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**Charting the Global Trajectory of Women's Entrepreneurship (1975-2025): Networks, Themes, and Research Frontiers****Ashbeelah Shafaqat Ali<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Faculty of Media and Mass Communication, University of Central Punjab.

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**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1638>****Abstract**

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global research on women's entrepreneurship, mapping its intellectual evolution, thematic structure, and collaborative landscape. Using 3,168 peer-reviewed articles indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection (1975–2025), the study applies performance analysis and science-mapping techniques through Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny to examine scientific production, citation impact, conceptual domains, and international research networks. The findings reveal a sustained growth trajectory, with accelerated publication expansion after 2014, signaling the consolidation of women's entrepreneurship as a mature scholarly field. Intellectual structure analysis identifies a gender-centric knowledge core interconnected with financial inclusion, innovation and performance, institutional environments, and socio-cultural determinants. Thematic evolution indicates a shift from descriptive gender discourse toward integrative frameworks linking empowerment, entrepreneurial outcomes, and development imperatives. Collaboration mapping highlights a hub-and-spoke global network dominated by the United States and Western Europe, with increasing contributions from emerging economies, particularly India and China. Despite conceptual richness, structural asymmetries persist in geographic representation and international collaboration. By integrating fragmented research streams, this study develops a multidimensional knowledge architecture that advances theoretical synthesis and policy relevance. The findings provide strategic insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to foster inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems and strengthen gender-responsive economic development worldwide.

**Keywords:** Women's Entrepreneurship, Bibliometric Analysis, Gender And Innovation, Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, Financial Inclusion, Global Collaboration Networks

**Introduction**

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of economic growth, social transformation, and innovation, yet it remains underrepresented in both practice and scholarship (Iqbal et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2023). Female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to job creation, poverty reduction, and community development, particularly in emerging economies, but face persistent structural barriers such as gender discrimination, limited access to finance, and socio-cultural constraints (Fauzi et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2024). Bibliometric analysis offers a systematic, quantitative approach to mapping the intellectual landscape of this field, enabling researchers to identify influential works, thematic clusters, and evolving trends. By visualizing networks of authors, institutions, and keywords, bibliometric methods help uncover hidden patterns and "invisible colleges" that shape the discourse on women's entrepreneurship (Jiang et al., 2024). This is essential for guiding policy, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that research agendas address both

economic and humanitarian dimensions of female entrepreneurial activity (Maurya et al., 2025).

Recent bibliometric studies have examined women's entrepreneurship from multiple perspectives, including family business contexts (Marín-Palacios, 2023), small and medium enterprises (Juneja et al., 2025), and country-specific landscapes such as China (Jiang et al., 2024). Large-scale analyses have mapped hundreds of publications, identifying dominant themes such as socio-cultural factors, entrepreneurial resources, mentorship, and the impact of digital technologies (Maurya et al., 2025). Co-citation and co-word analyses have revealed clusters around gendered performance, geographic influences, and financial struggles (Fayaz et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Other studies have focused on drivers of female entrepreneurship, highlighting socio-cultural, financial, and personal motivators (Yang et al., 2025), while thematic reviews have explored empowerment, innovation, and access to financing (Pradana et al., 2025). Collectively, these works demonstrate the breadth of inquiry but also reveal fragmentation, with research often siloed by geography, sector, or thematic focus.

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps persist. Many bibliometric analyses show a dominance of studies from developed nations, with limited contributions from developing economies where women's entrepreneurship could have the most transformative impact (Fauzi et al., 2023; Maurya et al., 2025). Critical social issues, such as motherhood, gender stereotypes, and intersectionality, remain underexplored (Maurya et al., 2025). There is also a lack of integrated frameworks linking entrepreneurial performance to broader socio-economic outcomes, particularly in relation to business growth (Frende Vega & Salgado-Canto, 2024). Furthermore, collaboration networks among scholars are weak, and certain themes like leadership, governance, and ICT adoption in women-led ventures are insufficiently developed (Kumari & Kumar, 2024). These gaps hinder the creation of holistic, inclusive policies and limit the potential for cross-cultural learning. This study aims to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis that synthesizes global research on women's entrepreneurship across diverse contexts. Using advanced tools such as Biblioshiny, it maps the intellectual, social, and conceptual structures of the field, integrating both developed and developing country perspectives (Juneja et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). The analysis identifies underrepresented themes, emerging trends, and potential areas for interdisciplinary collaboration. By combining performance metrics with thematic clustering, the study develops a conceptual framework that links antecedents, mediators, and outcomes of female entrepreneurship, thereby bridging economic, social, and cultural dimensions (Maurya et al., 2025).

The significance of this work lies in its potential to reshape the discourse on women's entrepreneurship by providing a macro-level, evidence-based view of the field. By systematically identifying influential works, thematic gaps, and collaboration opportunities, the study informs policymakers, educators, and practitioners seeking to promote gender equity and inclusive economic growth (Iqbal et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). It contributes to the literature by integrating fragmented research streams into a coherent framework, highlighting the interplay between socio-cultural contexts and entrepreneurial outcomes. Moreover, by emphasizing underexplored areas such as digital transformation, intersectionality, and policy impacts, the study opens new avenues for inquiry and practice. Ultimately, this bibliometric analysis serves as a foundational resource for building supportive ecosystems that empower women entrepreneurs globally.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Frameworks**

The evolution of women's entrepreneurship research has been fundamentally shaped by feminist theoretical frameworks that center gender as a critical analytical category. Zerwas (2019) established the theoretical foundations by examining how women's entrepreneurship intersects with work-life balance debates, arguing that feminist theories provide essential lenses for understanding the distinct challenges women entrepreneurs face in patriarchal economic structures. This foundational work highlighted that the field emerged from the recognition that traditional entrepreneurship theories, grounded in masculine norms of individualism and

continuous availability, inadequately captured women's entrepreneurial realities. Complementing this theoretical groundwork, Edelman et al. (2018) introduced the labyrinth metaphor to conceptualize the complex, non-linear barriers women navigate when pursuing entrepreneurial careers, moving beyond simplistic pipeline or glass ceiling metaphors to acknowledge the intricate navigation processes required for women's business success. Together, these works established that women's entrepreneurship cannot be understood through gender-neutral frameworks, but rather requires gender-aware theoretical apparatuses that recognize structural constraints and gendered institutional contexts.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, Brush et al. (2009) developed the seminal gender-aware framework (GAF), which systematically integrated gender analysis into entrepreneurship research by emphasizing how businesses are embedded in gendered contexts and how women's entrepreneurial experiences differ from men's. This framework evolved into the influential "5M" framework, encompassing Markets, Money, Management, Motherhood, and Meso/Macro environment, which has guided empirical research for over fifteen years. Schaper and Ettl (2025) conducted an integrative literature review marking the fifteenth anniversary of this 5M framework, assessing its enduring utility while identifying necessary future directions for research. Their analysis demonstrated that while the 5M framework successfully highlighted the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints, contemporary research must further develop the motherhood component to recognize the unequal distribution of care work, and expand the meso/macro environment category to address digital transformation and sustainability imperatives that increasingly shape women's entrepreneurial opportunities in the twenty-first century.

The extension of these frameworks into international contexts has revealed significant gaps in how gender-aware approaches travel across cultural boundaries. Akter et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review examining the development of gender-aware frameworks within international entrepreneurship, finding that while domestic entrepreneurship research has increasingly incorporated gender analysis, international entrepreneurship scholarship remains largely gender-blind or treats gender as a control variable rather than a constitutive element of entrepreneurial processes. Their analysis questioned how far the field has developed in creating truly inclusive theoretical models that account for the intersectionality of gender with culture, socioeconomic status, and institutional environments across diverse national contexts. This theoretical limitation is particularly problematic given that women's entrepreneurship in developing economies often emerges from necessity-driven motivations and informal sector participation, requiring frameworks that move beyond Western-centric assumptions about opportunity recognition and resource mobilization.

### **Motivations, Intentions and Socio-Cultural Embeddedness**

Moving from theoretical frameworks to empirical investigations of entrepreneurial behavior, research has increasingly focused on understanding the antecedents of women's entrepreneurial intentions and the cultural contexts shaping these motivations. Morales-Urrutia et al. (2022) applied Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior alongside Social Role Theory and Social Cognitive Theory to demonstrate how environmental factors, including educational support systems, access to financing, and familial encouragement, significantly moderate the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intention. Their findings revealed that while individual attitudes toward entrepreneurship may be gendered, the surrounding institutional and social infrastructure plays a crucial mediating role in transforming intentions into actual venture creation. Extending this analysis of cultural influences, Bullough et al. (2022) examined how societal culture, gender role expectations, and entrepreneurial environments interact to create distinct contextual realities for women entrepreneurs across different nations, demonstrating that cultural tightness, gender egalitarianism, and institutional support collectively determine the ease with which women can challenge traditional gender norms through business ownership.

The examination of individual-level motivational factors has further illuminated the competency-based frameworks driving women's entrepreneurial entry. Agarwal and Agrawal (2023) utilized the Resource-Based

View Theory, Social Learning Theory, Role Theory, and Social Identity Theory to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework analyzing how competencies develop differently among female entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts. Their analysis revealed that women often develop entrepreneurial competencies through non-traditional pathways, including caregiving experiences and community networking, rather than through formal business education or linear career progression. This competency-based approach highlights that women's entrepreneurial motivations frequently stem from the desire to create social value alongside economic returns, necessitating measurement frameworks that capture multidimensional success criteria beyond mere financial profitability. These motivational studies collectively demonstrate that women's entrepreneurship emerges from complex interactions between individual agency, acquired competencies, and socially constructed gender roles that constrain or enable particular business activities.

Alternative methodological approaches have been proposed to capture the nuanced lived experiences underlying these motivations and intentions. Oliveira et al. (2024) advocated for feminist phenomenological inquiry as a framework capable of addressing the gendered institutional contexts that shape women's daily entrepreneurial experiences, arguing that interpretative phenomenological analysis provides deeper insights into how women navigate professional and personal boundaries than traditional positivist methodologies. This phenomenological turn recognizes that women entrepreneurs construct meaning through embodied experiences of gender discrimination, work-family conflict, and community embeddedness that quantitative surveys often fail to capture. Complementing these individual-level analyses, Bastida et al. (2023) investigated collective entrepreneurship through cooperatives as a gender-sensitive alternative to traditional venture creation, finding that cooperative structures offer women collective bargaining power, shared childcare responsibilities, and reduced individual risk exposure. Their research demonstrated that when institutional frameworks support cooperative development, women demonstrate higher rates of collective entrepreneurial participation, challenging the individualistic hero-entrepreneur narrative that dominates mainstream entrepreneurship discourse.

### **Bibliometric Mapping and Knowledge Architecture**

The maturation of women's entrepreneurship as a distinct academic field has enabled sophisticated bibliometric analyses that map knowledge structures, collaboration patterns, and emerging thematic streams. Deng et al. (2021) conducted pioneering science mapping research utilizing bibliometric analysis to visualize the intellectual structure of female entrepreneurship studies, identifying key research clusters, seminal authors, and evolutionary pathways from 1990 to 2020. Their analysis revealed significant geographic concentration of research in the United States and United Kingdom, with limited cross-national collaboration despite the global nature of gendered entrepreneurial barriers. Extending this longitudinal perspective, Gehlot et al. (2025) examined decades of progress from 1993 to 2023, documenting the field's shift from descriptive studies toward theoretical sophistication and methodological diversity. Ghosh (2024) specifically analyzed gender discourses through bibliometric lenses, revealing how the terminology has evolved from "women entrepreneurs" to "female entrepreneurship" and finally to "gendered entrepreneurship," reflecting broader theoretical shifts toward intersectional and post-structural understandings. Bedaduri and Mamilla (2024) focused specifically on trends in survey questionnaire usage and emerging thematic concerns, finding increasing attention to digitalization, sustainability, and psychological capital as key variables in contemporary research instruments.

These bibliometric analyses have identified critical future directions, particularly regarding sectoral outcomes, sustainability imperatives, and digital transformation. Vuciterna et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive bibliometric review comparing women's entrepreneurial journeys in developed versus developing countries, finding that while developed country research emphasizes innovation and high-growth ventures, developing country studies focus on microenterprise, agricultural entrepreneurship, and necessity-driven survival

strategies. This bifurcation highlights the need for frameworks that transcend the developed/developing binary to recognize hybrid entrepreneurial forms emerging in globalized contexts. Sánchez-Limón et al. (2025) connected female entrepreneurship to sustainability and Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrating that women entrepreneurs exhibit higher propensities toward environmental and social sustainability in their business models. Martínez and Medina (2025) examined innovation contexts, identifying opportunity perceptions, digitalization, and economic policy as key factors underlying female entrepreneurial innovation, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors. Complementing these sectoral analyses, Bentouir et al. (2023) documented the transformative power of women entrepreneurs in Algeria's economic development, while Özyol (2020) emphasized investing in women's entrepreneurship as a mechanism for inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Collectively, these studies indicate that future research must address the underrepresentation of women in high-growth sectors, examine digital platform entrepreneurship, and develop international networks that foster interdisciplinary collaboration across the Global North-South divide.

Despite the considerable bibliometric scholarship reviewed above, several critical gaps necessitate a comprehensive new bibliometric analysis. Existing reviews have predominantly focused on specific sub-domains, such as sustainability, innovation, or developed versus developing country comparisons, rather than providing a holistic overview of the field's entire knowledge architecture. Furthermore, the rapid acceleration of research production since 2020, coupled with the emergence of post-pandemic entrepreneurial realities, digital platform economies, and shifting geopolitical collaborations, has significantly altered the research landscape in ways not captured by studies concluding their data collection in 2021 or 2022. Most importantly, prior bibliometric analyses have not systematically examined the intellectual foundations through co-citation analysis of references or employed advanced science mapping techniques to reveal the evolution of thematic clusters over time. Therefore, addressing these limitations requires a new comprehensive bibliometric study that updates the knowledge base, maps the current collaboration networks, and identifies the latest thematic trajectories in women's entrepreneurship research. Based on the above research following research questions have been constructed:

RQ1. How has women's entrepreneurship research evolved in terms of scientific production, citation impact, and intellectual foundations over time?

RQ2. What are the dominant thematic domains, conceptual structures, and emerging research trends shaping the knowledge architecture of women's entrepreneurship scholarship?

RQ3. How is global research productivity and collaboration structured across countries, institutions, authors, and sources within women's entrepreneurship research?

## **Method**

### **Data Source and Research Strategy**

The dataset was retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection using an advanced title-field query designed to capture the principal lexical variants of the topic. The final search string was executed in the Title (TI) field using terms such as: *women entrepreneurship*, *women entrepreneur(s)*, *female entrepreneur(s)*, *female entrepreneurship*, and *women's/womens entrepreneurship*. Results were then refined to Document Type: Article and Language: English. The search covered the full available timespan in the export (1975–2025) and yielded 3,168 records from 924 sources. Full records and cited references were exported for analysis (to enable citation, co-citation, and RPYS procedures).

### **Screening and Dataset Construction**

Because the query was restricted to the title field and the document type was limited to peer-reviewed articles, additional manual screening was applied only to remove obvious false positives (records where the title matched the query terms but the substantive focus was unrelated to women/female entrepreneurship).

Duplicate records arising from export batches were removed. The finalized corpus contained 3,168 articles, authored by 6,950 unique authors, with 123,819 cited references and 6,474 author keywords (DE), reflecting a broad and cumulative knowledge base.

### **Data Processing and Normalization**

Data cleaning and harmonization were performed prior to network construction to reduce fragmentation caused by naming variants. Author names and institutional affiliations were standardized where needed (e.g., abbreviated vs. full institutional names). Keywords were consolidated by merging Author Keywords (DE) with Keywords Plus when producing “KW\_Merged” for conceptual and thematic mapping. Basic bibliometric indicators (e.g., citations per document, document age) were computed directly from the WoS export fields. Country attribution was based on corresponding-author and affiliation metadata, and collaboration was operationalized using single-country publications (SCP) versus multiple-country publications (MCP) derived from co-authorship country combinations.

### **Bibliometric Analysis and Visualization**

Analyses were conducted in R (bibliometrix/Biblioshiny) following standard performance analysis and science-mapping workflows (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Performance analysis quantified annual scientific production, citation impact, and productivity distributions across sources, authors, institutions, and countries, including journal trajectories over time and the most globally cited documents. Science mapping included: (1) three-field (Sankey) analysis linking cited references–authors–keywords to reveal intellectual backbone and thematic anchoring; (2) country collaboration mapping to visualize international co-authorship structures and hub-and-spoke patterns; (3) co-word thematic mapping (centrality–density strategic diagram) to classify themes as basic vs. niche; (4) conceptual structure mapping using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to position keywords into multidimensional thematic domains (e.g., finance/access, performance/innovation, gendered agency, socio-cultural/psychological factors); (5) trend topics (top terms per year) and a keyword treemap to capture thematic dominance and the long tail of specialized topics; and (6) Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy (RPYS) to identify historically influential publication years and landmark intellectual roots, while accounting for citation-window effects in the most recent years.

### **Results**

The bibliographic collection statistics depict women entrepreneurship research as a large, mature, and steadily expanding field with strong international visibility. Spanning the period from 1975 to 2025, the dataset comprises 3,168 documents published across 924 sources, indicating both historical depth and wide interdisciplinary dispersion. The annual growth rate of 6.05% reflects sustained scholarly momentum rather than episodic interest. A total of 6,950 authors contribute to this body of work, with an average of 2.81 co-authors per document and only a small share of single-authored publications, underscoring the collaborative nature of research in this domain. International co-authorship accounts for 34.41% of the output, highlighting a globally interconnected research community. Despite the relatively young average document age of 5.49 years, the literature demonstrates solid impact, with an average of 22 citations per document. Finally, the large number of references (123,819) and author keywords (6,474) points to a conceptually rich, theoretically cumulative, and thematically diverse field that continues to evolve around gender, entrepreneurship, and women’s economic participation.

The annual scientific production of women entrepreneurship research demonstrates a clear long-term growth trajectory, moving from a prolonged period of very limited output to a phase of rapid and sustained expansion (Figure 1). From the mid-1970s through the early 2000s, publication activity remains consistently low, indicating that the topic occupied a relatively marginal position within entrepreneurship and gender scholarship. A gradual increase becomes visible after the mid-2000s, suggesting the early consolidation of

women entrepreneurship as a recognized research area. The most pronounced acceleration occurs after approximately 2014, where publication volumes rise sharply and continue to grow through the late 2010s and early 2020s, reflecting heightened academic, policy, and societal attention to gendered entrepreneurship. The sharp decline observed in the most recent year should be interpreted cautiously, as it is likely attributable to incomplete indexing or early-access limitations rather than a genuine reduction in scholarly activity.

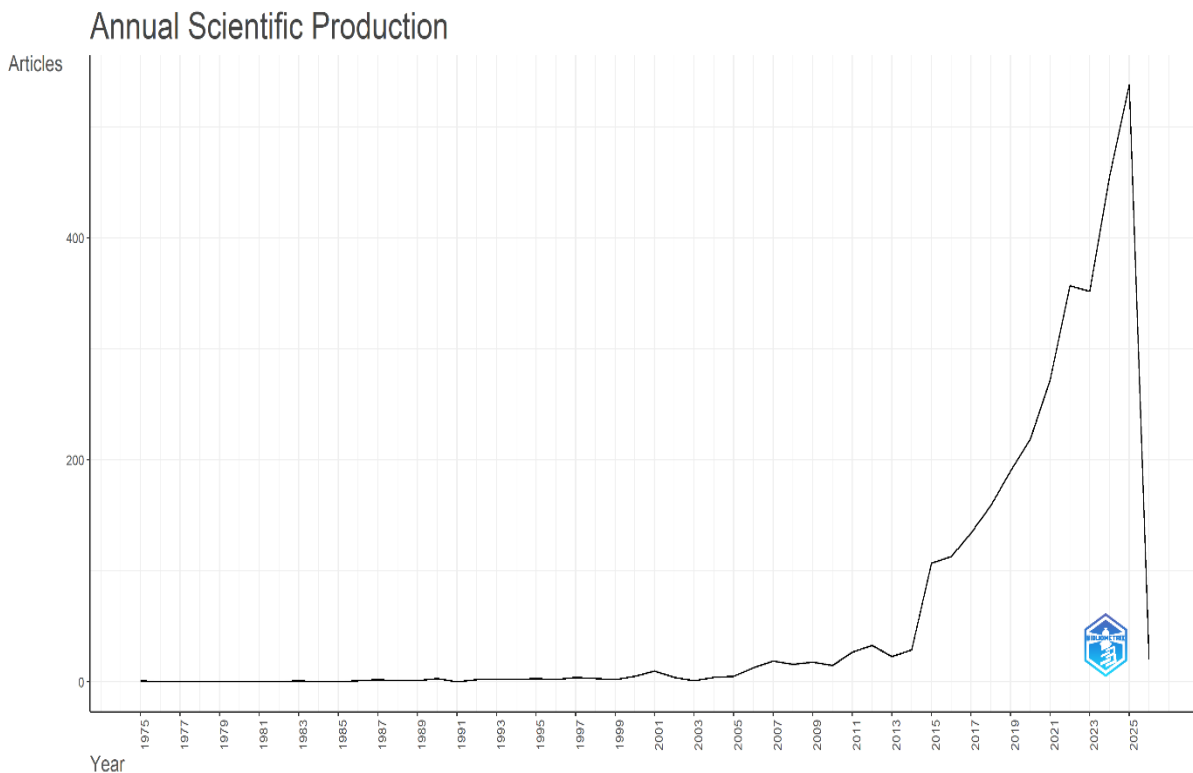


Figure 1. Annual Scientific Production

The pattern of average citations per year reveals important fluctuations in the scholarly impact of women entrepreneurship research over time, indicating periods of heightened influence alongside phases of consolidation (Figure 2). During the early years, citation averages remain very low, reflecting the limited visibility and marginal positioning of the field within broader entrepreneurship scholarship. From the mid-1990s onward, several sharp citation peaks emerge, suggesting the publication of seminal or highly influential works that shaped subsequent research agendas. The early to mid-2000s represent a particularly strong impact phase, with the highest citation averages, indicating that foundational theoretical and empirical contributions from this period continue to anchor the field. After 2010, average citations per year stabilize at moderate levels, reflecting a transition from a phase dominated by a few highly cited landmark studies to a more mature and crowded research landscape with a larger volume of publications sharing attention. The decline observed in the most recent years should be interpreted cautiously, as newer publications have had insufficient time to accumulate citations rather than indicating a reduction in research quality or relevance.

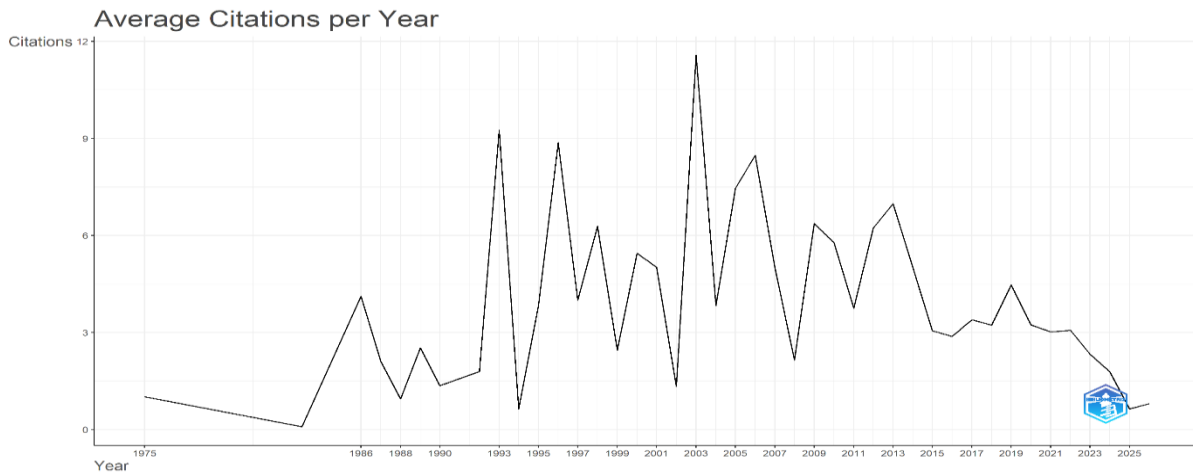


Figure 2. Average Citations per Year

The three-field plot illustrates a highly coherent intellectual structure in which foundational scholarship, leading authors, and dominant research themes are tightly interconnected, revealing how knowledge in women entrepreneurship has been cumulatively constructed (Figure 3). A relatively concentrated set of seminal cited references, most notably works by Ahl, Welter, Jennings, Brush, De Bruin, and Marlow, forms the intellectual backbone of the field and strongly informs the work of a core group of highly productive authors. These authors, including Welsh, Kaciak, Urbano, McAdam, Hechavarria, Ramadani, Agarwal, Welter, Essers, Marlow, Brush, and Ahl, occupy central positions in the network, indicating both sustained productivity and conceptual leadership. Their publications converge overwhelmingly on a focused set of merged keywords, with “gender,” “women entrepreneurs,” and “female entrepreneurship” emerging as the most dominant themes, while related concepts such as performance, impact, challenges, self-efficacy, innovation, and growth represent more specific analytical extensions. The strong alignment between cited references, authors, and keywords highlights a mature and specialized research community characterized by cumulative theorization, influential pioneers, and a clear thematic core centered on gendered perspectives in entrepreneurship.

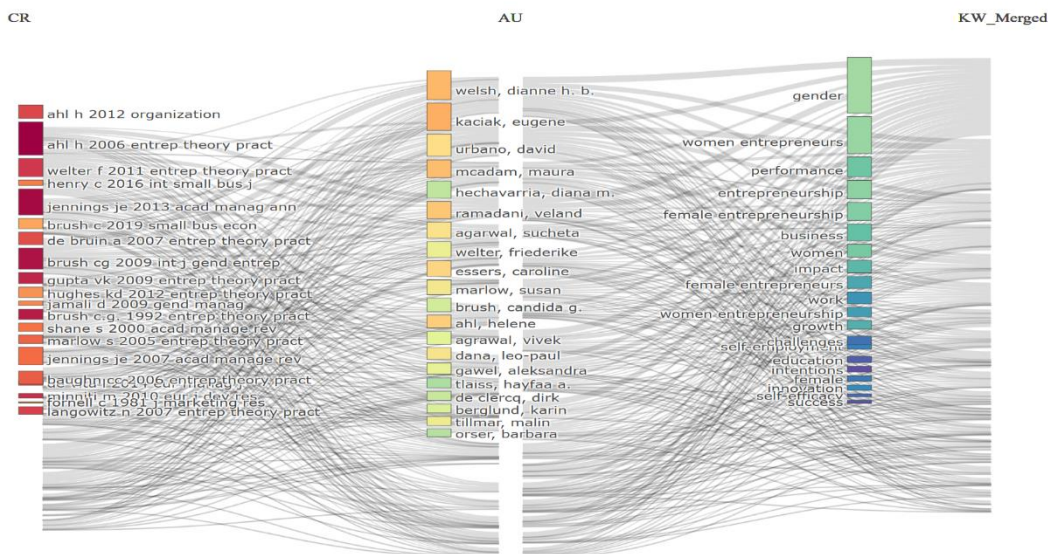


Figure 3. Three-Field Plot

The distribution of the most relevant sources demonstrates a clear concentration of women entrepreneurship research within a set of specialized and high-impact journals that collectively shape the intellectual core of the field (Figure 4). The *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* emerges as the leading outlet with 177 articles, underscoring its central role as the primary disciplinary home for gender-focused entrepreneurship scholarship. This is followed by *Small Business Economics* (99 articles) and the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* (86 articles), indicating strong engagement from mainstream entrepreneurship and small business research communities. Journals such as *Sustainability* and the *Journal of Enterprising Communities* highlight the growing integration of women entrepreneurship with themes of sustainable development, community embeddedness, and socio-economic impact. The presence of outlets focused on regional development, emerging economies, and management further reflects the contextual and interdisciplinary orientation of the field. Overall, the concentration of publications within these journals suggests both a well-established publication infrastructure and a balance between specialized gender-focused venues and broader entrepreneurship and management journals.

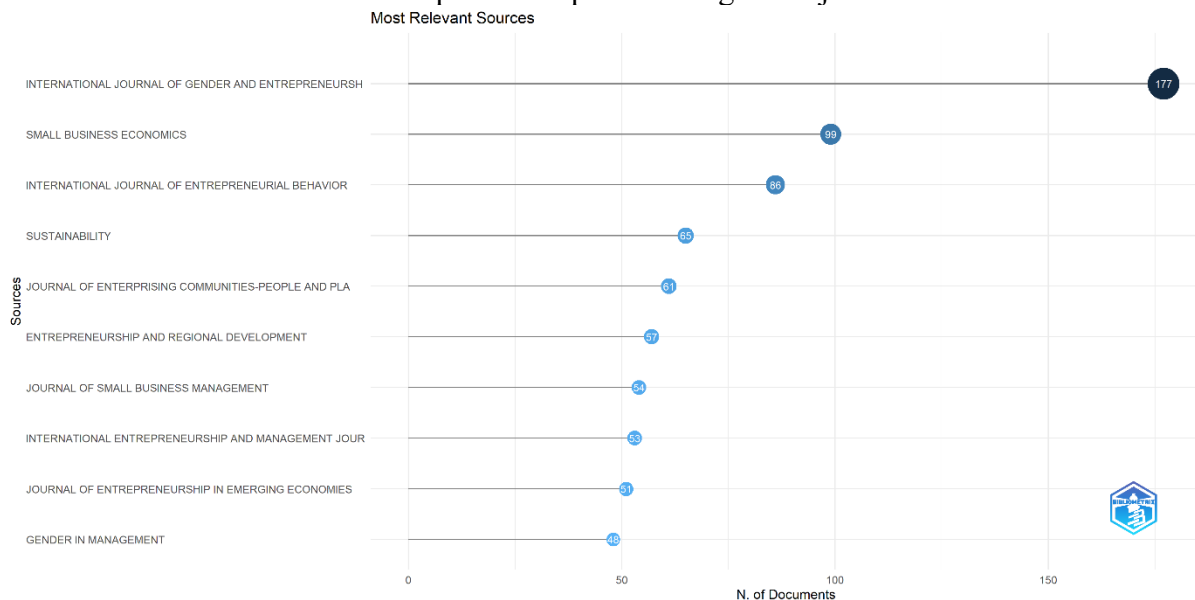


Figure 4. Most Relevant Sources

The temporal production patterns of leading journals reveal how women entrepreneurship research has progressively consolidated within a core set of outlets, particularly in the last decade (Figure 5). For much of the period from the mid-1970s through the early 2000s, cumulative publication counts across all sources remain negligible, indicating that women entrepreneurship had not yet emerged as a distinct or sustained research focus. A gradual increase becomes visible after the mid-2000s, followed by a sharp and sustained acceleration after approximately 2014, when multiple journals begin to show rapid cumulative growth. The *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* exhibits the steepest rise, reflecting its central role in hosting and shaping the field's expansion. *Small Business Economics* and the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* also demonstrate strong upward trajectories, signaling the integration of gendered entrepreneurship research into mainstream entrepreneurship outlets. The more recent but pronounced growth of *Sustainability* and the *Journal of Enterprising Communities* indicates an expanding linkage between women entrepreneurship, sustainability, and community-level development. Overall, the figure illustrates a clear phase of journal-level consolidation and specialization, with accelerated publication activity concentrated in a small number of influential sources during the most recent period.

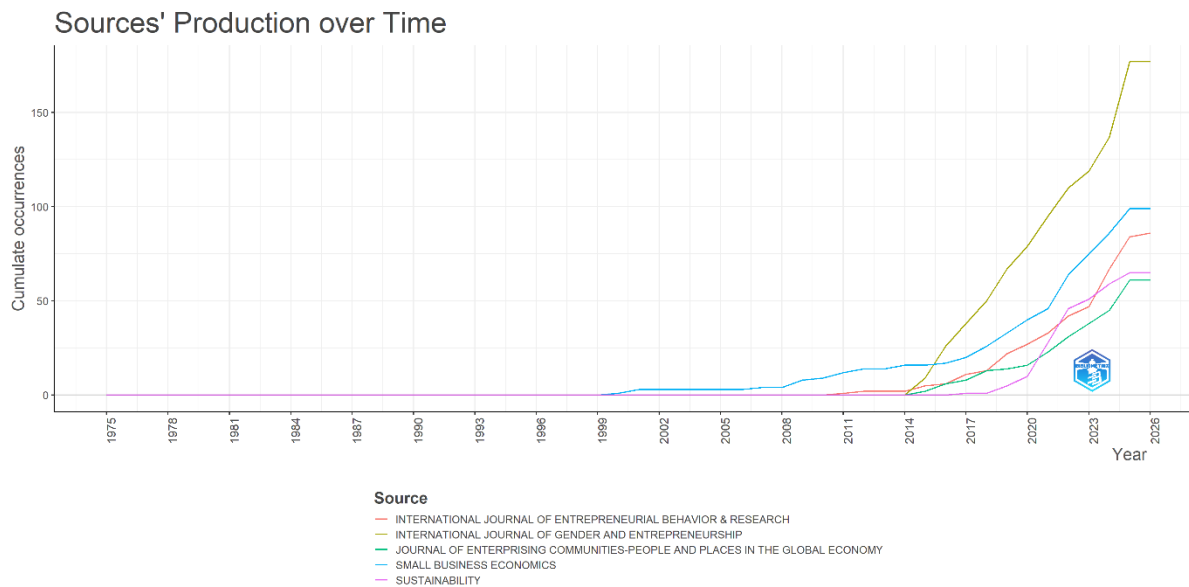


Figure 5. Temporal production patterns of leading journals

The ranking of the most relevant authors highlights a concentrated group of scholars who have played a central role in shaping and sustaining women entrepreneurship research (Table 1). Eugene Kaciak emerges as the most prolific contributor with 23 publications, followed closely by Dianne H. B. Welsh (21) and Maura McAdam (20), indicating sustained and high-volume engagement with the field. Authors such as Veland Ramadani, Helene Ahl, and Caroline Essers also occupy prominent positions, reflecting both productivity and intellectual influence. When fractionalized authorship is considered, scholars like McAdam, Marlow, Essers, and Ahl display particularly strong contributions, suggesting deep and recurring involvement in collaborative research rather than isolated outputs. The presence of authors working across different theoretical traditions and geographic contexts, ranging from feminist and critical perspectives to institutional and emerging-economy analyses, underscores the field’s conceptual diversity while also revealing a stable core of influential contributors who collectively define its research agenda.

Table 1. Most Relevant Authors

Authors	Articles	Articles Fractionalized
KACIAK, EUGENE	23	7.37
WELSH, DIANNE H. B.	21	6.65
MCADAM, MAURA	20	7.92
RAMADANI, VELAND	18	5.00
AHL, HELENE	15	5.12
ESSERS, CAROLINE	15	6.17
URBANO, DAVID	14	4.33
AGARWAL, SUCHETA	13	4.03
DANA, LEO-PAUL	13	3.22
MARLOW, SUSAN	13	6.33

The authors’ production over time highlights a dynamic and evolving leadership structure within women entrepreneurship research, characterized by the coexistence of foundational scholars and emerging contributors, alongside increasing publication intensity and impact in recent years (Figure 6). Early pioneers

such as Helene Ahl, Susan Marlow, and Caroline Essers show long and sustained academic trajectories, with relatively modest annual output but exceptionally high citation impact, reflecting their role in shaping critical, feminist, and identity-based perspectives that continue to anchor the field. From around 2014 onward, a new cohort of highly productive authors, including Eugene Kaciak, Dianne H. B. Welsh, Maura McAdam, and Veland Ramadani, demonstrates consistent annual publication activity, with noticeable peaks in both output and citations after 2018, indicating a period of rapid field expansion and consolidation. The darker and larger bubbles in the late 2010s and early 2020s reveal that this growth is not only quantitative but also accompanied by strong scholarly influence, often driven by collaborative work. Authors such as Agarwal and Dana exemplify rising contributors whose recent publications, particularly in developing and emerging economy contexts, are gaining traction quickly. Overall, the figure underscores a maturing research landscape in which enduring theoretical contributions coexist with increasingly diverse, collaborative, and high-impact empirical research, reinforcing the vitality and global relevance of women entrepreneurship scholarship.

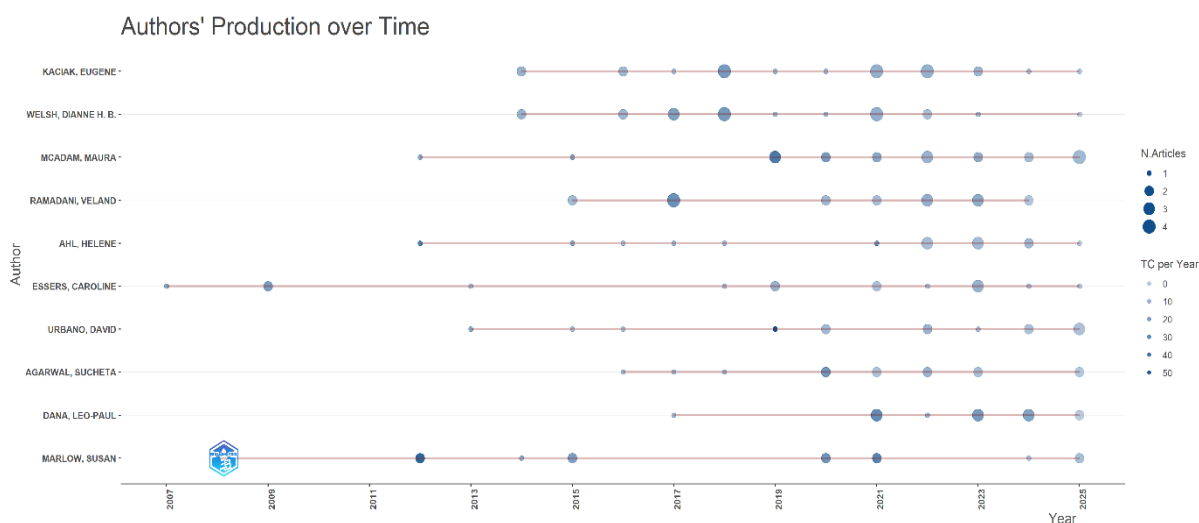


Figure 6. Authors' Production over Time

The distribution of the most relevant institutional affiliations reveals that women entrepreneurship research is anchored in a diverse set of globally influential universities and national research systems, spanning both developed and emerging economies (Table 2). The University of North Carolina emerges as the most productive institution with 57 articles, followed closely by the University of London with 53 publications, underscoring the strong leadership of North American and UK-based universities in shaping the field. Prominent representation of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) system and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) system highlights India's growing institutional presence and sustained research capacity in women entrepreneurship. Institutions such as Babson College reflect the field's close ties to entrepreneurship education and practice-oriented scholarship, while the Egyptian Knowledge Bank signals the role of national research infrastructures in supporting scholarly output. The inclusion of universities from Ghana and South Africa further indicates the increasing contribution of African institutions, emphasizing the global and contextually diverse nature of research on women entrepreneurship and its relevance across different socio-economic and development settings.

Table 2. Most Relevant Institutional Affiliations

Affiliation	Articles
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA	57
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON	53
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT (IIM SYSTEM)	43
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM (IIT SYSTEM)	39
BABSON COLLEGE	38
EGYPTIAN KNOWLEDGE BANK (EKB)	38
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF OHIO	35
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA	33
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA	33
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG	33

The longitudinal patterns of institutional publication output reveal a clear and relatively recent consolidation of women entrepreneurship research within a small number of highly productive affiliations (Figure 7). For most of the period prior to the mid-2000s, publication activity across all leading institutions remains negligible, indicating that women entrepreneurship had not yet become an established or sustained research focus at the institutional level. A gradual increase is visible after the late 2000s, followed by a pronounced acceleration after approximately 2014, when multiple institutions begin to show steep and simultaneous growth trajectories. The University of North Carolina and the University of London exhibit the most rapid and sustained increases, reflecting their central role in driving high-volume scholarly output in the field. Indian institutions, particularly the IIM and IIT systems, demonstrate strong growth in the most recent period, underscoring the rising contribution of emerging economies to global women entrepreneurship scholarship. Overall, the figure highlights a shift from scattered, institutionally isolated contributions to a more concentrated and globally distributed pattern of research production, signaling the maturation and internationalization of the field.

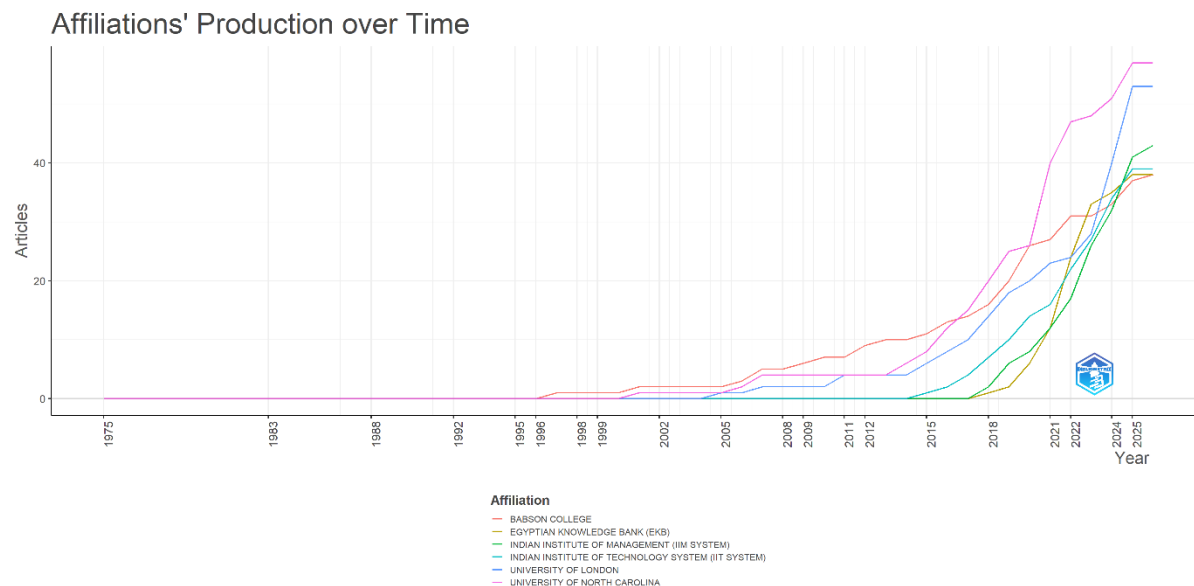


Figure 7. Institutional publication

The distribution of corresponding authors' countries reveals clear asymmetries in both research productivity and international collaboration within women entrepreneurship scholarship (Figure 8). The United States

dominates the field by a wide margin, exhibiting the highest volume of publications and a strong balance between single-country publications and multiple-country collaborations, indicating both a large domestic research base and substantial global engagement. The United Kingdom and India follow as major contributors; however, their collaboration profiles differ markedly, with the UK showing a relatively higher proportion of internationally co-authored work compared to India's predominantly domestic output. China and Spain also emerge as significant contributors, reflecting the growing importance of Asian and Southern European research systems. Several countries, such as France, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, and Canada, display comparatively high shares of multiple-country publications, highlighting a strategic orientation toward international collaboration despite more moderate total output. In contrast, countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, and Bangladesh contribute fewer publications overall and rely more heavily on single-country research, suggesting structural or resource-related constraints on international collaboration. Collectively, the figure underscores a globally uneven but increasingly interconnected research landscape, where a small number of highly productive countries act as central hubs while others participate more selectively through international partnerships.

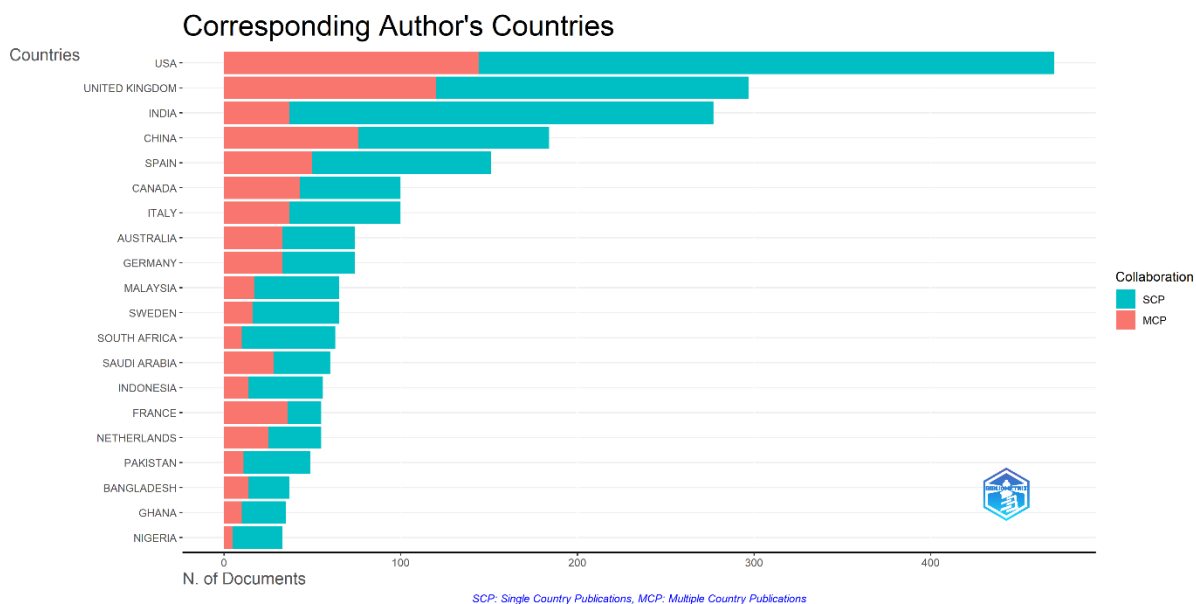


Figure 8. Corresponding Authors' countries

The longitudinal trends in national research output demonstrate a pronounced acceleration and increasing concentration of women entrepreneurship scholarship within a small group of leading countries over time (Figure 9). For much of the period prior to the mid-2000s, publication activity across all countries remains minimal, indicating that the field had not yet achieved sustained international visibility. From around 2010 onward, a clear divergence emerges, with the United States exhibiting the steepest and most sustained growth trajectory, consolidating its position as the dominant global contributor. The United Kingdom and China follow with strong upward trends, reflecting both mature research infrastructures and expanding scholarly engagement with gendered entrepreneurship. India shows a particularly sharp rise in the most recent decade, signaling its rapid emergence as a major contributor, while Spain demonstrates steady but comparatively moderate growth. Overall, the figure highlights a shift from marginal and dispersed national contributions to a highly dynamic and uneven global production landscape, where a handful of countries drive the expansion of women entrepreneurship research while others participate at a more gradual pace.

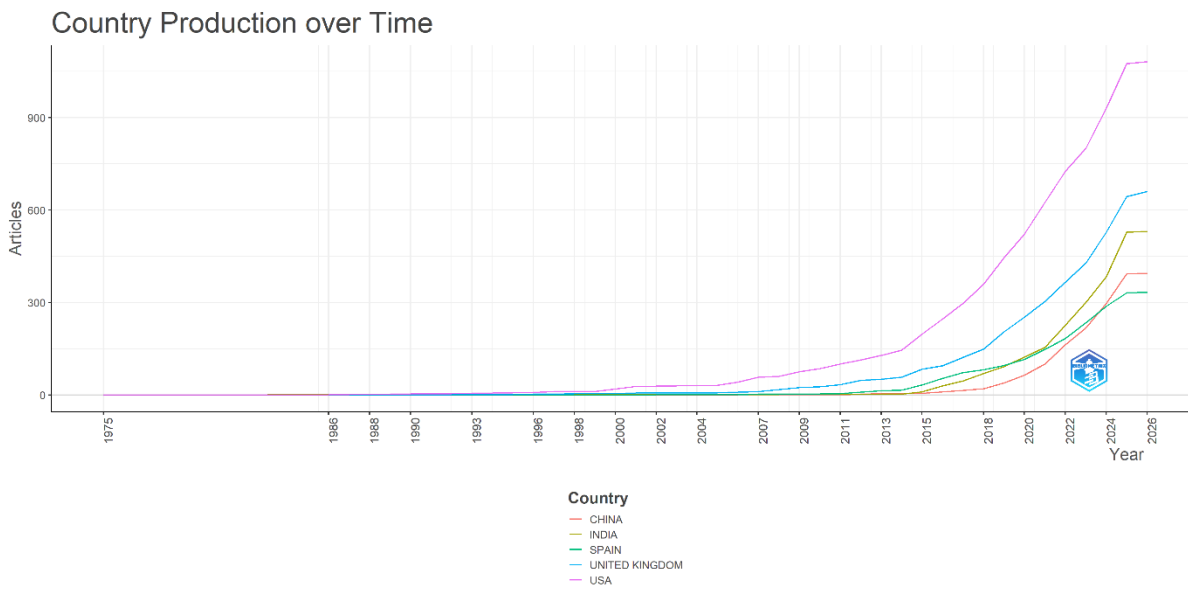


Figure 9. Country Production over Time

The distribution of the most globally cited documents highlights the intellectual foundations and landmark contributions that have most strongly shaped women entrepreneurship research (Figure 10). The review article by Jennifer E. Jennings (2013) in *Academy of Management Annals* stands out as the single most influential work, with 832 citations and the highest citations per year, underscoring its role in synthesizing and setting the research agenda for the field. Seminal theoretical and empirical contributions published in leading journals such as *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Organization*, and *Small Business Economics* dominate the list, reflecting the centrality of entrepreneurship, organizational theory, and gender-focused perspectives. Works by Ahl, Marlow, De Bruin, and Cliff represent foundational gender-critical and theoretical interventions that continue to attract sustained citations over time, while more recent contributions by Urbano (2019) and Kanze (2018) exhibit very high normalized citation scores, indicating rapid and contemporary influence. Collectively, these highly cited documents demonstrate that the field is anchored in a small set of conceptually powerful and methodologically robust studies that bridge gender theory, entrepreneurship, institutions, and performance, providing enduring reference points for subsequent scholarship.

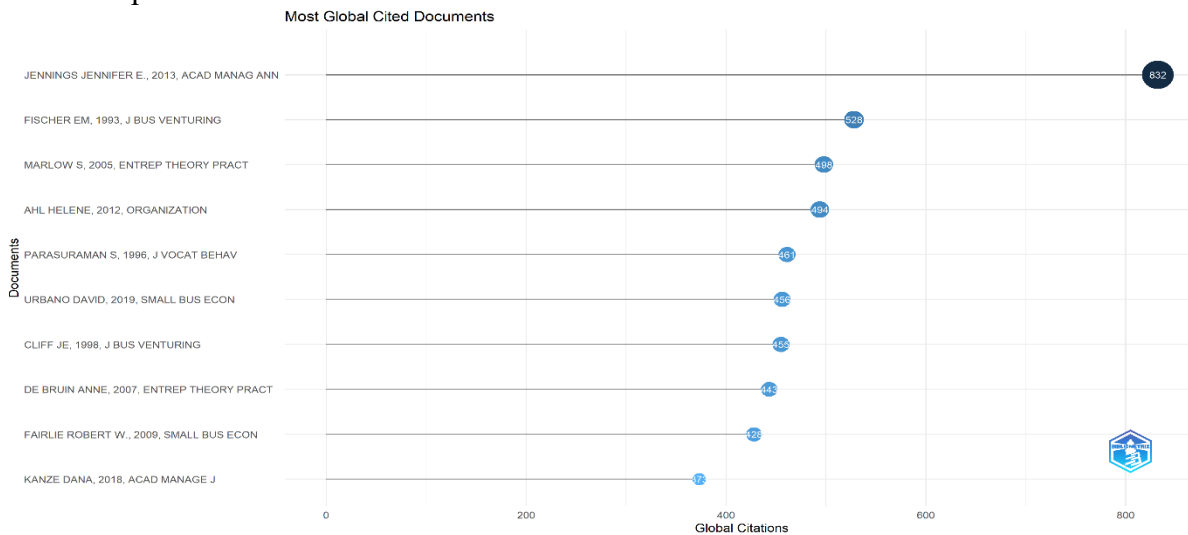


Figure 10. Most Global Cited Documents

The reference publication year spectroscopy reveals the deep historical roots and cumulative intellectual development of women entrepreneurship research, highlighting how the field has evolved through successive waves of influential scholarship (Figure 11). The overall citation trend shows minimal activity before the 1970s, followed by a gradual increase as foundational ideas from sociology, psychology, and economics began to inform entrepreneurship research. Clear citation peaks mark historically significant years, indicating the publication of seminal works that continue to shape the field’s theoretical and methodological foundations. Early peaks reflect the influence of social network theory, self-efficacy, organizational gender studies, and institutional economics, while later peaks from the 1990s onward correspond to the consolidation of entrepreneurship as a core research domain. From the mid-2000s to around 2019, the sharp rise in cited references signals an accelerated phase of knowledge production, refinement, and diversification, particularly around gender, feminist theory, institutions, and methodological rigor. The apparent decline in the most recent years is best understood as a citation window effect rather than a substantive downturn. Overall, the RPYS pattern demonstrates that women entrepreneurship research is a mature, interdisciplinary field built on enduring foundational contributions, periodically revitalized by highly influential works that redefine theory, methods, and research priorities.

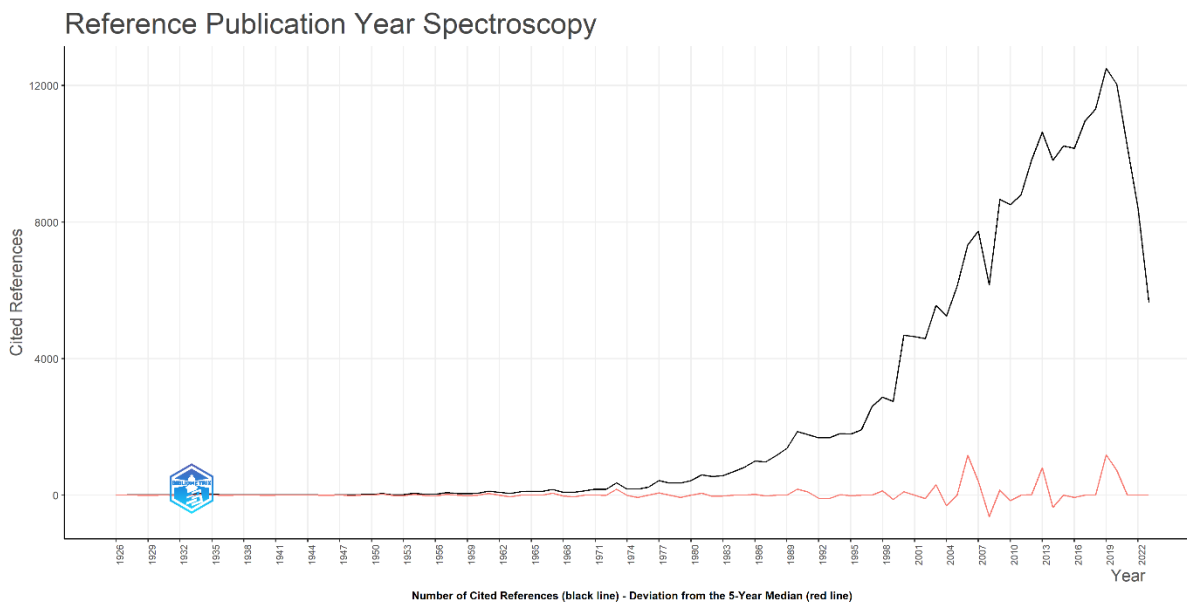


Figure 11. Reference publication year spectroscopy

The treemap visualization highlights the thematic structure and relative prominence of key concepts within women entrepreneurship research, revealing a clear concentration around a small set of dominant themes alongside a long tail of more specialized topics (Figure 12). The concept of “gender” occupies the largest share, underscoring its role as the primary analytical lens through which entrepreneurship is examined, followed by closely related themes such as “women entrepreneurs,” “entrepreneurship,” and “female entrepreneurship,” which collectively confirm the central focus of the field. Substantial attention is also directed toward outcome-oriented themes, including “performance,” “impact,” “growth,” and “success,” indicating strong interest in evaluating both economic and social consequences of women’s entrepreneurial activity. Mid-sized clusters such as “innovation,” “self-efficacy,” “education,” “work,” and “self-employment” reflect efforts to understand enabling mechanisms, individual capabilities, and structural conditions shaping entrepreneurial behavior. Smaller yet persistent themes, such as “networks,” “family,” “culture,” “institutions,” “credit,” and “microfinance”, point to contextual, relational, and institutional dimensions that complement the dominant gender-centric narrative. Overall, the treemap illustrates a mature

and multifaceted research landscape in which core gender and entrepreneurship concepts are firmly established, while a diverse range of supporting themes continues to enrich and extend the field’s analytical scope.



Figure 12. Tree map

The trend topics analysis demonstrates a clear temporal evolution of women entrepreneurship research from a fragmented and exploratory phase to a mature, theoretically sophisticated, and methodologically reflexive field (Figure 13). Prior to 2014, thematic activity is sparse and dispersed, with occasional attention to contextual issues such as networks, credit markets, class, and childcare, indicating an emergent research space without a consolidated core. From around 2014 to 2018, the field begins to stabilize around gender-focused theoretical foundations, as concepts such as feminist theory, gender theory, economic development, and business ownership gain visibility. A decisive shift occurs after 2019, marked by the overwhelming dominance of women entrepreneurship-related terms, including women entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs, women’s entrepreneurship, gender, and women, reflecting both rapid growth and conceptual consolidation. In the most recent years, the emergence of themes such as innovation, impact, resilience, experience, and intersectionality signals increasing analytical depth and sensitivity to complexity, while the appearance of systematic literature review indicates a phase of knowledge consolidation and synthesis typical of a mature research domain. Overall, the figure captures a transition from foundational exploration to a highly active and diversified research agenda that increasingly integrates theory, context, outcomes, and methodological rigor.

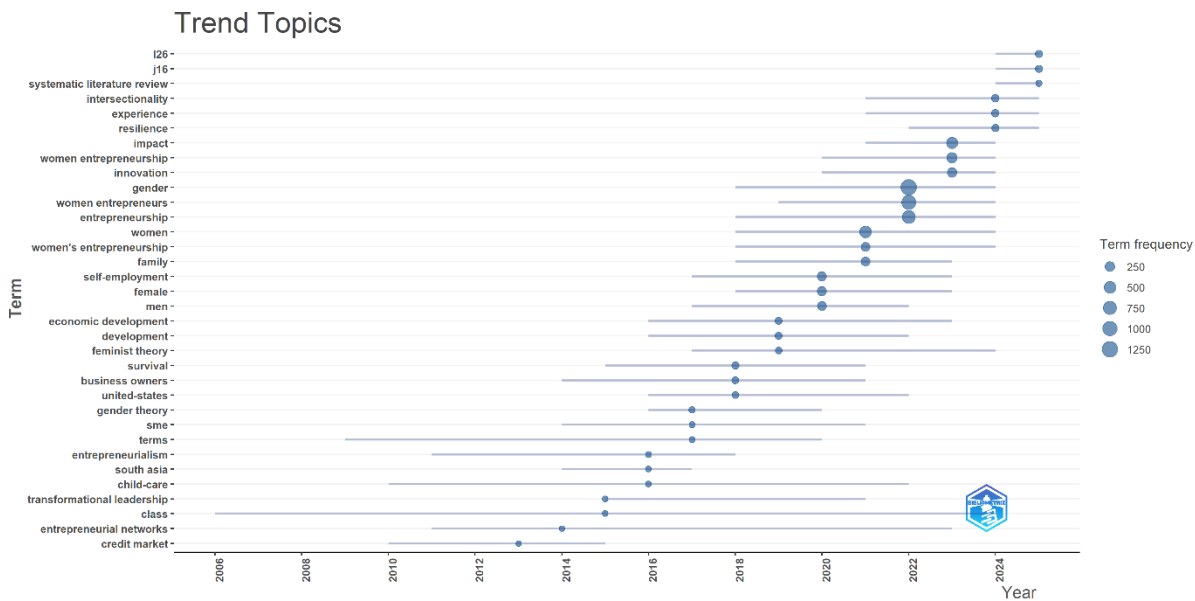


Figure 13. Trend topics

The strategic thematic map reveals a research landscape structured around two clearly differentiated yet complementary thematic clusters, reflecting both specialization and foundational relevance within women entrepreneurship scholarship (Figure 14). The cluster comprising “gender,” “entrepreneurship,” and “women” appears in the niche themes quadrant, indicating a highly developed and internally coherent body of research that is theoretically rich but comparatively less connected to the broader thematic network. This positioning suggests a specialized stream of scholarship, often grounded in feminist, critical, and gender-theoretical perspectives, that advances depth rather than breadth. In contrast, the cluster centered on “women entrepreneurs,” “female entrepreneurship,” and “performance” is located in the basic themes quadrant, reflecting high centrality but lower internal density. This indicates that these concepts function as foundational and widely connected reference points across the field, underpinning diverse empirical and conceptual studies, albeit without a tightly integrated internal structure. The absence of clearly defined motor themes suggests that the field is driven not by a single dominant paradigm but by the interplay between specialized gender-focused theorization and broadly applied performance-oriented research, highlighting both the maturity and pluralism of women entrepreneurship research.

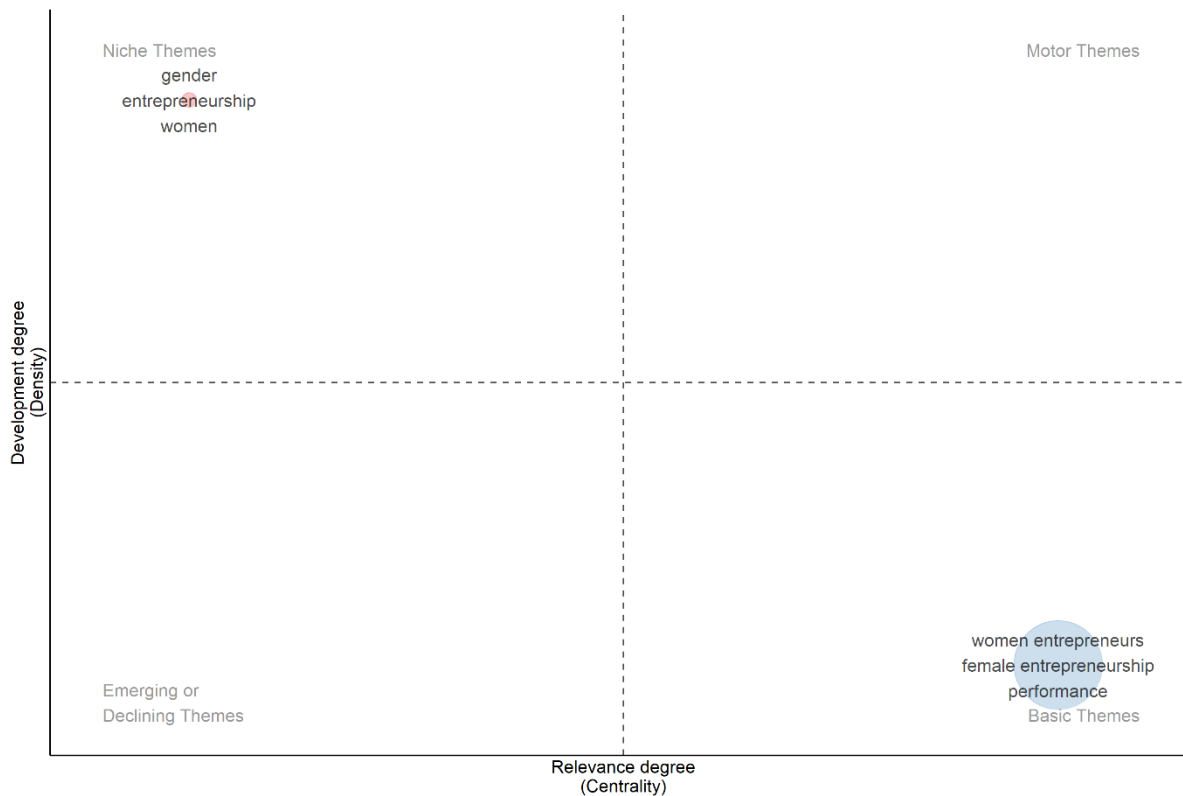


Figure 14. Thematic map

The conceptual structure map based on multiple correspondence analysis reveals a multidimensional intellectual organization of women entrepreneurship research, structured around four interrelated thematic domains that collectively explain a substantial share of keyword co-occurrence variance (Figure 15). One prominent cluster is oriented toward financial access and enterprise support, emphasizing concepts such as credit, access, microfinance, SMEs, and firms, which together reflect a strong research stream focused on structural and resource-based conditions enabling entrepreneurial activity. A second cluster concentrates on strategic outcomes and organizational performance, bringing together innovation, knowledge, growth, performance, impact, management, leadership, and institutional factors, highlighting a performance-driven perspective that links women entrepreneurship to business success and economic outcomes. Centrally positioned is a dense cluster explicitly focused on women and female entrepreneurship, encompassing gender, women entrepreneurs, empowerment, self-employment, work, and entrepreneurial strategies, underscoring the field's core concern with agency, inclusion, and gendered entrepreneurial experiences. A fourth cluster captures socio-cultural and psychological dimensions, including motivations, culture, context, family, perceptions, and self-efficacy, pointing to the importance of individual-level and social influences shaping entrepreneurial behavior. Overall, the factorial map demonstrates that women entrepreneurship research integrates financial, strategic, gendered, and socio-cultural perspectives into a coherent yet pluralistic knowledge structure, reflecting both theoretical maturity and analytical diversity.

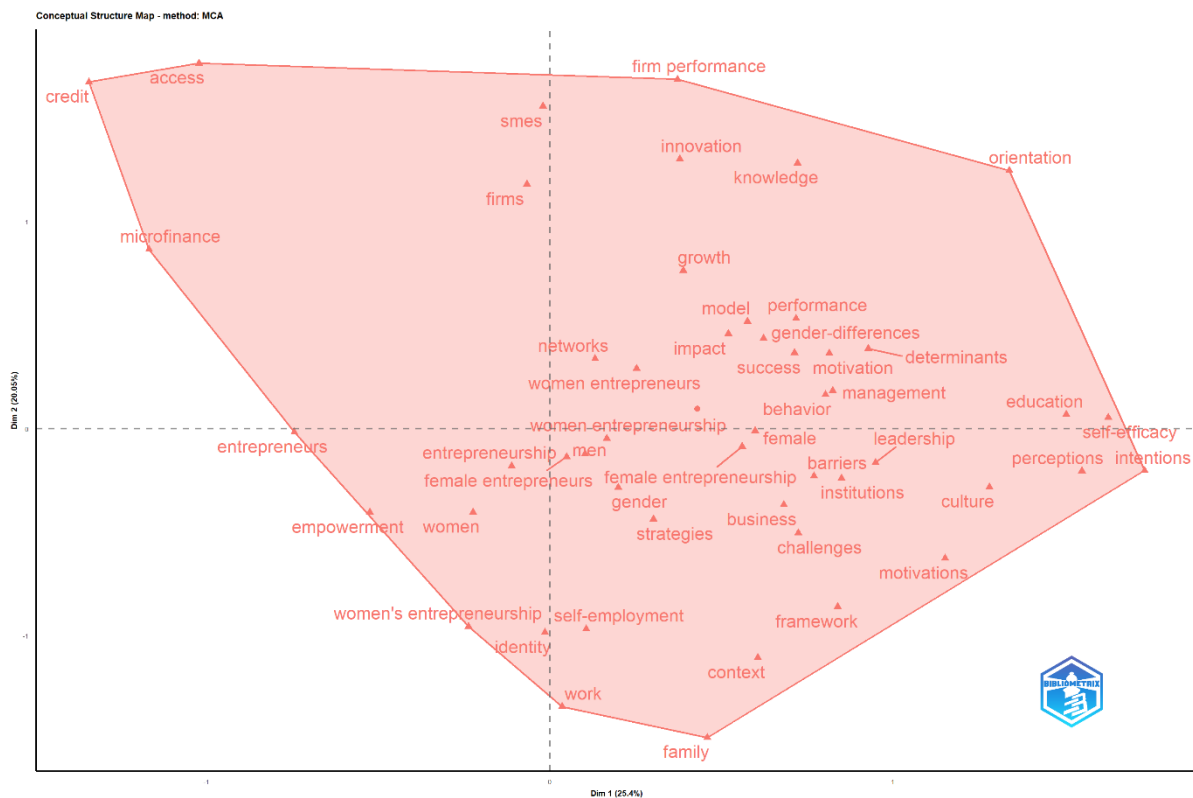


Figure 15. Factorial Map

The country collaboration map illustrates a highly uneven yet strongly interconnected global research network in women entrepreneurship, dominated by a small number of central hubs that structure international knowledge flows (Figure 16). The United States clearly emerges as the primary global hub, combining the highest research output with the densest web of international collaborations, particularly with Western Europe and East Asia. A tightly integrated European cluster, led by the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, forms the second major center of activity, characterized by both intense intra-European collaboration and strong transatlantic linkages with the USA. Asia shows increasing prominence, with countries such as China, India, Japan, and South Korea acting as important partners within global collaboration networks, often connected through US- and Europe-centered ties. Australia and Canada function as secondary but strategically important nodes, reinforcing Commonwealth and trans-Pacific collaboration patterns. In contrast, many countries in Africa and South America exhibit more limited internal regional collaboration and rely primarily on partnerships with established hubs, reflecting structural asymmetries in global knowledge production. Overall, the map reveals a hub-and-spoke collaboration structure in which a few highly productive countries act as brokers of international research, underscoring both the globalization of women entrepreneurship scholarship and persistent inequalities in collaborative capacity across regions.

## Country Collaboration Map

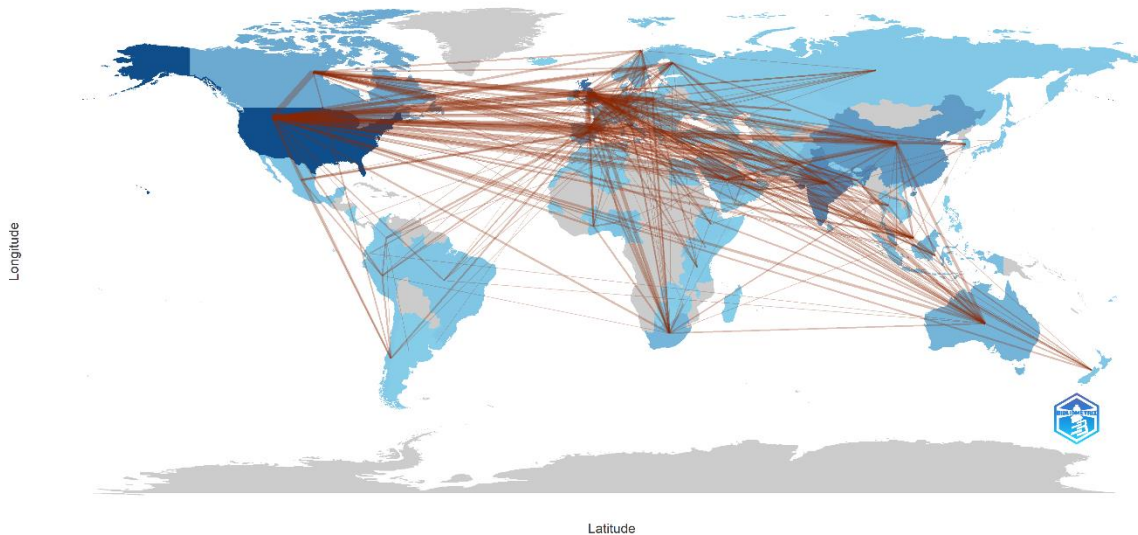


Figure 16. Countries' Collaboration World Map

### Discussion

The findings collectively position women's entrepreneurship as a consolidated and intellectually mature research domain that has transitioned from marginal scholarly attention to a globally institutionalized field of inquiry. The steady expansion of scientific production, coupled with sustained citation influence, indicates that the topic has moved beyond exploratory scholarship toward theoretical consolidation and empirical diversification. The presence of strong co-authorship patterns and dense intellectual linkages further suggests that knowledge production in this area is no longer fragmented but embedded within collaborative epistemic communities. This maturation is reinforced by the concentration of publications within specialized journals and the sustained visibility of pioneering scholars whose work continues to structure contemporary debates. The evidence therefore reflects a field that has achieved disciplinary legitimacy while retaining interdisciplinary openness.

Equally significant is the thematic and conceptual diversification observed across science-mapping outputs. While gender remains the central analytical anchor, the knowledge architecture has expanded to incorporate performance, innovation, institutional environments, and socio-cultural determinants. This indicates that women's entrepreneurship research has evolved from descriptive gender-based analyses toward integrative frameworks that connect agency, structure, and outcomes. The coexistence of niche gender-theoretical streams with broader performance-oriented scholarship further signals pluralism rather than paradigmatic dominance. Such diversification reflects a field responding to global policy agendas, development imperatives, and shifting entrepreneurial ecosystems.

### RQ1. Evolution of production, citation impact, and intellectual foundations

The longitudinal patterns of publication and citation demonstrate that women's entrepreneurship research has undergone a classic trajectory from emergence and consolidation to rapid expansion, consistent with earlier retrospectives but on a broader empirical scale. Iqbal et al. (2024) describe women's entrepreneurship as moving from a fragmented, under-recognized niche toward a more integrated field with growing theoretical sophistication, and the present findings confirm this by showing a long period of low output followed by a sharp rise in publications and stabilization of citation impact in recent years. Similarly, Kumari and Kumar (2024) documented an acceleration of work after 2012; the current analysis extends this trend backward to

the 1970s and forward into the mid-2020s, revealing how early peaks in average citations coincide with seminal interventions that later bibliometric and narrative reviews identify as agenda-setting.

Reference publication year spectroscopy and the list of globally cited documents underline the central role of a relatively small canon of theoretical and empirical studies that continue to attract sustained attention. This pattern echoes Maurya et al.'s (2025) observation that female entrepreneurship research is anchored in enduring foundational contributions but periodically revitalized by new syntheses and frameworks. The prominence of gender-critical and feminist works, such as those by Ahl, Marlow, and De Bruin, within the citation backbone resonates with earlier mappings that stress the importance of feminist theory and gendered critiques in defining the field's intellectual identity (Jiang et al., 2024; Maurya et al., 2025). At the same time, the rise of more recent, highly normalized citations to work on institutions, innovation, and development indicates a shift toward integrating women's entrepreneurship with broader debates on sustainability, policy, and structural transformation, thereby broadening its intellectual foundations beyond gender alone (Fauzi et al., 2023; Sánchez-Limón et al., 2025).

### **RQ2. Thematic domains, conceptual structures, and emerging trends**

The thematic, treemap, and conceptual-structure analyses show that the knowledge architecture of women's entrepreneurship is organized around a gender-centric core that branches into performance, finance, institutional, and socio-psychological sub-domains. This configuration is broadly consistent with previous bibliometric and thematic syntheses that identified recurring clusters around socio-cultural factors, entrepreneurial resources, mentorship, and digitalization (Jiang et al., 2024; Pradana et al., 2025). In particular, the strong presence of themes such as performance, growth, innovation, and impact mirrors findings from Frende Vega and Salgado-Canto (2024), who emphasized the centrality of business growth and performance outcomes in female entrepreneurship scholarship. Likewise, the appearance of credit, microfinance, and SMEs as distinct clusters aligns with evidence that access to finance and enterprise support remain persistent focal points in studies of women's entrepreneurial activity in developing and emerging economies (Fauzi et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025).

Trend topics and the strategic thematic map further reveal the field's transition from exploratory to more consolidated and reflexive research. Early dispersed concerns with networks, childcare, and class give way, after 2014, to a stabilized vocabulary centered on women's entrepreneurship and gender, paralleling Kumari and Kumar's (2024) depiction of a shift toward more coherent and gender-aware research frames. The more recent rise of terms such as intersectionality, resilience, innovation, and systematic literature review indicates a deepening engagement with complexity and a move toward meta-synthesis and critical reflection, in line with Iqbal et al.'s (2024) call for integrative and future-oriented research agendas. Conceptual structure mapping shows that gendered agency and empowerment are now analytically linked to financial, strategic, and socio-cultural dimensions, echoing Juneja et al. (2025) and Marín-Palacios (2023), who observed that contemporary work increasingly embeds women's entrepreneurship simultaneously in family, organizational, and market contexts. Nonetheless, the absence of clearly defined motor themes in the strategic map suggests that, while the field is thematically rich, it remains pluralistic rather than dominated by a single integrative paradigm, a finding that mirrors earlier claims about fragmentation and the need for stronger theoretical integration (Pradana et al., 2025).

### **RQ3. Global productivity and collaboration across countries, institutions, authors, and sources**

The analysis of sources, authors, institutions, and countries demonstrates a highly concentrated yet increasingly internationalized research ecosystem. Journals such as the *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, *Small Business Economics*, and the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* function as core outlets, corroborating previous mappings that identified these venues as the primary homes for gendered entrepreneurship scholarship (Jiang et al., 2024). The presence of sustainability-oriented

and community-focused journals, such as *Sustainability* and the *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, reinforces recent claims that women's entrepreneurship is progressively linked to sustainable development and community-level outcomes (Fauzi et al., 2023; Sánchez-Limón et al., 2025). At the author level, a relatively small group of highly productive scholars, including Kaciak, Welsh, McAdam, Ramadani, Ahl, and Essers, appears as the intellectual and collaborative backbone, consistent with earlier observations of a stable core of influential contributors whose work spans feminist, institutional, and emerging-economy perspectives (Yang et al., 2025).

Institutional and country-level results highlight substantial asymmetries in research capacity and collaboration. The dominance of institutions in North America and the United Kingdom, alongside rapidly increasing contributions from Indian and other Asian universities, mirrors the geographical imbalances and emerging-economy catch-up dynamics reported by Jiang et al. (2024) and Juneja et al. (2025). The country collaboration map, showing the United States and a cluster of Western European countries as central hubs in a hub-and-spoke global network, converges with Maurya et al.'s (2025) finding that knowledge flows are strongly mediated by a small set of brokerage countries, while nations in Africa, South Asia, and parts of Latin America participate more selectively and often through partnerships with these hubs. At the same time, the growing presence of institutions from India, Ghana, South Africa, and other emerging contexts indicates a gradual broadening of the field's geographic base, partially responding to calls by Fauzi et al. (2023) for more attention to developing economies where women's entrepreneurship can be particularly transformative. However, the relatively low levels of international collaboration for countries such as Pakistan, Nigeria, and Bangladesh suggest persistent structural and resource constraints that may limit their visibility and voice in shaping global research agendas, reinforcing the need for more equitable collaboration structures.

### **Practical Implications**

From a policy standpoint, the findings underscore the need for integrated entrepreneurship ecosystems that combine financial inclusion, institutional support, and capability development. Governments and development agencies should prioritize gender-responsive financing mechanisms, innovation training, and institutional mentoring structures. The strong linkage between socio-cultural factors and entrepreneurial outcomes suggests that policy interventions must extend beyond economic incentives to address normative and structural barriers. Academic institutions can leverage the identified collaboration hubs to build transnational research consortia, particularly integrating underrepresented regions into global knowledge networks. For practitioners, the thematic emphasis on performance and innovation highlights the importance of scaling support programs that move women entrepreneurs beyond subsistence ventures toward high-growth sectors.

### **Limitations**

Several methodological limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, reliance on the Web of Science Core Collection introduces indexing bias, privileging English-language and Western journals while underrepresenting regional scholarship. Second, bibliometric techniques capture structural and relational patterns but cannot evaluate the substantive quality or real-world impact of individual studies. Third, citation-based indicators inherently favor older publications with longer citation windows. Finally, the title-field search strategy, while enhancing precision, may exclude relevant studies where women's entrepreneurship is discussed but not foregrounded in titles.

### **Future Research Directions**

Future studies should adopt multi-database datasets integrating Scopus, Dimensions, and regional indexes to enhance representational inclusivity. Longitudinal comparative analyses examining pre- and post-pandemic entrepreneurial ecosystems would provide additional insight into structural resilience. Greater integration of intersectionality, particularly class, ethnicity, and digital access, is essential to move beyond binary gender

frameworks. Methodologically, mixed-method bibliometric designs combining science mapping with systematic qualitative synthesis could yield deeper theoretical integration. Expanding South–South collaboration mapping also represents a critical frontier for decolonizing women’s entrepreneurship scholarship.

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