Reflexivity in Systematic Literature Reviews: The Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Bibliometric Evaluation

COOMBES, Philip <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1174-5652> and TRESIDDER, Richard <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8872-9581>

Reflexivity in Systematic Literature Reviews: The Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Bibliometric Evaluation

Philip Coombes*

Richard Tresidder

Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB

*Email: philip.coombes@shu.ac.uk

Abstract

Bibliometric systematic literature reviews (bibliometric SLRs) have become popular for evaluating knowledge structures in business and management research, yet their rapid institutionalisation has outpaced critical reflection on the philosophical assumptions that underpin them. Despite the proliferation of protocol-driven frameworks, bibliometric SLRs continue to be treated as neutral technical procedures, obscuring the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal commitments embedded in citation practices, clustering algorithms, and database infrastructures. This paper argues that such unexamined assumptions systematically shape what becomes visible, legitimate, and citable within business and management scholarship, reinforcing dominant paradigms while marginalising heterodox and Global South perspectives. To address this blind spot, the paper advances the concept of reflexive bibliometric practice and demonstrates its necessity through an empirical mapping of more than 7,800 Scopus-indexed bibliometric SLRs published between 1978 and 2025. The analysis shows that bibliometric tools do not only measure influence; they can contribute to constructing perceived intellectual boundaries. The paper presents a novel philosophical framework that embeds reflexivity into each stage of review design, reveals how bibliometric practices reproduce structural distortions, and offers actionable guidance for authors, reviewers, editors, and research-governance bodies. By repositioning bibliometric SLRs as interpretive and value-laden knowledge practices, the paper provides a timely intervention that strengthens the methodological foundations of business and management research.

Keywords

Bibliometrics; chronopolitics of citation; citation analysis; epistemology-ontology-axiology-temporality; systematic literature review

1. Introduction

The increase in production of academic research has been paralleled by a surge in the number of bibliometric and systematic literature reviews published (Marzi et al., 2025). Combining bibliometric analyses with systematic literature reviews (bibliometric SLRs) have become popular for evaluating knowledge structures in business and management research, driven by growing expectations for transparency, methodological rigour, and replicability. Over the past decade, bibliometric SLRs have expanded rapidly, supported by protocol driven frameworks such as PRISMA (Moher et al., 2015), SPAR 4 SLR (Paul et al., 2021), the Bibliometric Analysis Procedure and Best Practice Guidelines (Donthu et al., 2021), and the 3-Rs Retrieve-Review-Report framework (Coombes, 2024). These frameworks have standardised procedures for corpus construction, inclusion criteria, and analytical logic, enabling large scale mapping of research domains through, for instance, citation, co citation, and bibliographic coupling techniques. As a result, bibliometric SLRs now play a decisive role in consolidating scholarly fields, identifying thematic clusters, and shaping the intellectual boundaries of business and management research and their journal publications (see for instance Bhukya et al., 2022 for a bibliometric overview of forty years of the European Management Journal). Yet despite their methodological sophistication and widespread adoption, these reviews are typically treated as neutral, technical exercises rather than interpretive knowledge practices that embed philosophical assumptions. Existing bibliometric SLR frameworks provide procedural reflexivity by documenting search steps and methodological choices, but they do not address the deeper epistemic and ontological assumptions that shape what these reviews can see. Bibliometric SLRs increasingly operate as adjudicators of legitimacy in business and management research, and the field lacks a shared conceptual language for evaluating the interpretive and value-laden choices embedded in those reviews. This paper introduces

philosophical reflexivity to make those assumptions explicit and to show how they influence the knowledge claims that bibliometric SLRs produce.

What remains under examined is the lack of reflexivity within bibliometric SLRs themselves (see Marzi et al., 2025 as a notable exception). Existing frameworks emphasise procedural rigour but remain largely silent on the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal assumptions that shape how bibliometric tools construct knowledge. This absence matters theoretically and methodologically. Without reflexive scrutiny, citation counts are too easily equated with intellectual significance, algorithmic clusters are mistaken for natural scholarly communities, and database coverage is assumed to represent the full terrain of knowledge production. These assumptions risk reinforcing dominant paradigms, marginalising heterodox or Global South perspectives, and reproducing cumulative advantage dynamics that privilege established work over emerging contributions. In short, the field lacks a conceptual apparatus for interrogating the philosophical premises embedded in bibliometric practice. This gap motivates the central research question of this paper: How can reflexive bibliometric practice integrate epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal awareness into the design, conduct, and interpretation of bibliometric SLRs in business and management research?

To address this question, the paper adopts a hybrid conceptual-methodological approach. Conceptually, it develops a philosophical framework that positions bibliometric techniques as interpretive devices rather than neutral measurement tools. Methodologically, it illustrates this argument through an empirical mapping of over 7,800 Scopus indexed bibliometric SLRs published between 1978 and 2025, demonstrating how citation trajectories, database politics, and ranking regimes shape what becomes visible, legitimate, and citable within management scholarship. Scopus is widely considered a high-quality database for academic research (Baas

et al., 2020; Kumpulainen & Seppanen, 2022). The empirical data is not presented as a standalone dataset for statistical inference; rather, it functions as a corpus that grounds the conceptual argument and reveals the practical consequences of unexamined assumptions in bibliometric SLR practice.

The paper offers four core contributions. First, it advances a reflexive bibliometric framework that embeds epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality into each stage of review design and interpretation. Second, it conceptualises bibliometric techniques as interpretive knowledge practices, challenging the assumption that citation-based mappings objectively mirror intellectual reality. Third, it introduces the concept of chronopolitics of citation, highlighting how temporal distortions privilege legacy paradigms and delay recognition of innovative or heterodox work. Fourth, it demonstrates empirically how these philosophical dimensions manifest in the structure, visibility, and evaluative hierarchies of bibliometric SLRs in business and management research. Together, these contributions reposition bibliometric SLRs as philosophically situated practices rather than purely technical procedures.

Finally, these insights have significant theoretical implications for business and management research. By foregrounding reflexivity, the paper advances theories of literature reviewing that move beyond proceduralism toward a more interpretive, value conscious understanding of knowledge synthesis. It reconceptualises bibliometrics as a sociotechnical practice shaped by epistemic, ontological, axiological and temporal commitments, thereby enriching theoretical accounts of how scholarly fields are constructed, stabilised, and contested. More broadly, the framework contributes to reflexivity theory by demonstrating how methodological tools participate in shaping the very knowledge they claim to measure. While the analysis also carries implications for editorial policy, research governance, and responsible metrics, its

primary contribution lies in reorienting theoretical debates about how business and management scholarship is mapped, evaluated, and reproduced through bibliometric SLR practices.

2. The Rise and Utility of Bibliometric SLRs in Business and Management Research

This section examines the rise, methodological strengths, and evolving role of bibliometric SLRs in management research. It also situates the field's development highlighting both the promise and limitations of large-scale mapping approaches.

2.1 Empirical growth of bibliometric SLRs

Systematic literature reviews have grown considerably in business and management scholarship over the last twenty years. The traditional narrative review, although useful for conceptual synthesis, is widely recognised as prone to selection bias, limited transparency, and inconsistent methodological bases (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). Bibliometric SLRs have appeared in response to these issues, providing scalable algorithmic methods that allow researchers to visualise and explore the structure of a research area through combined citation relationships. The increased prevalence of bibliometric SLRs in business and management research is empirically demonstrated through an analysis of Elsevier's Scopus database. The search strategy began with a broad keyword search using terms such as "systematic review*", "systematic literature review*", "citation analys*", "co-citation analysis*", "bibliometric*", and "meta-analys*". This initial query yielded a very large corpus of 978,709 documents. To refine the results, the search was restricted to occurrences of these keywords in article titles, abstracts, and author-supplied keywords, ensuring that only works explicitly engaging with these methods were included. The period covered was set from 1970 to 2025, capturing over five decades of scholarly output. The keyword search was then refined to include only the word

“bibliometric*” in article titles, abstracts, and author-supplied keywords. This refined query yielded 76,997 documents published between 1978 and 2025. A further selection process limited the search to article and review type documents only published in English language in the Scopus subject area of Business, Management, and Accounting, thereby excluding books, conference papers and other editorial material. This further query reduced the dataset to 7,873 documents published between 1978 and 2025. A summary of the Boolean search criteria used is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Boolean search outcomes for articles in the Scopus academic database

Sequence	Criteria	Filters	Documents
1	Keyword search	"systematic review*" OR "systematic literature review*" OR "citation analys*" OR "co-citation analysis*" OR "cocitation analysis*" OR "bibliometric*" OR "meta-analys*" OR "meta analys*"	978,709
2	Restriction	Article title, abstract, keywords	
3	Period	1970 to 2025	
4	Keyword search	"bibliometric*"	76,997
5	Restriction	Article title, abstract, keywords	
6	Period	1978 to 2025	
Selection of subject area, language, and document type			
7	Scopus subject area	Business, Management, Accounting	7,873
8	Document type	Article and Review	
9	Language	English	
Date of search: 21st January 2026			

While our search outcomes follow established norms for procedural reflexivity, we also adopt philosophical reflexivity, recognising that choices about databases, keywords, and temporal boundaries are value-laden rather than neutral. We therefore present the corpus as an illustrative dataset shaped by these assumptions, modelling the reflexive approach advocated in this paper. Using the data from our corpus, the growth trajectory of bibliometric SLRs is particularly notable from 2015 onwards, reflecting shifts in methodological expectations and performance-driven academic cultures. Figure 1 illustrates this upward trend in publication volume.

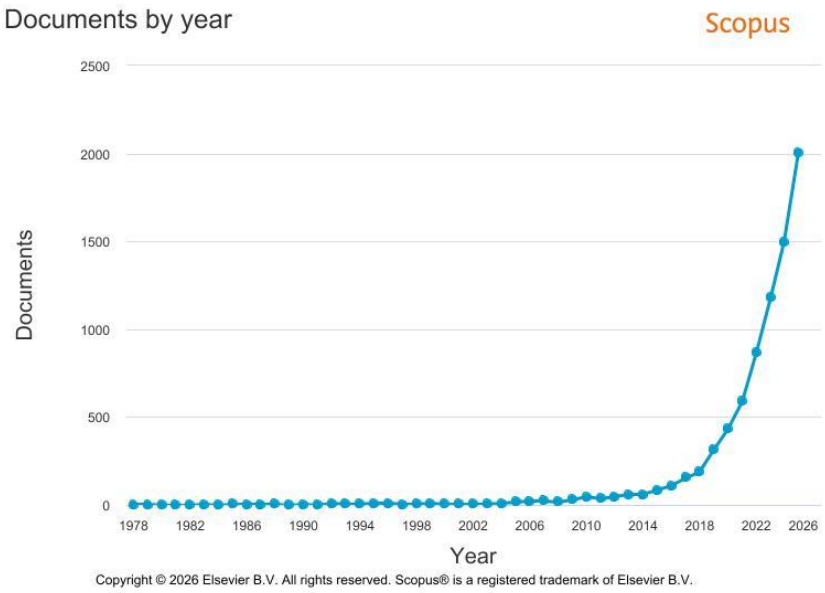


Figure 1. Evolution of bibliometric SLR journal articles in business and management research (Source: Scopus)

The top five journals publishing bibliometric SLR articles in business and management research are Journal of Cleaner Production (n=272) articles, Technological Forecasting and Social Change (n=178) articles, Cogent Business and Management (n=145) articles, Journal of Business Research (n=133) articles, and Humanities and Social Sciences Communications (n=107) articles. A multiple line chart illustrating the evolution of these journals publications is presented in Appendix 1.

While this expansion demonstrates the mainstreaming of bibliometric methods, it also raises critical questions about how such growth shapes the intellectual landscape of business and management scholarship. The concentration of bibliometric SLRs in higher-ranked journals suggests that citation-based legitimacy is increasingly tied to evaluative regimes such as journal rankings and impact factors (Hicks et al., 2015). This pattern reinforces axiological bias, privileging mainstream paradigms while marginalising practitioner-oriented or heterodox contributions (Kumpulainen & Seppanen, 2022; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The geographic

distribution of author affiliations further highlights Global North dominance, evidencing epistemic inequalities in whose knowledge is recognised as authoritative (Nkomo, 2015). Finally, the increasing invocation of protocol-driven frameworks signals both the codification of review practice and the risk of methodological routinisation. Hence, these dynamics underscore the need for closer scrutiny, which the following sections address.

2.2. Methodological strengths and scholarly contributions

Bibliometric SLRs offer several advantages that have helped advance business and management research. Their alignment with scientific norms of transparency and verifiability has made them attractive to scholars seeking to consolidate knowledge across large bodies of literature. Protocol-driven frameworks provide explicit guidance on corpus construction, inclusion criteria, and search logic, enabling independent replication and scrutiny. Using algorithmic extraction and visualisation tools such as CiteSpace, Gephi, and VOSviewer, bibliometric analysis can efficiently synthesise thousands of publications, minimise omission risk, and extend review scope beyond human capacity. Citation, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling analyses reveal relational dynamics between scholars and ideas (Garfield, 1972; Kessler, 1963; Small, 1973), helping to identify dominant paradigms, peripheral clusters, and the diffusion of concepts over time. These methodological strengths have positioned bibliometric SLRs as a valuable tool for theory development, institutional benchmarking, and strategic research planning. Yet these strengths must be understood alongside their limitations. Algorithmic extraction and citation-based mapping can reinforce reductionism, where citation counts are treated as indicators of significance (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014). Co-citation structures may reflect rhetorical citation practices rather than genuine intellectual lineage, privileging mainstream paradigms while obscuring heterodox contributions (Cronin, 1998; Hammarfelt, 2017). Similarly, clustering and visualisation choices shape portrayals of fields,

often presenting them as more coherent and stable than they are in practice (Zupic & Cater, 2015). Because bibliometric SLRs frequently rely on Scopus and other academic database-indexed journals, they privilege English-language sources and Global North epistemologies (Nkomo, 2015). Taken together, these methodological choices highlight the dual nature of bibliometric SLRs: scalable tools for synthesis and theory development, but also interpretive artefacts that embed philosophical assumptions. Recognising this duality underscores the need for reflexive awareness in their application.

2.3 Growing role in knowledge discovery and theory development

While bibliometric SLRs were once seen as descriptive exercises focused on structural mapping, there is increasing emphasis on their potential to support theory development and conceptual innovation. Scholars contend that bibliometric findings can identify blind spots, critically evaluate thematic boundaries, recognise novelty within research domains, and detect paradigm shifts or fragmentation (Linnenluecke et al., 2020). With this view, bibliometrics contribute not only to organising knowledge but also to constructing theory through meta-analytical integration. However, their growing role must be accompanied by reflexive awareness. Authors should disclose methodological assumptions, reviewers should interrogate biases embedded in corpuses, and editors should encourage interpretive contextualisation of bibliometric outputs. Without such reflexivity, bibliometric SLRs risk reinforcing dominant paradigms at the expense of intellectual diversity and theoretical innovation. Recent work by Breslin and Gatrell (2023) advances this discussion by conceptualising literature reviews along a miner-prospector continuum, where ‘miners’ consolidate existing knowledge through systematic rigour while ‘prospectors’ explore new intellectual terrain to generate theoretical innovation. Integrating their continuum into the reflexive bibliometric framework proposed here demonstrates how epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal awareness can

re-balance review practice. Similarly, Kunisch et al. (2023) conceptualise review research as a distinct form of scientific inquiry, while Aguinis et al. (2023) highlight best-practice recommendations for methodological reviews. Together, these insights reinforce the argument that bibliometric SLRs are interpretive practices whose contribution type and methodological rigour must be reflexively disclosed and critically assessed.

More recently Kaur (2025) exemplifies the strengths and limitations of contemporary bibliometric SLR mapping. Kaur's study demonstrates the power of large-scale, data-driven approaches to reveal structural patterns across vast literatures, offering valuable insights into interdisciplinarity and field evolution. However, its methodological commitments also illustrate the need for reflexive scrutiny. While Kaur provides a comprehensive review of the field, the analysis remains grounded in the assumption that citation-based clusters reflect underlying intellectual communities. This paper complements and extends this work by interrogating the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal assumptions that shape such mappings. Whereas Kaur offers a descriptive account of the field's structure, this paper provides a philosophical framework for understanding better how bibliometric tools construct that structure. In doing so, it contributes a reflexive lens that reveals what large-scale mapping studies cannot capture on their own: the interpretive, value-laden, and temporally uneven dynamics of citation-based knowledge creation.

3. Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Bibliometric SLRs

This section examines the philosophical assumptions embedded in bibliometric SLRs and shows how they shape what becomes visible, legitimate, and citable in business and management research. It is organised around four core dimensions - epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality - and demonstrates how each dimension introduces specific risks

and distortions. For each dimension, we provide explicit evaluative guidance for authors, reviewers, and editors to support reflexive bibliometric practice.

3.1 Epistemology: How bibliometric SLRs construct knowledge

Bibliometric SLRs are often underpinned by a positivist epistemology that treats citation frequency as a proxy for intellectual significance. In this view, knowledge is constructed through measurable influence, and highly cited works are assumed to represent the most important contributions to a field (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014). While this assumption provides a convenient basis for large-scale mapping, it risks reducing complex scholarly practices to quantitative indicators. Citations serve multiple rhetorical and strategic functions such as signalling legitimacy, aligning with dominant paradigms, or positioning work within established debates (Cronin, 1998). When bibliometric analyses equate frequency with importance, these rhetorical dimensions are obscured, and the epistemic richness of citation practices is flattened into numerical counts. This epistemic reductionism has practical consequences for bibliometric SLRs in business and management research. Co-citation structures, for example, are often interpreted as objective representations of intellectual communities. Yet they may simply reflect patterns of rhetorical alignment, where scholars cite seminal works to demonstrate conformity rather than to engage substantively with their arguments (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014; Cronin, 1998). In practice, this means that bibliometric SLRs can reproduce dominant paradigms while overlooking heterodox or emergent perspectives that have not yet accumulated sufficient citations to be algorithmically visible. The result is a narrowing of theoretical horizons, where knowledge discovery is guided by citation volume rather than conceptual novelty. Recognising the epistemological assumptions embedded in bibliometric practice is therefore essential. Reflexive bibliometric SLRs should explicitly acknowledge the interpretive nature of citation counts, clarifying how

frequency is understood in relation to intellectual significance, rhetorical positioning, and legitimacy. By doing so, they move beyond treating bibliometrics as neutral measures and instead situate them as interpretive devices that require contextualisation.

3.1.1 Epistemology in the Audit Society

Business and management research operates within highly institutionalised systems of evaluation, accreditation, and impact reporting, linking bibliometrics to what Power (1997) describes as the audit society. Norms of quantification influence knowledge production, and visibility becomes a strategic goal. Journals act as gatekeepers of academic legitimacy, and bibliometrics functions not merely as a methodological tool but as a regime of governance embedded within academic culture. In business schools - particularly those with AACSB and EQUIS accreditation - and in national research evaluations such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework, citation impact is rewarded. This system tends to privilege established theories, quantitative work within dominant paradigms, English-language journals, rapidly cited topics, and highly cited contributions. Conversely, radical challenges, interdisciplinary or innovative fields, regional or indigenous research, and slow-evolving ideas are disfavoured. Citation behaviour is also shaped by social biases including homophily, prestige bias, gender and ethnicity disparities, and linguistic imperialism (Crespo et al., 2013; Dworkin et al., 2020; Hammarfelt & Haddow, 2018). These produce skewed citation landscapes that do not accurately reflect scholarly merit. Bibliometrics risks reproducing these inequalities by transforming historical advantage into ongoing dominance, citation gaps into reputational gaps, and structural biases into infrastructural biases. This manifests in what Ros and Wevers (2025) refer to as epistemic capture, where accepted knowledge boundaries reflect social privilege rather than epistemic strength.

3.1.2 The Interpretive labour behind bibliometric knowledge

A bibliometric SLR involves numerous unseen interpretive decisions: selecting keywords, defining subject areas, determining temporal boundaries, choosing document types, and setting thresholds for meaningful citations. These decisions require scholarly judgement, yet they are often masked by an aura of computational authority (Zupic & Cater, 2015). Transparency about design choices is essential for bibliometric validity. Foucault's (1980) concept of governmentality helps explain how systems of measurement shape behaviours. Bibliometrics functions as a mode of governance in which visibility becomes a form of control, authors internalise performance tracking, and research agendas align with what metrics reward. In business and management scholarship, this can shift focus from societal impact to citation potential, from critical theory to managerial orthodoxy, and from local engagement to global metric success. Watermeyer (2019) terms this asymmetrical accountability, in which scholars are accountable to metrics rather than to the public good.

3.1.3 Responsible metrics as pragmatic epistemology

Responsible metrics frameworks (Hicks et al., 2015; Himanen et al., 2024) reflect a pragmatist epistemology in which knowledge is evaluated for its usefulness to meaningful research goals and where methodological pluralism is embraced. Metrics are tools, not absolute truths. This stance guards against over-reliance on any single metric, citation essentialism, and evaluation monoculture, replacing them with contextual interpretation and expert judgement. Responsible metrics promote a reflexive realist ethos: metrics reveal something, but never everything. They help scholars avoid misuse of quantitative indicators, protect emerging or interdisciplinary research, enhance methodological credibility, and maintain focus on knowledge that matters to business and society.

3.2 Ontology: What reality do bibliometric maps represent?

Bibliometric SLRs often rest on a realist ontology that treats publications, citations, and clusters as natural categories existing independently of the analytical methods used to produce them. In this view, bibliometric maps are assumed to mirror the intellectual structure of a field (Leydesdorff, 2001). Yet clusters and networks are at least partly produced through algorithmic thresholds, database coverage, and visualisation choices (Hammarfelt, 2017; Zupic & Cater, 2015). These methodological decisions impose boundaries that appear natural but are in fact contingent. This oversimplification can mislead theory development. A bibliometric map may suggest coherence where fragmentation exists, or stability where contestation is the norm. Treating clusters as objective communities risks overlooking cross-cutting debates, emergent perspectives, and practitioner knowledge that fall outside algorithmic visibility. Reflexive bibliometric practice requires scholars to acknowledge this constructed ontology and disclose the methodological choices that shape it.

3.2.1 Algorithmic ontology

Scientometric tools like CiteSpace, Gephi, and VOSviewer perform scholarly communication by converting complex textual meanings into numeric similarity metrics (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). They generally assume that citation, co-citation and bibliographic coupling analyses reflect conceptual connections or shared intellectual heritage, even though such relationships may be contextual or rhetorical (Waltman & van Eck, 2012). Visualisation platforms impose structure using clustering and layout algorithms that reflect encoded choices concerning proximity, centrality, and modularity (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). Through these computational approaches, abstract scholarly relationships are transformed into perceived knowledge boundaries. These are then interpreted as objective intellectual frameworks (Chen, 2017). As a result, these tools embed algorithmic assumptions that influence what ‘exists’ within the

mapped research domain and how influence is interpreted. Slight adjustments in distance metrics, co-occurrence thresholds, and normalisation techniques can generate different ontologies of the same scholarly field (Thelwall, 2017). This leads to ontology becoming computationally constructed rather than neutrally discovered. In the attempt to visualise intellectual structures, bibliometrics reduces diverse forms of scholarship into labels and nodes (articles, authors, keywords). The item's weight determines the size of the label and circle. The higher the weight, the larger the label and circle. The colour indicates the cluster to which it belongs. The lines between items represent edges (relationship links). The distance between the two items indicates their relatedness regarding link strength which omits epistemic richness and context (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Zupic & Cater, 2015). Conceptual nuance is lost through aggregation, thus erasing the interpretive dimensions of scholarship from network outputs (Chen, 2017). Citation-based mapping also tends to favour fast-moving, high-volume research fields, making slower areas seem marginal or peripheral. Furthermore, complex academic behaviours, including rhetorical citation, interdisciplinary borrowing, or critical positioning, are simplified to geometric proximity in visual space, reifying algorithmic assumptions as objective relationships (Waltman & van Eck, 2012). Bibliometric maps are therefore representational artefacts or models that simplify complexity to make scholarly landscapes understandable (Rafols, 2019). Their ontological status is pragmatic, not literal.

3.2.2 Database politics and ontological boundaries

Commercial database providers such as Clarivate and Elsevier determine which journals 'exist' in global knowledge infrastructures (Kumpulainen & Seppanen, 2022). Their inclusion criteria favour profitable, large-scale publishers and marginalise practitioner outlets, open scholarship, and independent presses. What is not indexed becomes invisible to citation-based inquiry and is excluded from 'evidence-based' synthesis. Bibliometric SLRs may unintentionally narrow

knowledge landscapes by erasing local business practices, indigenous entrepreneurship models, and non-Western managerial theories (George et al., 2016; Nkomo, 2015). This ontological exclusion demands critical auditing of corpus construction practices.

3.2.3 Governmentality and the construction of scholarly reality

Metrics do not merely measure scholarly activity; they shape it. Through governmentality (Foucault, 1980), bibliometric systems influence what scholars' study, how they write, and which audiences they target. Citation-driven incentives can narrow the intellectual landscape, privileging topics that align with metric visibility over those that address societal needs.

3.3 Axiology: Values embedded in bibliometric evaluation

Bibliometric SLRs embed value judgements about what counts as legitimate knowledge. They privilege citation counts, journal rankings, and database inclusion as proxies for quality (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016; Hicks et al., 2015; Wilsdon et al., 2015). This evaluative bias systematically favours English-language journals, Global North epistemologies, and mainstream paradigms, while marginalising practitioner-oriented, heterodox, or regionally grounded contributions. Citation counts reflect cumulative advantage: highly cited works continue to accrue visibility, while innovative or disruptive contributions may be overlooked until they achieve sufficient recognition (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014; Hammarfelt, 2017). Bibliometric SLRs that report only citation frequencies risk reproducing evaluative hierarchies rather than interrogating them. Reflexive bibliometric practice requires scholars to disclose how evaluative criteria shape their findings and to situate bibliometric indicators within broader value regimes.

3.3.1 Axiology in the audit society

The audit culture of business schools amplifies axiological distortions. Accreditation systems, journal rankings, and national research evaluations reward particular forms of knowledge production, reinforcing hierarchies of legitimacy. Bibliometrics becomes a mechanism through which value judgements are institutionalised and reproduced.

3.3.2 Axiological justice and responsible evaluation

Responsible metrics frameworks emphasise inclusive representation, contextual interpretation, and ethical evaluation. They advocate that metrics should inform but not replace expert review, that evaluation must consider diverse outputs and contexts, and that transparency in metric construction is essential (Hicks et al., 2015; Himanen et al., 2024). These principles support knowledge justice and help prevent bibliometric SLRs from reinforcing epistemic inequalities.

3.4 The Chronopolitics of Citation: Temporal distortions in scholarly influence

Traditional bibliometric analyses rely on cumulative citation counts, privileging older, established publications that have had time to accumulate citations. Innovative or heterodox contributions may remain under-recognised until they achieve sufficient visibility. These chronopolitical effects entrench legacy paradigms and undervalue emerging perspectives (Hammarfelt, 2017). A bibliometric SLR that reports only cumulative citation frequencies risks presenting a static picture of influence, obscuring the dynamic processes through which ideas gain or lose traction. Citation half-life, trajectory patterns, and delayed recognition provide richer insights into scholarly influence but are rarely considered in standard practice. Reflexive bibliometric practice requires scholars to incorporate temporality into their analyses and interpret citation patterns as evolving processes rather than fixed indicators of value.

3.4.1 Temporal fairness in responsible metrics

Responsible metrics frameworks emphasise temporal fairness: recognising slow-burn contributions, avoiding overreliance on short-term citation visibility, and evaluating influence as a trajectory rather than a snapshot. This supports more balanced assessments of scholarly impact.

3.5 Methodological Implications for reflexive bibliometric SLRs

The philosophical critique outlined above has methodological implications for how bibliometric SLRs should be conducted. Reflexivity requires researchers to clearly define epistemic assumptions; articulate whether influence is being equated with citations; clarify whether clusters reflect ontology or analytical convenience; justify corpus construction decisions; and explain database and keyword choices. Recognising that bibliometric SLRs are the result of interpretive labour is essential for methodological transparency (Paul et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003). Without such reflexivity, bibliometric outcomes risk producing superficial mappings rather than contributing to meaningful knowledge development.

3.6 Towards equitable and reflexive knowledge recognition

Reflexive bibliometric practice can help reduce biases by including regional databases (e.g., SciELO, CNKI, African Journals Online), recognising diverse knowledge contributions, foregrounding underrepresented epistemologies (Nkomo, 2015), and measuring societal impact alongside scholarly citations (Aguinis et al., 2020). This supports the broader movement to decolonise business scholarship and promotes more inclusive theory development. By situating bibliometric methods within a responsible metrics framework, computational power and scholarly judgement are integrated, interpretive labour is made visible, methodological transparency enhances rigour, and ethical practices promote inclusion and credibility. The next

section operationalises this philosophical position into a practical model of reflexive bibliometric practice, offering guidance for researchers, reviewers, and policymakers.

3.7 A conceptual model of reflexive bibliometric practice

To reiterate, bibliometric SLRs are often presented as objective, rigorous, and scalable methods for synthesising academic knowledge. Yet, as the preceding sections have shown, they rest on philosophical assumptions that shape how knowledge is represented and valued. To move beyond these limitations, we propose here a conceptual model of reflexive bibliometric practice that integrates four dimensions - epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality - into the design, conduct, and evaluation of bibliometric SLRs.

Epistemology: Knowledge Construction. At the planning stage, reflexivity requires authors to acknowledge that citation frequency does not automatically equate to intellectual significance (Bornmann & Leydesdorff, 2014). Instead of treating highly cited works as inherently more valuable, reviewers should consider the rhetorical, strategic, and contextual functions of citations. In practice, this means reporting how citation patterns are interpreted, clarifying whether they reflect intellectual lineage, controversy, or legitimacy-seeking behaviour.

Ontology: Representing Reality. During the search and analysis stages, bibliometric maps are often treated as mirrors of scholarly reality (Leydesdorff, 2001). Reflexivity challenges this assumption by recognising that clusters and networks are constructed artefacts shaped by database coverage, algorithmic thresholds, and visualisation choices (Hammarfelt, 2017; Kumpulainen & Seppanen, 2022; Zupic & Cater, 2015). Reflexive practice requires authors to disclose these methodological decisions and to interpret clusters as heuristic devices rather than

objective communities. For reviewers and editors, this means assessing whether authors have explained how algorithmic settings influence the ontological picture of the field.

Axiology: Values and Evaluation. At the reporting stage, bibliometric indicators are often used to signal value, reinforcing journal rankings and citation counts as proxies for quality (Hicks et al., 2015; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Reflexivity requires authors to situate these metrics within broader evaluative regimes, acknowledging how they privilege mainstream paradigms and marginalise alternative epistemologies. Practically, this involves discussing the value assumptions embedded in database selection, journal lists, and performance metrics, and considering how these shape the conclusions of the review.

Temporality: Chronopolitics of Citation. Finally, reflexivity must account for the temporal dynamics of citation - the chronopolitics of citation. Older works accumulate citations by default; while emerging or heterodox contributions often experience delayed recognition (Hammarfelt, 2017). Reflexive bibliometric practice requires authors to report citation trajectories, half-lives, and patterns of delayed influence, rather than relying solely on cumulative counts. This provides a fairer view of scholarly impact and helps reviewers and editors to identify contributions that may be undervalued in short-term metrics. Taken together, these dimensions form the locus of a reflexive zone where bibliometric SLRs are recognised as interpretive knowledge devices rather than neutral measurement tools. Figure 2 illustrates the integration of epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal commitments to support reflexive bibliometric practice.

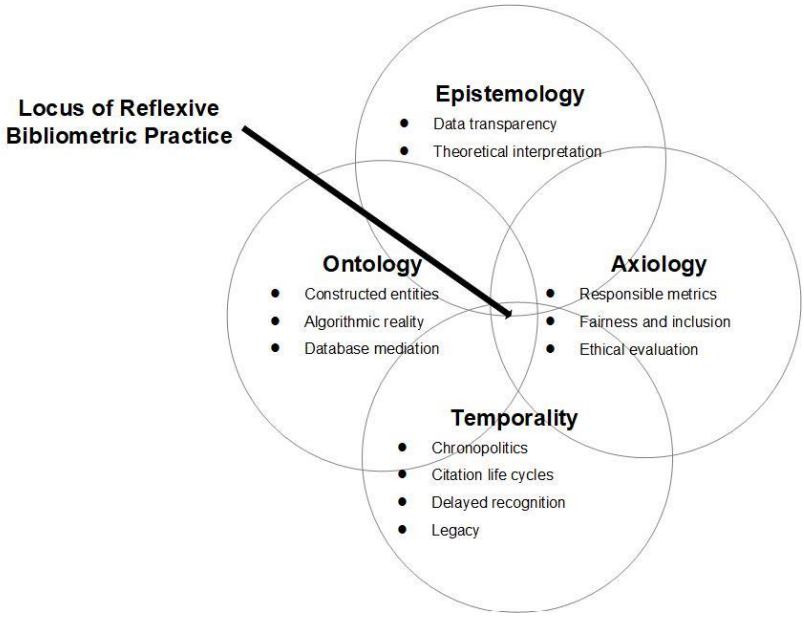


Figure 2. Framework for Reflexive Bibliometric Practice

By embedding reflexivity at each stage, bibliometric SLRs can move beyond descriptive mapping to support theory development, ethical evaluation, and more inclusive governance of research.

In this paper, the unit of analysis is the review design itself, understood as the set of methodological, interpretive, and evaluative choices through which review teams construct bibliometric knowledge. Rather than treating reflexivity as a characteristic of individual researchers or as a property of wider governance systems, the framework conceptualises review design as the locus where epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal assumptions are operationalised in practice. This focus enables a clearer explanation of how specific decisions - such as database selection, clustering thresholds, evaluative criteria, or temporal windows - shape the knowledge claims that bibliometric SLRs can make. By centring the review design as the primary analytical unit, the framework shows how reflexive bibliometric practice can be systematically embedded into the architecture of evidence synthesis, providing

a coherent mechanism through which interpretive awareness enhances transparency, methodological robustness, and theoretical contribution.

4. Advocating Reflexive Bibliometric Practice

This section develops the reflexive bibliometric framework. It integrates the four philosophical dimensions - epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality - and demonstrates how reflexive awareness can reshape the design and interpretation of bibliometric SLRs.

Bibliometric SLRs are not neutral instruments; they are interpretive devices shaped by epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal assumptions. To advance this recognition, we propose a reflexive bibliometric practice process that embeds philosophical awareness into every stage of review design, execution, and evaluation. Reflexivity entails explicitly acknowledging methodological assumptions, disclosing interpretive choices, and contextualising quantitative outputs with qualitative insight. Protocol-driven frameworks promote transparency and replicability, yet they remain largely silent on the philosophical foundations of bibliometric analysis. Reflexivity complements these frameworks by adding a critical layer of awareness at each stage of review, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Process of Reflexive Bibliometric Practice

Stage of SLR	Reflexive Bibliometric Practice
Planning	Articulate epistemic assumptions about citation use, clarifying whether frequency signals influence, legitimacy, or rhetorical alignment.
Search and Selection	Disclose database politics, including language restrictions, indexing biases, and inclusion/exclusion criteria that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge.
Analysis	Report algorithmic thresholds and clustering logic, recognising that maps are constructed artefacts rather than mirrors of reality.
Interpretation	Contextualise findings within evaluative regimes, acknowledging how journal rankings and citation counts embed axiological bias.

Reporting	Incorporate temporality by analysing citation trajectories, half-lives, and delayed recognition, thereby mitigating legacy dominance and cumulative advantage.

For instance, consider a hypothetical example of a bibliometric SLR of sustainability reporting. A conventional review might simply map clusters of publications and conclude that mainstream accounting and governance paradigms dominate the field. A reflexive review, by contrast, interrogates how citation practices privilege these paradigms, discloses algorithmic choices in clustering, and examines whether practitioner-oriented or Global South contributions are excluded by database filters. It also analyses citation trajectories to identify 'slow-burn' contributions that gain influence over time. Such reflexivity yields richer theoretical insights, revealing not only dominant paradigms but also marginalised perspectives and emergent ideas. This hypothetical example of how bibliometric SLRs can demonstrate reflexivity in action is illustrated in Appendix 2. Together, these pathways institutionalise reflexivity, transforming it from an individual scholarly stance into a systemic norm. Reflexive bibliometric practice thus provides a philosophical toolkit that complements existing protocols, enriches theory development, and promotes more inclusive governance of research.

5. Implications for Authors, Reviewers, and Editors

The philosophical framework developed in this paper has direct consequences for how bibliometric SLRs should be designed, evaluated, and governed within business and management research. Because bibliometric SLRs increasingly shape what is recognised as legitimate knowledge, reflexivity cannot remain an abstract ideal; it must be operationalised through concrete expectations for authors, reviewers, and editors. In what follows, we translate the four philosophical dimensions - epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality - into practical guidance for each stakeholder group. The aim is to support a more transparent, inclusive, and methodologically robust bibliometric review culture.

5.1 Implications for authors conducting bibliometric SLRs

For authors, reflexive bibliometric practice begins with acknowledging that bibliometric SLRs do not simply "discover" intellectual structures but actively construct them. This requires authors to articulate the epistemic purpose of their review from the outset. Whether the intention is to map a field, evaluate its development, synthesise conceptual trajectories, or identify theoretical blind spots, authors should make explicit how their epistemic stance shapes the interpretation of citation patterns. Treating citation counts as indicators rather than explanations is essential; authors should contextualise citation behaviour in terms of rhetorical practices, institutional incentives, and disciplinary norms rather than if frequency equates to intellectual significance. Ontological reflexivity requires authors to treat clusters and networks as heuristic devices rather than as representations of real scholarly communities. This means disclosing the methodological decisions that shape the corpus - database selection, keyword logic, inclusion and exclusion criteria, document types - and explaining how algorithmic thresholds, normalisation techniques, and visualisation settings influence the resulting map. Authors should avoid reifying algorithmic artefacts and instead provide interpretive commentary that situates clusters within the broader intellectual landscape. Axiological reflexivity demands that authors recognise the value-laden nature of bibliometric indicators. Decisions about journal rankings, citation thresholds, and database coverage inevitably privilege certain epistemologies and marginalise others. Authors should therefore reflect on whose knowledge is included or excluded, consider incorporating regional or non-English-language databases where appropriate, and acknowledge how performance cultures such as AACSB, EQUIS, or the Research Excellence Framework shape the visibility of contributions. Making these evaluative assumptions explicit strengthens the credibility of the review and supports more inclusive knowledge recognition. Temporal reflexivity requires

authors to move beyond cumulative citation counts and to report citation trajectories, half-lives, and delayed recognition. Influence should be presented as a dynamic process rather than a static snapshot. Identifying slow-burn contributions, citation bursts, or temporal anomalies can reveal intellectual developments that cumulative counts obscure. By situating influence within its temporal context, authors can avoid chronopolitical distortions that privilege legacy paradigms and overlook emerging or heterodox ideas.

5.2 Implications for reviewers evaluating bibliometric SLRs

Reviewers play a crucial role in ensuring that bibliometric SLRs meet appropriate standards of reflexivity and methodological rigour. When assessing epistemological coherence, reviewers should examine whether authors have clearly stated the epistemic purpose of their review and whether their interpretation of citation patterns is consistent with that purpose. Overreliance on quantitative indicators without interpretive justification should be challenged, and reviewers should encourage authors to contextualise citation behaviour rather than treating it as a direct measure of intellectual significance. Ontological scrutiny requires reviewers to interrogate how authors have constructed their corpus and whether they have been transparent about database coverage, inclusion criteria, and algorithmic choices. Reviewers should be alerted to claims that present clusters or networks as objective representations of a field and should encourage authors to treat these structures as heuristic rather than definitive. Where necessary, reviewers should request additional explanation or triangulation to support interpretive claims. From an axiological perspective, reviewers should be attentive to unacknowledged value judgements embedded in the review. This includes biases arising from reliance on journal rankings, English-language sources, or citation-based indicators that privilege dominant paradigms. Reviewers should encourage authors to reflect on these biases and to consider how their methodological choices shape the visibility of different knowledge traditions. Responsible

metrics principles provide a useful benchmark for evaluating whether the review aligns with ethical and inclusive evaluative practices. Temporal reflexivity should also form part of the review process. Reviewers should assess whether authors have considered citation trajectories, half-lives, and delayed recognition, and whether claims about influence or field evolution are supported by appropriate temporal analysis. Manuscripts that rely solely on cumulative citation counts without acknowledging temporal distortions risk misrepresenting intellectual developments and should be encouraged to adopt a more nuanced temporal perspective.

5.3 Implications for editors and editorial boards

Editors and editorial boards have the authority to shape the governance of bibliometric SLRs and to set expectations that promote reflexive and responsible review practice. Editorial guidance can help ensure that bibliometric SLRs submitted to journals do not reproduce unexamined assumptions or reinforce epistemic inequalities. From an epistemological standpoint, editors may wish to require authors to state the epistemic purpose of their review explicitly and to justify their interpretive stance toward citation patterns. Manuscripts that treat citation counts as proxies for quality or influence without contextualisation should be encouraged to adopt a more reflexive approach. Ontologically, editors can promote transparency by requiring authors to include a methodological appendix detailing corpus construction, database coverage, algorithmic thresholds, and visualisation settings. Such disclosures help reviewers and readers understand how bibliometric maps were produced and prevent the reification of algorithmic artefacts. Editors may also encourage authors to treat clusters as heuristic devices and to avoid presenting bibliometric structures as objective representations of scholarly reality. Axiologically, editors can play a key role in promoting evaluative fairness. This may involve encouraging authors to reflect on the value-laden nature of bibliometric indicators, to consider diverse sources of knowledge, and to align their work

with responsible metrics frameworks such as DORA, the Leiden Manifesto, or the SCOPE principles. Editorial policies that support inclusive representation and knowledge justice can help counteract the structural biases embedded in citation-based evaluation. Finally, editors can promote temporal reflexivity by requiring authors to report citation trajectories, half-lives, and temporal anomalies. Manuscripts that rely solely on cumulative citation counts should be encouraged to adopt more temporally sensitive approaches. By embedding temporal awareness into editorial expectations, journals can help prevent chronopolitical distortions and support more accurate interpretations of scholarly influence.

Taken together, these implications provide a governance framework for reflexive bibliometric practice. By embedding epistemological, ontological, axiological, and temporal reflexivity into the design, evaluation, and editorial oversight of bibliometric SLRs, the business and management research community can move beyond proceduralism toward more inclusive, context-sensitive, and theoretically generative forms of knowledge synthesis. Table 3 operationalises this framework into a set of evaluative criteria that authors, reviewers, and editors can use to guide and assess bibliometric SLRs.

Table 3. Reflexive evaluation framework for bibliometric SLRs

Philosophical Dimensions/Distortions	Implications for Authors	Implications for Reviewers	Implications for Editors
Epistemology Over reliance on citation counts as indicators of significance; epistemic reductionism.	Authors should articulate the epistemic purpose of the review, contextualise citation patterns, and avoid treating frequency as importance. Interpretive commentary should accompany	Reviewers should assess whether epistemic assumptions are explicit, whether citation data are interpreted cautiously, and whether claims about influence are justified.	Editors should require explicit epistemic justification and discourage manuscripts that equate citation counts with scholarly value.

	quantitative findings.		
Ontology Reification of clusters and networks; treating database boundaries as natural.	Authors should treat clusters as heuristic devices, disclose corpus construction decisions, and explain algorithmic thresholds and visualisation choices.	Reviewers should examine transparency in corpus construction and algorithmic settings, and challenge claims that present maps as objective representations.	Editors should require methodological appendices detailing corpus construction and promote transparency in database coverage and analytical choices.
Axiology Reinforcement of dominant paradigms; privileging English language and Global North epistemologies.	Authors should disclose value-laden decisions, reflect on whose knowledge is included or excluded, and consider incorporating regional or non-English language databases.	Reviewers should identify unacknowledged evaluative biases and encourage alignment with responsible metrics principles.	Editors should promote inclusive evaluative standards and encourage alignment with frameworks such as DORA, the Leiden Manifesto, and SCOPE.
Temporality Chronopolitical distortions; privileging older, established work.	Authors should report citation trajectories, half-lives, and delayed recognition, interpreting influence as dynamic rather than static.	Reviewers should assess whether temporal dynamics are analysed and whether cumulative counts are contextualised.	Editors should require temporal reporting and discourage reliance solely on cumulative citation counts.
Cross-cutting Reflexivity Treating bibliometric SLRs as neutral technical procedures.	Authors should make interpretive labour visible and justify methodological decisions.	Reviewers should assess reflexive disclosures and methodological transparency.	Editors should encourage reflexive reporting standards and promote responsible bibliometric governance.

6. Conclusions

The paper introduces a novel framework that embeds epistemology, ontology, axiology, and temporality into the design and interpretation of bibliometric SLRs. While reflexivity has been

widely discussed in qualitative research (see Kaur, 2025), it has rarely been applied to algorithmic, database-driven methodologies. This framework extends reflexivity beyond researcher positionality to encompass the sociotechnical systems through which bibliometric knowledge is produced. The framework is also operationalised into a set of evaluative criteria that authors, reviewers, and editors can use to guide and assess bibliometric SLRs. Existing bibliometric methodologies often assume that citation counts, and algorithmic clusters objectively mirror intellectual reality. This paper challenges that assumption by demonstrating how bibliometric tools enact specific epistemic and ontological commitments. It reframes bibliometrics as interpretive devices that construct, rather than merely reveal, scholarly landscapes. This conceptual shift distinguishes the paper from both protocol-driven bibliometric SLR frameworks and responsible metrics initiatives, which focus primarily on governance rather than methodological reflexivity. The paper develops the concept of chronopolitics of citation to explain how temporal dynamics shape scholarly visibility. Citation accumulation privileges older, mainstream work while delaying recognition of innovative or heterodox contributions. This temporal distortion has significant implications for how bibliometric SLRs represent intellectual influence and field evolution. The chronopolitics concept provides a new theoretical lens for understanding cumulative advantage and temporal bias in citation-based evaluation. Drawing on a dataset of over 7,800 Scopus-indexed bibliometric SLRs published between 1978 and 2025, the paper illustrates how epistemic, ontological, axiological, and temporal assumptions manifest in practice. The empirical data is not presented as a standalone statistical analysis but as a corpus that grounds the conceptual argument. This hybrid approach demonstrates how reflexive bibliometric practice can be operationalised in real review contexts.

References

Aguinis, H., Cascio, W. F., & Ramani, R. S. (2020). Science's Reproducibility and Replicability Crisis: International Business is not Immune. In: Eden, L., Nielsen, B. B., Verbeke, A. (Eds.), *Research Methods in International Business*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22113-3_2

Aguinis, H., Ramani, R. S., & Alabduljader, N. (2023). Best-practice recommendations for producers, evaluators, and users of methodological literature reviews. *Organizational Research Methods*, 26(1), 46-76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428120943281

Baas, J., Schotten, M., Plume, A., Cote, G., & Karimi, R. (2020). Scopus as a curated, high-quality bibliometric data source for academic research in quantitative science studies. *Quantitative Science Studies*, 1(1), 377-386. https://doi.org/10.1162/qss_a_00019

Bhukya, R., Paul, J., Kastanakis, M., & Robinson, S. (2022). Forty years of European Management Journal: A bibliometric overview. *European Management Journal*, 40(1), 10-28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.04.001

Borgatti, S. P., & Halgin, D. S. (2011). On network theory. *Organization Science*, 22(5), 1168-1181. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0641

Bornmann, L., & Leydesdorff, L. (2014). *Scientometrics in a changing research landscape*. EMBO Report 15, 1228-1232. https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.201439608

Breslin, D., & Gatrell, C. (2023). Theorizing through literature reviews: The miner-prospector continuum. *Organizational Research Methods*, 26(1), 139-167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428120943288

Chen, C. (2017). Science mapping: a systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Data and Information Science*, 2(2), 1-40. https://doi.org/10.1515/jdis-2017-0006

Coombes, P. (2024). Systematic review research in marketing scholarship: Optimizing rigor. *International Journal of Market Research*, 66(6), 687-693. https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853231184729

Crespo, J. A., Li, Y., & Ruiz–Castillo, J. (2013). The measurement of the effect on citation inequality of differences in citation practices across scientific fields. *PLOS One*, 8(3), e58727. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0058727

Cronin, B. (1998). Metatheorizing citation. *Scientometrics*, 43(1), 45-55. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02458393

Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 133, 285-296. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.070

Dworkin, J. D., Linn, K. A., Teich, E. G., Zurn, P., Shinohara, R. T., & Bassett, D. S. (2020). The extent and drivers of gender imbalance in neuroscience reference lists. *Nature Neuroscience*, 23, 918-926. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41593-020-0658-y

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79*, (Ed. Colin Gordon). Pantheon.

Garfield, E. (1972). Citation analysis as tool in journal evaluation. *Science*, 178(4060), 471-479. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.178.4060.471

George, G., Howard-Grenville, J., Joshi, A., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). Understanding and Tackling Societal Grand Challenges through Management Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(6), 1880-1885. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4007

Hammarfelt, B. (2017). Four claims on research assessment and metric use in the humanities. *Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 43(5), 33-38. https://doi.org/10.1002/bul2.2017.1720430508

Hammarfelt, B., & Haddow, G. (2018). Conflicting measures and values: How humanities scholars in Australia and Sweden use and react to bibliometric indicators. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 69(7), 924-935. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24043

Harzing, A. W., & Alakangas, S. (2016). Google Scholar, Scopus and the Web of Science: A longitudinal and cross-disciplinary comparison. *Scientometrics*, 106(2), 787-804. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-015-1798-9

Hicks, D., Wouters, P., Waltman, L., de Rijcke, S., & Rafols, I. (2015). Bibliometrics: The Leiden Manifesto for research metrics. *Nature*, 520, 429-431. https://doi.org/10.1038/520429a

Himanen, L., Conte, E., Gauffriau, M., Strom, T., Wolf, B., & Gadd, E. (2024). The SCOPE framework - implementing ideals of responsible research assessment. *F1000Research*, 12, 1241. https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.140810.2

Kaur, V. (2025). Mapping the Interdisciplinary Landscape of Management and Organization Studies: A Big Data Bibliometric-Systematic Literature Review. *European Management Journal*. Forthcoming. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2025.11.004

Kessler, M. M. (1963). Bibliographic coupling between scientific papers. *American Documentation*, 14(1), 10-25. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.5090140103

Kumpulainen, M., & Seppanen, M. (2022). Combining Web of Science and Scopus datasets in citation-based literature study. *Scientometrics*, 127(10), 5613-5631. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04475-7

Kunisch, S., Denyer, D., Bartunek, J. M., Menz, M., & Cardinal, L. B. (2023). Review research as scientific inquiry. *Organizational Research Methods*, 26(1), 3-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281221127292

Leydesdorff, L. (2001). *The challenge of scientometrics: The development, measurement, and self-organization of scientific communications*. Universal-Publishers.

Linnenluecke, M. K., Marrone, M., & Singh, A. K. (2020). Conducting systematic literature reviews and bibliometric analyses. *Australian Journal of Management*, 45(2), 175-194. https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896219877678

Marzi, G., Balzano, M., Caputo, A., & Pellegrini, M. M. (2025). Guidelines for bibliometric-systematic literature reviews: 10 steps to combine analysis, synthesis and theory development. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 27(1), 81-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12381

Moher, D., et al. (2015). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P) statement. *Systematic Reviews*, 4(1), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-4-1

Mongeon, P., & Paul-Hus, A. (2016). The journal coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: A comparative analysis. *Scientometrics*, 106(1), 213-228. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-015-1765-5

Nkomo, S. M. (2015). Challenges for management and business education in a 'developmental' state: The case of South Africa. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 14(2), 242-258. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2014.0323

Paul, J., Lim, W. M., O'Cass, A., Hao, A. W., & Bresciani, S. (2021). SPAR-4-SLR framework. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), O1-O16. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12695

Power, M. (1997). *The audit society: Rituals of verification*. Oxford University Press.

Rafols, I. (2019). S&T indicators in the wild: Contextualization and participation for responsible metrics. *Research Evaluation*, 28(1), 7-22. https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvy030

Ros, R., & Wevers, M. (2025). Epistemic capture through specialization in post-World War II parliamentary debate. *Computational Humanities Research*, 1, e6. https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2025.10008

Small, H. (1973). Co-citation in the scientific literature: A new measure of the relationship between two documents. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 24(4), 265-269. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.4630240406

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: an overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333-339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Thelwall, M. (2017). *Web indicators for research evaluation. A practical guide*. Morgan & Claypool.

Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Developing evidence-informed management knowledge by systematic review. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), 207-222. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375

van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84(2), 523-538. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3

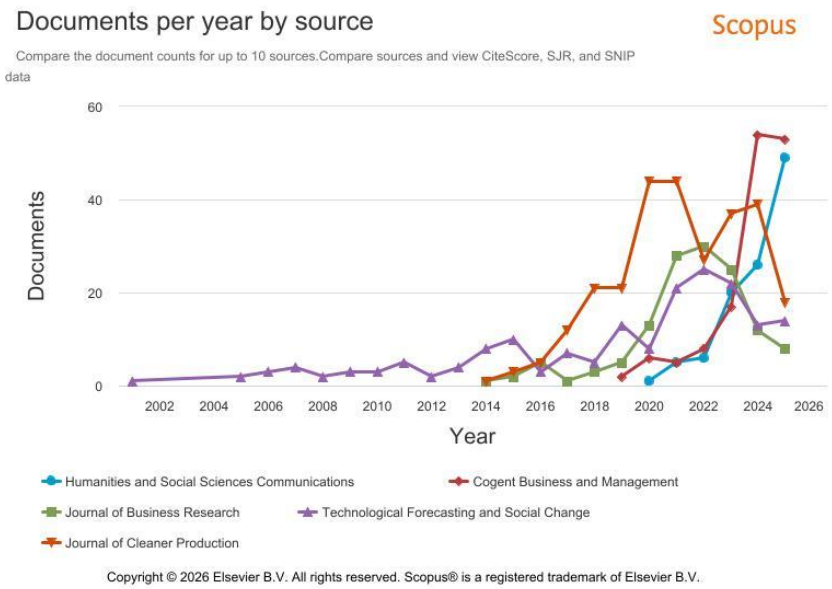
Waltman, L., & van Eck, N. J. (2012). A new methodology for constructing a publication-level classification system of science. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 63(12), 2378-2392. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.22748

Watermeyer, R. (2019). *Competitive accountability in academic evaluation*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wilsdon, J., et al. (2015). The Metric Tide. Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research. *Higher Education Funding Council for England*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4929.1363

Zupic, I., & Cater, T. (2015). Bibliometric methods in management and organization. *Organizational Research Methods*, 18(3), 429-472. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114562629

Appendix 1. Evolution of top five journals publishing bibliometric SLR articles in business and management research (Source: Scopus)



Appendix 2. A hypothetical scenario of reflexive bibliometric practice

This vignette is an illustrative fictional scenario designed to demonstrate the application of reflexive bibliometric practice. It does not derive from a specific empirical analysis.
During the bibliometric SLR mapping of sustainability reporting in business and management research, one cluster emerged that appeared quantitatively anomalous. The co-citation algorithm grouped together articles on corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosure, integrated reporting, and indigenous knowledge systems. At first glance, this cluster seemed incoherent: the textual overlap was weak, citation links were sparse, and the modularity score suggested low internal cohesion. A purely quantitative interpretation might have dismissed the cluster as noise or treated it as a methodological artefact of the algorithm.
Step 1: Identifying the anomaly
Quantitative output: The VOSviewer map showed a small, peripheral cluster linking CSR disclosure studies (largely Global North, accounting journals) with articles on indigenous knowledge and sustainability practices (largely Global South, development studies journals).
Algorithmic interpretation: The cluster was flagged as 'low significance' due to weak density and citation frequency.
Step 2: Reflexive investigation
Rather than discarding the cluster, the research team applied a reflexive lens:
Epistemological awareness: Recognising that citation frequency does not equate to intellectual significance, the team questioned why these disparate literatures were algorithmically linked.
Ontological awareness: Acknowledging that clusters are constructed artefacts, they examined the methodological thresholds that had grouped these articles together.
Axiological awareness: They considered whether evaluative hierarchies (journal rankings, citation counts) were obscuring the normative importance of indigenous sustainability perspectives.
Temporal awareness: They noted that many indigenous knowledge articles were recent and had not yet accumulated citations, producing a chronopolitical distortion.
Step 3: Content and thematic analysis
The team conducted a qualitative content analysis of the articles within the cluster:
CSR disclosure studies: Focused on transparency, accountability, and investor-oriented reporting metrics.
Indigenous knowledge studies: Emphasised relational accountability, stewardship of land, and community-based evaluation.
Thematic overlap: Both literatures addressed the question of 'what counts as legitimate knowledge in sustainability reporting', but from radically different epistemic traditions.
Step 4: Domain expertise
Drawing on expertise in sustainability accounting and critical management studies, the team interpreted the cluster as a site of **latent conceptual convergence**:
CSR disclosure research is beginning to grapple with non-financial forms of accountability.
Indigenous knowledge research offers alternative ontologies of value and responsibility.
The algorithmic link, though quantitatively weak, signalled an emergent dialogue between mainstream reporting practices and heterodox epistemologies.
Step 5: Reflexive interpretation

The reflexive bibliometric SLR reframed the cluster not as noise but as a **critical frontier**:
Interpretive insight: The cluster reveals how bibliometric SLR mapping can surface marginalised literatures that challenge dominant paradigms.
Practical implication: Authors should disclose when clusters are interpreted through thematic analysis rather than quantitative coherence.
Editorial implication: Reviewers and editors should recognise that low-density clusters may represent sites of theoretical innovation rather than methodological error.