

Intellectual Landscape of Service Quality Research in Business Schools: A Thematic Approach

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Abstract:

This study explores the intellectual structure of service quality research in business schools through a keyword co-occurrence analysis of 54 Scopus-indexed articles. Four distinct clusters emerged, each representing a central thematic focus within the field. Cluster 1 emphasizes perceived service quality and educational value, highlighting student satisfaction, loyalty, and the application of quantitative methods such as SERVQUAL and structural equation modeling. Cluster 2 addresses service management and operational innovation, focusing on quality control, operational excellence, and innovative practices in business education. Cluster 3 concentrates on employability and measurement of educational outcomes, underscoring psychometric rigor, scale development, and students' perceptions. Cluster 4 pertains to institutional quality governance and branding, emphasizing quality assurance, perceived quality, and university reputation. By mapping these themes, the study provides a comprehensive overview of research trends, identifies knowledge gaps, and offers insights for educators, administrators, and researchers aiming to enhance service quality and educational effectiveness in business schools.

Keywords: Service Quality, Business Schools, Keyword Co-occurrence, Thematic Clusters, Higher Education

1. Introduction

Contemporary business schools have transcended their conventional role as centers of academic instruction to emerge as dynamic service-oriented institutions embedded within competitive, globalized, and digitally infused ecosystems (Valencia-Arias et al., 2023). Within this reconfigured environment, institutional performance is increasingly appraised not merely through academic metrics but through the holistic value created for a diverse set of stakeholders—including students, alumni, employers, and society at large (Kamakoty & Singh, 2023). Consequently, management education is now positioned at the intersection of pedagogical excellence and service quality, where both tangible and intangible dimensions of the educational experience coalesce to determine institutional distinctiveness and stakeholder allegiance.

The interdependence between educational service quality and stakeholder engagement has been well established in the literature. High-caliber learning experiences, robust administrative systems, and credible employability outcomes enhance perceived institutional value and stimulate long-term emotional and behavioral commitment (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). Institutional image—representing the collective perception of an institution's integrity, prestige, and social legitimacy—functions as an essential intermediary linking perceived quality to behaviors such as advocacy, philanthropic giving, and continued affiliation. Yet, the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and hybrid pedagogies has disrupted established paradigms of quality delivery, compelling business schools to reimagine how excellence, value, and trust are enacted in technologically mediated settings (Osman et al., 2024). Despite these transformations, evidence suggests that foundational principles—such as functional reliability, relevance, and perceived utility—remain central to sustaining satisfaction and loyalty among learners (McKinsey, 2023).

Recent empirical research in higher education underscores that perceptions of service quality are shaped by an interplay of multidimensional determinants, including faculty expertise, infrastructure, technology integration, placement efficacy, and collaboration with industry (Sharif & Lemine, 2021; Kamakoty & Singh, 2023; Valencia-Arias et al., 2023). These factors extend beyond immediate academic encounters to influence enduring perceptions of institutional worth and post-graduation engagement. Alumni relations, once considered an auxiliary outcome of academic identity, have thus evolved into a strategic resource central to institutional reputation, sustainability, and governance.

Within the Indian higher education landscape, the urgency of this issue has intensified. Policy shifts emphasizing institutional autonomy, self-financing, and alumni-driven funding—supported by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and allied bodies—have repositioned alumni engagement as a critical pillar of financial and reputational resilience. Nonetheless, the landscape remains uneven: while a handful of elite business schools command significant alumni contributions, the majority face persistent challenges in fostering sustained trust and engagement. The discrepancy between pledged and realized contributions highlights latent issues of perception, transparency, and emotional connection (Basu, 2025), reinforcing the view that alumni affinity must be cultivated through high-quality educational and service experiences long before graduation.

From a theoretical standpoint, constructs such as perceived value—defined as the individual's assessment of benefits relative to costs (Zeithaml, 1988)—and institutional image—representing the evaluative synthesis of emotional and cognitive judgments (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001)—remain pivotal in shaping satisfaction and loyalty. Satisfaction, in turn, serves as the affective evaluation of the educational encounter and a precursor to behavioral intentions such as advocacy, referral, and philanthropic giving (Clemes et al., 2013). These dynamics are particularly salient in management education, where the perceived return on investment, employability, and network value significantly inform students' judgments of institutional worth. However, despite robust international scholarship exploring these interrelationships, empirical integration within the Indian business education context remains comparatively underdeveloped.

Existing investigations have predominantly employed SERVQUAL or SERVPERF frameworks (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992), generating valuable insights into the drivers of satisfaction and retention across Western and Southeast Asian contexts. Nonetheless, these frameworks often inadequately capture the sociocultural heterogeneity and market sensitivities of Indian business schools, where accreditation disparities, ownership diversity, and outcome-driven expectations prevail (Kamakoty & Singh, 2023; Venkatesh et al., 2023). Moreover, the extant corpus tends to examine dyadic linkages—such as service quality–satisfaction or image–loyalty (Athiyaman, 1997; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001)—rather than integrated models that map the entire experiential continuum from educational encounters to alumni behavioral outcomes. Such fragmentation restricts theoretical coherence and impedes the formulation of comprehensive institutional strategies.

Equally, the behavioral dimensions of alumni engagement have received limited empirical scrutiny within India. While Western scholarship has extensively explored how satisfaction, identification, and attachment predict alumni giving and advocacy (Weerts & Ronca, 2008; Sung & Yang, 2009), Indian research has largely remained confined to enrollment, satisfaction, and academic outcomes. Furthermore, the digital transformation of higher education has introduced new variables—such as online pedagogical design, virtual infrastructure, and hybrid delivery—that influence perceptions of quality, value, and institutional trust in ways yet to be fully understood (Kuo et al., 2014; Fiati et al., 2023). For business schools that depend heavily on experiential learning and peer interaction, these shifts are particularly consequential, necessitating renewed inquiry into how the quality–value–loyalty nexus operates in technology-mediated environments.

Against this conceptual and contextual backdrop, the present study undertakes a systematic exploration of scholarly discourse surrounding service quality in higher business education. Using keyword analysis of Scopus-indexed publications, the study aims to (1) identify emerging themes that characterize the intellectual evolution of research on service quality in business schools, and (2) delineate future research avenues that can guide scholars in advancing theory and practice in this domain.

By adopting a keyword and content-driven approach, this investigation contributes to the consolidation of fragmented knowledge and the identification of underexplored intersections—particularly those linking service quality with digital transformation, stakeholder engagement, and institutional sustainability. In doing so, the study not only illuminates the

thematic trajectory of service quality research within management education but also provides a strategic compass for future inquiry, thereby fostering a more integrated and forward-looking understanding of business education as a service-driven, stakeholder-centered enterprise.

2. Methodology

Bibliometric techniques have gained increasing prominence in business and management research for mapping intellectual structures and identifying thematic trends within specific domains (Donthu et al., 2020a, 2020b; Khan et al., 2021; Das et al., 2025). In the present study, a thematic approach was adopted to examine the evolution of research on service quality in business education. Data were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic publications (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021).

To capture the most relevant body of literature, a targeted keyword search was conducted using the string “service quality” AND (“business school” OR “b-school”), limited to publications in English between 1988 and 2025 (up to 18 October 2025). This search yielded 54 documents, including journal articles, review and conference papers, and book chapters. In total, 245 keywords were extracted from these publications, of which 31 met the threshold of a minimum occurrence of two, and were subsequently included in the keyword co-occurrence analysis.

The bibliographic data were exported in compatible formats and analyzed using VOSviewer, a well-established software for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks (Van Eck & Waltman, 2022; Chen & Song, 2017). The analysis was confined to keyword mapping, which facilitated the identification of emerging themes and thematic clusters within the literature on service quality in business schools. Each cluster was interpreted to reveal its underlying conceptual focus, providing insights into dominant research directions and prospective avenues for future inquiry.

3. Findings

The keyword co-occurrence mapping of literature on service quality in business schools reveals a fragmented yet evolving intellectual structure. The four clusters derived from the keyword co-occurrence analysis collectively reflect the disciplinary intersections of management education, service science, and student-centric pedagogical evaluation. Each cluster highlights a distinct but interrelated thematic domain, underscoring how the notion of “service quality” has been conceptualized and operationalized within the context of higher business education.

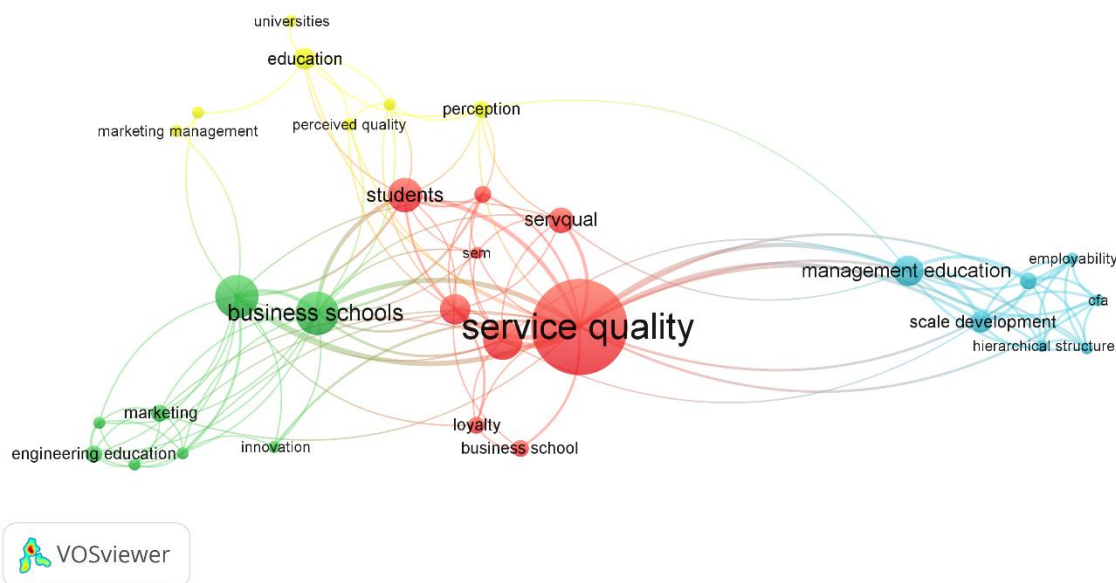
Cluster 1, comprising terms such as service quality, student satisfaction, loyalty, SERVQUAL, and structural equation modelling (SEM), embodies the dominant research paradigm in this field. This cluster is grounded in the adaptation of service marketing frameworks to educational settings, where students are perceived as primary consumers. The strong association between service quality and student satisfaction suggests that empirical inquiry has been largely oriented toward validating measurement models and testing causal relationships using structural modelling techniques. This focus reflects the ongoing effort to quantify educational experiences through established service quality constructs, yet it also points to the persistent challenge of contextualizing such measures within pedagogical realities unique to higher education.

Cluster 2 extends this understanding by bridging service management and marketing perspectives with operations management and engineering education. Its composition reflects an interdisciplinary approach that integrates quality control principles from industrial contexts into academic institutions. The inclusion of terms such as innovation and customer satisfaction indicates a growing recognition that continuous improvement in educational services requires managerial agility and the systematic application of service operations frameworks. This convergence signals a shift from conceptual replication toward contextual adaptation, wherein business schools increasingly treat service quality as an operational and strategic imperative rather than a mere perceptual construct.

Cluster 3 represents the methodological core of the domain, as it encapsulates keywords such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), scale development, hierarchical structure, and students’ perception. This cluster underscores the methodological rigor characterizing contemporary research on service quality measurement in higher education. The emphasis on psychometric validation and structural hierarchy illustrates an enduring preoccupation with refining constructs that accurately capture students’ evaluative judgments of institutional performance. Furthermore, the emergence of

employability within this cluster suggests that research is beginning to link service quality perceptions with tangible academic outcomes and post-graduation trajectories, thereby aligning measurement precision with educational relevance.

Cluster 4 broadens the analytical lens by situating service quality within a wider educational and managerial context. The co-occurrence of perceived quality, quality management, service quality assurance, and universities implies a movement toward institutional accountability and systemic quality governance. This cluster connects marketing management concepts with institutional-level quality assurance mechanisms, reflecting how universities are reconfiguring their internal processes to sustain reputational capital and accreditation standards. The integration of perception and education within this thematic space further illustrates the transition from satisfaction-based evaluations to holistic institutional performance metrics.



4. Emerging Themes in Business Education in India

Clusters	Keywords	Core Focus	Aligned Theme
Cluster 1	Business School, Higher Education, Loyalty, Service Quality, SERVQUAL, SEM, Student Satisfaction	Studies focusing on Service Quality, Student Satisfaction, and Loyalty using Quantitative methods (SEM, SERVQUAL)	Theme 1: Perceived Service Quality and Educational Value
Cluster 2	Business Schools, Customer Satisfaction, Engineering Education, Innovation, Marketing, Operations Management, Quality Control, Service Management	Focus on Operational Quality, Service Management, and Innovation in Education	Theme 2: Service Management and Operational Innovation in Business Education
Cluster 3	CFA, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Employability, Hierarchical Structure, Management Education, Scale Development, Students' Perception	Emphasis on Psychometric rigor, Employability, and Measurement of Educational Outcomes	Theme 3: Employability and Measurement of Educational Outcomes
Cluster 4	Education, Marketing Management, Perceived Quality, Perception, Quality Management, Service Quality Assurance, Universities	Institutional Quality, Assurance Mechanisms, and Branding in Higher Education	Theme 4: Institutional Quality Governance and Branding in Higher Education

Theme 1: Perceived Service Quality and Educational Value

Perceived service quality emerges as a foundational determinant of students' evaluation of their educational investment in business schools. Academic rigor, relevance of curricula, and instructional competence collectively shape functional and affective dimensions of perceived value. High-quality academic delivery enhances satisfaction, fosters emotional attachment, and strengthens institutional trust. Sharif and Lemine (2021) demonstrate that effective teaching and faculty–student bonding reinforce emotional connections, while Damaris et al. (2019) confirm that pedagogical quality combined with student motivation elevates perceived value. Service quality, conceptualized through frameworks such as SERVQUAL, underpins satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn inform students' perception of institutional prestige and credibility (Mohammed et al., 2023; Singh & Jasial, 2020). Consequently, service quality in business education is both a functional driver of perceived value and a symbolic marker of institutional excellence, reflecting the alignment between academic delivery and student expectations.

Theme 2: Service Management and Operational Innovation in Business Education

Operational and managerial innovations, encompassing service management practices and quality control, constitute an increasingly strategic focus for business schools. Modern business education environments rely on systematic approaches to curriculum delivery, pedagogical innovation, and quality assurance to maintain competitive advantage (Pekkaya et al., 2023; Leonnard, 2021). Institutions integrating operational innovations, including digital platforms and hybrid learning modalities, demonstrate responsiveness, adaptability, and efficiency in service provision. Valencia-Arias et al. (2023b) and Alsharafat et al. (2023) highlight that modern infrastructure and technology not only facilitate learning but also signal institutional legitimacy and innovation. Through these mechanisms, operational excellence and service management become instrumental in enhancing student satisfaction, perceived value, and overall institutional image, particularly in competitive, globalized management education markets (Popli et al., 2022; Afif, 2023).

Theme 3: Employability and Measurement of Educational Outcomes

Employability remains a core concern in the evaluation of business education, and it constitutes a critical dimension of perceived value. Placement performance, career readiness, and the development of transferable skills directly affect students' assessment of educational return on investment (Mehra et al., 2023; Ghosh & Jhamb, 2022). Concurrently, psychometric validation of constructs such as student perception, satisfaction, and employability ensures methodological rigor in capturing educational outcomes (CFA, confirmatory factor analysis, scale development) and strengthens the reliability of empirical inferences. The linkage between academic experiences and career outcomes fosters institutional credibility, trust, and brand differentiation, while collaborations with industry enhance practical relevance, entrepreneurial skill development, and market alignment (Soam et al., 2023; Klafke et al., 2023). Collectively, employability metrics serve as both outcome measures and strategic signals, shaping perceived value and institutional reputation in business education.

Theme 4: Institutional Quality Governance and Branding in Higher Education

Institutional quality governance, encompassing quality assurance frameworks, branding strategies, and marketing management, represents a critical dimension of higher education's evolving landscape. Ensuring perceived quality, transparency, and reliability fosters trust, satisfaction, and affective attachment among students (Alwi et al., 2019; Manzoor et al., 2020; Kaushal et al., 2021). Quality management practices, including service quality assurance mechanisms, act as tangible signals of institutional legitimacy and credibility (Zhuang & Zhou, 2022; Cyran, 2023). Moreover, institutional image has been shown to influence alumni engagement, advocacy, and supportive behaviors, highlighting the interconnection between governance, branding, and long-term stakeholder loyalty (El-Kassar et al., 2022; Sudhana et al., 2023). Thus, institutional quality governance functions as a multidimensional construct, integrating operational, symbolic, and reputational dimensions of business education.

5. Future Research Avenues

The evolving landscape of business education in India presents multiple pathways for scholarly inquiry. Future research should focus on developing integrative models that connect academic quality, infrastructure, technology, and industry engagement with institutional branding and long-term loyalty outcomes. Longitudinal studies could explore how perceived value evolves throughout the student journey and how it translates into alumni attachment and advocacy.

The expanding role of digital transformation invites further examination of how artificial intelligence, hybrid pedagogy, and learning analytics influence engagement, satisfaction, and perceived institutional image. With employability remaining a core concern, future studies may analyze how perceptions of return on investment interact with non-economic outcomes such as self-efficacy, social capital, and psychological well-being.

Moreover, the intensification of academia–industry collaboration necessitates research on co-created learning ecosystems, exploring how joint initiatives between universities and corporations foster sustainable innovation and legitimacy. Future investigations could also extend beyond cognitive evaluations to assess emotional and symbolic dimensions of institutional image, including identity congruence, pride, and affective attachment. Cross-cultural comparative studies can further illuminate variations in how students from diverse contexts perceive value, satisfaction, and reputation. Finally, as sustainability and ethics become integral to business education, there is a need to assess how socially responsible practices, green infrastructure, and ethical curricula enhance perceived value and institutional image, aligning management education with broader global and societal imperatives.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from the keyword analysis underscore that service quality remains a central determinant of perceived value and institutional image in business education, particularly within the Indian context. Business schools operate not merely as educational providers but as complex service organizations where students evaluate the return on their academic investment through multidimensional outcomes encompassing learning, career readiness, and institutional reputation (Sharif & Lemine, 2021; Damaris et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2023). The analysis of keywords and clusters revealed four interrelated thematic domains: academic excellence, technological and infrastructural modernization, employability and industry collaboration, and institutional quality and governance. Collectively, these domains highlight the integrated nature of student experience, satisfaction, and loyalty in shaping the perceived value of business education.

Academic Excellence and Perceived Educational Value emerged as the first critical theme. Intellectual rigor, pedagogical relevance, and faculty competence collectively influence students' cognitive and affective evaluation of their educational experience. High-quality teaching and strong student–faculty interactions enhance satisfaction and foster trust, thereby reinforcing institutional reputation (Singh & Jasial, 2020; Sharif & Lemine, 2021). These findings corroborate prior studies that link effective academic delivery with both functional and symbolic dimensions of value (Damaris et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2023). From a strategic perspective, this underscores the importance for business schools to maintain rigorous curricula and faculty excellence as a foundational element in building long-term loyalty and alumni engagement.

The second theme, Technological and Infrastructural Modernization as Strategic Enablers, reflects the growing importance of digital and physical learning environments in shaping student perceptions. Modern infrastructure, including well-equipped classrooms, digital platforms, and adaptive learning technologies, strengthens students' experiential learning while simultaneously signaling institutional responsiveness and innovation (Pekkaya et al., 2023; Leonnard, 2021; Valencia-Arias et al., 2023b; Alsharafat et al., 2023). Furthermore, technology adoption in teaching, hybrid learning, and administrative processes enhances perceived educational quality and reinforces institutional credibility (Idkhan & Idris, 2023; Zaidi et al., 2023; Afif, 2023). These insights highlight that infrastructure and technology serve not only as operational facilitators but also as strategic differentiators in the competitive landscape of management education.

The third theme, Employability, Industry Collaboration, and Institutional Image Formation, emphasizes the centrality of career outcomes and practical exposure in evaluating educational value. Placement performance, internships, and industry-linked projects directly influence students' perceived return on investment and strengthen institutional reputation (Mehra et al., 2023; Ghosh & Jhamb, 2022; Venkatesh et al., 2023). Moreover, academia–industry partnerships foster entrepreneurial skills, practical competence, and curricular relevance, enhancing both employability and institutional credibility (Soam et al., 2023; Klafke et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2023). Institutional image, shaped through these mechanisms, extends its influence to alumni loyalty, advocacy, and engagement, reflecting a cumulative interplay between educational quality, career readiness, and reputational capital (Alwi et al., 2019; Manzoor et al., 2020; El-Kassar et al., 2022).

Finally, the study identifies several future research avenues. First, longitudinal studies can investigate how perceptions of academic quality, infrastructure, and industry engagement evolve across the student life-cycle and translate into alumni advocacy. Second, the integration of emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence, learning analytics, and hybrid

pedagogies—offers fertile ground for examining their impact on perceived value, satisfaction, and institutional image. Third, research on co-created learning ecosystems and academia–industry collaborations can illuminate the mechanisms through which practical exposure enhances employability and institutional legitimacy. Fourth, emotional, symbolic, and identity-related dimensions of institutional image—including affective attachment, pride, and congruence—warrant deeper exploration. Finally, the incorporation of sustainability, ethics, and socially responsible practices into curricula and infrastructure represents a critical frontier for understanding how value, reputation, and alumni engagement co-evolve in socially conscious business education (Sudhana et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that service quality in business education is inherently multidimensional, encompassing academic rigor, technological and infrastructural support, employability outcomes, and institutional governance. These dimensions collectively shape perceived value, institutional image, satisfaction, and alumni engagement. By providing a structured thematic framework derived from bibliometric analysis, this research offers actionable insights for administrators, policymakers, and scholars to enhance educational experiences, strengthen institutional reputation, and cultivate sustainable alumni relationships. Future scholarship integrating these dimensions within longitudinal, comparative, and interdisciplinary designs can deepen understanding of how business schools generate enduring value in an increasingly competitive, digitalized, and socially conscious educational landscape.

7. Implications

The findings of this thematic analysis provide meaningful insights for multiple stakeholders in the domain of business education. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of how service quality, perceived value, infrastructure, and employability converge to shape institutional image and alumni engagement. Researchers can leverage the identified thematic clusters and keyword co-occurrences as a reference point for selecting seminal literature, identifying prolific authors, and recognizing trending research areas. The study's framework offers a structured lens to explore the multidimensional of educational service quality and can guide future studies in constructing integrative models that account for academic, technological, and industry-linked determinants of perceived value.

From a **practical standpoint**, the research offers actionable insights for administrators and policymakers in business schools. Emphasizing academic rigor, modern infrastructure, and industry collaboration can enhance student satisfaction, perceived institutional credibility, and alumni loyalty. Digital and technological investments, such as hybrid learning platforms, AI-enabled pedagogy, and analytics-driven student support systems, emerge as strategic levers for improving the quality of education and reinforcing institutional prestige. Additionally, fostering structured partnerships with industry not only boosts employability outcomes but also strengthens institutional image and long-term stakeholder engagement.

From a **societal and policy perspective**, the study highlights the broader role of business schools in shaping human capital and contributing to regional economic and social development. High-quality educational service provision, coupled with ethical practices and sustainable campus operations, can enhance institutional legitimacy and public trust. Policymakers can utilize these insights to support regulatory frameworks and incentive mechanisms that encourage quality-driven and socially responsible management education, ensuring that graduates are both professionally competent and socially conscious.

8. Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the bibliometric analysis relied exclusively on the Scopus database, which, while comprehensive, may not encompass all relevant publications; additional databases could provide complementary perspectives. Second, the study considered only English-language articles and reviews, potentially excluding significant research published in other languages, particularly in emerging markets. Third, the analysis focused solely on keyword co-occurrence and cluster mapping using VOSviewer, without integrating citation analysis, co-authorship networks, or longitudinal trend analysis. While this approach was suitable for identifying emerging themes, it may not capture deeper relational or temporal dynamics within the literature. Finally, the manual consolidation and cleaning of bibliographic data introduce potential inconsistencies in author names, affiliations, or institutional metadata, which could slightly affect the accuracy of network and cluster identification. Future research could address these limitations by integrating multiple bibliometric techniques, expanding database coverage, and employing automated, reproducible data-cleaning protocols to ensure more robust and comprehensive insights.

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