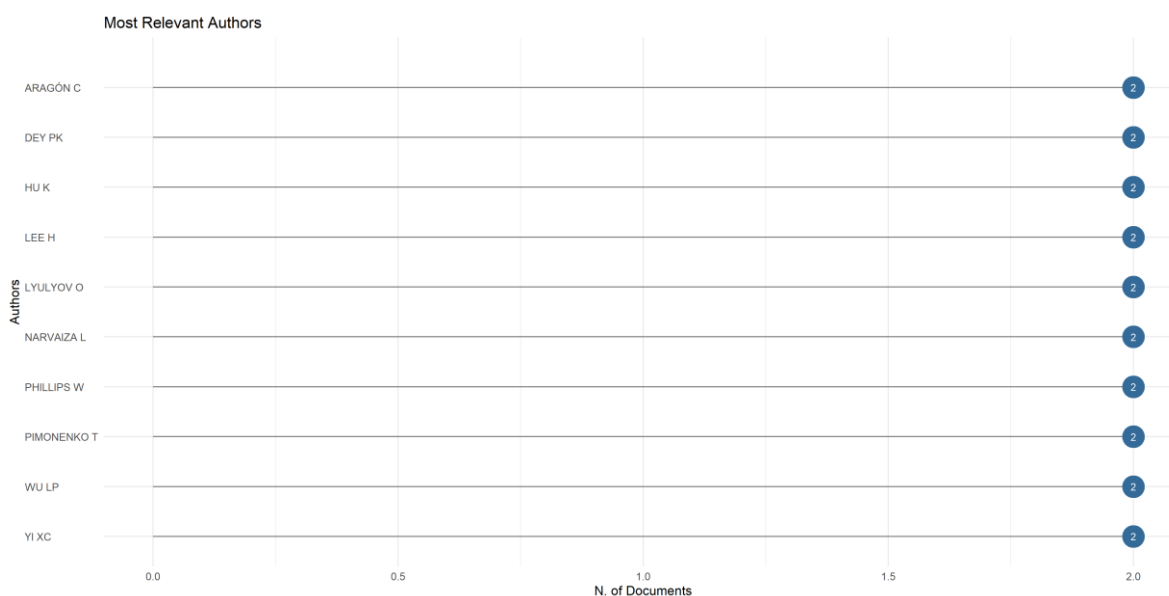


figure5: most relevant authors

This image lists the most relevant authors in a specific research field, likely based on a literature review. The horizontal bar chart next to their names visualizes their productivity, showing the N. of Documents (number of documents) each has published on the topic. Authors like LYULYOV O and PMONENKO T appear to be the most prolific, with their bars extending furthest towards the 2.0 mark, indicating they have written the most papers.

Most Relevant Affiliation

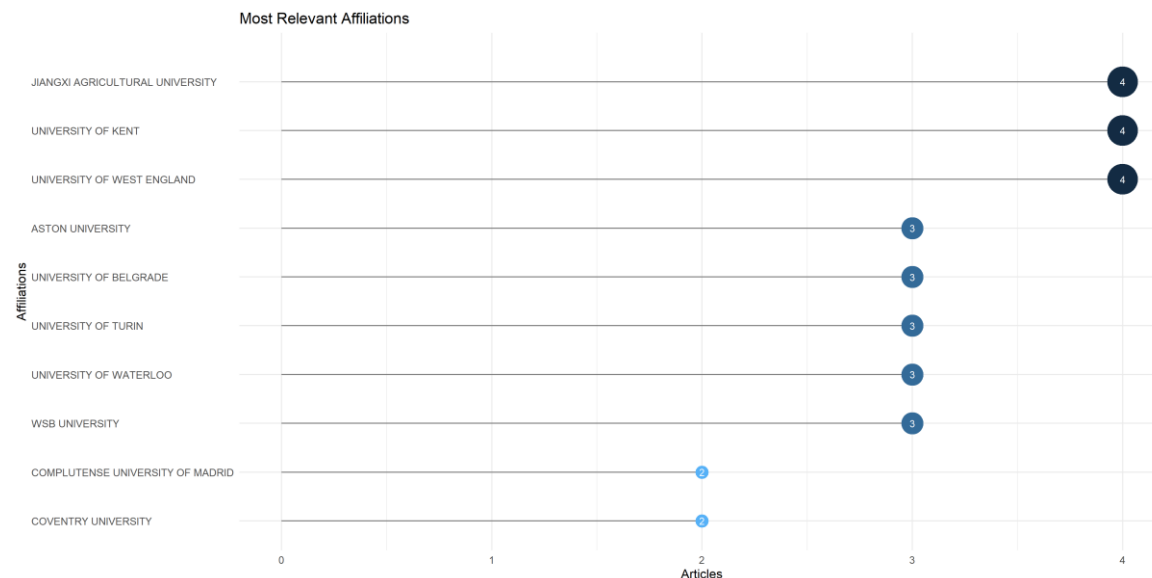


figure6: Most relevant affiliation

This image presents a bar chart titled Most Relevant Affiliations, listing universities identified as the most significant contributors to a specific research area. The horizontal bars visually represent the number of articles each institution has published on the topic. Jiangxi Agricultural University appears to be the most prolific, with its bar extending furthest to the right, corresponding to the highest number of articles (around 4). This data is typically extracted from a bibliometric analysis, highlighting the key academic institutions actively publishing research in this field.

Most relevant countries

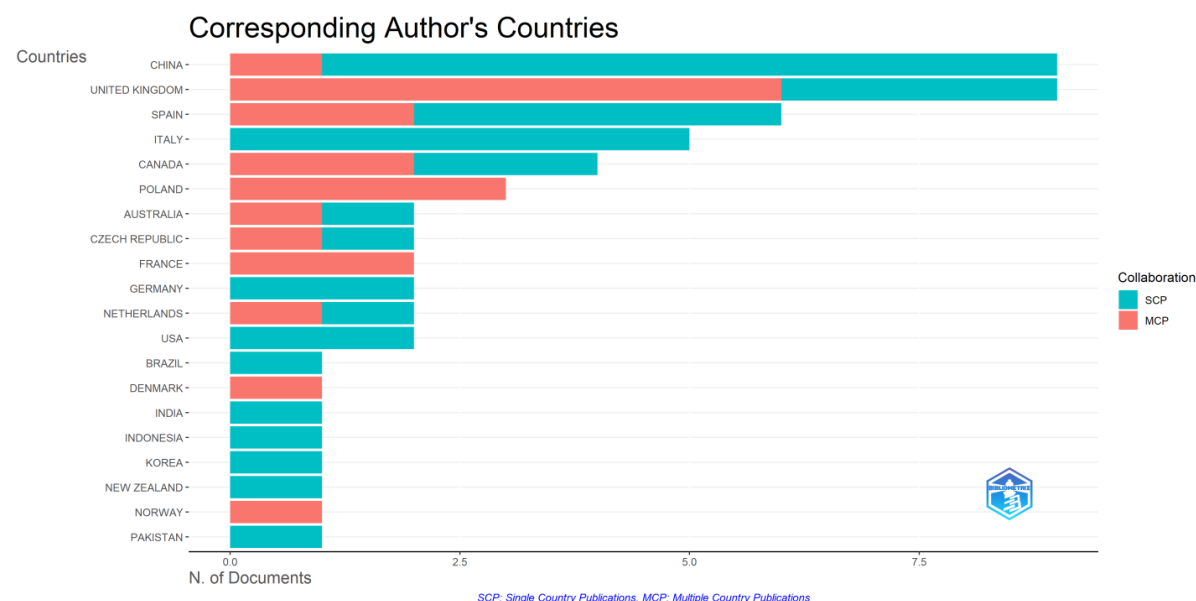


figure7: Most relevant countries

This image shows the global distribution of research for a specific topic, based on the countries of corresponding authors. China and the United Kingdom are listed first, suggesting they are major contributors. The chart distinguishes between Single Country Publications (SCP), featuring authors exclusively from a single country, and Multiple Country Publications (MCP), which reflect international collaboration among authors.

This data, derived from a bibliometric analysis, highlights which nations are leading the research and how much they collaborate internationally.

Most cited counties

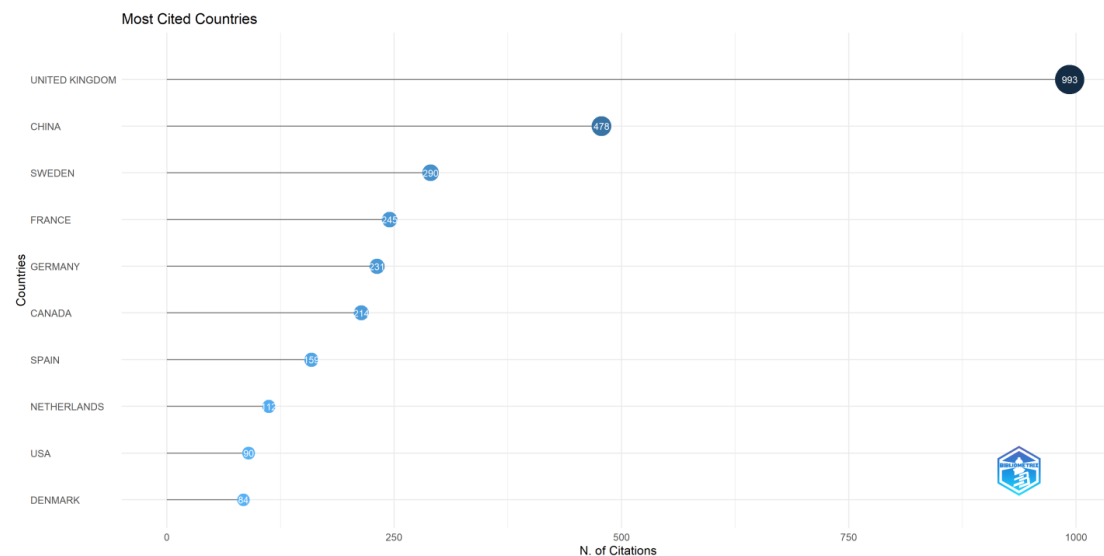


figure8: Most cited counties

This image presents a list of the Most Cited Countries in a specific research field, indicating which nations publications have the greatest global academic influence. The United Kingdom and China top the list. The charts design suggests it may visualize citation metrics, such as average citations per document. The abbreviations and at the bottom likely represent specific citation indices or statistical values, showing the impact and reach of the research produced by scholars from these leading countries.

Most relevant words

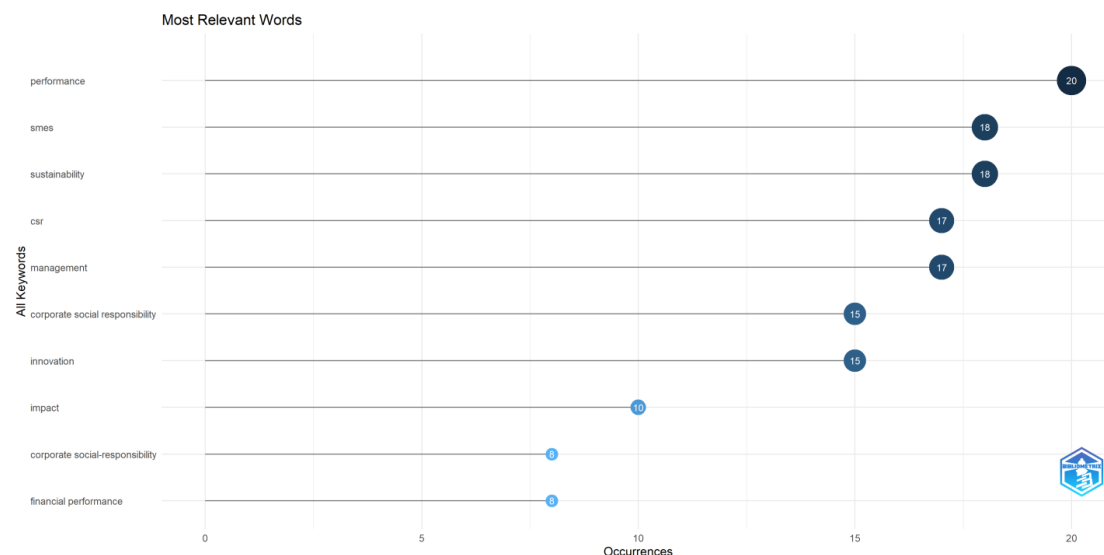


figure9: Most relevant words

Most frequent words



This tree map straight-up shows which topics dominate the research space. Performance, CSR, SMEs, Sustainability, Management, and Innovation take up the biggest chunks, meaning they appear the most and drive the conversation. Smaller blocks like firm performance, strategy, social capital, and green innovation still matter but don't carry the same weight. Overall, its the same old pattern: research keeps circling around how responsibility, sustainability, and innovation shape organizational performance, especially in SMEs.

Co-occurrence network

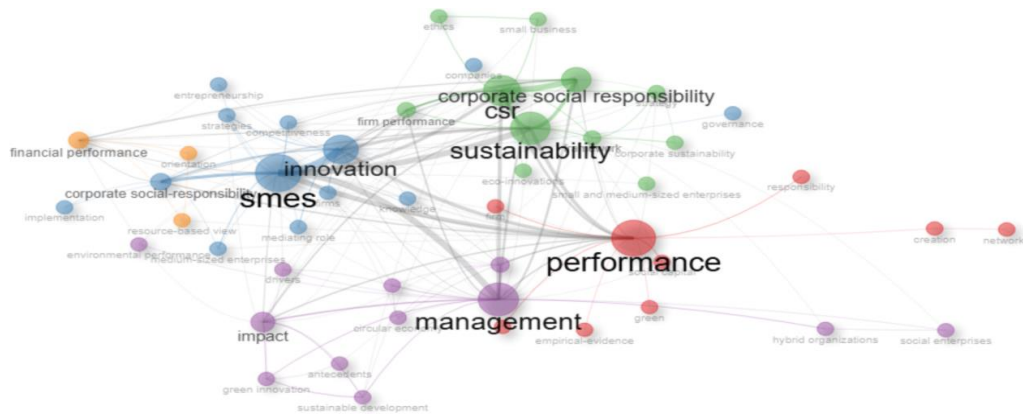


figure13: Co-occurrence network

This map basically shows which research keywords hang out together the most. Bigger nodes mean those terms show up a lot, and thicker links mean theyre super tight in the literature. You can see sustainability, performance, CSR, innovation, and SMEs forming the core crew, while smaller themes orbit around them. Its kinda the classic story: management, impact, and responsibility all loop back to how firms actually perform. Looks chaotic, but there is a solid pattern underneath it.

Thematic Map

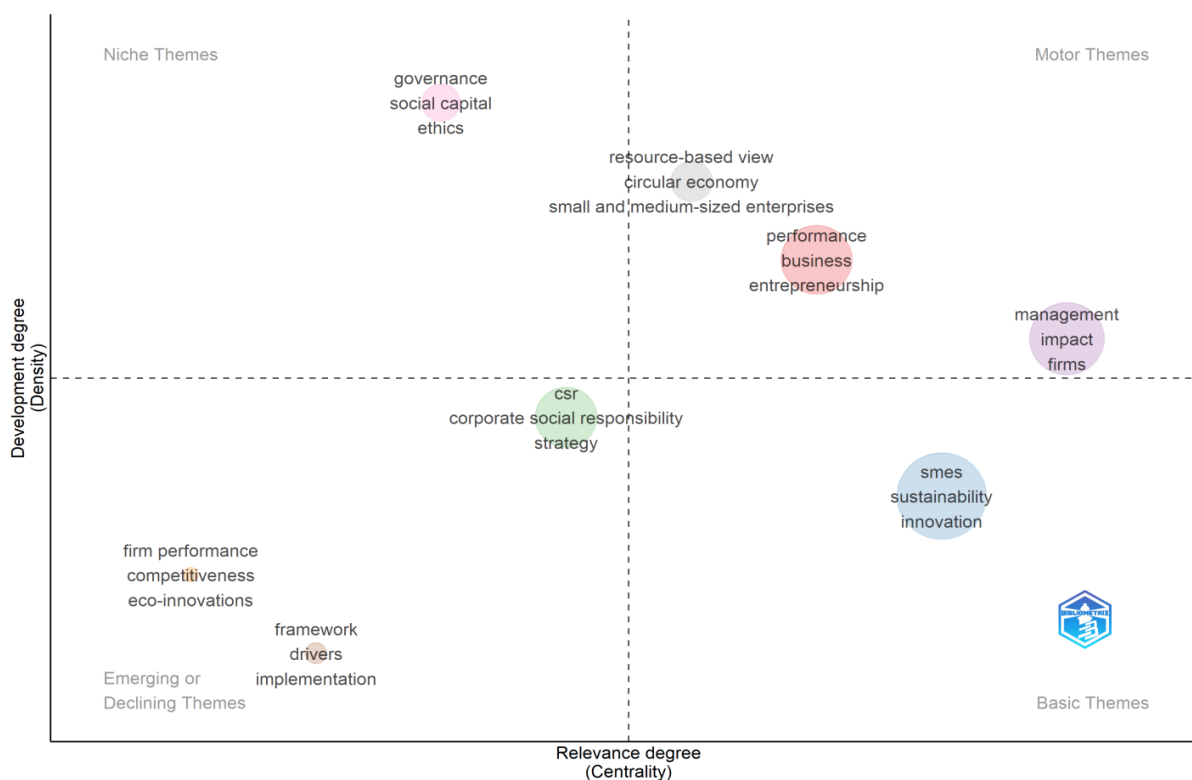


figure14: Thematic map

This thematic map basically shows which topics are popping off and which ones are kinda fading. Management, impact, and firms land in the motor themes zone — super relevant and well-developed. SMEs, sustainability, and innovation sit as basic themes, meaning they're important but still growing. CSR and strategy are chill in the middle, steady but not too deep. Stuff like eco-innovation and competitiveness look like they're slipping into the emerging/declining corner.

Country Scientific Production

Country Scientific Production

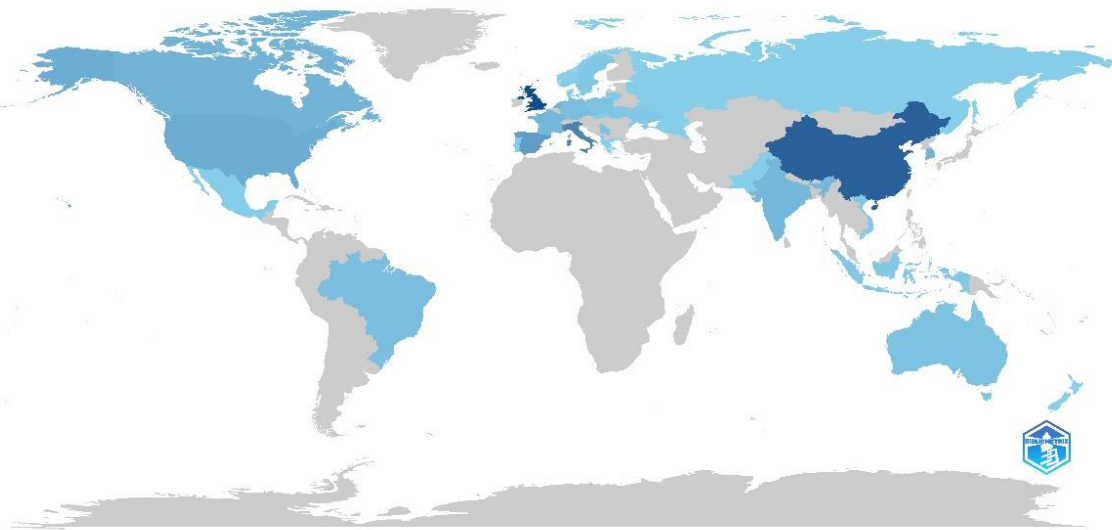


figure15: Country scientific production

This map basically shows whose putting out the most research. Darker shades = higher scientific output, and unsurprisingly, China, the UK, and a few European countries are carrying the load. The US and parts of Asia also show solid contribution. Lighter-blue regions are active but not major players. Large chunks of Africa, the Middle East, and some parts of South America are barely involved. It's the usual global pattern — research power is concentrated in a few heavy-hitting countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: MAPPING THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE AND TRENDS

The bibliometric analysis of 58 documents from the Web of Science database reveals a detailed picture of the intellectual landscape concerning the transformation of Producer Companies (PCs) into sustainable social enterprises. The findings are structured around performance analysis, which outlines the field's key actors and impact, and science mapping, which elucidates its conceptual structure and thematic evolution.

Performance and Productivity Trends- The scientific production in this domain from 2015 to 2025 demonstrates a pattern of irregular growth. Following a dip in 2018, publication output saw a steady increase, culminating in a significant peak in 2024, which suggests a rising scholarly interest in this hybrid organizational model, potentially spurred by global sustainability imperatives like the UN SDGs. Despite this growth, the annual growth rate remains at 0%, indicating that while interest is solid, the field has not yet experienced exponential expansion (Donthu et al., 2021). The impact of the literature, as measured by average citations per year, has been fluctuating, with notable peaks in 2015, 2017, and a sharp rise in 2025, pointing to periods where foundational or highly influential works were published and subsequently recognized. The analysis identifies the core sources disseminating this research. Journals like the *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* stand out as highly pertinent, highlighting the field's firm grounding in business ethics and sustainable management scholarship. In terms of

contributors, authors like Lyulyov O and Pimonenko T emerge as the most prolific. Geographically, the research is led by China and the United Kingdom, both in terms of production volume and citation impact, highlighting their central role in shaping the academic conversation. Institutional leadership is held by Jiangxi Agricultural University, reflecting the strong link between this research area and agricultural and development economics.

Conceptual Structure and Thematic Evolution- The conceptual structure of the field, revealed through keyword co-occurrence and thematic mapping, is dominated by a tightly knit cluster of core concepts. The most relevant words and the co-occurrence network consistently highlight performance, sustainability, management, innovation, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the central pillars of the discourse (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This network suggests that the literature predominantly investigates how CSR and management innovation act as drivers for enhancing the sustainability and overall performance of organizations, with a specific focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as an analogous structure to PCs.

The thematic map provides a dynamic view of the fields evolution, distinguishing between different types of themes. Motor themes—highly developed and important for the structuring of the research field—include management, impact, and firms. These are well-researched areas that form the core of the discipline. In contrast, basic themes such as sustainability, innovation, and SMEs are of central importance but are less developed, indicating they are transversal concepts that require further specialized research (Kumar et al., 2022). The positioning of CSR and strategy as either basic or niche themes suggests they are recognized as important but may not yet be fully integrated into the core theoretical models specific to Producer Companies. The emergence or decline of themes like eco-innovation and competitiveness in the niche or emerging/declining quadrant points to the evolving focus of the field, potentially shifting towards more specific environmental and strategic dimensions.

Collaboration Patterns and Geographical Reach- The scientific landscape is also characterized by distinct collaboration patterns. While international co-authorship (MCP) accounts for 36.21% of the documents, indicating a healthy level of global academic cooperation, the majority of publications are single-country productions (SCP). The world map of scientific production visually confirms a concentration of research power in a few key nations, notably China, the UK, and parts of Europe and the United States. This geographical concentration suggests that the discourse is currently dominated by specific academic and economic contexts, underscoring a significant opportunity for future research to incorporate perspectives from the Global South, where Producer Companies are often most active and critical for development.

Practical and Theoretical Implications- The findings of this bibliometric analysis offer significant implications for both theory and practice, clarifying the pathways through which Producer Companies (PCs) can evolve into sustainable social enterprises.

Theoretical Implications This study provides a consolidated, data-driven map of the intellectual structure of research at the intersection of Producer Companies, social enterprise, and management innovation. Theoretically, it contributes in several key ways:

Integration of Disparate Theoretical Domains: The co-occurrence network and thematic map visually demonstrate that the transformation of PCs is not governed by a single theory but by the confluence of several established domains. The study validates that Resource-Based View (linking innovation and social capital to performance), Stakeholder Theory (central to CSR and social enterprise models), and Theories of Hybrid Organizing are critically relevant and interconnected in this context (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Lyulyov et al., 2021). This bibliometric synthesis provides a scaffold for developing a more integrated theoretical model specific to producer-owned hybrid organizations.

Refining the Construct of Management Innovation: The identification of management innovation as a central theme, closely linked with sustainability and performance, underscores that innovation in this context extends beyond technology. It emphasizes innovations in governance, member participation models, and value-

chain management that are essential for balancing social and commercial logics. This finding deepens the theoretical understanding of management innovation as a critical capability for navigating hybridity in traditionally non-profit or cooperative structures (Kumar et al., 2022).

Contextualizing CSR and Sustainability: The prominence of CSR, not as a peripheral activity but as a core strategic theme linked directly to performance, challenges the traditional separation of corporate strategy and social responsibility. For PCs, the analysis suggests that CSR is inherently embedded in their member-centric mission, theoretically repositioning it from an external obligation to an internal driver of legitimacy and competitive advantage (Xie et al., 2019).

Practical Implications-For practitioners, policymakers, and PC leaders, the results of this analysis highlight actionable strategic levers:

Strategic Roadmap for PC Leadership: The strong interlinkage between CSR, innovation, and performance provides a clear mandate for PC managers. To achieve a successful transformation, they must proactively integrate sustainability and ethical practices into their core strategy, rather than treating them as standalone projects. Investing in management systems that foster innovation—particularly green innovation and sustainable business model innovation—is shown to be a direct route to improved performance (Xie et al., 2019).

Guidance for Policymakers and Support Institutions: The geographic concentration of research highlights a gap in knowledge and potentially in practice from the Global South. Policymakers in developing countries, where PCs are crucial for rural development, can use these insights to design support programs that foster management innovation, facilitate access to green technologies, and incentivize the measurement of social impact alongside financial returns.

Benchmarking and Collaboration Opportunities: The identification of the most relevant sources, authors, and institutions provides practitioners with a knowledge map to identify leading experts, cutting-edge research, and potential academic or institutional partners for collaboration. This can help PCs bridge the gap between theory and practice by engaging with the forefront of scholarly thought.

Future Research

Deepening Context-Specific Inquiry: The geographical concentration of research output of Country scientific production calls for more empirical studies from the Global South, particularly in India and Africa, where the PC model is actively promoted. Future research should investigate the unique institutional, cultural, and market challenges that PCs face in these contexts during their transformation.

Exploring Underexplored Themes: The thematic map identifies eco-innovation and competitiveness as emerging or niche themes. Future studies should explicitly explore how green innovation and circular economy principles can be operationalized within PCs to enhance both their environmental sustainability and their market competitiveness (Kumar et al., 2022).

Investigating Governance and Member Dynamics: While management is a motor theme, the specific governance innovations required for PCs to maintain their social mission under commercial pressures are underexplored. Research is needed on novel governance models that ensure member democracy, equity, and participation while enabling professional management and strategic agility (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

Methodological Diversification: Future reviews could benefit from incorporating additional databases like Scopus to capture a wider range of publications. Furthermore, as the field matures, supplementing bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review would allow for a deeper, qualitative synthesis of the mechanisms and outcomes identified in the primary studies (Donthu et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study has employed a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to map the scholarly landscape of research on transforming Producer Companies into sustainable social enterprises from a management innovation perspective. The analysis of 58 documents from the Web of Science database reveals a field that, while not yet experiencing explosive growth, has demonstrated significant and rising interest, particularly in recent years.

The performance analysis delineates the key contributors to this discourse, with China and the United Kingdom leading in scientific production and impact, and journals like the *Journal of Business Ethics* serving as the primary dissemination outlets. More importantly, the science mapping reveals a coherent and interconnected conceptual structure. The core of the field revolves around the powerful synergy between corporate social responsibility, management innovation, sustainability, and organizational performance, often examined through the lens of SMEs. Thematic analysis further clarifies that while themes like management and impact are well-developed, foundational concepts like sustainability and innovation remain dynamically evolving, indicating the field's ongoing maturation. In summary, this study consolidates a fragmented body of literature, providing a clear, data-validated overview that confirms the integrated role of ethical management and strategic innovation in the transition of Producer Companies towards a sustainable social enterprise model. It offers a foundational reference point for scholars entering the field and a strategic compass for practitioners steering this complex transformation.

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