

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SMEs: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL RESEARCH TRENDS 2022–2026

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Abstract

This study aims to map global research trends on community economic empowerment through Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) using a bibliometric analysis approach. Data were obtained from the Scopus database comprising 102 unique articles published between 2022 and 2026. The analysis encompasses publication distribution by year, most-cited documents, countries with the highest productivity, dominant research themes, and mapping of the most frequently appearing keywords. Results indicate a significant surge in publications during 2025–2026, with dominant themes including women's economic empowerment, SME digitalization, sustainability, and financial inclusion. India and China emerged as the most productive countries, contributing 28 and 22 articles respectively. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape in economic empowerment and serves as a guide for researchers in identifying relevant research gaps for future investigation.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis, economic empowerment, SMEs, Scopus, research trends

INTRODUCTION

Community economic empowerment through Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) has become one of the priority agendas for economic development in various countries, particularly in developing nations. SMEs play a strategic role in promoting inclusive economic growth, creating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, and improving community welfare (Beck et al., 2005; Lukacs, 2005). In the global context, the SME sector absorbs more than 60% of the workforce and contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many countries.

Nevertheless, academic research in the field of SME-based economic empowerment continues to undergo rapid dynamics, particularly with the emergence of digital economy trends, financial technology (fintech), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Various studies have demonstrated that financial inclusion, women's empowerment, and digitalization are key factors in driving sustainable SME growth (Muritala et al., 2012; Ndiaye et al., 2018).

To systematically understand the development and direction of research in this field, the bibliometric analysis approach becomes a highly relevant instrument. Bibliometrics is a quantitative method used to comprehensively analyze scientific literature, encompassing publication trends, author collaboration networks, keyword mapping, and identification of dominant research themes (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Cater, 2015). By leveraging data from the Scopus database, this study aims to fill the existing literature gap by providing a comprehensive overview of the global research landscape on community economic empowerment and SMEs.

This study formulates the following research questions: (1) What are the publication trends of SME-based economic empowerment research globally during the 2022–2026 period? (2) Which countries and institutions are most productive? (3) What are the dominant research themes and most frequently appearing keywords? (4) Which articles are the most influential? The study aims

to map research trends, identify country contributions, describe dominant themes, identify influential articles, and provide recommendations for future research agendas.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Economic empowerment is a process that enables individuals and community groups to independently access and control economic resources (Sen, 1999). In the context of SMEs, economic empowerment encompasses improved access to capital, markets, technology, and business knowledge. SMEs are defined as business units with assets and turnover below thresholds set by respective countries, generally distinguished into micro, small, and medium enterprises based on their operational scale.

Academic literature demonstrates that SMEs play a crucial role in economic development, particularly in developing countries. Beck et al. (2005) found that countries with strong SME sectors tend to have higher economic growth rates and lower poverty levels. Furthermore, SMEs also play an important role in driving innovation and entrepreneurship (Acs & Audretsch, 1990). More recent literature highlights the convergence of SME research with sustainability frameworks, with scholars increasingly examining how SMEs can contribute to achieving the United Nations SDGs (Ndiaye et al., 2018).

Bibliometric analysis is a research method that uses statistical and mathematical approaches to analyze scientific publications. First introduced by Pritchard (1969), this method has evolved into one of the primary tools for mapping the development of scientific knowledge. In the context of economics and business, bibliometrics is used to identify research trends, measure researcher and institutional productivity, and map collaboration networks among researchers (Donthu et al., 2021). The main techniques employed include: (1) descriptive analysis; (2) co-citation analysis; (3) co-authorship analysis; (4) keyword co-occurrence analysis; and (5) bibliographic coupling

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric approach using secondary data sourced from the Scopus database. Bibliometrics was selected as the research method due to its capacity to provide a comprehensive and systematic overview of research development based on measurable and verifiable publication data (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The research design consists of three stages: (1) data collection; (2) data processing and analysis; and (3) interpretation and visualization.

Data were collected from the Scopus database in May 2026 using a systematic search strategy. Keywords employed include: "economic empowerment", "community economic empowerment", "SMEs", "MSME", and "small medium enterprise". Applied filters encompass: (1) Language: English; (2) Year range: 2022–2026; (3) Document type: articles, book chapters, conference papers, and reviews. A total of 102 unique documents were successfully collected after the deduplication process. Data were exported in CSV format and processed using Python for quantitative analysis.

Analysis was conducted through several sequential stages: First, descriptive analysis covering publication distribution by year, document type, most productive sources, and country distribution. Second, author and institutional productivity analysis. Third, citation analysis to identify the most influential articles. Fourth, keyword co-occurrence analysis to map dominant research themes and identify research clusters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of Data

Data collection from the Scopus database yielded 102 unique documents distributed across various publication types. As presented in Table 1, book chapters represent the largest share (37.3%), followed closely by journal articles (36.3%), and conference papers (16.7%). This

distribution reflects the multidisciplinary nature of economic empowerment research, which spans across academic journals, edited volumes, and scholarly conferences

Table 1. General Overview of Research Documents

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Total Unique Documents	102	100%
Book Chapter	38	37.3%
Article (Journal)	37	36.3%
Conference Paper	17	16.7%
Book	7	6.9%
Review	3	2.9%

Annual Publication Trends

The annual publication distribution reveals a highly significant growth trend, particularly in the 2025–2026 period. In 2022, only 1 article was recorded, subsequently increasing drastically to 43 articles in 2025, reaching its peak with 58 articles in 2026 (data through May 2026). As shown in Table 2, this surge of over 4,200% from 2022 to 2025 indicates growing academic interest in SME-based economic empowerment issues, driven by post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery urgency and increasing policy attention to inclusive economic development.

Table 2. Annual Publication Distribution

Year	Publications	Percentage (%)	Growth
2022	1	1.0%	–
2025	43	42.2%	+4,200%
2026*	58	56.9%	+34.9%
Total	102	100%	–

**Data through May 2026*

Country Distribution of Publications

Country distribution analysis based on author affiliations reveals that India dominates with 28 articles (27.5%), followed by China with 22 articles (21.6%), as presented in Table 3. This finding aligns with both countries' positions as major emerging economies with very large SME sectors receiving intensive research attention. The United States and Australia each contributed 7 articles, indicating interest from developed countries in SME empowerment in developing contexts. Notably, Southeast Asian countries—including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh—contributed only 3 articles each, representing a significant research gap given the region's massive SME sector.

Table 3. Top 10 Countries by Publication Output

Rank	Country	Articles	Percentage (%)
1	India	28	27.5%
2	China	22	21.6%
3	United States	7	6.9%
4	Australia	7	6.9%
5	South Africa	6	5.9%
6	Brazil	5	4.9%
7	Bangladesh	3	2.9%
8	Malaysia	3	2.9%
9	Indonesia	3	2.9%
10	Turkey	3	2.9%

Dominant Research Themes

Based on keyword and article title analysis, several dominant research theme clusters were identified. As shown in Table 4, sustainability-related topics dominate with 29 articles (28.4%), followed by women's empowerment with 26 articles (25.5%), and digital/ICT themes with 23 articles (22.5%). This indicates a paradigmatic shift in SME research that increasingly integrates gender perspectives, environmental responsibility, and digital transformation.

Table 4. Distribution of Research Themes

Research Theme	Articles	Percentage (%)	Trend
Sustainability & Sustainable Development	29	28.4%	Increasing
Women's Empowerment	26	25.5%	Increasing
Digital & ICT / E-Commerce	23	22.5%	Increasing
Community Empowerment	17	16.7%	Stable
Sustainable Tourism	12	11.8%	Increasing
SME / MSME	6	5.9%	Stable
Microfinance & Crowdfunding	2	2.0%	Stable

Dominant Keyword Analysis

The keyword analysis reveals interrelated thematic clusters in economic empowerment research. Table 5 presents the top 20 most frequently appearing keywords. The keyword "empowerment" appeared most frequently (7 times), followed by "community empowerment" (6 times) and "economic empowerment" (5 times). Three dominant clusters emerge: (1) Empowerment cluster

centered on community and women's empowerment; (2) Sustainability cluster including "circular economy" and "sustainable development goals"; (3) Digital transformation cluster encompassing "digital economy", "digital literacy", and "e-commerce".

Table 5. Top 20 Most Dominant Keywords

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Theme Cluster
1	empowerment	7	Empowerment
2	community empowerment	6	Empowerment
3	economic empowerment	5	Empowerment
4	sustainability	5	Sustainability
5	women empowerment	4	Gender
6	circular economy	4	Sustainability
7	sustainable development	3	Sustainability
8	social impact	3	Social
9	sustainable tourism	3	Tourism
10	social transformation	3	Social
11	digital economy	3	Digital
12	innovation	3	Innovation
13	digital literacy	2	Digital
14	resilience	2	Resilience
15	sustainable development goals	2	SDGs
16	financial inclusion	2	Finance
17	financial literacy	2	Finance
18	e-financial strategies	2	Finance
19	women's empowerment	2	Gender
20	gastronomy tourism	2	Tourism

Most Cited Articles

Given that the data covers the relatively recent 2022–2026 period, citation accumulation is still in its early stages. The most-cited articles are works published in 2025 on circular economy affinity and digital empowerment (5 citations each), followed by articles on organisational culture and stakeholder engagement (4 citations each). Table 6 presents the ten most-cited articles. This pattern suggests that sustainability and digitalization-themed articles tend to attract higher citation rates, reflecting the broader academic community's prioritization of these research directions.

Table 6. Top 10 Most Cited Articles

No.	Title (abbreviated)	Year	Citations
1	Consumers' affinity to the circular economy: Empirical evidence...	2025	5
2	Digital empowerment and economic equity: Exploring the impact...	2025	5
3	How does organisational culture affect agile projects?...	2025	4
4	Integrating technical assessment and stakeholder engagement...	2025	4
5	Can digital collaboration curb corporate greenwashing?...	2025	4
6	Policy gaps, actor dynamics, and implementation challenges...	2025	3
7	Enhancing Sustainability with Macroalgae: Driving Economic Growth...	2025	3
8	Leading the innovation: role of employee engagement as mediator...	2026	2
9	Crowdfunding dilemmas: understanding the roadblocks in Bangladesh...	2025	1
10	Sustainability of wall construction techniques for self-built rural...	2025	1

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several important patterns. First, the dominance of India and China reflects the urgency of economic empowerment issues in nations with large populations and massive informal sectors. Second, the integration of sustainability and SDGs themes signals a paradigmatic shift from economic growth-centered research toward equitable and environmentally responsible development. Third, the strong emergence of women's empowerment as a leading theme (25.5%) reflects academic recognition that gender is a critical dimension of economic empowerment, as women face greater structural barriers in accessing capital and markets. Fourth, digitalization and e-commerce themes indicate that digital transformation has become the primary empowerment pathway for SMEs in the contemporary era.

The limited representation of Southeast Asian countries—particularly Indonesia, which has over 65 million SMEs—constitutes a significant research gap. Future research should prioritize this region, employing longitudinal designs and mixed-methods approaches to capture the dynamic nature of SME empowerment. Additionally, the role of Islamic finance and sharia-compliant crowdfunding in SME empowerment remains almost entirely unexplored in the bibliometric corpus, representing a promising avenue for future scholarly investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully mapped the global research landscape on SME-based community economic empowerment through bibliometric analysis of 102 documents from the Scopus database for the 2022–2026 period. Five key conclusions are drawn: (1) Publication trends experienced a significant surge in 2025–2026, indicating growing post-pandemic urgency of

economic empowerment studies; (2) India and China dominate knowledge production while Southeast Asian countries remain underrepresented; (3) Three dominant theme clusters—sustainability, women's empowerment, and digitalization—characterize the field; (4) Significant research gaps exist in longitudinal studies, cross-country comparative research, and Islamic finance integration; (5) Future research should focus on Southeast Asian contexts, particularly Indonesia, with comprehensive mixed-methods approaches.

This study carries several policy implications: governments should strengthen SME empowerment policies integrating gender, digitalization, and sustainability dimensions; financial inclusion programs should be expanded to reach underserved communities; digital literacy investment for SME actors should be increased; and economic empowerment policies should align with SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 10. The primary limitation of this study lies in its exclusive reliance on the Scopus database, potentially excluding relevant publications indexed in other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar.

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