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Exploring ESG practices for family businesses: A bibliometric analysis

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to map the development of research on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices for family business. As significant role-players in the global economy, family-owned companies face multiple sustainability pressures from various stakeholders. Their attractiveness for ESG engagement may be due to their special governance and long disturbance orientation, but the literature does not provide a coherent result for the drivers. Adopting bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in the Web of Science, and using Bibliometrix R-package, this study visualizes the intellectual structure, influential works and emerging topics of the ESG-family businesses research landscape. It analyzes co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks, and identify research clusters and thematic trends. The findings offer a comprehensive overview of ESG practices for family firms' research. It combines these insights to offer practical guidance for managerial decisions, highlighting how family firms can strategically leverage ESG practices for enhanced long-term value and stakeholder engagement. Moreover, it demonstrates that the development of ESG scholarship illuminates economic designs of management under which family businesses can steer the complex dynamics of regulation, competitiveness, and sustainability challenges.
Keywords: *Bibliometric analysis, ESG practices, Family firms, Governance, Sustainability.*

1. Introduction

Family businesses hold a prominent position in the global economy, making important contributions to industrial development and sustainable value creation [1, 2]. Their distinctive profile comprised of family objectives and business strategies constantly grappling with each other tends to situate them ahead as strategic visionaries and role models for emerging companies [3]. The stability and longevity typically found in family businesses further contribute to their market influence and presence. Unlike organizations that adopt profit maximization as the exclusive goal, family businesses tend to base their enterprises around enduring family values and long-term goals, thus shaping their governance structures and working methods [4, 5]. In addition, the heterogeneity in family business resulting from variations in family culture, business models, and socio-economic interests provides further complexity to their strategic behavior [6].

Throughout the last decades, the role of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices has become exponentially more crucial. This is not merely because companies are no longer under evaluation in terms of profit margins only but also due to their other social and ecological responsibilities. In this dynamic era, family firms represent an interesting and special area of study, offering even more so because they account for approximately 70–90% of all enterprises worldwide [7]. The interrelationship between family and business systems compels both the opportunities and challenges of applying ESG strategies.

Family firms are generally defined by long-term orientation, strong relational ties with their communities, and the commitment of intergenerational continuity qualities that are themselves harmonious with the values to which ESG practice appeals. Despite this seemingly fitful alignment,

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however, there is broad resistance from family firms to embracing sustainability initiatives in formal or express terms. The basis for such resistance can involve risk aversion, managerial or financial resource constraint, and pervasive preference for family control [8].

Despite growing interest in ESG issues within family businesses in recent years, to our knowledge, there has been no systematic and comprehensive bibliometric review of this research area hitherto. In addressing this issue, this present study shall strive to map the intellectual landscape and trajectory of ESG-named research within family businesses. Through an examination of publishing patterns, influential contributors, and thematic trends, this research aims to establish a basic comprehension of the field's development and to promote areas of future research.

Moreover, Family businesses face unique economic trade-offs in adopting ESG practices, balancing socioemotional wealth protection against profitability. While interest is growing, not much is known about the role of ESG research in shaping managerial economic decisions in family businesses. This article helps fill this gap by systematically reviewing the literature, offering insights on the extent to which economic reasoning affects ESG adoption in family businesses.

This paper follows the following structure. Initially, the conceptual foundations and principal literature regarding ESG practices in family businesses are discussed with the major frameworks and research gaps pinpointed. Secondly, the methodology part depicts the bibliometric approach applied to map the research landscape. Thirdly, the results encapsulates the main findings presented as publication patterns, thematic groups, and collaboration networks. This is followed by an interpretation of the managerial and economic implications of the findings for family firms. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of major contributions and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Empirical studies of family firms and how they approach ESG rely on several integrated theoretical frameworks in combination to account for their distinct behavior.

Agency theory suggests that the overlap between ownership and control in family firms typically family members as principals and agents is reducing common agency costs due to monitoring being easier and interests being closer [9-11]. However, this alignment can also generate unique agency conflicts, specifically between active and passive family shareholders or across generations, which can affect governance and strategic decision-making [3].

Stewardship theory also corroborates this view by positing that family members operating the business are motivated by a sense of responsibility, loyalty, and obligation to the long-term interest of the business and the family, producing trust and relational governance [4, 12]. Socioemotional wealth (SEW) theory provides additional depth to this debate by highlighting the influence of non-monetary goals, such as family control, identity, and legacy, that may drive family businesses towards maintaining reputation and social capital albeit to the expense of short-term profitability [3, 13].

The resource-based perspective (RBV) further asserts that the distinctive assets and skills acquired in the crossing of family and business systems alike, which can be called "familiness," can confer a lasting competitive edge, especially in addressing ESG issues [2, 14]. In addition, stakeholder and institutional theories also explain how family businesses respond to legitimacy pressure from external environments and balance heterogeneous stakeholders' interests, influencing their ESG practice and reporting [5, 6]. Together, the two theories provide a combined view from which to study the drivers, barriers, and heterogeneity of ESG practice in family firms [3, 4].

These theories collectively reveal the economic incentives and constraints governing ESG decisions in family firms. Agency theory, for example, observes inherent family-nonfamily member conflicts affecting governance costs, with stewardship theory observing aligned interests to invest in ESG over the long run. The socioemotional wealth perspective emphasizes non-economic factors affecting managerial economic decisions, such as reputation and legacy, that are most significant in ESG adoption

[15]. Combining these frameworks provides a comprehensive economic view to account for why and how family businesses address ESG challenges and opportunities

2.2. ESG Practices within Family Businesses

The literature identifies the fact that family-owned companies have certain patterns when they are taking up and undertaking ESG practices. Environmentally, many family businesses leverage their long-term horizon and intimate social connections to drive sustainability initiatives such as resource efficiency, pollution avoidance, and environmentally focused innovation, yet others will be more risk-averse in embracing such initiatives through formality due to risk aversion, limited resources, or a preference for informal family centric practices [2, 3]. Socially, the relational virtues of family businesses in being close to the community, employee loyalty, and commitment to local development tend to get reflected in good philanthropy and employee welfare efforts, though the degree of formalization and external reporting varies widely, based on generational shifts and evolving family issues [1, 4]. Governance, in terms of family firms, typically employs new structures such as family councils, boards of directors that include family members, and formal succession planning, which can enhance stability and accountability but also entrench resistance to the application of external governance standards, including standards related to ESG disclosure and transparency [5, 6]. The cross-group interactions between these environmental, social, and governance practices are driven by internal family dynamics and external stakeholder pressures, leading to a diversified and complicated ESG environment in the family business setting [3, 4].

Family firms' ESG practices have significant economic considerations, including investment cost, risk mitigation, and governance transformation. Examples of environmental practices are the best way to illustrate this, where they may entail upfront capital but reduce long-term operational risk as well as maximize use of resources. Governance practices driven by ESG can maximize firm value through minimizing default risk as well as stakeholder trust building [16]. These economic compromises are significant to realize in making managerial decisions, especially considering family firms' long-term orientation and socioemotional wealth orientation.

3. Methodology

Bibliometric analysis provides a reproducible and systematic way of identifying outstanding research and emerging themes in ESG in family businesses. This method enables us to uncover intellectual patterns and cooperation networks that lie behind managerial economics research, providing a valuable foundation for understanding decision-making dynamics within the domain.

3.1. Data Sources

This paper employs a bibliometric methodology to map the research landscape of ESG practices in family firms systematically. It is based on data from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection, which is highly reputed for having very comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature and is widely used in bibliometric studies [17, 18]. The WoS database was selected due to its robust indexing of management, business, and sustainability studies that ensured coverage of high-quality and relevant publications.

The search strategy was formulated to maximize the recall of pertinent literature. The following Boolean search query was applied in the WoS Core Collection.

(TS=((“ESG” OR “Environmental Social Governance” OR “Corporate Social Responsibility” OR “CSR” OR “Sustainability” OR “Sustainable Development Goals” OR “SDGs” OR “Responsible Business Practices” OR “Business Ethics” OR “Sustainable Practices”).

AND (“Family Firms” OR “Family-Owned Businesses” OR “Family Enterprises” OR “Family-Controlled Firms” OR “Family Business” OR “Family Business Governance” OR “Family Business Values” OR “Family Business Sustainability”).

AND (“Governance” OR “Social Responsibility” OR “Environmental Sustainability” OR “Stakeholder Management” OR “Intergenerational Values” OR “Philanthropy” OR “Diversity and Inclusion” OR “Social Impact” OR “Environmental Strategies” OR “Sustainable Innovation” OR “Long-term Orientation” OR “ESG Performance”))).

3.2. Data Structure

Our search was conducted without time restriction to include the evolution of the research field from the earliest time to the present date. Articles, reviews, and conference proceedings published in English only were employed to ensure data quality and comparability of the dataset.

Our initial search yielded a list of bibliographic records containing metadata such as title, authors, abstract, keywords, year of publication, source, and cited references. In ensuring data reliability, duplicate entries were removed, and the titles and abstracts were manually screened to exclude nonspecific publications. The final dataset was stored in a compatible format (e.g., BibTeX or CSV) for subsequent analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis Tools

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix R-package [18] which is a common tool for the visualization and quantitative analysis of bibliographic data. This tool allows us to construct co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks, and to identify research clusters and thematic trends.

3.4. Metrics and Indicators

The following bibliometric indicators were studied to provide a general view of the ESG family business research landscape.

Table 1.
Overview of bibliometric indicators’ description.

Indicators	**Description**
Publication Output	Publication counts by year to identify temporal trends and patterns of growth.
Authorship Analysis	The most prolific authors, collaboration networks, and their institutional affiliation.
Source Analysis	Leading journals and conference proceedings that publish ESG-family business studies.
Citation Analysis	Most cited articles and key works outline the intellectual structure of the discipline.
Keyword and Thematic Analysis	Co-occurrence analysis of keywords to map research themes, emerging topics, and intellectual clusters.

Table 1 provides a comprehensive view of the key bibliometric indicators used to analyze the ESG practices for family businesses research landscape. It includes metrics related to publication output, authorship analysis, source analysis, citation analysis, and keyword and thematic analysis.

Table 2.
Data description.

Metadata	Description	Missing Counts	Missing %	Status
AU	Author	0	0.0	Excellent
DT	Document Type	0	0.0	Excellent
SO	Journal	0	0.0	Excellent
LA	Language	0	0.0	Excellent
PY	Publication Year	0	0.0	Excellent
WC	Science Categories	0	0.0	Excellent
TI	Title	0	0.0	Excellent
TC	Total Citation	0	0.0	Excellent
CR	Cited References	2	0.33	Good
AB	Abstract	3	0.49	Good
C1	Affiliation	3	0.49	Good
RP	Corresponding Author	9	1.46	Good
DE	Keywords	30	4.88	Good
ID	Keywords Plus	30	4.88	Good
DI	DOI	37	6.02	Good

Table 2 presents the completeness of the bibliographic metadata of family business ESG practices collected from the WoS database for bibliometric analysis. Data quality assessment is a critical step in bibliometric studies to ensure the credibility and accuracy of subsequent analyses [17].

Results indicate outstanding data quality for the basic bibliographic fields. Specifically, metadata fields for Author (AU), Document Type (DT), Journal (SO), Language (LA), Publication Year (PY), Science Categories (WC), Title (TI), and Total Citation (TC) do not contain any missing values, as indicated by a 0.00% missing rate. A classification of "Excellent" is applied to all these fields, since this indicates full coverage and ensures analysis stability in authorship, publication tendencies, source influence, and citation metrics.

Other essential fields such as Cited References (CR), Abstract (AB), and Affiliation (C1) contain very few missing values (0.33% to 0.49%) and are given a "Good" rating. Corresponding Author's (RP) missing rate is a little higher at 1.46%, but within acceptable limits for bibliometrics and does not affect the validity of author network research.

For Keywords (DE), Keywords Plus (ID), and DOI (DI) fields, the rates missing are 4.88%, 4.88%, and 6.02%, respectively. While these percentages are higher than those of the core fields, they are still rated as "Good," meaning complete enough to conduct keyword co-occurrence analysis and render most records traceable through DOI.

Overall, our dataset is highly complete for all the major variables and adequately covered for other fields. The extremely low rate of missing data for non-mandatory fields is not expected to introduce significant bias or affect the validity of the bibliometric mapping, network visualizations, or theme analysis. Such high data integrity gives credibility to the findings and conclusions of the study.

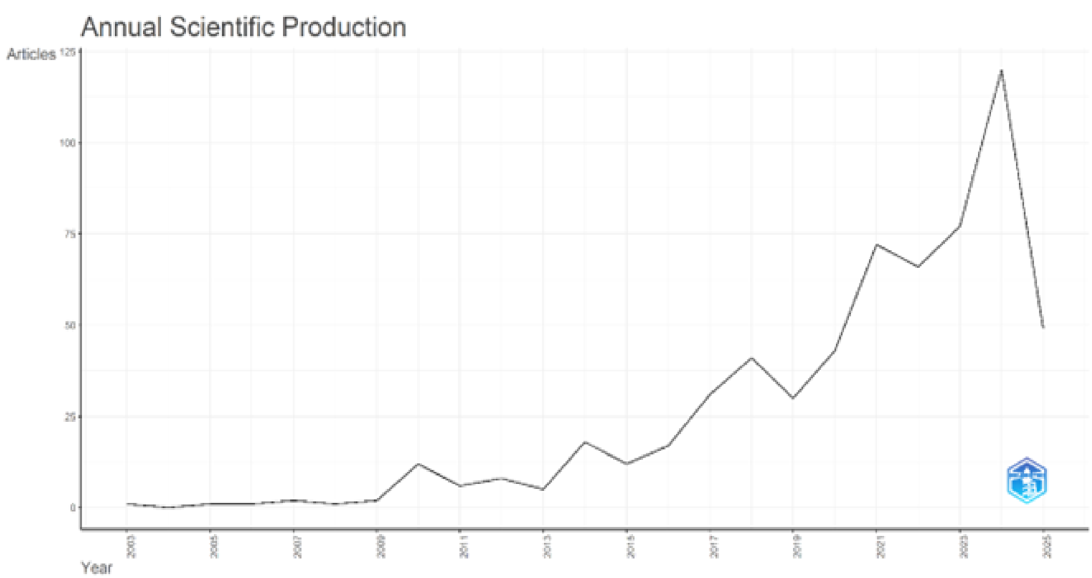
4. Main Results

4.1. Analysis Description

The descriptive dataset report presents a comprehensive overview of the research environment for ESG practices in family businesses during the 2003-2025 interval.

Figure 1.
Overview of data.

The dataset includes 615 articles from 228 distinct journals, representing a robust and diversified academic production. The 19.35% average annual growth rate is evidence of a rapidly developing research field, which indicates the increasing academic and applied attractiveness of ESG topics within the context of family enterprises. With 1,528 contributing authors and a co-authorship average of 3.02 per paper, the figure confirms a culture of collaborative research, reinforced once more by the international co-authorship rate of 39.19%, which serves to emphasize the worldwide relevance and interdependence of this collection of research.



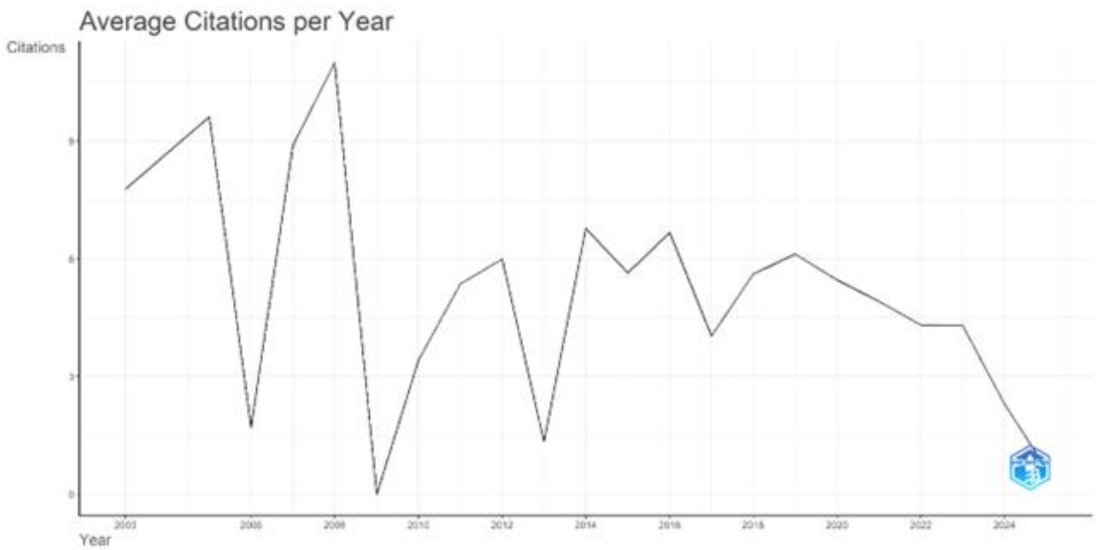


Figure 2.
Analysis description.

The graph of annual scientific production on ESG practices in family businesses from 2003 to 2025 shows a clear upward trend, with relatively low and stable publication numbers until around 2013, followed by a steady and then sharp increase peaking in 2024. This pattern reflects the growing academic and practical interest in ESG topics within family firms, especially as global attention to sustainability and responsible business practices has intensified. The significant spike in 2024, with over 120 articles, highlights a surge of scholarly activity likely driven by increased stakeholder pressure, regulatory changes, or special academic initiatives12.

The subsequent drop in 2025 is likely not indicative of declining interest but may be due to incomplete data for the current year or a normalization after an exceptional peak. Overall, the 19.35% average annual growth rate and high levels of international collaboration underscore the dynamic and expanding nature of this research field. The trend demonstrates that ESG in family businesses has evolved from a niche topic to a mainstream concern, attracting a diverse and global scholarly community.

The annual scientific production on ESG practices in family businesses has shown a marked increase, especially from 2013 onward, with a dramatic peak in 2024. This growth reflects the rising global importance of sustainability and responsible business practices, as well as the unique position of family firms in these discussions. The sharp rise in publications suggests heightened interest and possibly the influence of new regulations or special academic initiatives, while the drop in 2025 likely results from incomplete data for the current year or a normalization after the previous surge. Overall, the field's average annual growth rate of 19.35% and high international collaboration highlights its dynamic and expanding nature.

In contrast, the trend in average citations per year is more volatile and has generally declined in recent years. Early publications (2003–2010) received higher average citations, likely because they had more time to accumulate references and were foundational to the field. As the volume of new research has increased, especially with the surge in recent years, average citations per article have dropped particularly for the most recent years, where articles have not yet had sufficient time to be cited. This pattern is typical in rapidly growing research fields and suggests that while the quantity of research is rising, the impact per article may take time to materialize as newer studies gain visibility and influence.

Overall, High levels of ESG research reflect increasing stakeholder pressures and shifting regulation affecting family firms' strategic decisions. Overriding governance and social responsibility themes highlight shifting economic priorities, with managers needing to modify decision frameworks balancing financial and non-financial priorities [15].

4.2. Author Analysis

Author analysis of ESG research in family firms shows a highly collaborative and internationally active research network. With 1,528 distinct authors publishing 615 articles, the field has an active co-authorship culture with over three authors per article on average. This reflects that ESG in family business is an inter-disciplinary area, often having to engage with different kinds of knowledge from management, sustainability, governance, and family enterprise scholarship. The 39.19% global rate of co-authorship also testifies to the worldwide relevance of the subject as authors from all countries and regions come together to address the multi-faceted and disparate challenges of ESG acceptance in family businesses.

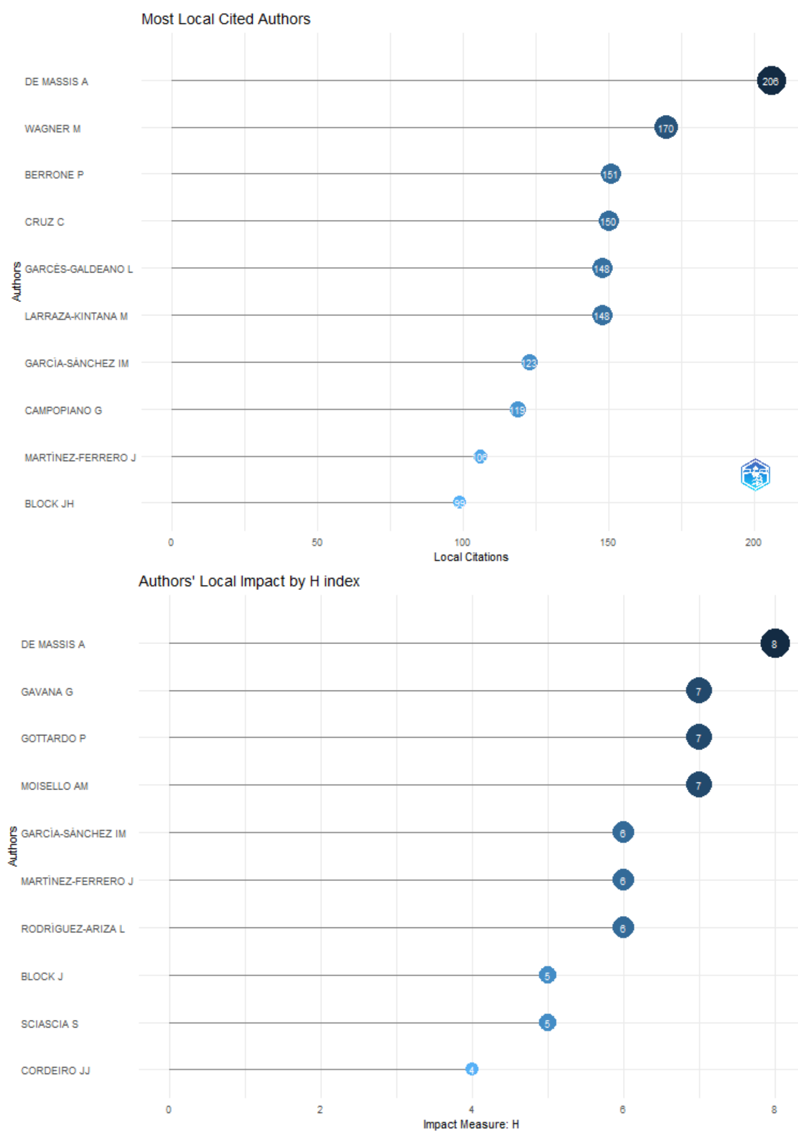


Figure 3.
Author analysis.

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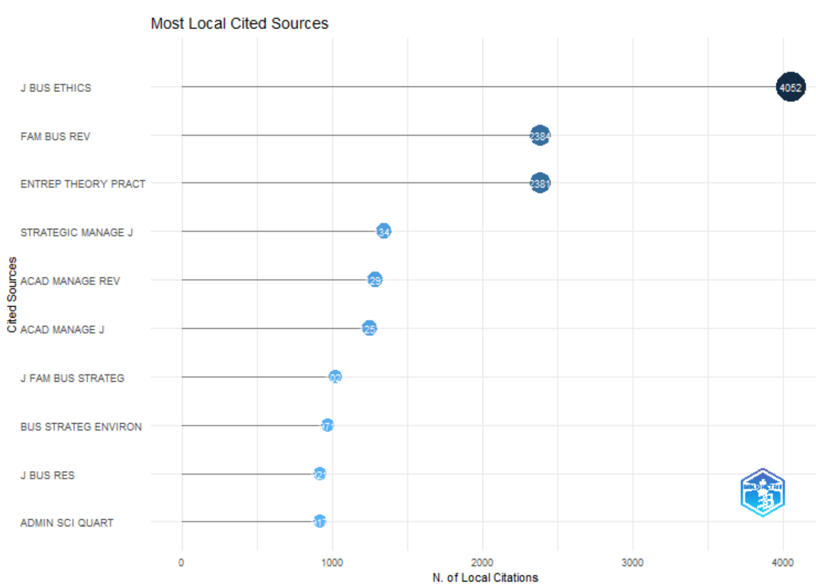
Also, the high author involvement levels and low levels of missing author data are indicative of a mature and well-networked research community. That there are seminal contributors as well as new contributors helps to inform both applied and theoretical developments, which makes the literature adaptive and responsive to changes in the offing. The high level of cooperation also enables cross-fertilization of ideas and best practices across regions, raising the overall quality and relevance of the research. This web of connected authors not only enriches the intellectual foundation of the field but also sets the field up to address new ESG challenges in family businesses around the world.

4.3. Source Analysis

The review of the ESG research sources in family businesses depicts a broad and dispersed scholarly landscape, with 615 articles disseminated across 228 various journals between 2003 and 2025. The broad range of sources attests that the emphasis on ESG practices by family businesses is not concentrated in any one discipline or journal but rather traverses fields such as management, sustainability, corporate governance, and business ethics. That there are several journals as sites of publication means that the content is of interest to a wide community of scholars and is seen as relevant by authors and editors from various backgrounds. That the sources are diverse also means that ESG research in family firms is multidisciplinary and integrative, being referenced from a variety of theoretical and applied perspectives.



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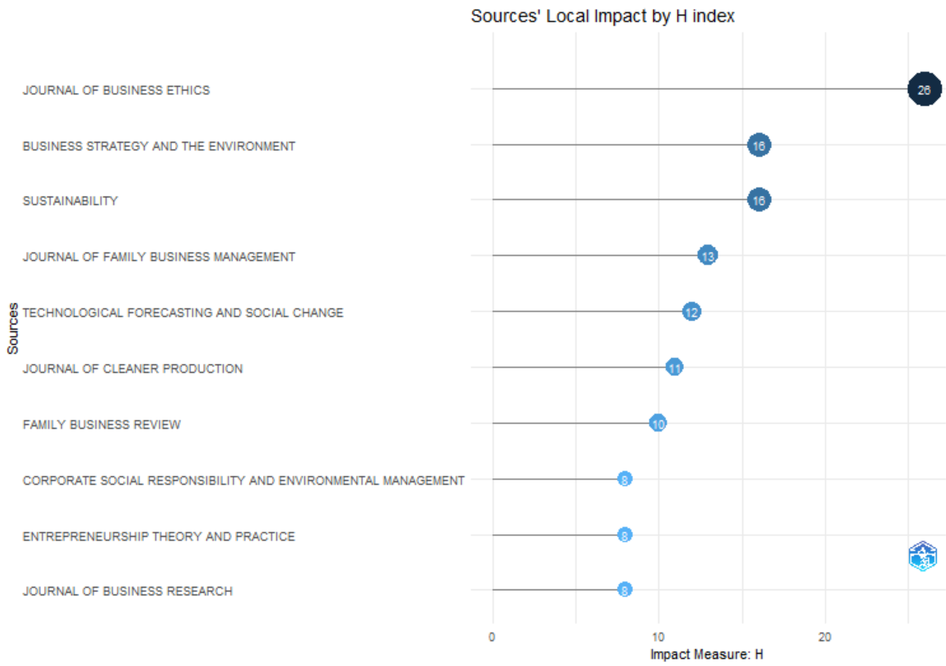

Figure 4.
Author analysis.

The studies of the ESG research sources for family firms reveal a broad and dispersed academic landscape, with 615 articles within 228 distinct journals between 2003 and 2025. The broad assortment of sources validates that the interest of family firms in ESG practices is not centered on one specific discipline or journal but rather it cuts across disciplines such as management, sustainability, corporate governance, and business ethics. There are several journals as sites of publication that the content is of interest to a wide range of scholars and is deemed suitable by authors and editors of various backgrounds. That the sources are diverse also suggests that ESG research in family businesses is multidisciplinary and integrative, being quoted from many theoretical and practical perspectives.

4.4. Keywords and Topics

Keyword analysis and theme analysis reveal that the research context of ESG practices among family businesses is backed by an intersection of traditional and modern themes. Most frequently employed terms are "ESG practices," "family firms," "sustainability," "corporate social responsibility (CSR)," "governance," "stakeholder management," and "long-term orientation." These are the main terms addressing the main theme of the field: how family businesses cope with the point of convergence of environmental, social, and governance duties in the light of unique family objectives and business strategies. Additional keywords: "philanthropy," "succession planning," "community," and "innovation" also crop up to drive home the multi-dimensionality of ESG in family businesses, both the internal dynamics (e.g., succession planning and family governance) and the external consequences (e.g., community involvement and social responsibility) being highlighted.

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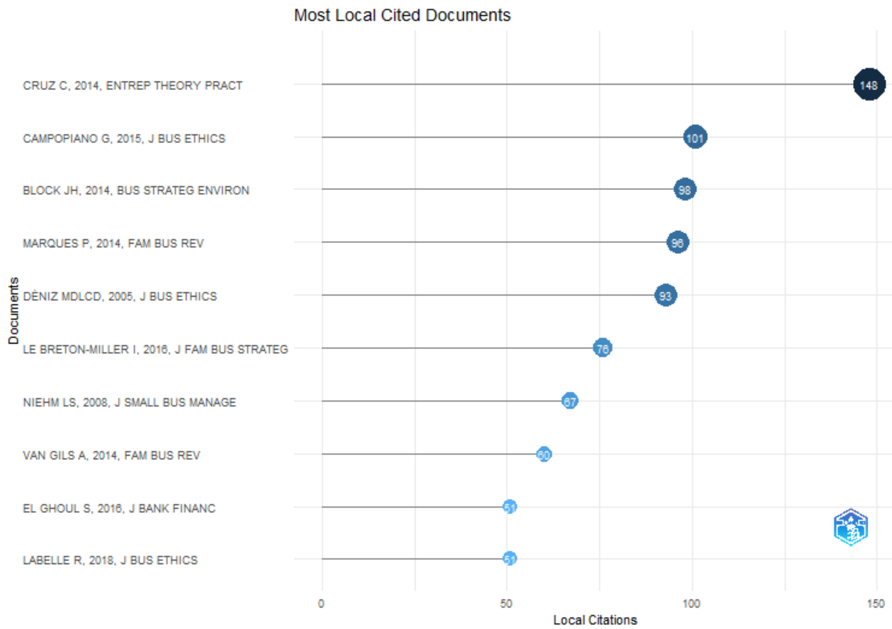


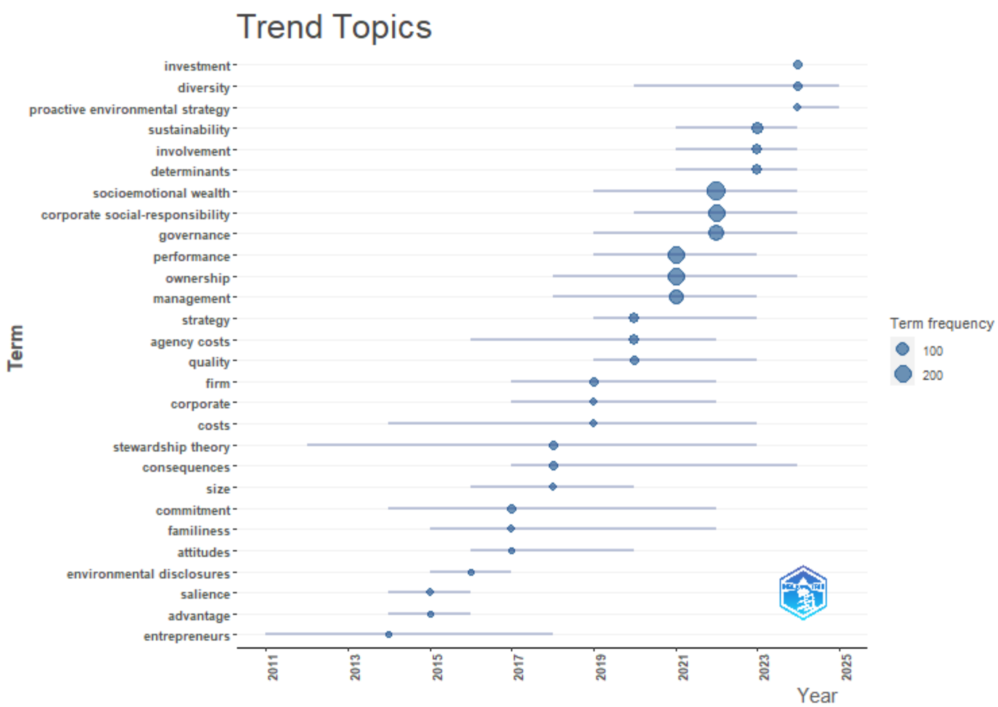
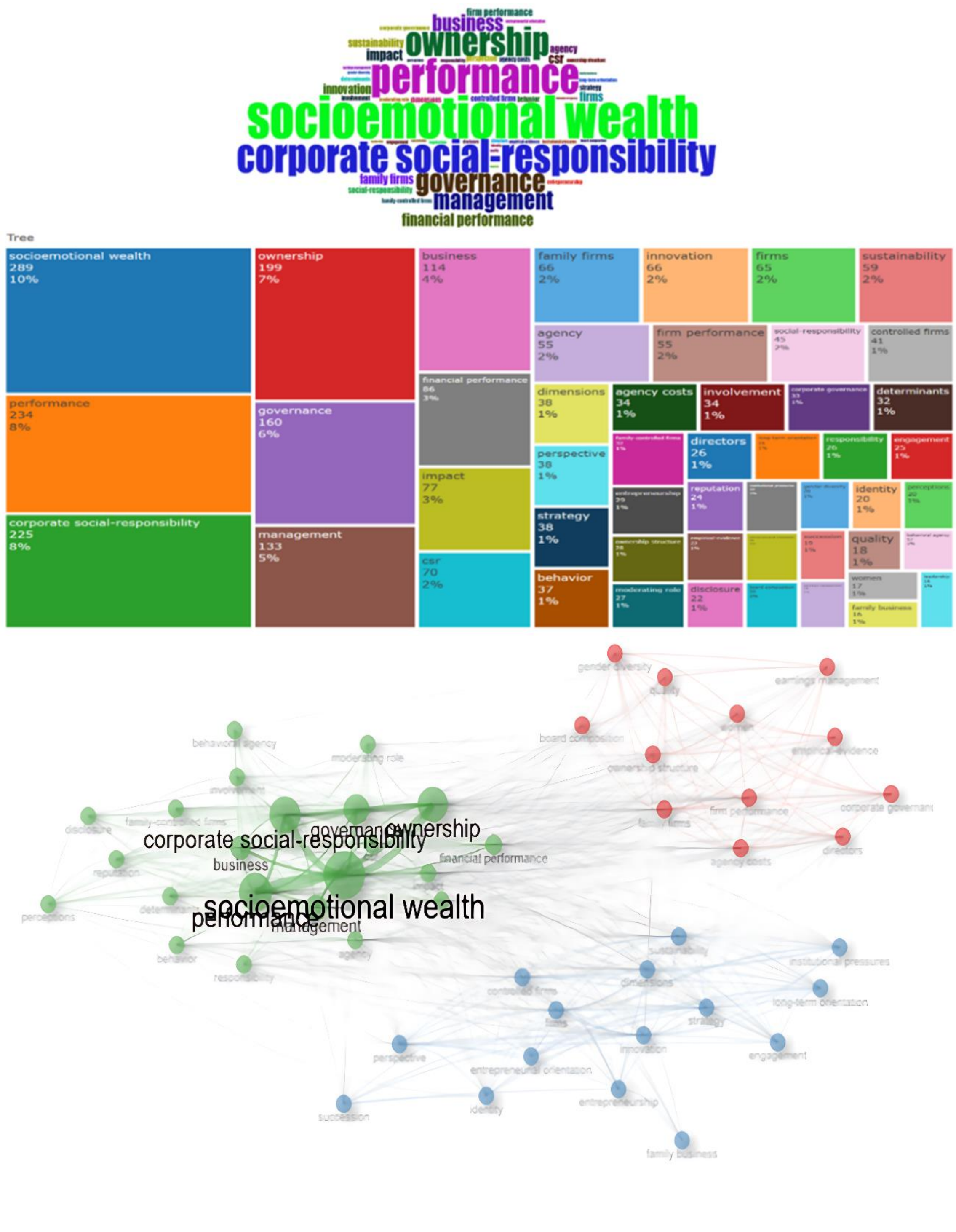


Figure 5.
Documents and keywords analysis.
Source: Cruz, et al. [19]**;** Campopiano and De Massis [20]; Bloan [21]; Marques [22]; Deniz, et al. [23]; Le Breton-Miller, et al. [24]; Niehm, et al. [25]; Van Gils and Van den Heuvel [26]; El Ghoul, et al. [27] and Labelle, et al. [28].

This analysis is buttressed by a convergence of new and traditional themes. Most frequent terms are "ESG practices," "family firms," "sustainability," "corporate social responsibility (CSR)," "governance," "stakeholder management," and "long-term orientation." They are main terms talking about the main theme of the discipline: how family firms deal with the point of intersection of environmental, social, and governance obligations under the conditions of unique family objectives and business strategies. Other such words like "philanthropy," "succession planning," "community," and "innovation" also come to the forefront to highlight the multi-dimensionality of ESG in family businesses, both the internal dynamics (e.g., succession planning and family governance) and the external consequences (e.g., community engagement and social responsibility) being highlighted.



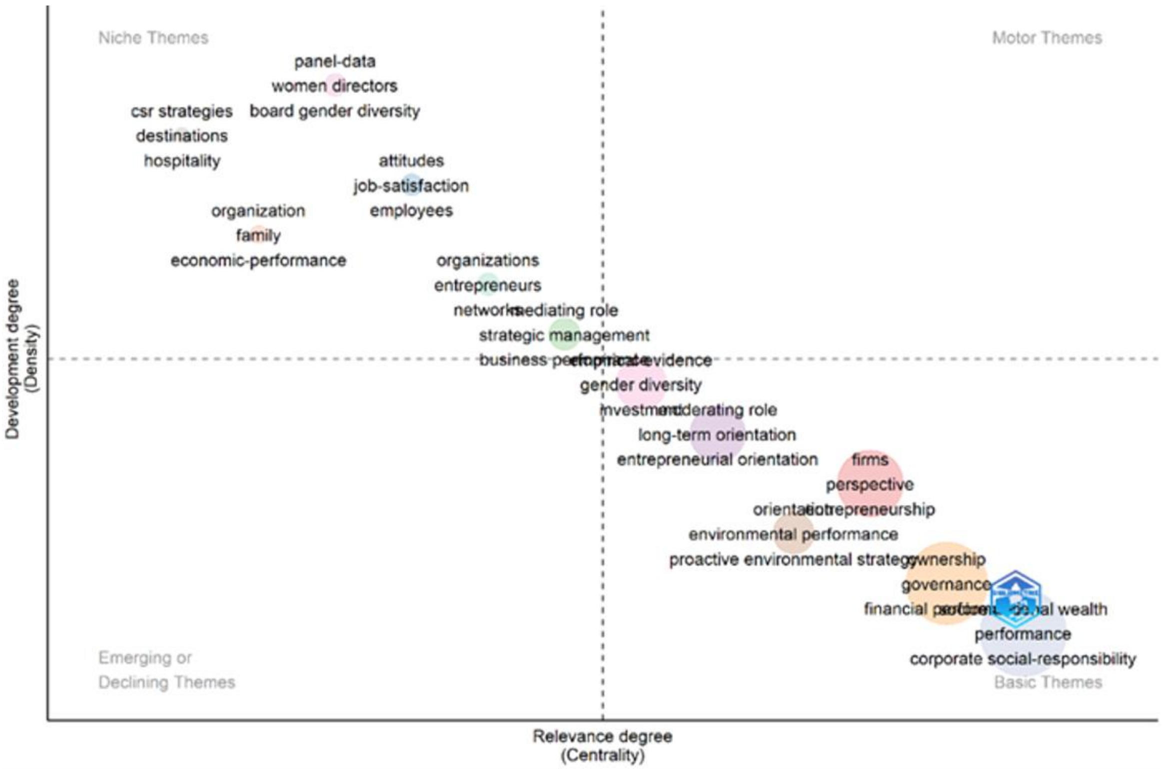


Figure 6.
Mapping keywords and thematic structure.

According to figure 6, the keywords analysis reflects the themes and evolving priorities of the scholarly inquiry into ESG practices by family businesses. The recurring keywords "family business," "ESG," "governance," "sustainability," and "stakeholder engagement" indicate that family businesses' adoption of environmental and social concerns into their strategic and governance structures continue to be a lively area of scholarly research. Such popular phrases like "agency theory," "socioemotional wealth," and "resource-based view" is bearing witness to the market need for theoretical frameworks to explain the unique incentives and hurdles of family-owned business in seeking out ESG programs.

Temporal analysis of keyword trends shows a shift in research attention over recent years. Earlier studies often emphasized governance and agency issues, while more recent work highlights topics such as sustainability disclosure, social responsibility, and regulatory compliance. This evolution reflects broader changes in the external environment, including increasing stakeholder expectations and new reporting standards. Collectively, keywords analysis maps intellectual architecture across the discipline as well as marking out areas for new research, including ESG adoption economic effect and family governance's role in leading sustainable business practice.

5. Discussion and Implications

The family firm ESG research, as plotted by the bibliometric analysis, both reflects growing academic focus on sustainability and reacts to the specific contribution of family firms to the global economy. Family firms, accounting for 70–90% of global companies [7] are long-term focused, locally embedded, and marked by intergenerational succession features well-suited to ESG objectives [1, 4]. The research reveals that these firms are driven by stewardship and socioemotional wealth (SEW), placing greater importance on family tradition, reputation, and relationship capital over short-term profits [3, 13]. This is often what can propel active involvement in social and environmental issues, such as philanthropy, empowerment of communities, and environmental innovation [2].

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However, the discussion is made complex by family business diversity and the problems they face in institutionalizing ESG practices. Agency theory would argue that the overlap of ownership and control among family businesses can reduce traditional agency costs but also create unique agency conflicts among active and inactive family members or across generations [9, 10]. Besides, literature identifies sustained resistance to formal ESG adoption based on commonly risk-averse underpinnings, constrained means, and a desire to maintain family control [8]. While some family firms excel in informal, value-driven ESG behavior, others lag in the adoption of open disclosure reporting and governance demands, especially as external pressures from stakeholders and regulators mount [5, 6]. More recent research also highlights the impact of generational transitions, with successive generations being more open to official ESG practices and external engagement [4].

The bibliometric findings validate these conclusions through showing high and speeding-up scientific production, widespread international cooperation, and diversification of research themes ranging from traditional CSR to emerging issues like diversity, innovation, and ESG reporting. This indicates that the academic world is reacting and adding to the ever-unfolding issues facing family firms in a sustainability era. The robust data quality and comprehensive coverage of the data set lend credibility to these findings. Nonetheless, the literature also identifies several open issues, most notably how family values are instantiated into technical ESG frameworks, by what mechanism external shocks (e.g., regulation or crisis) may influence ESG engagement, and long-term performance impacts of ESG engagement in family firms. Closing these gaps will require interdisciplinary approaches and longitudinal research that can identify the dynamic interplay between family, business, and societal expectations in the ESG area.

The bibliometric findings reinforce these remarks by suggesting a rapid and persistent increase in scientific output, international collaboration rates, and diversification of research themes spanning traditional CSR to newer issues like diversity, innovation, and ESG reporting. This indicates that academic literature is both responding to and shaping the evolving challenges of family businesses within a sustainable world. The high quality of the data and extensive coverage of the dataset substantiate these outcomes.

Our study identifies emerging research clusters as the foundation of family business managerial responses to ESG integration. These findings can be used by practitioners with a view to implementing governance structures and sustainability practices that are responsive to economic incentives and long-term value creation. For example, it has been found that those family businesses with strong governance frameworks have been better placed to address ESG related risks and opportunities, firm resilience, and stakeholder trust. These disclosures emphasize the economic justification of adopting ESG, balancing cost and strategic benefit.

However, the literature raises several open questions, such as how family values get translated into institutionalized ESG frameworks, the effects of external shocks (e.g., regulatory changes or crises), and the long-term effects of ESG engagement on family firm performance. These issues will have to be addressed with interdisciplinary approaches and longitudinal designs that can grasp the interactive dynamics of family, business, and societal expectations in the context of ESG.

Table 3.
Summary of ESG Practices Research in Family Businesses.

Aspect	Key Findings	Supporting Literature/Notes
Scope & Data	615 articles, 228 journals, 2003–2025; robust, diversified, high data quality	Dataset from Web of Science; 0% missing core fields
Annual Growth	19.35% average annual growth rate, sharp rise post-2013, peak in 2024, slight drop in 2025	Reflects rising interest and global ESG trends
Authorship	1,528 authors, avg. 3.02 authors/paper, 39.19% international co-authorship	Indicates strong collaboration and global relevance
Source Analysis	228 journals, multidisciplinary (management, sustainability, governance, ethics)	Wide academic audience, increasing over time
Keywords & Topics	ESG, family firms, sustainability, CSR, governance, Emerging innovation, diversity, reporting	Evolving field, responsive to global sustainability
Theoretical Frameworks	Agency theory, stewardship theory, socioemotional wealth, resource-based view, stakeholder theory	Explains unique ESG drivers/barriers in family firms
ESG Practices	Long-term orientation, community ties, philanthropy, informal governance; heterogeneity in adoption	Driven by family values, but resistance persists
Barriers	Risk aversion, resource constraints, preference for family control, generational differences	Miller and Le Breton-Miller [8] and Chua, et al. [6]
Citation Trends	Older articles more cited; recent surge in publications causes average citations/articles to drop	Typical in fast-growing fields
Data Integrity	Excellent coverage of all core bibliographic fields; minimal missing data	Ensures reliability of analysis
Future Research	Institutionalization of ESG, generational effects, long-term impact, interdisciplinary approaches	Identified as gaps in current literature

This table summarizes the research on ESG practices in family businesses, highlighting key trends and implications from our bibliometric analysis. The persistent increase in the number of publications and citation impact reflects speeding academic and practical recognition of ESG as a core driver of managerial decision-making and sustainable value creation in family business. This aligns with a more recent pattern of market and regulatory developments that emphasize the integration of ESG as core to business competitiveness and sustainability [15, 29].

The evolution of clearly distinguishable thematic groups in the case of governance, social responsibility, and environmental management serves to support the multidimensional character of ESG matters that face family firms. For example, government research puts agency and economic trade-offs for family ownership structures at the forefront, whereas social issues recognize talent management and social impact measurement as strategic tools above requirements of rules [30]. These are captured through the journal's emphasis on bringing economic logic to managerial decisions where family businesses need to balance financial performance and socioemotional wealth [31].

Co-authorship and citation network analysis of collaboration networks confirm increased interdisciplinary collaboration, vital to balance the complexity of ESG. Collaboration networks allow for dissemination of new governance best practice and sustainability initiatives available for family firms to utilize in enhanced resilience and stakeholder confidence under evolving regulatory pressures, such as the UK adopting IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards [15].

From a managerial economics perspective, these bibliometric trends reflect that family businesses increasingly are coordinating ESG activities with economic incentives, capitalizing on their long-term orientation and transgenerational entrepreneurial experience to drive development [31]. Research gaps uncovered in this review also reflect avenues for future research to examine the economic impacts of implementing ESG on company performance and decision-making in the short term.

By and large, bibliometric assessment not only maps family firm studies on ESG intellectual landscape but also serves as an academic and practitioner handbook. It demonstrates that development of ESG scholarship illuminates economic designs of management under which family businesses can steer the complex dynamics of regulation, competitiveness, and sustainability in 2025 and beyond.

6. Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive mapping of the intellectual terrain and developmental trajectory of ESG practice studies on family businesses. The findings reveal that scholarly attention to this nexus has grown exponentially, particularly in the last decade, according to a very high annual growth rate, increasing international collaboration, and diversification of research topics and sources. Family businesses, with their characteristic governance, long-term orientation, and strong community embeddedness, are both well-placed and singularly disadvantaged in the adoption of ESG practices. The literature demonstrates how most family businesses are motivated by stewardship, socioemotional wealth, and keeping family heritage but are also limited by risk aversion, scarcity of resources, and opposition to formalization leading to a substantial heterogeneity in the adoption and disclosure of ESG.

Theoretical frameworks such as agency theory, stewardship theory, socioemotional wealth, and the resource-based view have been of central importance in grasping the drivers and intricacies of family firms' ESG engagement. Evidence shows family businesses' strengths and limitations in this regard, with generational change and external stakeholder influence being a central driver in forging ahead. Despite the advances, there are gaps in the literature on how family values are articulated in formally institutionalizing policies on ESG, changes across generations and their effects on this, and long-term consequences on company performance and legitimacy of ESG involvement. Future research must involve interdisciplinary approaches and longitudinal setups so that it can address such loopholes and further clarify the evolving role of family businesses to foster responsible and sustainable business practices globally.

By combining bibliometric data with managerial economics, this study enhances understanding of how family firms economically address ESG uptake. Additional work should examine the interaction between ESG initiatives and firm performance more extensively, providing prescriptive guides for decision-makers in family business contexts.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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