

MAPPING GLOBAL TRENDS IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUE DILIGENCE RESEARCH (2010–2024): A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Makale İlk Gönderim Tarihi / Received (First): 08.11.2025

Makale Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 06.12.2025

Atıf/Citation: Celepli Sütbaş, M., & Güzeller, C. (2025). Mapping global trends in human rights and due diligence research (2010–2024): a bibliometric analysis. *Scientific Journal of Innovation and Social Sciences Research*, 5(2), 125-145. <https://doi.org/10.71284/sjissr.2025523>

Abstract

This study gives a detailed bibliographic review of the academic sources on human rights and due diligence that appeared between 2010 and 2024. We use the Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny package in R to analyse 582 publications in social sciences, business, management and accounting in the English language article using Scopus data. We study trends in publications, citation performance, authors, international cooperation, contributions by countries, conceptual clusters, and development of themes. The results demonstrate an increase in production since 2017 and a spike since 2021, which has been driven by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive of the European Union. Certain terms mentioned in the keywords and their co-occurrence with other terms accentuate the integration of human rights due diligence (HRDD) as a governance instrument and the emphasis on climate change, stakeholder engagement, and assessment mechanisms. This study illuminates the knowledge base and patterns of the field by mapping structural development and defining powerful sources, actors and centers of collaboration. It provides an evidence map to researchers and policymakers, and provides the future research on comparative regulation contexts, the perspective of developing countries, and integrative research on the connections between governance, sustainability, and supply chains.

Keywords: Human Rights, Due Diligence, Human Rights Due Diligence, Bibliometric Analysis

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1. Introduction

Human rights, as delineated by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (United Nations, 2011), refer to the universally recognized entitlements that individuals possess solely by their humanity, which are inalienable and inherently universal. Although the safeguarding of these rights is predominantly regarded as a state-centric obligation, the analysis has incorporated emergent issues and responsibilities, including globalization, the climate crisis, forced labor, supply chain infringements, and digital transformation (Macchi, 2020). This enlargement necessitates the establishment of a novel governance framework in partnership with the state. Consequently, the obligation to uphold human rights has evolved into a duty not only for the state but also for the private sector, particularly for multinational corporations (Chambers & Yilmaz-Vastardis, 2021).

One of the salient concepts that emerges within this framework is due diligence. Originally linked to the domain of financial risk management, it has since evolved into a multifaceted methodology that pertains to corporations actively confronting their influence on human rights (Sherman, 2022). Based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), due diligence is a structured process undertaken by an organization, in an effort to detect, prevent, mitigate, and report harmful human rights impacts, which might arise as a result of its direct business activities or even business relationships (O'Brien & Dhanarajan, 2015). The process includes risk evaluation and the companies must set their corporate governance in a way that complies with the tenets of human rights (Sherman, 2022). Human rights-based due diligence (HRDD) is regarded as another form of this process. It has been subjected to specific adaptations to the issues of human rights concerns, the conceptualization of which can be characterized as dynamic and progressive (UN, 2011).

Chambers and Yilmaz-Vastardis (2021) explain that Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) procedures are not necessarily considered an activity whose sole purpose is simply reporting or generating corporate accountability. Since the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D) of the European Union was adopted, HRDD is also becoming a legal obligation. Not only does this development assist corporations in adhering to standards such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, but it leaves strong grounds for a corporation to protect itself against any lawsuits in the future (Sherman, 2022).

Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) encompasses the methodologies aimed at mitigating adverse effects on human rights while simultaneously accounting for such repercussions. This methodology is predicated upon the standard of care that a 'reasonable and prudent' enterprise would implement under specific circumstances. The obligation of care mandated by HRDD is not absolute; rather, it is contingent upon context and may fluctuate based on variables such as the industry in which the organization functions, its scale, and the contextual backdrop of its operations (McCorquodale &

Nolan, 2021). Given the inherent nature of the process, it is imperative to revise HRDD protocols as the environments in which corporations operate evolve (Sherman, 2022). In this regard, HRDD can be characterized as a multifaceted governance instrument that imposes both ethical and legal obligations upon corporate entities. Numerous scholarly investigations have concentrated on the notion of human rights within the purview of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) in prominent academic publications such as 'Business Ethics Quarterly' and 'Benchmarking: An International Journal' (Muchlinski, 2012). Nevertheless, both within the realm of academic discourse and at the practical implementation level, a multitude of inquiries persist that require elucidation concerning the effects, constraints, and transformative potential of HRDD.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these qualitative advancements in the existing body of literature, scholarly works emerging at the nexus of human rights and due diligence concepts predominantly emphasize normative dimensions or are confined to limited sectoral analyses; thus, there exists a paucity of comprehensive studies that systematically delineate the structural and thematic advancements within the discipline. Trinh et al. (2025) conducted a comprehensive analysis of 1,721 publications indexed in the Scopus database to chart the overarching progression, collaborative efforts, and topic clusters associated with the due diligence literature, thereby providing managerial insights, especially within the context of international business. Nonetheless, this investigation did not delineate thematic distinctions pertinent to HRDD nor did it concentrate on a human rights-centric normative framework (e.g., UN Guiding Principles, Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence). This study scrutinizes 582 scholarly publications indexed in the Scopus database from 2010 to 2024 employing bibliometric analysis methodologies to address this identified gap. In doing so, it aspires to offer a multidimensional framework that elucidates the structural evolution, thematic clusters, geographical dispersion, and intellectual dynamics of the literature concerning human rights and due diligence, thereby serving as a foundational guide for both scholars and policymakers.

The manuscript is organized in the following manner: The initial segment investigates the theoretical frameworks surrounding human rights concepts and the associated due diligence processes; the subsequent segment delineates the research methodology, the data set, and the analytical approaches employed. The third segment articulates the findings, while the fourth segment critically evaluates these findings in the context of the extant literature. The concluding segment delineates the study's limitations and proffers recommendations for prospective research endeavors.

2. Method

Despite the considerable advancements made in this domain since 1978, bibliometric analysis has emerged as a vital tool for elucidating specific phenomena within the fields of social sciences and

business administration. The primary objective of bibliometrics is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the scientific literature pertinent to the subject under investigation (Büyüköztürk, 2016). Furthermore, bibliometric analysis assists researchers by delineating the landscape of existing literature in the discipline (Zupic & Carter, 2015).

2.1. Research Model

The present study was conducted employing a bibliometric analysis framework characterized by a descriptive methodology. Bibliometric analysis constitutes a systematic approach that leverages secondary data to scrutinize publication trends, citation relationships, thematic orientations, and collaboration networks within scholarly literature (Zupic & Carter, 2015). In this framework, the investigation seeks to analyze the literature generated by the intersection between of human rights and due diligence. Consequently, the following inquiries were posed.

- What are the annual production trajectories of scholarly publications concerning the topics of 'human rights' and 'due diligence' from the year 2010 to 2024?
- Who are the influential within the corpus of literature addressing human rights and due diligence? In what manner are the productivity and citation impact of these scholars influenced?
- How are the international academic collaboration networks delineated in the literature under consideration? Which nations and co-authors exhibit a more pivotal role?
- What are the principal themes that emerge within the literature on 'human rights' and 'due diligence,' and how do these themes progress over time?
- Based on co-citation and keyword co-occurrence analyses, which conceptual clusters (themes) are prominent in the literature? What are the structural and content-related attributes of these themes?
- In which nations is the academic output within the domain of human rights and due diligence geographically concentrated? What is the scientific impact and citation performance of these nations?
- How has the relevant literature transformed with respect to intellectual structure? What are the foundational studies and theoretical frameworks that underpin the literature?
- Regarding Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), what areas do the structural and thematic advancements in the scholarly literature emphasize?

2.2. Research Universe and Sample

The research universe encompasses scholarly articles disseminated between the years 2010 and 2024 that incorporate the key terms 'human rights' and 'due diligence.' In light of its pre-eminence within the field of social science publications, the Scopus database was used as the primary data source

(Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The Web of Science database was not additionally used, as the studies under examination were already encompassed within the Scopus database. The subsequent criteria were considered in the delineation of the universe: Only documents published in the English language were incorporated. Van Leeuwen et al. (2001) and Van Raan (2005) have posited that studies conducted in English exhibit greater methodological validity for analytical purposes due to the comparatively higher volume of research published in English relative to other languages. Research articles, book chapters, review articles, and conference proceedings were included as the publication types.

In the framework of bibliometric methodologies, disciplinary constraints also hold significance concerning data integrity and the depth of analysis. While the principle of due diligence originated within the legal domain, it has since become particularly important in business and economics-oriented application areas, such as corporate risk management, supply chain oversight, sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and ethical governance (Chambers & Yilmaz-Vastardis, 2021). For these reasons, the academic literature situated at the intersection of human rights and due diligence is confined to the disciplines of business, economics, and social sciences. The sample constructed by these criteria comprises a total of 582 publications.

Even though Scopus has wide scopes and is common in bibliometric research, the analysis using just one database is likely to have a limit to its scope. According to previous sources, some high-impact publications included in the Web of Science (WoS) might not be fully covered in Scopus, especially in the interdisciplinary fields (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). Thus, the omission of WoS is recognized to be a methodological drawback of the study. It is suggested that future research can be enhanced by incorporating the information provided by Scopus and WoS to generate a more holistic and cross-verified mapping of the field.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

In this study, we relied on secondary data, namely bibliographic records retrieved from the Scopus database. Such records derived by the database (e.g., names of the authors, year of publication, title of the journal, number of citations, keywords, and country of origin) are also prevalent as secondary data in bibliometric research to analyse scientific output and visualise research trends and structures (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Carter, 2015). This is used when researchers want to study large volumes of literature in a systematic manner without gathering primary data in the form of surveys, interviews, and experiments.

The empirical data were procured from bibliographic entries sourced from the Scopus database. The pertinent records were exported in BibTeX format and employed in the analytical process. The dataset

encompasses bibliometric variables including author names, publication year, article title, abstract, keywords, source name, citation count, and country affiliations. The R programming environment (specifically the Bibliometrix / Biblioshiny package) was utilized for the analytical assessment of the data.

2.4. Data Analysis

The amassed data were subjected to evaluation utilizing quantitative methodologies within the framework of bibliometric analysis. The analytical procedure was conducted under the following categories: temporal sequences and publication patterns, citation trajectories and network interaction analyses, author profiles and collaboration network examinations, nation-based production and citation evaluations, as well as thematic conceptual analyses. The rationale for employing these analyses in conjunction is to elucidate the literature not solely thematically or quantitatively, but also structurally, conceptually, and socially. Kumar (2025) underscores that the integrative application of bibliometric analyses serves a complementary function in delineating research domains, assessing author impact, and recognizing nascent themes, while Darman et al. (2023) elucidate that concurrent analytical techniques unveil the profundity of the research domain. Through these analyses, the intellectual evolution and trends of the literature has been thoroughly examined.

3. Findings

In this study, a comprehensive analysis of 582 scholarly publications in the English language within the domains of social sciences, business, management, and accounting, published between the years 2010 and 2024, was conducted utilizing the Scopus database with the search terms ‘due diligence’ and ‘human rights.’ The scope of the analysis was limited to articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and review articles. These publications were disseminated across a total of 302 distinct academic journals, and the annual growth rate was 32.79%. Regarding the authorship profile, the 582 documents were attributed to a cumulative total of 729 unique authors. Approximately 62% of the publications were identified as being authored by a single-authored. The average author per publication has been calculated as 1.62. Moreover, only 14.78 percent of the documents were written using international collaborative authorship. The publications received a total of 26,997 citations with an average of 9.69 citations per article.

3.1. Publication Trends and Academic Interest

In this segment, the distribution of scholarly articles published between 2010 and 2024 about the human rights and due diligence themes on a yearly basis will be investigated. The increase in publications is confirmed by the graphical results illustrating the time development. The intensity of publication and levels of academic engagement during particular intervals are explained. Furthermore,

this section also encompasses data regarding the mean annual citation frequency of pertinent publications.

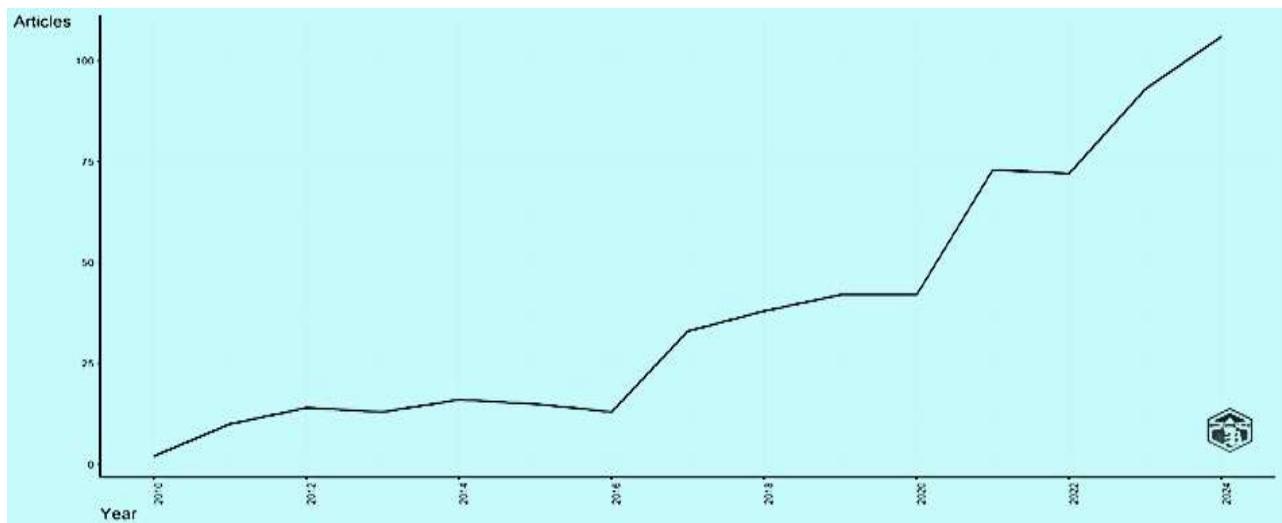


Figure 1. Science Production on an Annual Basis

Figure 1 explains the annual frequency of publications in terms of scholarly articles on human rights and due diligence between 2010 and 2024. The number of publications annually produced can be used as an important indicator of evaluating the extent to which academic work in this field has grown over time (Cheng et al., 2024). Indicate a steady upward trend, which started in the year 2010. It is important to mention that publication statistics show a significant rise starting in 2017. This has continued to increase gradually up to 2020.

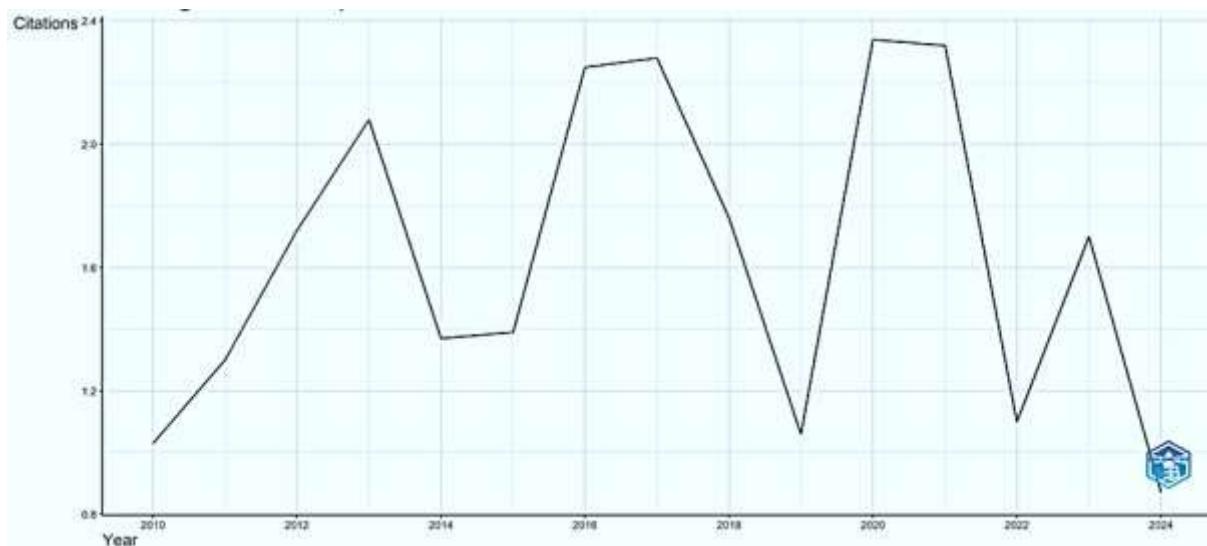


Figure 2. Average Citations Per Year.

Figure 2 shows the average annual number of citations for studies on human rights and due diligence published between 2010 and 2024. Kumar (2025) stated that analyses such as citation number analysis

by year are used to measure the effectiveness of research and its impact on the literature. The horizontal axis represents the year, while the vertical axis shows the average number of citations received by studies published in that year. According to Figure 2, while the average number of citations was quite low in 2010, this value fluctuated over the years. In particular, significant peaks in the average number of citations are observed in 2013, 2017, and 2020. As of 2024, the average number of citations appeared to decline again.

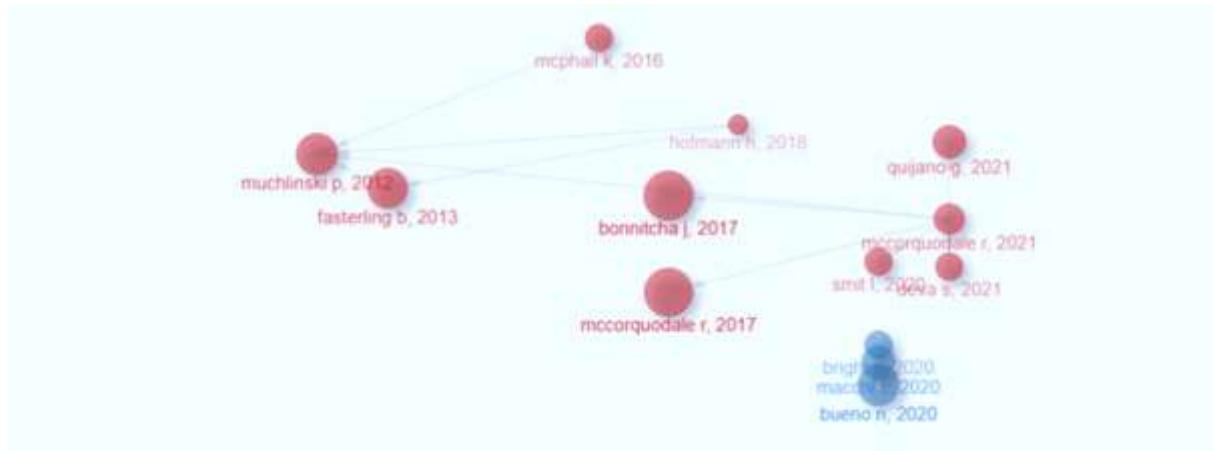


Figure 3. HistCocite: Historical Co-Citation Network

Figure 3 illustrates a citation history network derived from significant scholarly works published between 2010 and 2024 pertaining to human rights and due diligence. Citation networks constitute one of the essential bibliometric analyses that facilitate the elucidation of knowledge accumulation trajectories and the identification of studies exerting substantial influence on the academic discourse (Kumar, 2025). The red clusters depicted in Figure 3 signify the interrelations among older and more established publications. Conversely, the blue clusters denote the interconnections among more contemporary studies compared to the red clusters. In Figure 3, works such as Muchlinski (2012), Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) are observed to be more central and possess a greater number of connections in comparison to other scholarly contributions. McPhail and Ferguson (2016) is identified as highly influential yet exhibits a relatively low number of connections. Works including Quijano and Lopez (2021), Smit et al. (2020), and Deva S. (2021) are found to possess a restricted number of connections to the central node. The studies conducted by Bright et al. (2020), Macchi (2020) and Bueno and Bright (2020) are observed to constitute an independent sub-cluster with tenuous connections to other central nodes.

3.2. Author Profile and Academic Collaboration

In this segment, the collaborative affiliations among authors are illustrated via co-authorship networks, and the configurations of clustering are delineated.

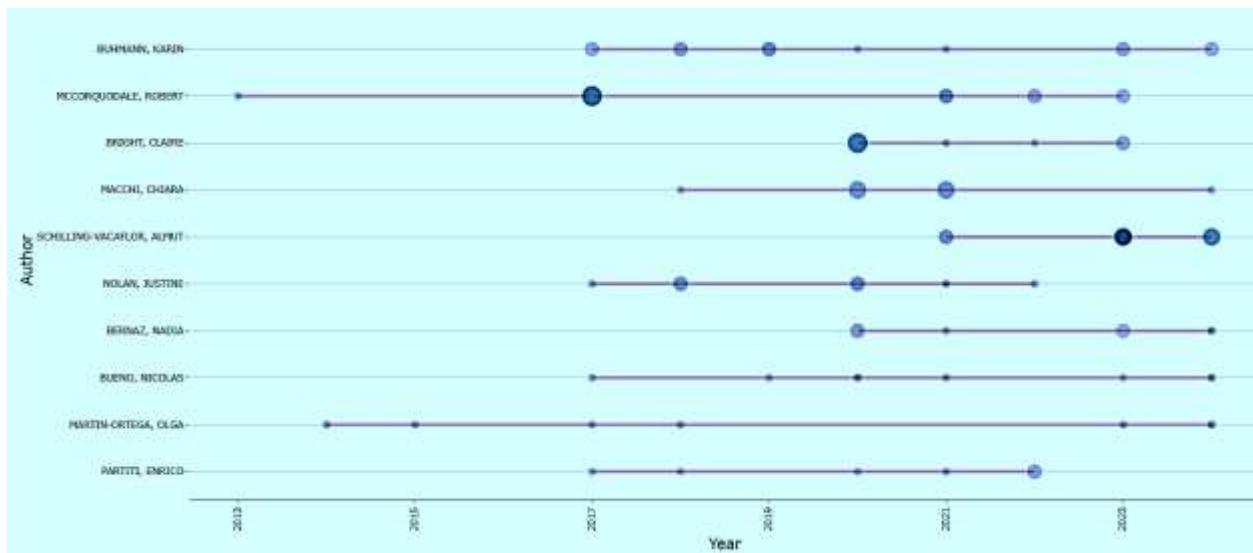


Figure 4. Authors' Production Over Time

Figure 4 illustrates the temporal distribution of scholarly publications alongside the annual citation metrics of the most prolific contributors within the domain of human rights and due diligence. Zupic and Carter (2015) have elucidated that both publication output and citation frequency are pivotal in the identification of key figures within the academic discourse. The horizontal axis shows, whereas the vertical axis enumerates the names of the authors. The magnitude of each circle reflects the quantity of articles disseminated within the corresponding year (N Articles), while the intensity of color signifies the average annual citations accrued by these articles (TC per Year). The data reveals that Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) has exhibited a consistent output since 2013, thereby making a substantial contribution to the existing literature. Schilling-Vacaflor A. has also emerged prominently in recent years, characterized by both prolific output and elevated citation intensity. Additionally, authors such as Bright et al. (2020), Buhmann et al. (2019) and Martin-Ortega (2014). have published numerous articles across various years, which have garnered a considerable volume of citations.

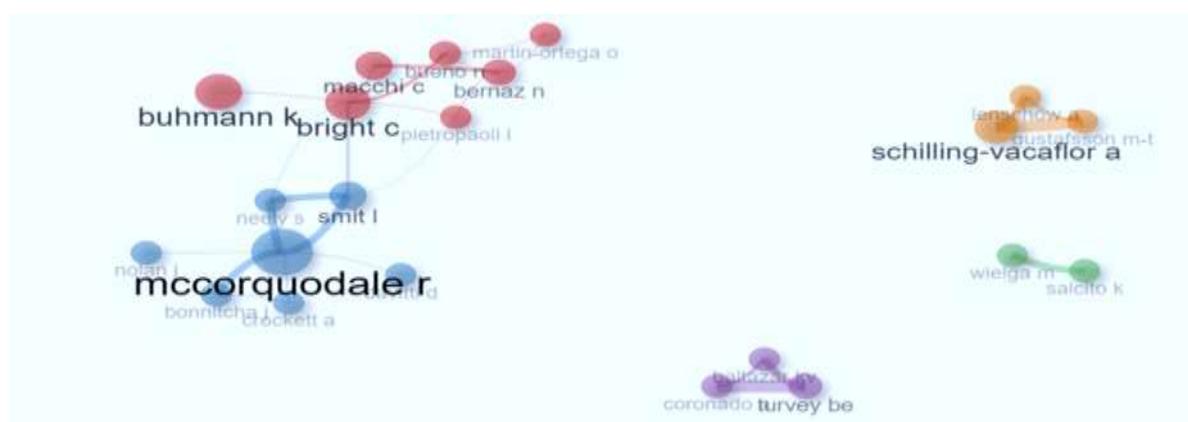


Figure 5. Collaboration Network

In Figure 5, each cluster delineates the authors who engage in collaborative efforts with one another. Zupic and Carter (2015) underscored that networks of author collaboration constitute essential bibliometric elements for elucidating the structure, productivity, and dissemination of knowledge utilized by scientifically constituted communities. The magnitude of the clusters signifies the influence of variables such as the volume of publications and the density of connections among authors. In Figure 5, Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) and the associated authors (e.g., Smit et al. (2020), McCorquodale and Nolan, (2021), are situated within the blue cluster, illustrating a robust collaboration in the scholarly discourse surrounding human rights and due diligence. In a similar vein, Buhmann et al. (2019), Bright C., and Macchi C. constitute the red cluster, which epitomizes their interrelationship, whereas Schilling-Vacaflor A. represents a smaller collaboration cluster within the orange cluster.

3.3. Geographical Distribution and International Production

In the segment dedicated to geographical distribution and international production, a statistical representation of the aggregate number of publications and the citations accrued by various nations is provided, alongside an analysis of the degree of influence exerted by these nations within the academic literature.

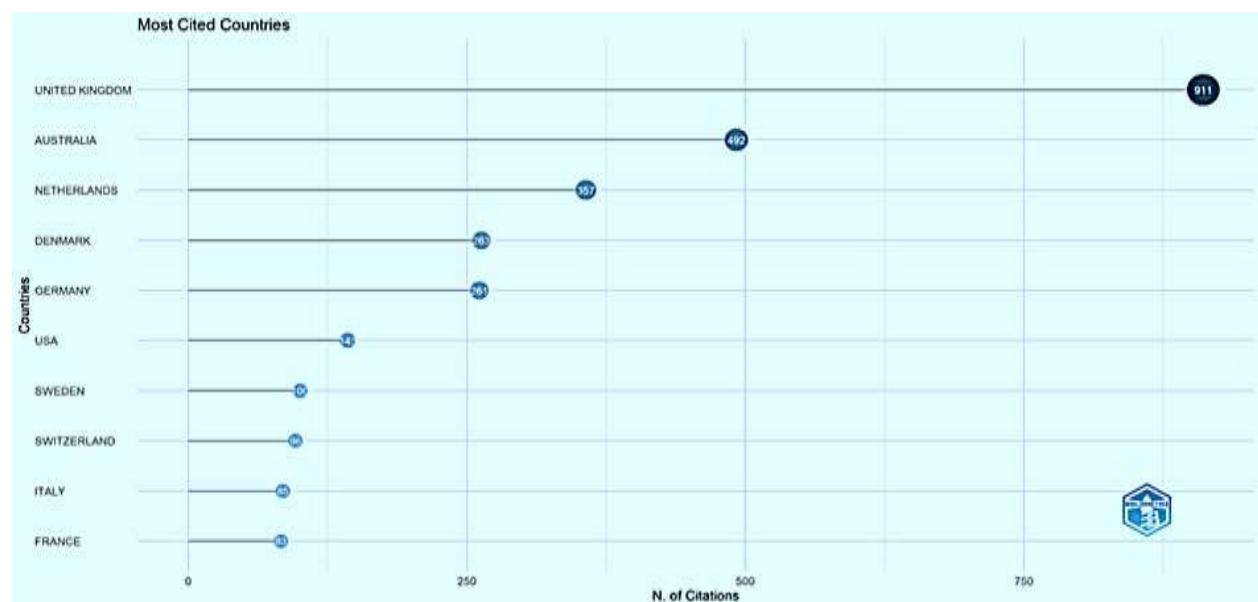


Figure 6. Most Cited Countries

Figure 6 illustrates the nation's highest number of citations in scholarly articles pertaining to human rights and due diligence from the years 2010 to 2024. De Paulo et al. (2023) posited that the examination of nations with the most citations significantly contributes to the delineation of scientific productivity landscapes and the formulation of related policies. The horizontal axis denotes the quantity of citations, whereas the vertical axis enumerates the respective countries. As indicated by the

results presented in Figure 6, the nation with the highest number of citations is the United Kingdom, accumulating a total of 911 citations. This is succeeded by Australia (492), the Netherlands (357), Denmark (263), and Germany (261).

3.4. Conceptual Framework and Thematic Advancement

In this segment, the interconnections among concepts identified in the scholarly literature are elucidated through thematic visualizations.

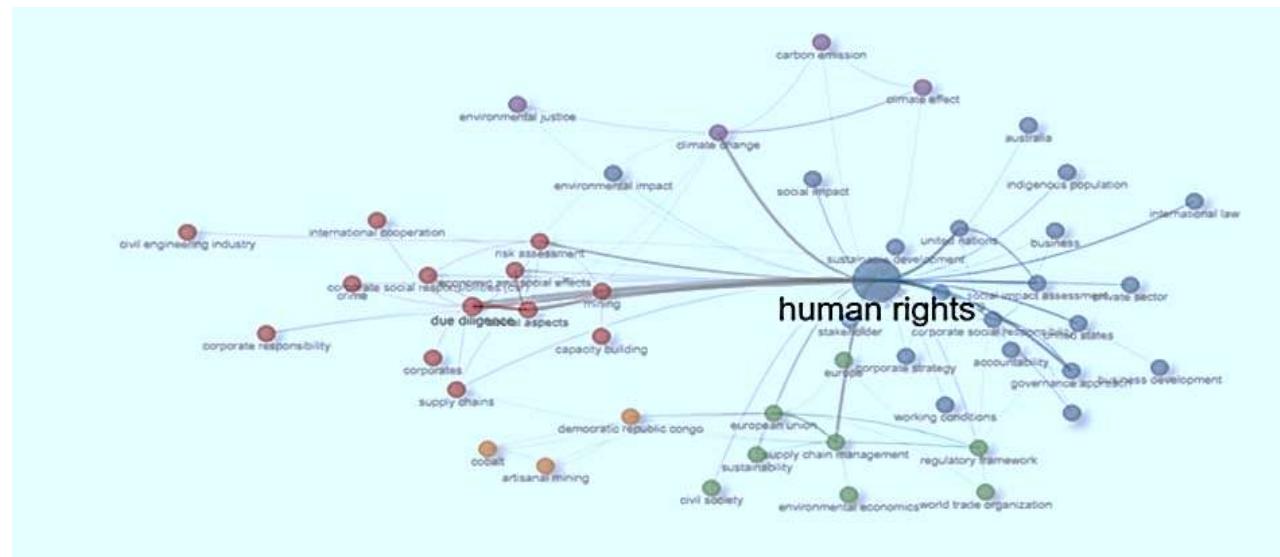


Figure 7. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

Figure 7 illustrates a prominent bibliometric analysis utilized for the mapping of a conceptual framework. Kumar (2025) has indicated that the co-occurrence network of principal concepts serves as a significant analytical method for discerning the structural organization and content trajectory of the literature. The co-occurrence network analysis depicted in Figure 7 delineates five distinct thematic clusters of key concepts that are frequently co-utilized within the literature on human rights and due diligence, identified by the colour blue, red, green, orange, and purple. The blue cluster (governance approach, regulatory framework, impact assessment, accountability, stakeholder, United Nations), characterized by robust interconnections, exhibits the most substantial association with human rights. This blue cluster embodies the institutional framework, oversight mechanisms, governance structures, and evaluative processes. The red cluster (due diligence, corporate social responsibility, supply chains, risk assessment), which revolves around due diligence, is intricately linked to concepts such as commercial infrastructure, corporate accountability, and supply chain management. The green cluster (sustainability, civil society, environmental economics, supply chain management) is associated with themes pertaining to sustainability and social actors. The purple cluster (climate change, carbon emissions, environmental impact, environmental justice), encompassing environmental concerns, signifies a relatively autonomous group. The orange cluster (Democratic Republic of Congo, cobalt,

artisanal mining), exhibiting the least influence and connectivity, represents a sub-cluster that encompasses geographical and sectoral considerations.

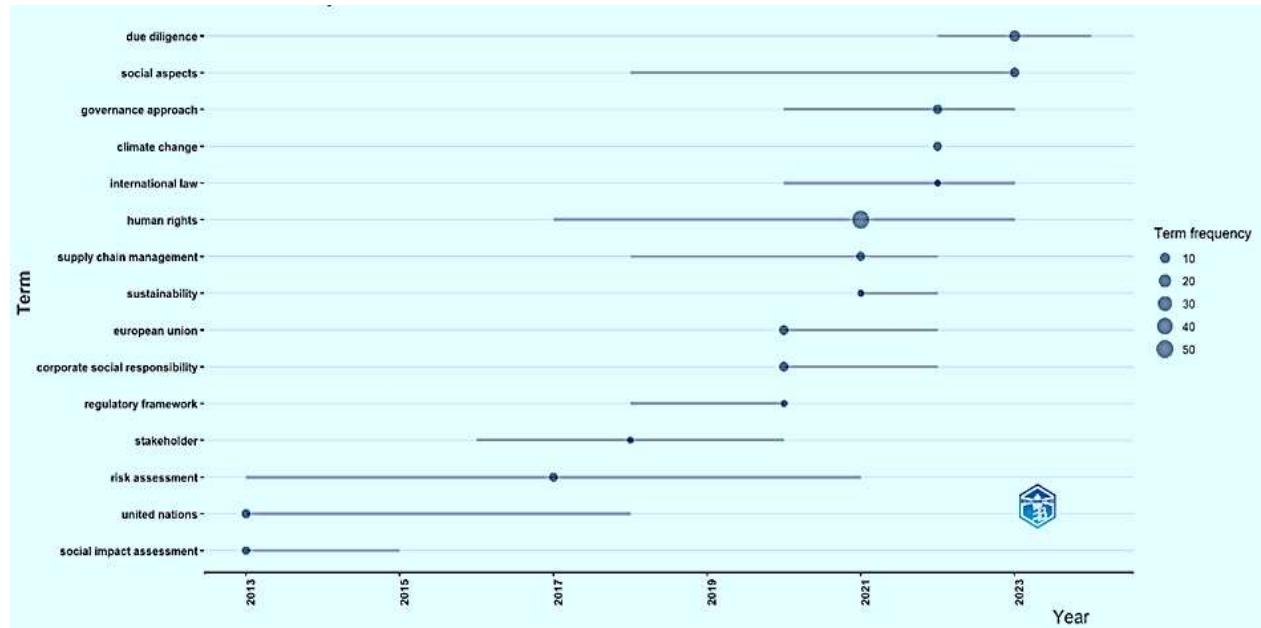


Figure 8. Trend Topics

Figure 8 illustrates the prominence and intensity of pivotal terminology frequently encountered in the scholarly discourse surrounding human rights and due diligence over the years. This examination elucidates both nascent concepts and identifies research deficiencies for future inquiry (Kumar, 2025). The magnitude of the clusters along the horizontal axes corresponds to the cumulative frequency of the pertinent term, whereas the horizontal axes delineate the temporal span during which these terms were prevalent. In Figure 8, a particularly notable observation is that the notion of 'human rights' is relatively recent (circa 2016) and has been utilized with the greatest frequency (approximately 50). Among the terminologies that have gained prominence in recent years, particularly post-2021, are 'due diligence,' 'social aspects,' 'governance approach,' and 'climate change.' Conversely, concepts such as 'United Nations' and 'social impact assessment,' despite being referenced as early as 2013, exhibit comparatively lower frequencies.

Co-occurrence network encompassing pivotal concepts, the thematic representation depicted in Figure 9 delineates the principal themes within the literature in accordance with their level of development (density) and centrality. The themes are categorized along four quadrants: motor themes, niche themes, emerging or declining themes, and foundational themes. This framework enables researchers to discern areas of strategic relevance and critical significance (Sadatmoosavi et al., 2021). Motor Themes (upper right quadrant): These signify both central and well-developed themes. The concepts of 'due diligence,' 'social dimensions,' 'climate change,' 'sustainability,' 'supply chain management,' 'international collaboration,' 'European Union,' 'human rights,' 'corporate social responsibility,' and

‘governance frameworks’ are encompassed within this category, representing sophisticated and pivotal themes.

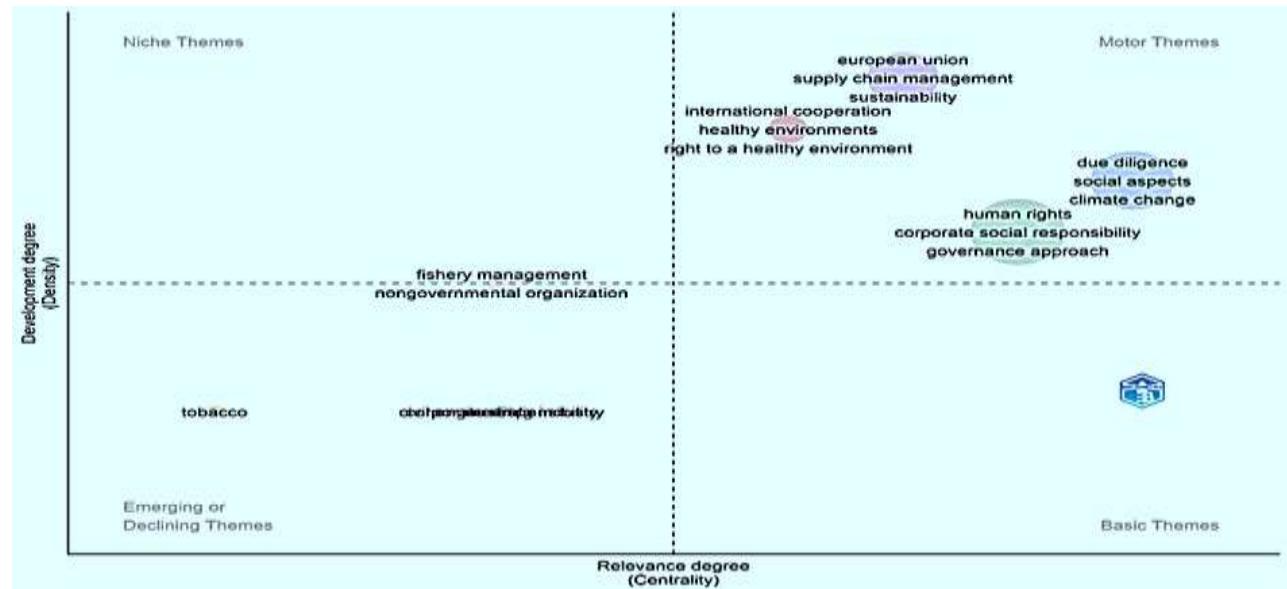


Figure 9. Thematic Map

Motor themes are evidenced in the literature to exert considerable influence and exhibit advanced levels of development. Niche Themes (upper left quadrant): Themes such as ‘international collaboration,’ ‘healthy environments,’ and ‘the right to a healthy environment’ are recognized as advanced yet possess low centrality. These themes exhibit limited interconnectivity with other themes within the broader network. Emerging or Declining Themes (lower left quadrant): Themes including ‘tobacco,’ ‘corporate accountability,’ ‘mining,’ and ‘conflict minerals’ are situated in this quadrant and symbolize either nascent issues or domains that have diminished in significance within the literature over time. These themes are characterized by a lack of centralization. Basic Themes (bottom right quadrant): These encompass centralized themes with a minimal degree of development.

3.5. Citation Impact and Intellectual Structure

This segment explains that are most frequently referenced within the scholarly literature and examines the co-citation dynamics that exist among these sources.

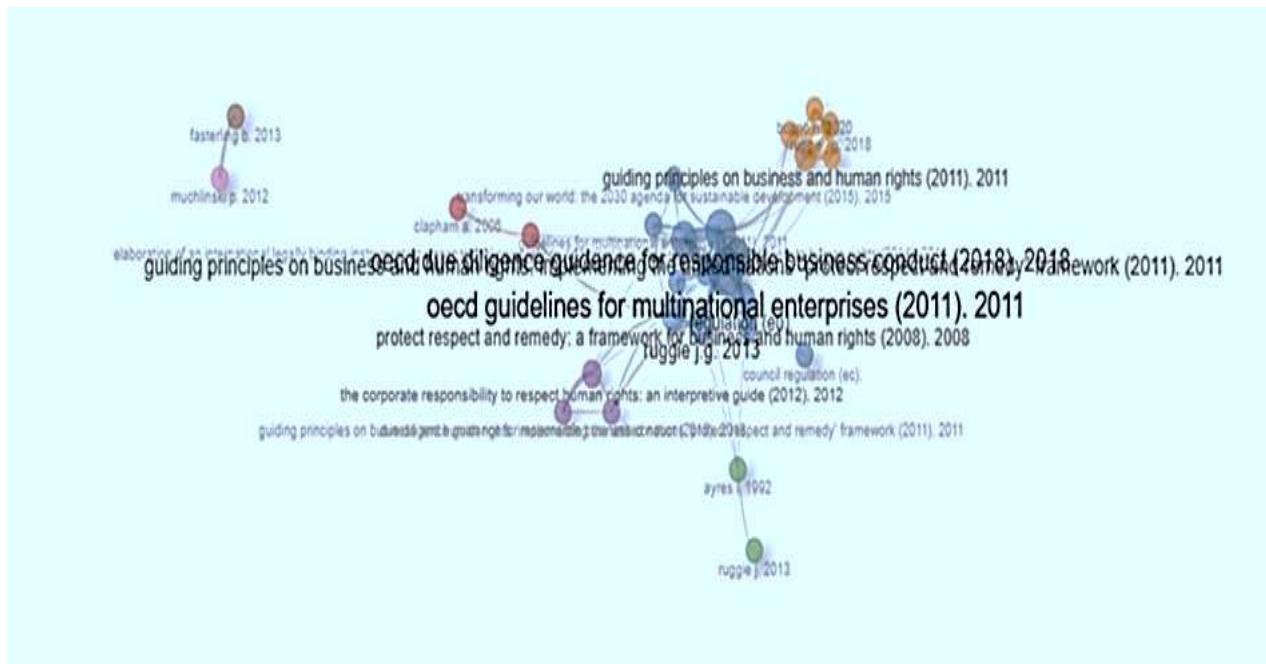


Figure 10. Co-Citation

Figure 10 elucidates the co-citation network analysis pertaining to the most frequently cited sources within the scholarly discourse on human rights and due diligence. This analytical framework delineates seminal studies, theoretical orientations, as well as the most impactful publications and authors within the corpus of literature on this topic (Sadatmoosavi et al., 2021). The nodes depicted in the visualization signify the principal sources that are referenced, represent the co-citation dynamics that exist among these sources. Furthermore, the magnitude of each node serves as an indicator of the quantity of citations attributed to the corresponding source, whereas color groupings signify thematic affiliations. The examination elucidates that the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011) and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2011) assume a pivotal role within the body of literature and are subjected to frequent citation. Strong interactions have been identified between these founding sources and numerous other sources. Additionally, the critical normative texts like the ‘Protect, Respect, and Remedy Framework’ and ‘The Responsibility of Business to Respect Human Rights’ have equally generated significant agglomerations in the study as they show high levels in terms of co-citation relations.

Table 1. Most Cited Academic Articles Internationally

| Author (Year) | Journal / Publication | Global Citation |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Hofmann H. (2018) | Journal of Business Ethics | 168 |
| 2 Bonnitcha J. (2017) | European Journal of Int. Law | 156 |
| 3 Simma B. (2011) | Int. and Comparative Law Q. | 152 |

| | | | |
|-----------|---|--------------------------------|-----|
| 4 | Vanclay F. (2020) | Impact Assess. and Proj. App. | 120 |
| 5 | Muchlinski P. (2012) | Business Ethics Quarterly | 117 |
| 6 | Kemp D. (2013) | Impact Assess. and Proj. App. | 117 |
| 7 | Sarfaty G.A. (2015) | Harvard Int. Law Journal | 93 |
| 8 | Cole S. (2014) | Journal of Sustainable Tourism | 90 |
| 9 | McCorquodale R. (2017) Business and Human Rights J. | Business and Human Rights J. | 89 |
| 10 | Buhmann K. (2019) | Corporate Governance | 83 |

According to Donthu et al. (2021), the studies most cited form the intellectual foundation of the given research field, and they play a major role in understanding the nature of the necessary literature. On a similar note, Kumar (2025) emphasizes that the search on the most-cited works is a critical component towards understanding the complexity of the literature. According to the data outlined in Table 1, Hofmann et al. (2018) article published in the Journal of Business Ethics, are the ones that have been cited the most (168 times overall). This is followed by the article by Bonnitcha, published in the European Journal of International Law, in 2017 (156 citations) and an article by Simma, published in the International and Comparative Law Quarterly, in 2011 (152 citations).

Moreover, there are two major academic studies published in the Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal journal by Vanclay (2020) and Kemp (2013), which received 120 and 117 citations, respectively. The fact that this journal has been published multiple times proves the existence of the importance of measuring impact on academic discourse. The compilation also includes contributions of well-known researchers in the field like that of Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) and Buhmann (2019) whose studies received 89 and 83 citations, correspondingly. These studies have been published in some of the most prestigious and interdisciplinary journals, which include the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Harvard International Law Journal, and Corporate Governance. This indicates that the topic is not restricted to law and business spheres, as it is accompanied by other concepts that include environment, ethics, and development.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

It is revealed that human rights and due diligence research has gained momentum, especially since 2018, and the topic has been placed higher on the agenda of policy-makers at the global level. This tendency is similar to compulsory reporting practices within corporate sustainability systems (Chambers & Yilmaz-Vastardis, 2021). Moreover, the clusters of keywords demonstrate that the study in the given area is becoming more and more multidisciplinary. This is an indication of the emergence of human rights literature at the intersection of law, management, ethics and international relations.

Moreover, the acceleration of research after 2018 appears to coincide with a broader institutionalization of corporate responsibility norms, particularly the integration of human rights due diligence into global governance mechanisms. The consolidation of the Human Rights and Sustainability Report (HRDD) within regulatory frameworks such as UN system, national due diligence legislation, and new EU-level directives demonstrates that the academic field has responded to these normative developments and evolved alongside them. This convergence between policy change and academic production highlights the reciprocal relationship between regulatory expectations and academic research. It also shows that the HRDD has become a fundamental analytical lens through which corporate behaviour, global value chains, and sustainability practices are examined.

Human resources (Oktaviani et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023; Thahir et al., 2025; Uçak, 2025) and due diligence (Gaviyau & Sibindi, 2023; Trinh, 2025) are two topics that many researchers study within the context of the scholarly discourse. However, extent of bibliometric studies that directly focus on the concept of HRDD is rather limited. This study attempts to contribute to the body of scholarship on due diligence and human rights models and uses bibliometric mapping techniques developed by Zupic and Cater (2015).

The results of this investigation indicate that there has been a considerable escalation in the quantity of scholarly publications within the domain of human rights and due diligence from 2010 to 2024. Notably, a marked increase has been detected since 2017, with a pronounced surge in the volume of publications following 2021. This augmentation is postulated to be associated with normative advancements, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN, 2011) and the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Guidelines (CS3D).

Upon analysing the mean number of citations per annum, it becomes evident that the scholarly impact of articles published in 2017 and 2021 is comparatively elevated. The observed decline in 2024 can be attributed to the fact that these works have not yet accrued a sufficient duration to garner citations. The citation history network elucidates the dissemination of knowledge within the literature over time. For instance, seminal works such as Muchlinski (2012) and Fasterling and Demuijnck (2013) have significantly influenced the conceptual framework. Conversely, Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) and Smit et al. (2020) research endeavors have transitioned toward more contemporary methodologies. This scenario encapsulates the prevailing intellectual orientation within the literature.

The results encompass a total of 729 distinct authors, with the majority of production being heavily reliant on individual contributions. Upon scrutinizing Figure 4, Table 1, and Figure 5, it becomes apparent that certain authors are distinguished by their productivity and citation influence within the domain of human rights and due diligence. Bonnitcha and McCorquodale (2017) and Buhmann et al..

(2019), as delineated in Table 1, rank among the most frequently cited scholars on pertinent subjects. According to Figure 4, McCorquodale's publication endeavors have remained consistent since 2013, whereas Buhmann has garnered attention in recent years through both prolific output and elevated citation frequency. An examination of the author collaboration network depicted in Figure 5 reveals that the blue cluster surrounding McCorquodale indicates an academic consortium that engages in more frequent collaborations within the literature, in contrast to Buhmann, who is situated within a separate cluster. These clusters illustrate that the domains of academic concentration in the literature vary not only thematically but also structurally.

The keyword co-occurrence network illustrated in Figure 7 elucidates that the notions of 'human rights' and 'due diligence' exhibit a substantial association with various thematic clusters within the scholarly discourse. The term 'human rights' is frequently interconnected with concepts pertaining to governance, accountability, and the context of the United Nations; conversely, the notion of 'due diligence' demonstrates significant affiliations with practical themes such as corporate social responsibility, risk assessment, and supply chain management. Figure 8 delineates the temporal evolution of these thematic interrelations; concepts such as 'sustainability,' 'governance approach,' and 'climate change' manifest prominently in the post-2021 timeframe. The thematic cartography presented in Figure 9 situates the concepts of 'human rights' and 'due diligence' as the evolved and central 'driving themes' within the literature, thereby underscoring that the theoretical framework in this domain is both resilient and prescriptive.

The insights derived from Figure 6 indicate that the corpus of literature concerning human rights and due diligence is predominantly concentrated in specific geographical hubs. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the emergence of HRDD as a legal imperative in numerous jurisdictions. In Europe, nations including France (in 2017), the Netherlands (in 2019), Germany (in 2021), Norway (in 2021), and Switzerland (in 2021) have instituted HRDD regulations in various manifestations. Examples include the Due diligence Act (France) and the Child Labour Due diligence Act in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the modern slavery acts that are applied in various countries like the United Kingdom and Australia have actually applied the legislation which focuses on transparency and reporting. These different approaches depict that the concept of (HRDD) has been adapted and diversified within the international context (McCorquodale & Nolan, 2021; Deva et al., 2023). The study constitutes one of the few investigations that question the scholarly literature developed at the nexus of human rights and due diligence models by putting into practice bibliometric techniques. Publication trends, patterns of the intellectual framework, collaborating communities, and thematic direction were all evaluated thoroughly, in this analysis that also captures the period of 2010 to 2024, thus explaining how the concept has progressed throughout this given duration. These findings reveal that the literature lies

mostly within the field of legal studies, business ethics and environmental sciences and a significant share of the studies are being conducted in developed countries.

Based on the results of the current research, it is possible to identify several directions that may be taken in future research. To provide the information about the interpretations and applications of HRDD in various industries, first, qualitative and mixed-method research is required to supplement bibliometric trends and investigate the meaning and implementation of HRDD. Second, it can be seen that widening the geographical area, notably via the Global South insights, can be able to uncover the impact of the institutional and socio-economic backgrounds on HRDD implementation. Third, considering sustainability, climate risks, and supply chain governance in HRDD research would help shed light on interaction between environmental and human-rights requirements. Lastly, the use of sophisticated techniques of analysis like topic modelling or longitudinal co-word analysis can assist in finding the new themes and complementing the conceptual organization of the field. Such guidelines would enhance both theoretical and practical growth of the HRDD scholarship.

It is recommended that future studies conduct a more comprehensive network analysis using both WoS and Scopus data, incorporate political-economic context variables into the model, and that may emerge in the literature, particularly following the European Union's CSDDD regulation.

Limitations

Since bibliometric analysis aims at explicating structural patterns, the has not conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of the contextual discourses that are relevant to the notions involving the research is not conducted. Future studies must consider in-depth evaluations using approaches like the content analysis or discourse analysis in order to complement the insight into these patterns.

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