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Trends in Sustainability and Management Strategies: A Bibliometric Review

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ABSTRACT

Through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in Scopus between 2000 and 2025, this study investigates the thematic development and evolution of research on sustainability and managerial strategies over the previous 20 years. The results show that research leadership has shifted significantly geographically, with Asian economies—especially China and India—becoming the main contributors in recent years, while Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom dominated early contributions. The balance between theoretical frameworks and practical approaches is reflected in the analysis's identification of distinct thematic clusters, such as corporate governance and sustainability reporting, sustainable supply chains and operational strategies, and green innovation and circular economy practices. The field's intellectual framework has been shaped by influential writers, especially those from China, and keyword research reveals how digitalization, AI, and green innovation are increasingly being incorporated into sustainability studies. The findings show that, thanks to interdisciplinary cooperation, technological advancement, and international policy imperatives, sustainability has evolved from a side issue to a crucial part of corporate strategy. There are still gaps, though, in areas like reporting on biodiversity, disclosure pertaining to governance, and the function of intangible resources like spiritual capital. All things considered, the study advances knowledge of how managerial approaches are being rethought to incorporate sustainability into corporate operations across the globe.

KEYWORDS: *Sustainability; Managerial strategies; Corporate governance; Sustainable supply chains; Green innovation; Bibliometric analysis.*

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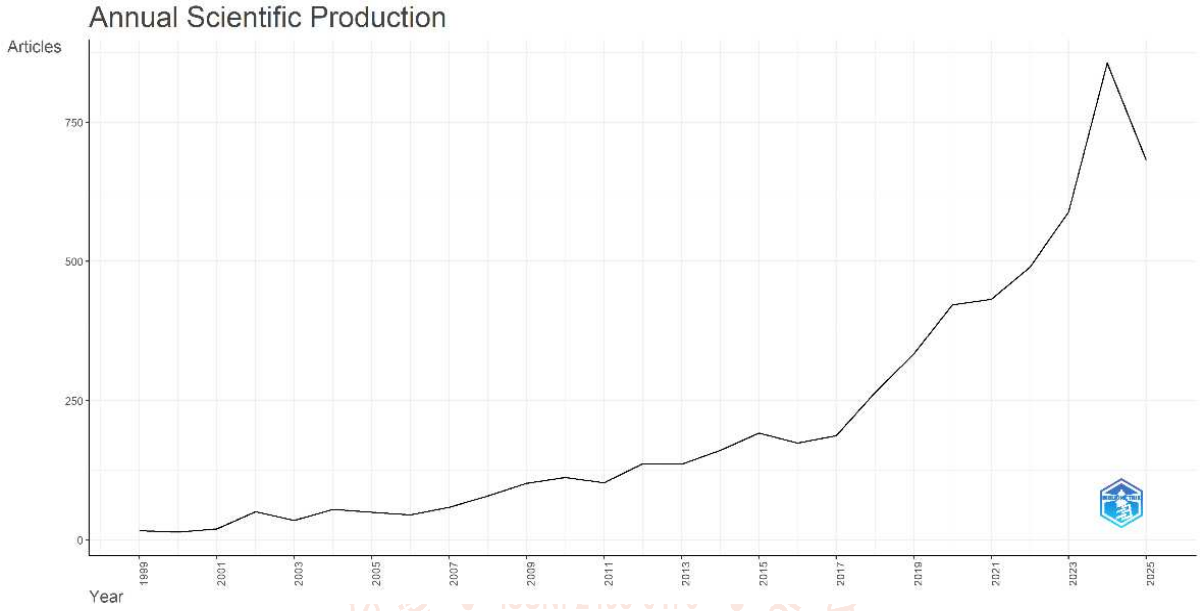
1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, sustainability and climate change have emerged as major issues on international policy and research agendas (Sari et al., 2020; Hahn et al., 2018). Scholarly interest in green finance, sustainable investment, and climate policy integration increased after the 2015 adoption of the Paris Agreement (Dixit, 2020; Yasir et al., 2020). Research output in this field exhibits a clear core–periphery structure, according to a bibliometric analysis of country collaborations. As a result of their established leadership, early leaders like the United States and the United Kingdom dominate the field with the highest publication volumes and citation counts, with average publication years ranging from 2016 to 2017 (Li et al., 2018).Between 2017 and 2019, European nations such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland also made significant contributions, combining robust networks of collaboration with a high impact on citations (Matt et al., 2015).

On the other hand, after 2020–2022, research contributions from emerging economies like China and India increased significantly, indicating a

geographical diversification of scholarship. Though its relatively recent average publication year (2022.35), which accounts for lower citation intensity compared to Western countries, China's rapid expansion is evident in its more than 800 publications. With an average publication year of 2021.16, India has also established a growing presence, demonstrating its rapidly expanding role in the field. Smaller nations like Libya (2022) and Lebanon (2021) have attained remarkably high average citations per publication, indicating that a small number of studies have had a significant worldwide impact. While the majority of other African and Middle Eastern nations continue to be on the outskirts of collaboration networks, South Africa emerged as the most significant African contributor (2018.31) (Couckuyt& Van Looy, 2021).

Overall, the development of research output demonstrates that, although Western countries took the lead early on, the post-2020 era has been marked by robust growth from emerging and Asian economies, especially China, India, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia. The urgency of climate action and the global spread of sustainability-oriented scholarship are both reflected in this trend, which shows a dynamic shift in the geography of research.



Similar to other developing interdisciplinary fields, neuromarketing research has demonstrated a steady upward trajectory over the last 20 years. Due to its status as a specialized field of study, the field remained in its infancy between 1998 and 2010, with fewer than 100 publications per year. Research output increased gradually between 2011 and 2016, then quickly after that. Beginning in 2017, neuromarketing experienced a period of rapid growth, reaching a peak of over 800 publications in 2024 after surpassing 500 publications in 2022. This increase highlights the increasing awareness of the value of neuromarketing, especially as its methodological breadth and real-world applications have been expanded by the incorporation of digital tools and artificial intelligence. The overall growth trajectory appears to be unaffected, even though 2025 shows a slight decline that is more likely to be explained by incomplete publication indexing than by a real decline in scholarly activity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to many, sustainability in business is not an optional feature but rather a strategic requirement that must be integrated into the core planning and operations of the organization (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Porter & Kramer, 2011). Scholars argue that businesses should make long-term decisions based on sustainability to meet present demands without compromising future natural and human capital (Elkington, 1997; Dyllick& Muff, 2016). According to this perspective, sustainable strategy is a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that takes into account social, economic, and environmental objectives. Empirical and conceptual work highlights how companies that adopt proactive sustainability strategies concurrently address ecological protection, economic viability, and social equity, which helps to explain why sustainability is increasingly seen as a component of competitive strategy rather than just compliance or philanthropy (Bansal & Song, 2017; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014).

The resource-based view (RBV) and its natural-environment extension (NRBV) provide a shared theoretical framework for explaining how sustainability becomes a source of competitive advantage. RBV sees internal resources that are valuable, rare, unique, and non-substitutable as enabling sustained firm performance, whereas

NRBV emphasizes environmental preservation-focused resources and capabilities as drivers of long-term advantage (Hart, 1995; Hart & Dowell, 2011).According to this literature, a company's strategic endowments—which include both tangible assets (processes, technologies) and intangible assets (knowledge, managerial vision, spiritual or intellectual capital) that are relevant for green outcomes—determine its ability to successfully pursue environmentally friendly practices (López-Gamero et al., 2011; Aragon-Correa & Sharma, 2003). Though intellectual capital has been empirically studied for sustainability outcomes, little is known about the role of spiritual capital and other intangible resources (Zhao et al., 2019).

A logical empirical thread connects business strategy, environmental management practices, and sustainability performance. Studies on green supply chain management, environmental process innovation, and other operational mechanisms have shown that companies with clear sustainability strategies are more likely to implement environmental management processes (from supplier engagement to process redesign) and achieve superior environmental performance (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004; Pagell& Wu, 2009). The fact that environmental management processes serve as the collection of practices and competencies that transform strategy into measurable sustainability outcomes motivates testing environmental management as a mediator between strategy and performance (Lee & Rhee, 2007).

Putting sustainability goals into action also calls for managerial and operational expertise, especially when it comes to digital transformation. More significant sources of competitive advantage in the digital age than technology itself are managerial vision, culture, and skills that instill digital practices throughout the organization, according to research on "digital business strategy" (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Sebastian et al., 2017). Therefore, managerial capability (leaders' digital literacy, strategic vision) and operational capability (processes, integration of digital routines) shape a company's ability to scale sustainability initiatives and implement innovations that benefit the environment (Liu, Chen & Chou, 2011). According to Hinings et al. (2018), integrating digital capabilities with sustainability strategy is therefore positioned as a cutting-edge field of strategic research.

Biodiversity and corporate reporting on biodiversity illustrate the immaturity and urgency of corporate sustainability practices in specific domains. Global policy agendas (like the post-2020 biodiversity framework) and risk reports have elevated biodiversity as a critical corporate concern (CBD, 2020), and scholars support robust corporate biodiversity indicators and internal accounting systems (Adler et al., 2018). Cross-country reviews, however, show that biodiversity disclosure is inconsistent and usually superficial: many businesses only mention biodiversity in passing, while few provide comprehensive internal performance measures (Boiral& Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2017).This disparity between corporate reporting practices and global urgency highlights a significant empirical gap and the need for standardized metrics and governance mechanisms that can better align corporate behavior with biodiversity targets (Rimmel &Jonäll, 2013).

Corporate governance and external institutional pressures also have an impact on sustainability disclosure and action. Examples of how governance and legal frameworks can alter managers' long-term decisions, risk appetites, and disclosure incentives can be found in the literature on shareholder litigation rights (Ferrell, Liang &Renneboog, 2016). Empirical studies have employed exogenous modifications in litigation regimes with varying degrees of success. Lowering litigation risk may have the opposite effect, according to some, while others contend that it may increase open disclosure and stakeholder engagement by reducing managers' fear of legal consequences (Cheng, Ioannou & Serafeim, 2014). The resulting ambiguity motivates empirical tests that specifically consider governance context as a moderator or shaper of sustainability outcomes.

Finally, supply-chain governance and stakeholder engagement are critical to achieving meaningful sustainability outcomes. Sustainability investments only yield positive results when all stakeholders—including suppliers, customers, and non-governmental organizations—are in agreement and actively involved, according to research on supplier and customer engagement (Vachon & Klassen, 2008; Tate et al., 2010). Sectoral studies, such as those on coffee supply chains, highlight trade-offs and contrast competing governance approaches (certification/standards versus free-market quality strategies). While quality-led market strategies may boost profits but may also harm the environment, certification can support social goals and biodiversity but can be costly and unfairly benefit farmers (Ponte, 2002; Raynolds, 2009).According to human ecology perspectives, bottom-up, cooperative governance pathways should receive more attention than they have in the literature to date because NGOs and local actors (farmers) possess important ecological knowledge (Forsyth, 2003).

Together, the reviewed literature identifies several research gaps that this study addresses. First, although RBV and NRBV support resource-based sustainable strategies, there hasn't been much empirical study on spiritual capital as an intangible resource that may have an impact on environmental management and sustainability

(Fernando, 2011). Second, to ascertain how internal environmental management processes mediate the transformation of strategy (and intangible resources) into environmental performance, more accurate empirical research is required (Montabon, Sroufe & Narasimhan, 2007). Third, because biodiversity reporting is still fragmented and underdeveloped, firm-level disclosure behavior in governance and institutional contexts (e.g., changes in shareholder litigation rights) still needs to be analyzed (Boiral, Heras-Saizarbitoria& Brotherton, 2020).Finally, the relationship between digital and managerial skills and sustainability strategy is a new area that needs more conceptual and empirical research (Hinings et al., 2018). In order to fill in these gaps, the study looks into environmental management as a mediator and creates and evaluates hypotheses (defined as hypotheses H1–H7 in the conceptual framework) that link spiritual capital and business strategy to environmental sustainability performance and environmental management practices.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To map the intellectual structure of the field and identify thematic trends in academic literature, this study employs bibliometric analysis, a quantitative technique first introduced by Pritchard in 1969. The Scopus database, recognized for its wide coverage of peer-reviewed management and business journals, served as the primary source of bibliographic data (Elsevier, 2023). To ensure rigor and relevance, the dataset was refined to include only documents categorized as “Articles,” limited to journal publications in English, and spanning the period from 2000 to 2025.

Objective of the Study:

The main objective of this study is to examine the evolution and thematic development of research on Sustainability and Managerial Strategies, with emphasis on global publication trends, influential contributors, and emerging thematic areas.

To guarantee comprehensive coverage, the following Boolean search string was employed in Scopus advanced search:

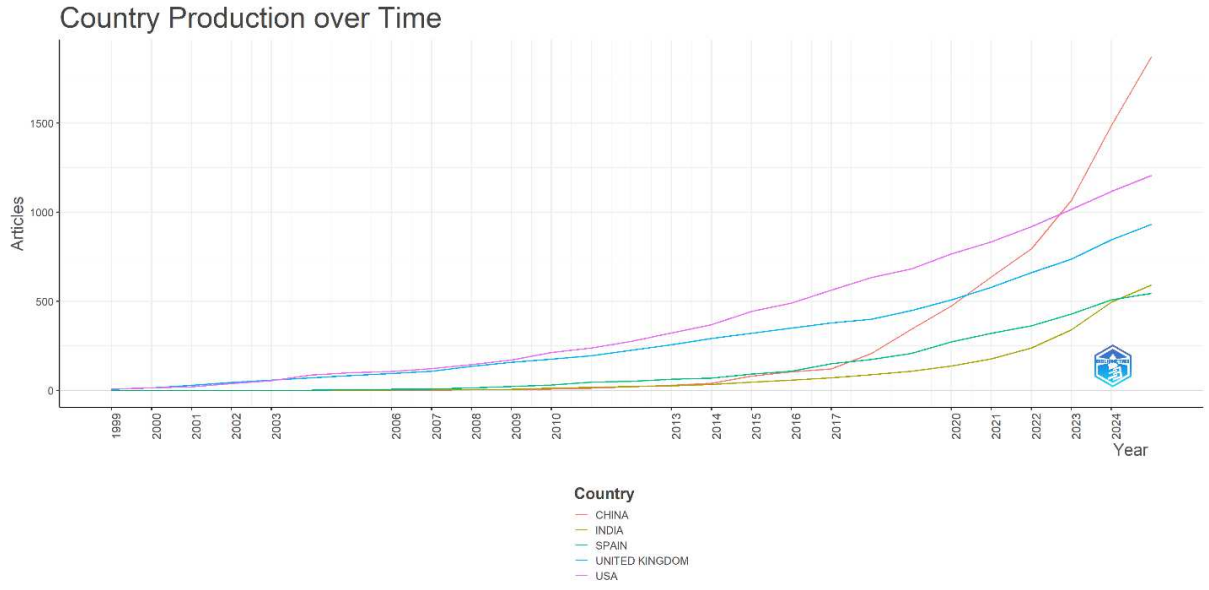
("sustainability" OR "sustainable management" OR "green strategy" OR "corporate sustainability" OR "environmental strategy" OR "ESG" OR "CSR") AND ("managerial strategy" OR "management strategy" OR "business strategy" OR "strategic management" OR "corporate strategy")

After applying the inclusion criteria and conducting manual screening, a total of XXX articles (replace with your final count) were retained for analysis. The bibliographic data were exported in BibTeX and CSV formats to ensure compatibility with bibliometric software. Analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010), which enabled examination of publication trends, collaboration patterns, and thematic structures.

This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of the existing body of knowledge, thereby providing a robust foundation for identifying key research areas and emerging directions in the field of sustainability and managerial strategies

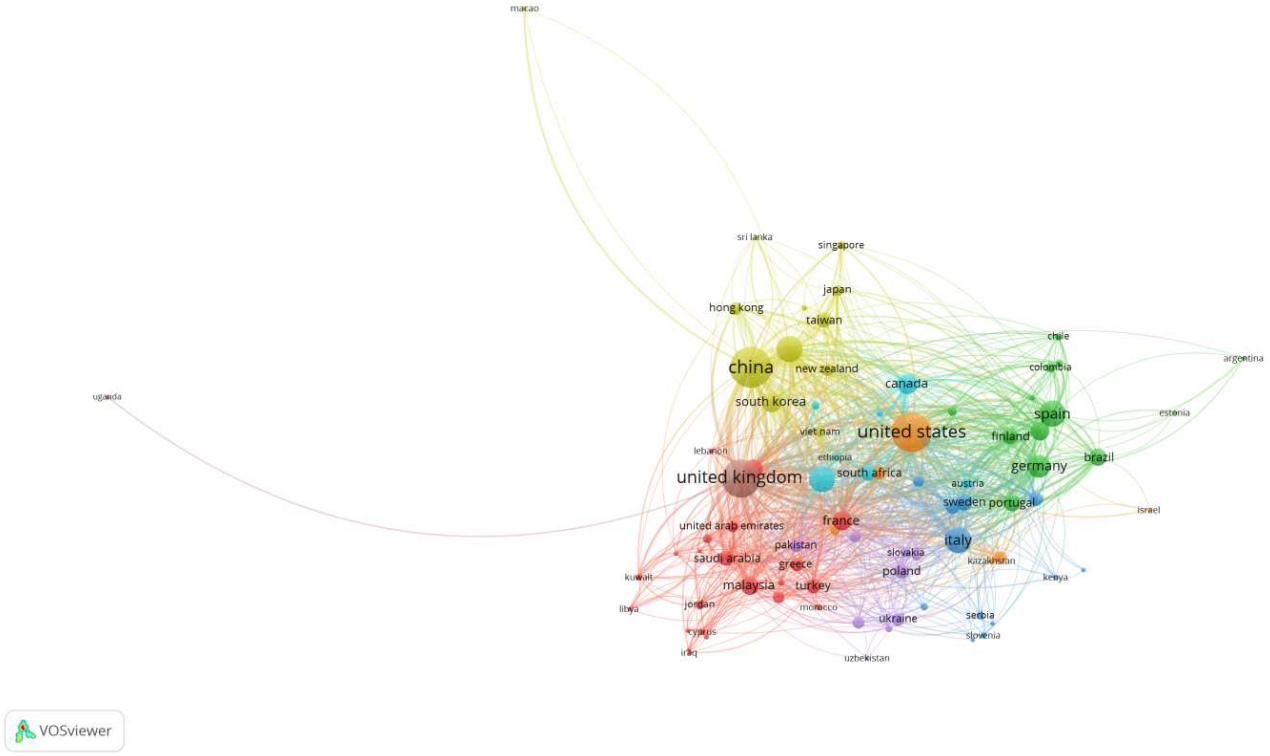
4. RESULTS

4.1. Country Production Over Time



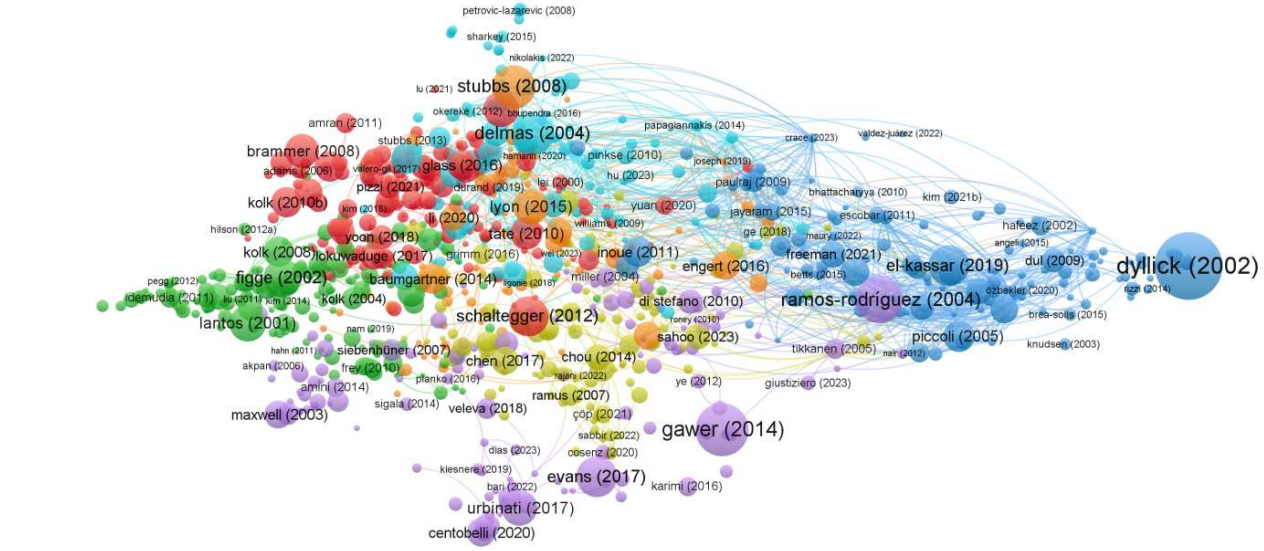
Significant geographic changes in research leadership are highlighted by the temporal analysis of scientific production at the national level. With consistent growth from the late 1990s through 2015 and cumulative outputs surpassing 900 and 800 publications, respectively, by 2024, the United States and the United Kingdom emerged as early leaders. As a steady contributor to Europe, Spain likewise exhibits steady growth, albeit at a slower rate. Conversely, China exhibits an exponential rise that starts around 2016, surpassing all other nations by 2024 with over 1,500 publications, highlighting its current dominance in the field. India's upward trajectory is similar but more recent, especially after 2020. By 2024, it will have over 600 publications, demonstrating its growing influence.These trends imply that although early scholarship was founded in Western nations, the post-2017 era is marked by the rapid expansion and dominance of Asian economies, especially China and India, suggesting a dynamic geographical diversification of research activity.

4.2. Country Co-authorship Map



A core-periphery structure influenced by both productivity and temporal trends can be seen in the country collaboration network. With average publication years ranging from 2016 to 2017, the US and the UK stand out as early leaders, generating the most documents and citations. Strong contributions from 2017–2019 are also demonstrated by European nations like Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, which combine substantial citation impact with high publication volumes. China and India, on the other hand, exhibit tremendous but more recent growth, contributing significantly to output despite having comparatively fewer citations per paper because of their recentness. Their average publication years range from 2021 to 2022.Despite producing relatively little, smaller countries like Lebanon (2021) and Libya (2022) exhibit remarkably high citation averages, indicating highly significant individual studies. While other African and Middle Eastern nations (such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, and Pakistan) exhibit increasing participation primarily after 2020, South Africa, with an average of about 2018, remains Africa's primary research hub. Overall, the temporal trend shows that although Western countries took the lead early on, the post-2020 era is marked by robust growth from emerging and Asian economies, indicating a geographical diversification of research activities.

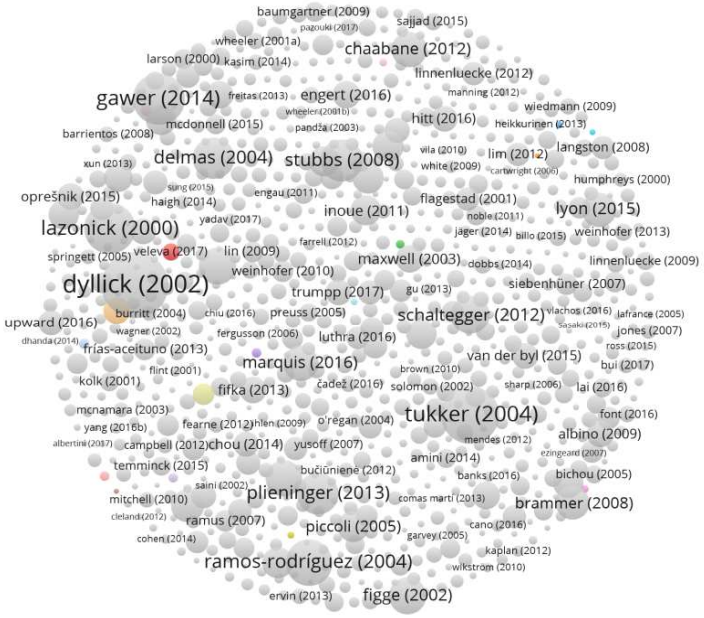
4.3. Bibliographic Coupling Map of Documents



A well-structured field divided into multiple clusters, each of which represents a different line of inquiry, is revealed by the bibliographic coupling network. Since accountability and disclosure play a significant role in forming strategy, one group places a strong emphasis on corporate governance, CSR, and sustainability reporting. The increasing incorporation of sustainability into business processes is demonstrated by another group of studies that concentrate on sustainable supply chains and operational procedures. While other groups focus on systems thinking and stakeholder-oriented approaches, a third cluster emphasizes themes of green innovation, the circular economy, and industry-specific applications.

Strong connections between recent publications are displayed in the network, indicating a growing convergence of concepts and a dynamic flow of information across subfields. Previous foundational works are still frequently cited, giving the field intellectual coherence. All things considered, the pattern depicts a varied and connected research environment that blends well-established theoretical understandings with new and applied viewpoints in strategy and sustainability.

4.4. Citation Map of Documents

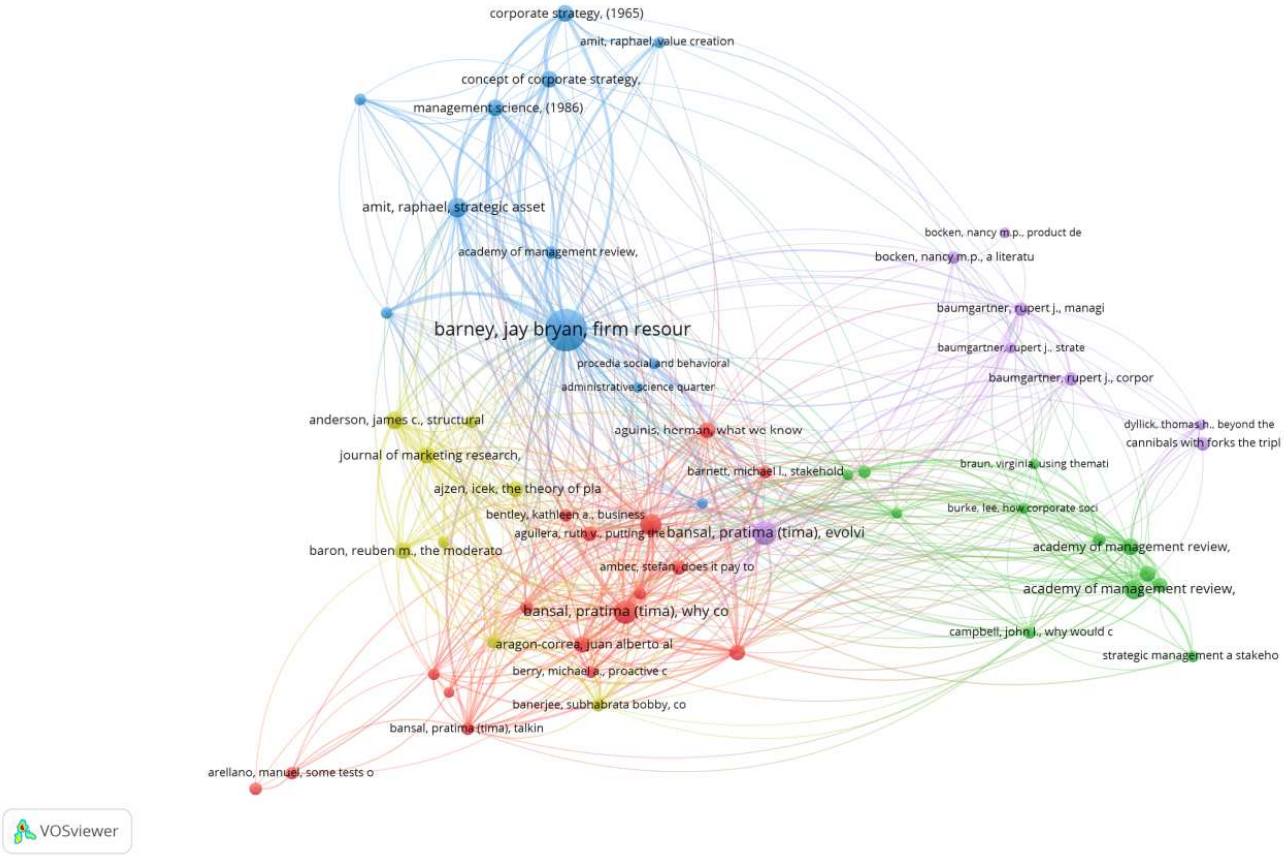


According to the citation network, key works in the field of sustainability in business strategy include Dyllick (2002), Tukker (2004), Delmas (2004), Schaltegger (2012), and Gawer (2014). These studies, which concentrate

on topics like corporate sustainability, business models, innovation, and strategic integration, serve as the intellectual underpinnings. The field is further expanded by frequently cited works that connect sustainability to management practices and organizational change, such as Stubbs (2008), Plieninger (2013), and Lyon (2015).

The network also shows the increasing impact of writers who offer viewpoints on corporate governance, stakeholder engagement, and systems thinking, such as Marquis (2016), Upward (2016), and Lazonick (2000). The emphasis on applied approaches in more recent works reflects a shift from conceptual frameworks to real-world implementation models. The citation network as a whole shows a developing field of study, with more recent contributions driving the agenda toward operationalization and practical application in business strategy, while early conceptual studies continue to have a significant impact.

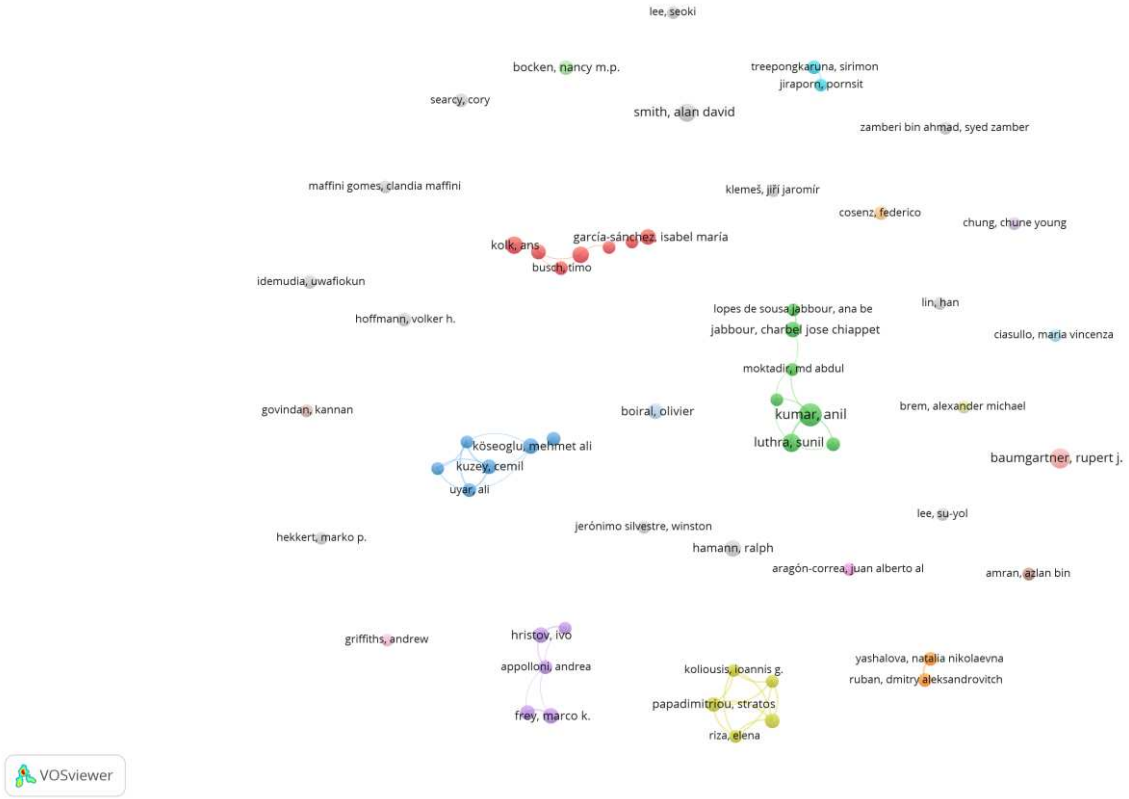
4.5. Co-citation of Cited References



By displaying clusters that link organizational theory, corporate social responsibility, and strategic management, the co-citation map draws attention to the theoretical underpinnings of sustainability in business strategy. The resource-based view and dynamic capabilities, which offer theoretical foundations for competitive advantage in sustainable contexts, constitute one of the main clusters. Stakeholder theory, institutional approaches, and corporate social responsibility are the focus of another cluster, which highlights how accountability and governance influence business conduct. A third cluster connects short-term tactics with long-term development objectives, building on frameworks for corporate sustainability and environmental management.

The close ties between these categories show how strategy, management, marketing, and the social sciences are all incorporated into sustainability research, which is by its very nature interdisciplinary. Applied sustainability studies are commonly cited alongside foundational works in management theory, demonstrating how traditional viewpoints are being modified to address modern issues. All things considered, the network represents an area that strikes a balance between theoretical complexity and practical application, bringing together various methodologies to promote sustainable business practices.

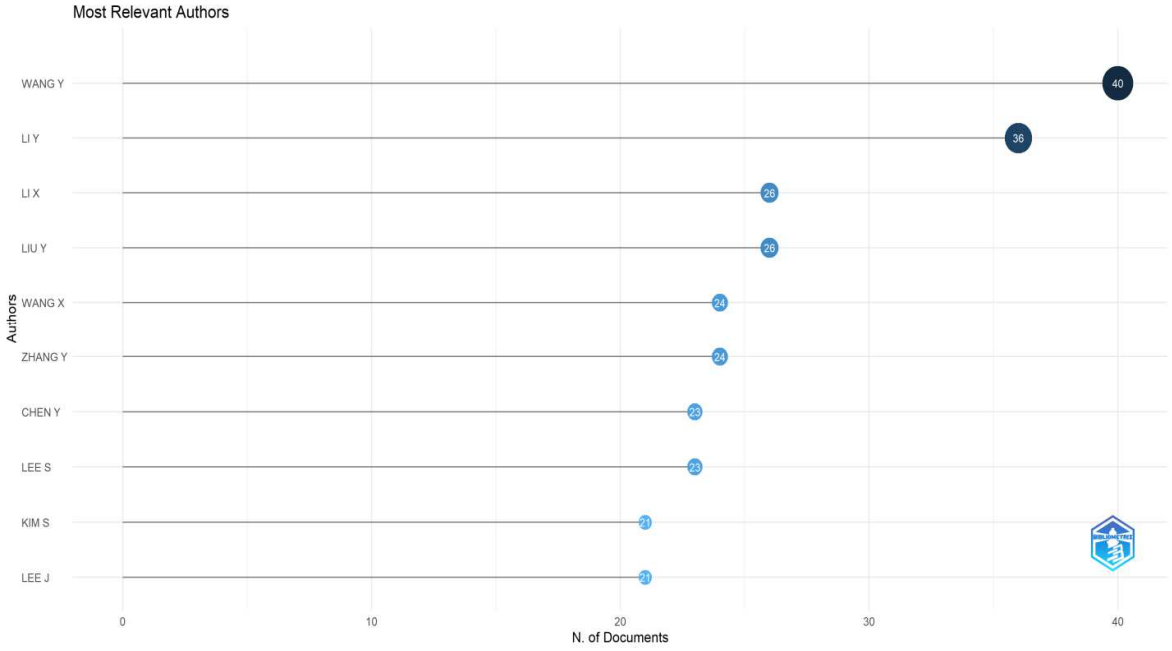
4.6. Authors Collaboration Network Chart



"Sustainability in business strategy," which is closely related to corporate governance, sustainability reporting, and corporate social responsibility, is one of the primary research topics. Influential writers like Schaltegger, Kolk, Baumgartner, and García-Sánchez contributed to the development of the field with their widely cited works. Newer trends focused on innovation, disclosure practices, and sustainable supply chains are reflected by more recent contributors like Kumar, Luthra, and Hristov.

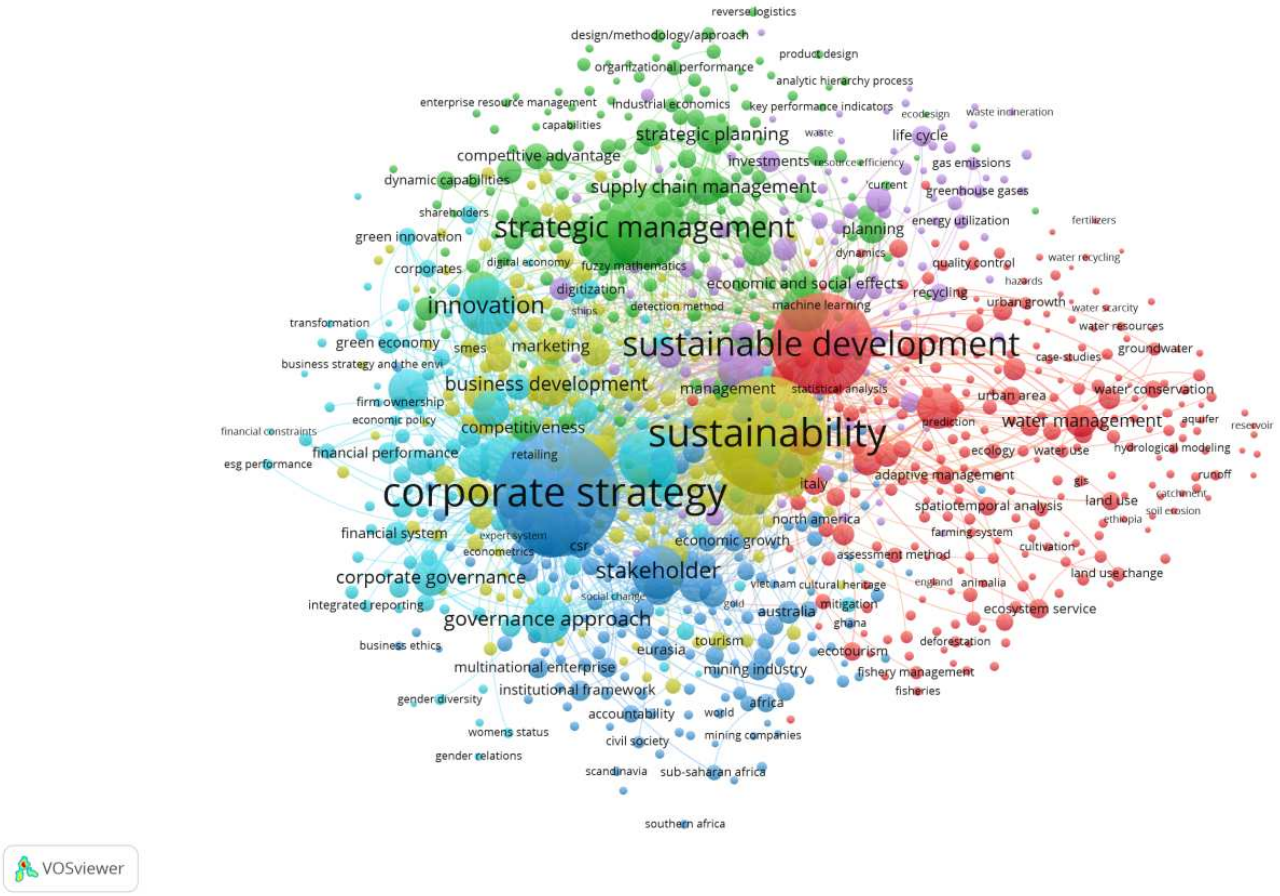
Various clusters include studies on the tourism and hospitality industries, supply chain and operational strategies, governance and accountability, and innovation in the circular economy. The shift from early conceptual discussions to more sectoral and applied approaches is indicative of the field's evolution over time. All things considered, the co-authorship network is a growing, interdisciplinary area of research where established thought leaders and new collaborations collaborate to advance sustainability in business strategy.

4.7. Most Relevant Author



Research in this field is heavily concentrated among a small number of prolific contributors, according to an analysis of the most pertinent authors. With 40 publications, Wang Y takes the lead, closely followed by Li Y with 36, establishing both as key contributors to the growth of academic output. Wang X and Zhang Y each produced 20 documents, indicating a strong but relatively moderate level of productivity. Li X and Liu Y also contributed significantly, each producing 23 and 22 documents, respectively. There is another active tier of researchers who regularly publish in this field, including Chen Y and Lee S (19 documents each) and Kim S and Lee J (18 documents each). Overall, the data shows that a small number of extremely productive scholars dominate the field, and Chinese authors—especially those with the last names Wang, Li, Zhang, and Liu—have a significant influence on the conversation about corporate strategy and sustainability, which is consistent with China's overall increase in the amount of academic research produced worldwide.

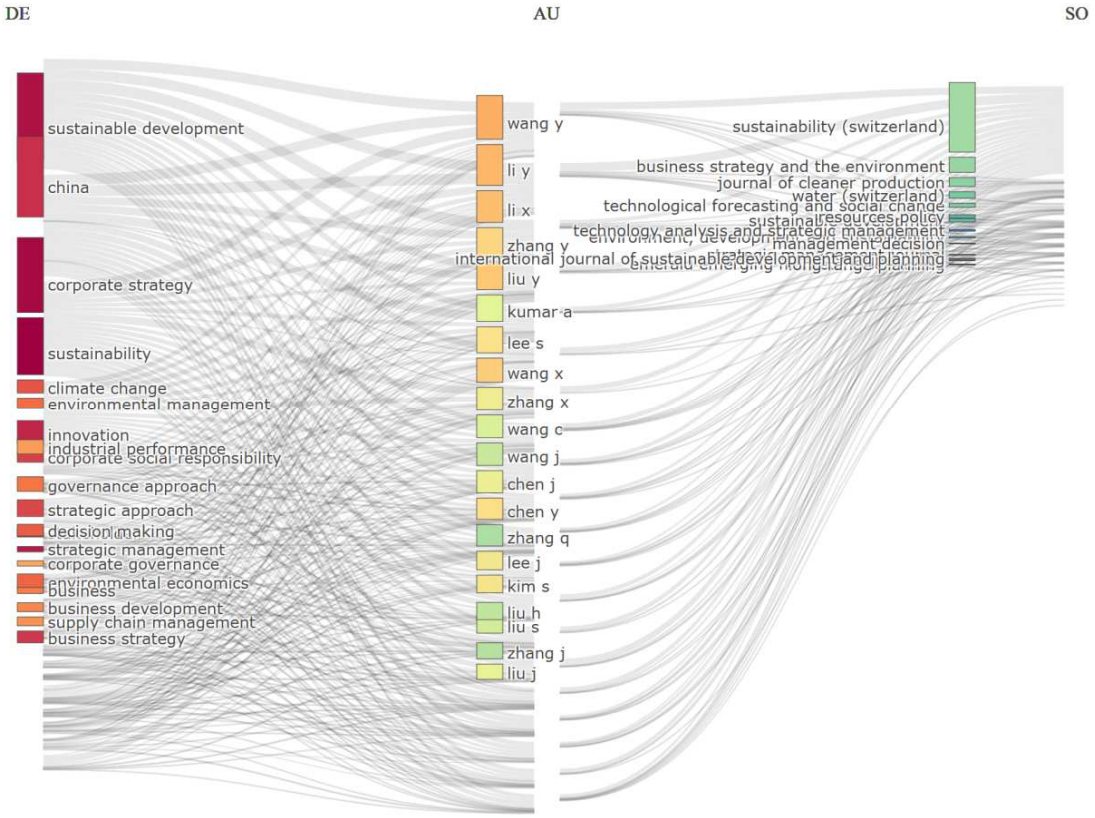
4.8. Keyword Cluster Map



The integration of social and environmental concerns into strategic management is reflected in the keyword network, which emphasizes sustainability, corporate strategy, and sustainable development as the main themes. A large portion of the research focuses on how companies incorporate sustainability principles into governance and decision-making processes, as indicated by closely related terms like strategic management, corporate governance, stakeholders, and business development. The increasing emphasis on operational and performance-oriented approaches is demonstrated by a strong cluster of keywords such as supply chain management, innovation, and competitiveness.

Other clusters link sustainability research to climate adaptation and environmental resource management by focusing on ecosystem services, land use, and water management. Technological tools are increasingly influencing the research agenda, according to emerging topics like machine learning, digitization, and green innovation. In order to promote sustainability in business contexts, corporate strategy, governance, environmental management, and technological innovation all converge in this vast and multidisciplinary field, as the network illustrates.

4.9. Three-Field Plot



The relationship between research topics, top writers, and important publications in the fields of corporate strategy and sustainability is depicted by the three-field plot. The prominent keywords on the left, including corporate strategy, climate change, sustainability, sustainable development, and environmental management, draw attention to the main focus of academic research in this field. These themes demonstrate how crucial it is becoming to connect environmental concerns with corporate governance and strategic management. Prominent writers who connect research topics with publishing outlets, such as Wang Y, Li Y, Zhang X, Liu Y, Kumar A, Lee S, and Chen J, stand out in the center. Their work focuses especially on corporate strategy, innovation, and sustainability, demonstrating their impact on the field. The main venues for sharing this research are the top journals, Sustainability (Switzerland), Journal of Cleaner Production, Business Strategy and the Environment, and Technological Forecasting and Social Change (right). Strong relationships between keywords, authors, and journals suggest that the field's intellectual core is sustainability-oriented strategies, with Chinese and international scholars playing crucial roles in promoting the global conversation on sustainable business practices.

5. FINDINGS

Research on managerial strategies and sustainability reveals a number of significant trends. Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom took the lead in this field early on, producing the most publications and citations until about 2016–2017. But after 2017, the economies of Asia, especially China and India, grew quickly. By 2024, China will have more than 1,500 publications, surpassing all other nations, and India will have more than 600. Smaller nations like Lebanon and Libya produced fewer publications, but their contributions had extremely high citation averages, demonstrating their influence on a global scale. International collaboration networks exhibit a strong core–periphery structure, with emerging economies joining after 2020 and Western nations forming dense networks early on. While Middle Eastern and Asian countries have also stepped up their involvement in recent years, South Africa continues to be the continent's largest contributor.

Regarding thematic development, the bibliometric mapping identified discrete research clusters, such as sustainable supply chains and operational strategies; corporate governance, CSR, and sustainability reporting; and green innovation, the circular economy, and sector-specific applications. These clusters imply that the field gradually shifts from abstract frameworks to realistic models of implementation, striking a balance between theoretical discussions and applied research. Although the field is still shaped by the intellectual underpinnings established by early researchers like

Dyllick (2002) and Schaltegger (2012), more recent research is placing an emphasis on applied models that connect sustainability to organizational performance, governance, and innovation. A small number of highly influential writers, particularly from China, have also had a significant impact on the field. Their writings have strengthened China's position as a major player in international discussions about strategy and sustainability. Furthermore, keyword analysis reveals that while recent emerging topics like digitization, machine learning, and green innovation indicate the growing integration of technology into sustainability practices, core themes like sustainability, corporate strategy, governance, and environmental management dominate the discourse.

6. CONCLUSION

The study comes to the conclusion that during the previous 20 years, research on managerial strategies and sustainability has changed dramatically. Asian economies, especially China and India, have become major players in recent years, indicating a shift toward greater geographical diversification of scholarly contributions, even though Western nations initially provided the intellectual foundation. Additionally, the field has moved from theoretical investigations of corporate sustainability to more applied and pragmatic methods that incorporate supply chain management, governance, innovation, and sector-specific procedures. This suggests that the field is maturing and that management, environmental sciences, and digital transformation studies have strong interdisciplinary ties.

The next frontier of sustainability research is represented by the growing importance of technological tools like artificial intelligence, digitization, and data-driven practices, which help businesses more successfully incorporate sustainability into their core managerial strategies. Notwithstanding these developments, there are still obstacles to overcome, especially in the fields of reporting on biodiversity, disclosing information pertaining to governance, and investigating intangible resources like spiritual capital. All things considered, the results show that sustainability is now a crucial part of business strategy everywhere and is no longer an optional or incidental issue. In order to address urgent global sustainability challenges, the study highlights the significance of ongoing international collaboration, innovation, and integration of digital capabilities.

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