Exploring Contemporary Research Trends in Theoretical Foundations of Social Exchange Theory: A Bibliometric Inquiry

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Abstract

This paper provides a bibliometric analysis that investigates the landscape of research based on Social Exchange Theory (SET) within business and management areas. The primary purpose is to overview the insights on the evolution, current studies and its patterns in school of thought of literature around SET related with employee in the organization. The method the current study imply is using bibliometric analysis which focus on the searching the data through high index journals in Scopus from the year 2011 until 2024. Through a bibliometric analysis method, these databases will import from a dataset and act as secondary data source. The study is descriptive in nature. Therefore, the research design gathered from Scopus databases to view relevant studies related with Social Exchange Theory. The bibliometric analysis gathered 185 datasets to showcase the authorships, publication patterns and examining the trends of SET in business and management areas are essentials. Thus, thorough investigates the relevancy is important to contributes the needs of Social Exchange Theory to enable in providing further details on business context and assisting other researchers and practitioners on relevancy of this theory in business and management context.

Keywords: *employee voice, social exchange theory, bibliometric analysis*

1. Introduction

Social Exchange Theory (SET) has emerged as a pivotal framework within the fields of sociology and psychology, elucidating the dynamics of social change, particularly in organizational contexts involving employees. It posits that individuals engage in various interactions that necessitate transactions, allowing them to acquire both tangible and intangible rewards while balancing their associated costs (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET is widely acknowledged across the social sciences, with researchers applying this theory to diverse disciplines (Chang, 2021; Thomas & Gupta, 2021).

This paper aims to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the research landscape surrounding Social Exchange Theory by addressing several specific objectives. The first objective is to analyze publication trends over time, examining changes in cumulative year, types of publications, and the distribution of papers within the field. The second objective focuses on the authorship trends and the key themes that emerge within the domain of Social Exchange Theory. The third objective involves analyzing highly cited publications and the collaborative networks among authors, institutions, and regions in the business and management research field, thereby illuminating the dynamics of interdisciplinary interest in SET. Finally, the fourth objective is to investigate the geographical distribution of authors, institutions, and countries, along with any collaboration data derived from the bibliometric analysis.

Overall, this paper offers a descriptive analysis encompassing citations, authorship patterns, publication trends, key themes, subject matter, and geographical distribution related to Social Exchange Theory.

The remaining content of this document is structured according to standard formats for bibliometric analysis studies. The following part, "Literature Review," provides a theoretical foundation and contextual basis for the analysis by offering an extensive evaluation of the body of work that has been written about Social Exchange Theory (SET). The "Methodology" section that follows describes the methodology used in this study, including the inclusion criteria, data gathering procedures, and analytical methods applied. The analytical results, comprising of trends, patterns, and insights obtained from the data, are showcased in the ensuing section titled "Results and Findings." To improve understanding, this section is supported by visuals like tables, charts, and graphs. The "Discussion and Limitations" section provides insights into the findings by interpreting them within the framework of the body of previous literature.

Literature Review

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a theory that showcase a dynamic of interpersonal relationships in the organizational context. Accordingly, the SET explained as an individual's engage in a social interaction based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit, while seeking to maiming rewards either tangible or intangible and minimizing the costs (Bandura, 1989).On the other hand, Cropanzano & Mitchell, (2005a) explained that the Social Exchange Theory (SET) is one of the most influential conceptual paradigm in the organizational behaviour. In the organizational setting, SET offers important insights for employee-employer relationships, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and other relevant outcomes that many other authors may benefiting the application of the theory(Ayop & Ishak, 2023). Being recognizable, while receiving ample support from an individuals or employer promotes a healthy communication. Researchers continued to explore the applicability and implications of social exchange theory in a modern organizational setting (Ahmad et al., 2023; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lambe et al., 2001; Zhao et al., 2019). It is evidently that strengthening the relationship between two parties enable promoting 'healthy' organizational citizenship behaviours.

With that understanding, this bibliometric study able to synthesizing and analysing the literature, patterns or trends around social exchange theory to further contributes to the business management areas. In addition, it enables to display scholarly publications, insights and analytical findings from high index dataset. This systematically analysis allows to identify key authors, journals and themes that resides in SET studies. Thus, recognising the patterns following specific timeframe allows researchers to understand the evolution of research over time, identifying emerging trends of title and assessing each individuals' studies to complement with other disciplinaries.

Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method that used to evaluate and analyze a large dataset from several database such as Scopus, PubMed and Web Of Science (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim & Kumar, 2024). Through a bibliometric analysis, researcher able to identify particular field or discipline related with the study. In this paper, the current study focuses on the specific theory that enable to overview large scale of dataset from a specific database- Scopus. The method requires the researcher to implement systematic examination of bibliographic data such as number of publications, field of research, authorships and enable to identify the insights of the research trends. This are essentials to gain insights and the impacts of the research literature.

Bibliometric analysis requires facts and figures derived from a selective database that enable to compliment the research needs. Although bibliometric analysis is a descriptive in nature, but it provides overall overview based on the high index publications resources that can support the research questions and research objectives.(Dervis, 2019; Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015; Goyal & Kumar, 2021) Total documents in the database presents the actual set of information that support further justification and investigation.
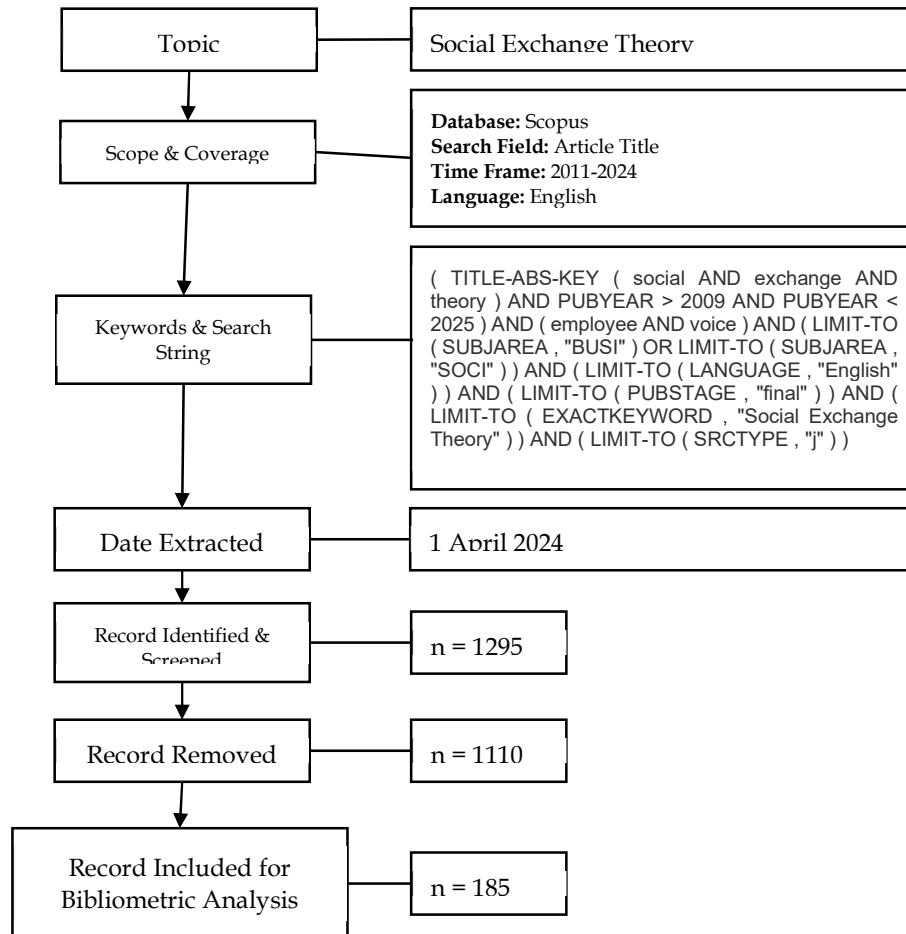
Search Strategy

In order to begin with the bibliometric analysis, choosing the database is essentials to acquire a large of dataset. In this study, searching the documents by entering the key words "Social Exchange Theory" resulting 13056 documents found. The documents related with several subject areas in which Social Sciences (5238) and business, management and accounting (5016).

This followed by psychology (2067), computer science (1960) and arts and humanities (1581). However, because of the current study focus on the social exchange theory (SET) within the context of social sciences and business management research areas, others research field were void. Within this searching strategy, the researcher carefully filtering necessary information to be gathered and compiles. This includes document types, source title, publication stage, keywords, affiliations, funding sponsor, country or territory, source type, language and open access. Thus, filtering the documents is important and ensuring the dataset is clean from duplication and errors. While the number generate at the first searching documents for Social Exchange Theory is overwhelming, further filtering requires. This includes only focus on two main subject areas (social sciences and business management), selecting document type and exclude other irrelevant information that may impact the outcome of the total documents. In addition, the year of publication is choose within 10 years because social exchange theory highly being used as the keywords by referring to the graphical result present in the database. With appropriate selections of themes, research areas, the total documents retrieved are 185.

Data Cleaning and Harmonisation

In bibliometric analysis, it's crucial for the dataset to be thoroughly cleaned to ensure accuracy and reliability. Following methodologies outlined by Castañeda et al. (2022), Dervis (2019), Donthu et al. (2021), and Tigre et al. (2023), researchers implement several measures to ensure the dataset sourced from the Scopus database is free from errors, duplications, and misinformation. One primary concern when retrieving a large dataset is the presence of duplicates. Therefore, it's essential to identify and eliminate any irrelevant or duplicated records to prevent redundancy and ensure the uniqueness of the data. Additionally, standardizing author names is imperative. In a dataset of 185 entries, there may be instances where authors' first and last names are misplaced or cited in different formats, which can significantly impact the overall analysis. Moreover, attention must be paid to standardizing journal titles, possibly requiring researchers to check for consistency using Boolean syntax. Inconsistent data can also hinder effective analysis, necessitating the removal or verification of details within Excel sheets. Incomplete or missing data poses another challenge, as missing values can significantly affect the analysis. Therefore, such entries must be excluded from the analysis. While addressing common errors within the dataset, normalizing the data is essential to adhere to the specified timeframe and aggregate the data appropriately at different levels for comprehensive analysis.

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the search strategy.
Source: Zakaria et al. (2021), Moher et al. (2009)

| Topic | → | Social Exchange Theory |

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Topic ──────────── Social Exchange Theory
  │
  ▼
Scope & Coverage ── Database: Scopus
                    Search Field: Article Title
                    Time Frame: 2011-2024
                    Language: English
  │
  ▼
Keywords & Search ── ( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( social AND exchange AND
String               theory ) AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR <
                     2025 ) AND ( employee AND voice ) AND ( LIMIT-TO
                     ( SUBJAREA , "BUSI" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA ,
                     "SOCI" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English"
                     ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBSTAGE , "final" ) ) AND (
                     LIMIT-TO ( EXACTKEYWORD , "Social Exchange
                     Theory" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) )
  │
  ▼
Date Extracted ──── 1 April 2024
  │
  ▼
Record Identified & ── n = 1295
Screened
  │
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Record Removed ──── n = 1110
  │
  ▼
Record Included for ── n = 185
Bibliometric Analysis
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Results

The following sections discussing the findings from the dataset and justification of each actions for this bibliometric analysis.

Documents Profiles

The results of the bibliometric analysis provide some important insights into the study dataset. The dataset includes 185 publications from 2011 to 2024, with an average of 3.25 contributing authors per piece. These publications have received a great deal of attention over the course of 14 years, totaling of 4,560 citations. Every paper has, on average, garnered 24.65 citations; cited papers have, on average, received 27.47 citations each. This suggests a noteworthy influence within the scholarly community. Furthermore, the research output's productivity and effect are indicated by the h-index, which measures the impact of citations, which is 39. The research findings are further supported by the g-index of 60, which is another measure of citation effect. Averaging 350.77 citations which 7.57 citations per author, the dataset presents researchers interest within the domain of social exchange theory. In addition, the initial findings shown that it is collectively contributes that the chosen theory triggering social sciences and business management

field of interest. Refer to Table 2, number of citations including the publication years, number of citations, the index numbers presents convincing data to the current study.

Table 1: Citation Metrics

Main Information	Data
Publication Years	2011 – 2024
Total Publications	185
Citable Year	14
Number of Contributing Authors	602
Number of Cited Papers	166
Total Citations	4,560
Citation per Paper	24.65
Citation per Cited Paper	27.47
Citation per Year	350.77
Citation per Author	7.57
Author per Paper	3.25
Citation sum within h-Core	4,249
h-index	39
g-index	60
m-index	2.79

Table 2: Document Type

Document Type	TP	%
Article	180	97.30%
Review	3	1.62%
Conference Paper	2	1.08%

With 185 of total documents, 180 of the document types is in a form of article, while review papers (3) and conference paper (2). It is obvious that the published research are based on article format and largely represent the overall dataset of Social Exchange Theory (97.30%). (Refer: Table 3).

Citation Analysis

The most highly cited papers in research field of Social Exchange Theory (SET) covers a wide range of topics. It includes team-member exchange, ethical leadership, organizational commitment, knowledge sharing and employee safety performance. By referring to Table 4, these papers have come across several different research areas. For instance, integrating the social cognitive theory with organizational behaviour, human resource management and psychology areas.

This is obviously shown that the authors recognize the potential of SET to be implemented in a different path of areas and contributes to the knowledge of the school of thought has potentially strengthening the relationship with other relevant areas. Several other papers also explore the quantitatively discussing the relationships of SET with leadership styles, organizational culture and human resource policies and practices. Following for the remaining data in Table 4, the current studies offer dynamic potential for SET to be widely address in the discussions or multiple fields. In addition, the social relationships in influencing individuals and organizational behaviour, thus underscoring the core principles of Social Exchange Theory. Overall, these findings represent the breadth and dept of research conducted within the Social Cognitive Theory and provides valuable insights for other researchers to bridge the gap between fields that ultimately benefiting and contributing the needs for individuals and organizational outcomes.

Table 3: Top 10 highly cited articles

No	Authors	Publication Title	Source	Cites	%
1	Banks G.C.; Batchelor J.H.; Seers A.; O'Boyle E.H.; Pollack J.M.; Gower K. (2014)	What does team-member exchange bring to the party? A meta-analytic review of team and leader social exchange	Journal of Organizational Behavior	35	16.64
2	Miao Q.; Newman A.; Yu J.; Xu L. (2013)	The Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior: Linear or Curvilinear Effects?	Journal of Business Ethics	116	14.83
3	Farndale E.; Van Ruiten J.; Kelliher C.; Hope-Hailey V. (2011)	The influence of perceived employee voice on organizational commitment: An exchange perspective	Human Resource Management	50	10.9286
4	Coyle-Shapiro J.A.-M.; Pereira Costa S.; Doden W.; Chang C. (2019)	Psychological Contracts: Past, Present, and Future	Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior	6	22.8333
5	Wu W.-L.; Lee Y.-C. (2017)	Empowering group leaders encourages knowledge sharing: integrating the social exchange theory and positive organizational behavior perspective	Journal of Knowledge Management	21	17.125
6	Caillier J.G. (2012)	The Impact of Teleworking on Work Motivation in a U.S. Federal Government Agency	American Review of Public Administration	42	8.53846
7	Pulles N.J.; Veldman J.; Schiele H.; Sierksma H. (2014)	Pressure or Pamper? The Effects of Power and Trust Dimensions on Supplier Resource Allocation	Journal of Supply Chain Management	50	9.90909
8	Mullen J.; Kelloway E.K.; Teed M. (2017)	Employer safety obligations, transformational leadership and their interactive effects on employee safety performance	Safety Science	91	13.125
9	Rigtering J.P.C.; Weitzel U. (2013)	Work context and employee behaviour as antecedents for intrapreneurship	International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal	9	8.66667
10	Ng T.W.H.; Feldman D.C.; Butts M.M. (2014)	Psychological contract breaches and employee voice behaviour: The moderating effects of changes in social relationships	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	23	7.72727

Analysis of Authorship Trends

In this section, the researcher analyses the current trends reveals from 185 datasets. This is important to corroborate with the SET and opportunity to multi-authored publications. This would possibly consistently to outnumbering the single-authored ones. Refer to Figure 1, from 1992 until 2023, single-authored conquer the publications until the emerging of multiple authors started to contribute starting from 2005. Although from the study, it indicates that the dataset are setting from 2011 until 2024, but it is important to showcase the trends in a much longer period of time which at least in a range of 20 years (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015).

Figure 1: Analysis for Authorhip Trends
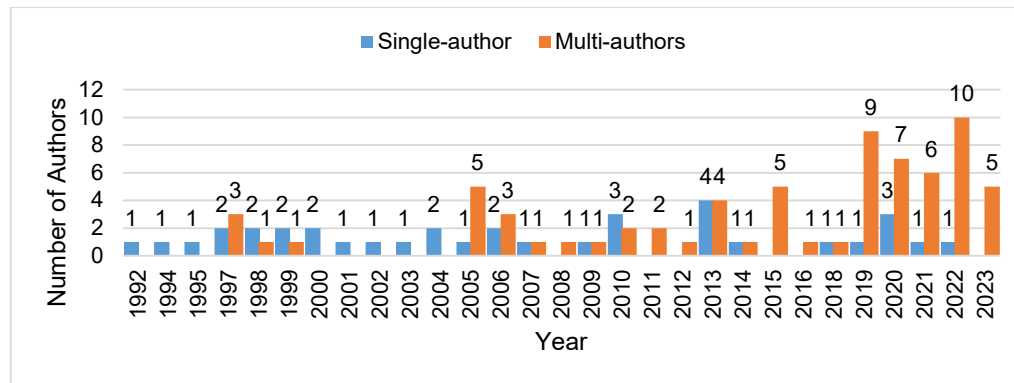
The trends presenting in this data has shown significantly growth and authors started to realise (since early 2000s) to have much more collaborative engagement and interdisciplinary approach to offers much expertise in the academic research. It prevails the needs for other potential authors who can use this as a stepping stone to offers informative and collaborate related with the Social Cognitive Theory studies.

Analysis of Publication Patterns

For the analysis of publication patterns, the data is display in Figure 2. A total of publications and citations according to its year are breakdown from 2011 to 2023. Within this timeframe, a total number of 175 publications were recorded which accumulating of 4526 total of citations. It is believe the numbers may increase if other authors from other database also cite the same publication. In order to analyse the trends for the Social Exchange Theory, it is recognizable that increase both number of publication and citations over the years presenting highly interest among researchers across the disciplines. For instance, on 2019, its is the highest number of publications received by Scopus with a total of citations of 662. This suggest that a peak of research activity and impact during this time frame among authors. Similarly, in 2018, the number of publications presented in Figure 2 is 13 with total citations 565. These two years in a row shown that the growth of author interests and other research activities that may contribute to the number of publications, examples the existing of international forums, journal publications, books and other relevant documents.

Figure 2: Publication Patterns
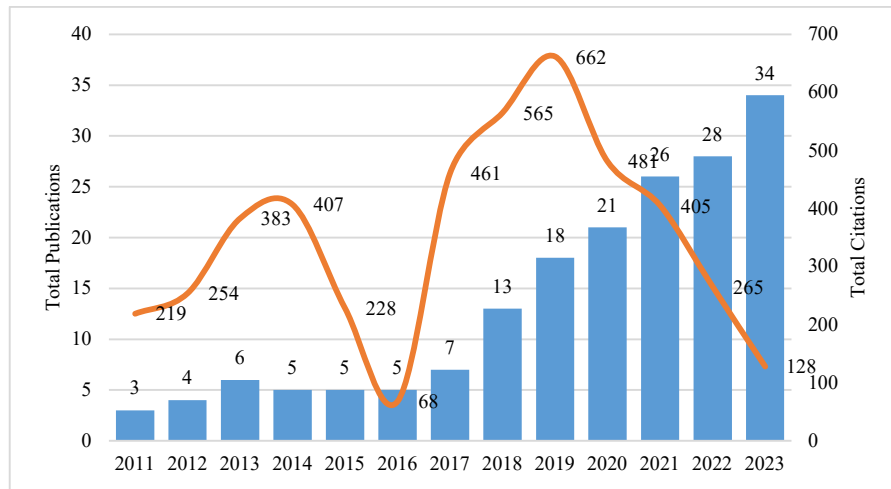
In summary for the publication trends, the Social Cognitive Theory offers dynamic landscape in research areas and impact on specific timeframe. With the numbers of total publications, the highest (34) and total citations – the highest (481) has significantly signalling other researchers that the Social Cognitive Theory are impacting across disciplinary research areas. Thus, it is evidently that the total number of citations and publication will increase for the coming years.

Keywords Co-occurrence Analysis

One of the bibliometric analyses is to identify the common keywords emerged from all publications retrieved. Previous studies has shown that the emerging of Social Exchange Theory prominent framework multidisciplinary areas such as human recourse management, psychology, business management and social sciences. Over the past few decades, the data shown increasing numbers of studies addressing the SET, explores the application in the organization, understanding individuals' behaviour (Bandura, 1989; Khang et al., 2014).

In this bibliometric analysis, the ability to provide the insights of trends and common themes emerge from the keywords and research title from 2011 until 2024 offers much more informative figures. For instance, the Social Cognitive Theory studies shown in Figure 3 as a wordcloud format, it comprises of all 185 published work in Scopus into frequencies. Frequencies that this study referring to is that compilations for all keywords extracted from each individual papers, and evaluated. Accordingly, the wordcloud is a method to promotes that the most highest word that commonly used will display larger font compare that keyword that less discuss in much more smaller font.

Common keywords such as "trust," "job performance," "human resource management," "leader-member exchange," "employee engagement," and "organizational commitment." These represents studies that related with interperosonal relationships, organizational commitement for offering dynamic culture in the organization and individuals behaviour within the business context.

Figure 3:Wordcloud for Keywords of 185

To summarise the key themes for Social Cognitive Theory, this bibliometric analysis enable researcher to understand much comprehensively literatures, contribution and further justification of the key areas following the trends and methodology employed in this research.

Subject Analysis

Following the bibliometric analysis, the subject of analysis is essentials to recognize the dominant themes arise in other disciplinaries. The analysis categorizes based on the subject areas, title of the research which revealing trends for each group. The majority of the publications (85.41%) fall under Business, Management and Accounting areas which highlight significantly on organizational behaviour, leadership and strategic management. The second dominant category is social sciences (39.46%) spanning between sociology, anthropology and political sciences. While Psychology-related studies (16.22%) address topics related with employee motivation, decision-making processes and human behaviour in organizational context, Computer Science, Decision Science and Economics, scores 10.27% each. The overall covers within data analytics, financial modelling and economic theories applies into the organization.

Table 4: Subject Area

Subject Area	Total Publications	Percentage (%)
Business, Management and Accounting	158	85.41%
Social Sciences	73	39.46%
Psychology	30	16.22%
Computer Science	19	10.27%
Decision Sciences	19	10.27%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	19	10.27%
Arts and Humanities	11	5.95%
Environmental Science	11	5.95%
Energy	9	4.86%
Engineering	9	4.86%
Medicine	5	2.53%

By referring Table 5, another niche areas such as Arts and Humanities, Environmental Sciences, Energy, Engineering and Medicine received the lowest publication output for Social Exchange Theory which lower than 10%.

These indicates that the most common research areas related with Social Exchange Theory is between Business, Management and Accounting and Social Sciences. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable input to other researchers on promoting diverse range of topics to shaping out the SET and further contribute the most relevant research areas. Thus, encouraging more co-authorship with cross-disciplinary would be possible for future directions for this study.

Geographic Analysis

Based on the 185 dataset retrieved, high publications countries come from Australia, China, Indonesia, and Jordan stand out as leading contributors to scholarly research on social exchange theory, with notable numbers of publications. Other countries such as Brunei, Finland, Malaysia, Italy, and Saudi Arabia exhibit moderate levels of scholarly output in this field, indicating active participation of researchers addressing Social Exchange Theory. Other countries relatively low publication due to several factors including limited academic infrastructures, political factors, research interests, selective journal publications and others.

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Figure 4: Worldwide scientific production indexed by Scopus on publication based country.
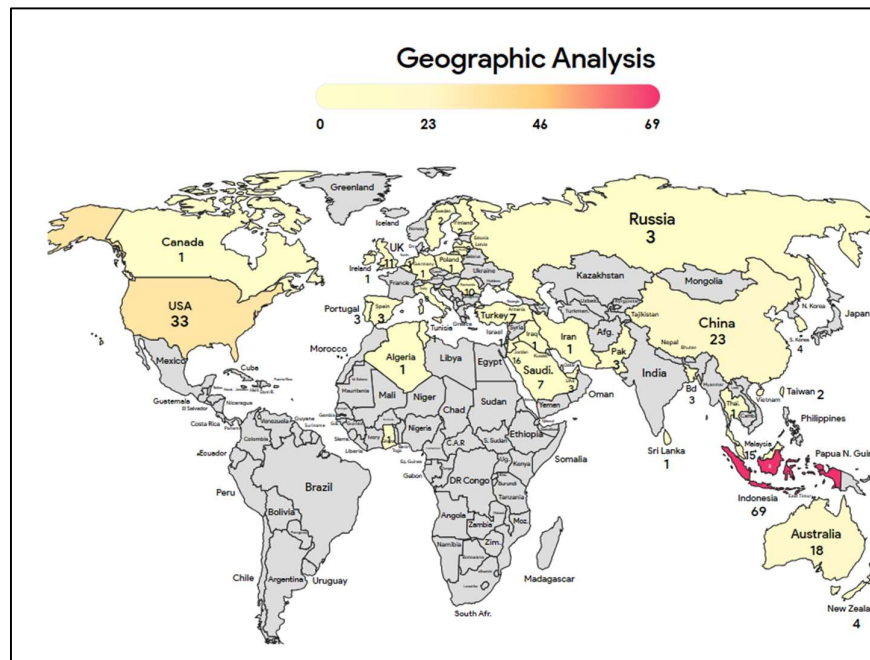

Figure 4 shows that worldwide scientific productions indexed by Scopus from researchers across countries. Develop and developing countries tend to have more publication compared that under developed countries. The difference of publication outputs determines the researcher's interest and also their involvement in any related exposure to the chosen theory.

The data display generates from iimaps.com open source application, allows this study further contributes the regional areas that allows the researchers to concentrate further on developing their research interest significantly. Overall, the analysis highlights regional trends, variations in scholarly engagement, and areas of active research in social exchange theory across different parts of the world.

Discussions

In the context of studying social exchange theory and its application in organizational settings, bibliometric analysis

can provide several benefits. Firstly, it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive overview of the literature, including the volume of publications, citation patterns, and collaboration networks among researchers. This information can help identify influential authors, seminal works, and key research themes within the field. Secondly, bibliometric analysis enables researchers to assess the dissemination and impact of research findings, by examining citation counts, publication trends, and journal impact factors. This can provide insights into the visibility and recognition of research within the academic community and beyond. Finally, bibliometric analysis can inform the development of research agendas and future directions by identifying gaps and opportunities for further investigation. By synthesizing and analysing the existing literature, researchers can identify areas where additional research is needed, as well as potential avenues for innovation and advancement in the field. The discussion around social exchange theory and its relevant application in the organizational settings, bibliometric analysis enable to gain much comprehensive overview of the existing literature, including numbers of publications citations patterns and collaboration networks (co-authorship). This information identify influential authors, seminal works and key research themes within the field.

Conclusion

In conclusion, bibliometric analysis offers a powerful methodological approach to examining the vast body of literature on social exchange theories within organizational contexts. Through systematic collection, organization, and quantification of bibliographic data, researchers can gain valuable insights into the trends, patterns, and impact of research in this area.

By applying bibliometric analysis methods, researchers can identify key authors, journals, and research themes within the field of social exchange theory. This approach enables tracking the evolution of research over time, identifying emerging topics and trends, and assessing the impact of individual studies on the field. Additionally, bibliometric analysis can help researchers understand the dissemination and impact of research findings by examining citation patterns, publication trends, and collaboration networks among researchers. Furthermore, the citation analysis revealed the impact and influence of individual publications within the dataset, with certain papers receiving a high number of citations. In addition, Co-authorship analysis highlighted collaboration patterns among researchers, demonstrating the importance of collaborative networks in advancing research within the field.

For the emerging key themes and keywords from overall data set uncovered prevalent themes and topics within the literature on SET, including organizational behaviour, leadership, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture. This reflects the multidisciplinary nature of SET and its relevance across various domains, including business, management, psychology, and social sciences.

Furthermore, bibliometric analysis can inform the development of research agendas and future directions by identifying gaps and opportunities for further investigation. By synthesizing and analyzing the existing literature, researchers can identify areas where additional research is needed, as well as potential avenues for innovation and advancement in the field of social exchange theories.

In general, bibliometric analysis offers insightful information on the state of social exchange theory research, which eventually advances understanding and application in organizational behavior, psychology, and related fields. Researchers can develop a greater understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal connections, exchanges, and behaviors within organizational contexts by rigorously analyzing scholarly articles. This can help them make more informed decisions and implement more effective treatments.

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