A Bibliometric Analysis of the Impact of Strategic Management of the Intellectual Capital on the Organizational Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategic management of intellectual capital as a source of competitive advantage within the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. By conducting a systematic literature review based on the PRISMA framework and utilizing a bibliometric methodology, 41 Scopus-indexed sources were analyzed using the Bibliometrix R package to identify research trends, knowledge gaps, and emerging topic clusters. The findings indicate that while intellectual capital remains a predominant theme, it is increasingly intersecting with topics such as the knowledge economy, sustainable development, and information management. The literature is still fragmented, lacking an extensive theoretical foundation and consistent contributions. This study calls for further research on integrating intellectual capital with sustainability and digital transformation goals, enhancing the understanding of its role in fostering innovation, resilience, and long-term organizational success.

Keywords
Intellectual Capital; Strategic Management; Knowledge Management; Bibliometrics.

Introduction

The issue of intellectual capital gained popularity due to the emergence of the new knowledge economy, which focused on an organization's intangible assets and management practices rather than tangible ones (Obeidatet al., 2017). As Clarke, Seng, and Whiting (2011) point out, intellectual capital is regarded as a higher-valued asset of a company compared to its material holdings, thus highlighting the superiority of intangible assets over material ones. Over the past two decades, numerous definitions of intellectual capital have been put forth by academics. For instance, Edvinsson and Malone (1997) proposed that intellectual capital can be categorized into three distinct dimensions: structural (organizational capital), relational (customer) capital, and human capital (Asiaei & Jusoh, 2015).

In essence, the non-financial and non-physical resources that go into creating value for a business are summed up by its intellectual capital (Brătianu, 2018). Organizations, particularly those engaged in business process outsourcing, have been concentrating on expanding their knowledge base and gaining a competitive edge to maintain a strong market position. This emphasis has become even more significant in the context of globalization and the current competitive environment. Consequently, intellectual capital is now considered a critical component of successful projects (Castillo-Palacio &

Vargas-García, 2022). While studies on the contribution of intangible resources to a company's competitive advantage are not particularly new, they remain relevant today.

Nonetheless, this study aims to concentrate on how the strategic management of intellectual capital influences the competitive advantage of business process outsourcing (BPO) companies. According to the Association of Business Service Leaders, Romania had more than 100,000 employees in the BPO sector in 2020. This achievement occurred despite Romania not being the most affordable country for outsourcing services, as rates have not decreased significantly. Instead, Romania has demonstrated a competitive advantage in both technical and soft skills, and it also has an advanced IT infrastructure and a workforce that is young, flexible, motivated, skilled, and multilingual.

Outsourcing as a concept began in the 18th century with British companies relocating manufacturing to countries like China and India to reduce costs and boost profits. This practice grew significantly in the 20th century as technological advancements facilitated global business operations (Bodislav, 2023). Outsourcing refers to a contractual agreement between two organizations where one organization receives specialized knowledge and the other is paid to operate a business. This practice is commonly known as BPO (Singh, 2022). BPO encompasses different types of outsourcing, such as IT outsourcing and knowledge process outsourcing, which includes outsourcing accounting, HR, and customer service (Mukucha et al., 2020). Foreign direct investment (FDI) and labor force involvement in the business services industry favored remote areas like Ireland and India in the 1990s. However, by the early 2000s, this trend expanded to include the Visegrád nations, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Philippines. Romania has since emerged as a key offshoring hub for business services in Central and Eastern Europe, alongside remote areas such as Ireland and India (Jipa et al., 2023).

Through the integration with the European Communities (EEC), Romania has become a well-known destination for various outsourcing fields, such as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO), Research and Development (R&D), and Shared Services (SS) (Todoran and Popa, 2020). KPMG's study underscores Romania's significant role in IT outsourcing, boasting over 265 outsourcing companies and a workforce of 125,000. The country's skilled workforce and openness to technology create an attractive business environment for global service providers (György & Madaras, 2020).
Outsourcing can be broadly classified into three main types: offshore, near-shore, and onshore. Each type presents distinct advantages and operational implications (Osagie et al., 2023). For example, onshore outsourcing involves engaging suppliers within the same nation, ensuring geographical proximity and alignment on cost, service standards, and timelines (Rosiński & Kossowska, 2023). Nearshore outsourcing, by contrast, involves delegating tasks to neighboring countries, benefiting from shared time zones, cultural alignment, and language familiarity, making it particularly advantageous for region-specific operations (Malhotra, 2019). Meanwhile, offshoring entails relocating business operations to more distant regions to reduce costs, access a broader talent pool, and accelerate market entry through competitive pricing (Arraya, 2021).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the concept of intellectual capital, recognizing it as a vital organizational resource capable of securing a competitive advantage (Vătămănescu et al., 2019). Today, intellectual capital is widely

acknowledged as an organization's most valuable form of capital and a key driver of innovation (Niwash et al., 2022).

Comprising relational, structural, and human capital, intellectual capital represents a collection of knowledge, talent, skills, technical expertise, relationships, and organizational capabilities. This resource enables organizations to gain a competitive edge (Brătianu, 2023). Intellectual capital and knowledge are recognized as strategic assets in the knowledge economy, essential for organizational performance and competitiveness. Knowledge management practices have further transformed knowledge into a strategic resource (Budiarti, 2017). Intangible resources thus hold substantial strategic value for corporate operations, ensuring organizations maintain a favorable market position (Rehman et al., 2022).

The strategic management of intellectual capital allows organizations to maximize their knowledge, expertise, and intangible assets, fostering innovation, facilitating market adaptation, and ensuring knowledge transfer. These processes lead to competitive advantages and long-term sustainability (Panchenko et al., 2021). For instance, human capital plays a pivotal role in global market competitiveness and innovation (Samoilovych et al., 2022), while structural capital emphasizes the importance of internal knowledge systems and intellectual property (Asiaei et al., 2022). Relational capital, which fosters external stakeholder relationships, has gained significance in the digital era as businesses increasingly leverage customer data and expertise (Erickson & Rothberg, 2023).

Hayton's research, as cited by Secundo et al. (2020), demonstrates the substantial influence of intellectual capital on innovation and corporate entrepreneurship, particularly in nascent high-tech businesses. The resource-based view (RBV) further emphasizes intellectual capital as a critical component of a company's competitive edge, encompassing its members' collective knowledge, experience, intellectual property, and information (Brătianu, 2018).

Organizational learning and unlearning are essential for integrating individual knowledge into collective organizational knowledge. These processes are dynamic and fluctuating due to knowledge creation, acquisition, forgetting, and loss (Brătianu, 2023). Studies continue to emphasize the critical impact of intellectual capital on business performance, underscoring its potential to enhance organizational competitiveness (Wójcik, 2021). As a vital organizational resource, intellectual capital fosters economic success, facilitates quick adaptation to change, and drives sustained competitive advantages (Abdulaali, 2018). Through strategic management, organizations can effectively harness intellectual capital to achieve superior business outcomes (Dinu et al., 2023). Global leaders such as Apple, Microsoft, Infosys, and TATA are prime examples of companies that have mastered the management of their intellectual capital, leveraging their employees' skills to produce innovative products that set them apart from competitors (Raushan et al., 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of local business investment while simultaneously highlighting the financial challenges associated with onshore ventures, particularly due to high labor costs in developed nations and talent shortages in developing ones. As a result, offshoring outsourcing has emerged as a viable solution for cost management and operational efficiency (Kajjumba, 2020).

The systematic literature approach

The scope of this review is to evaluate, synthesize, and identify research gaps in the available research on the topic of strategic management of intellectual capital in the business process outsourcing (BPO) competitive advantage. Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) define systematic literature reviews as transparent, replicable processes that minimize bias by extensive searches of published and unpublished material and provide an audit record of techniques and results. Conducting a literature review minimizes bias and ensures replicability to offer a comprehensive summary of available literature (Berre & Pendeven, 2023).

To further ensure methodological rigor, this study followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which provides a structured approach for systematic reviews by detailing steps such as identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of sources (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA enhances transparency and reproducibility, making it a widely adopted guideline in systematic reviews.

This paper uses a bibliometric analysis, a term introduced by Pritchard (1969), which encompasses all investigations seeking to measure the process of textual communication (Gokhale et al., 2020). Bibliometric analysis is a methodological approach that involves quantitative techniques to measure, monitor, and examine scholarly literature, identifying key subjects, authors, sources, and highly cited publications, analyzing papers indexed in Web of Science, and to identify developing patterns (Rojas et al., 2023).

Given the low number of retrieved documents, the search strategy allowed for all document types to be considered; therefore, out of the 41 sources, there were 16 conference papers, 25 articles, five book chapters, one book, eight conference papers, and two reviews. Most of the studies had intellectual capital and knowledge management as subject areas.

The records that were taken from Scopus were evaluated using quality standards. Following investigation of all the 41 sources, it was concluded that their suitability for the extent of the study was limited. The R program, using the Bibliometrix package (Radha and Arumugam &, 2021), will do the systematic literature review. Through its bibliometric analytic features, Bibliometrix is a valuable instrument for improving the review process in systematic literature reviews (Farooq, 2023). It allowed for a thorough review of bibliographic data and information visualization to evaluate the scientific body of knowledge on the specified topic.

Table 1 shows, at this level, a preview of the overall data retrieved information. Moreover, Scopus constantly ranks only reliable and credible sources since it emphasizes quality, therefore guaranteeing the integrity and dependability of the systematic review (Baas et. Al, 2020). The search was done by applying the " Search string: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("intellectual capital") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("competitive advantage") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("strategic management")). There were 41 total findings obtained.

Table 1. *Main Information about the records extracted*

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1997:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	34
Documents	41
Annual Growth Rate %	2.6
Document Average Age	9.51
Average citations per doc	29.98
References	1962
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	117
Author's Keywords (DE)	116
AUTHORS	
Authors	96
Authors of single-authored docs	10
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	10
Co-Authors per Doc	2.37
International co-authorships %	4.878
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	25
book	1
book chapter	5
conference paper	8
review	2

The Annual Scientific Production (Figure 1) shows steady growth in research from 1997 to 2024, with a notable peak in 2017. This probably indicates a greater awareness of the importance of intellectual capital for competitive advantage and strategic management. Small variations between 2019 and 2023 could be attributed to outside influences, like the COVID-19 pandemic, which momentarily changed the focus of study. Its steady but moderate 2.6% yearly growth rate highlights the field's specialist nature. The limited annual publication volume underscores prospects for additional investigation and global cooperation to broaden the field's reach and influence.

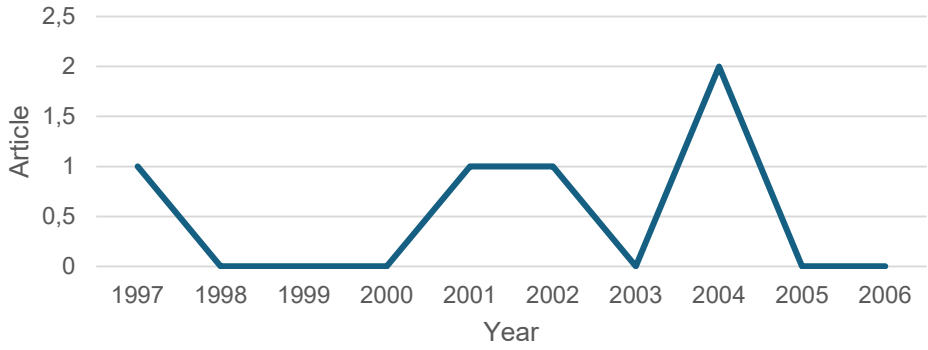

Figure 1.*. Annual Scientific Production*

Table 2: Most Relevant Sources highlights the distribution of publications across journals and proceedings. With three articles apiece, the Journal of Intellectual Capital and the Proceedings of the European Conference on Knowledge Management (ECKM) are the most prominent in this specialized sector. Other sources, such as the Financial and Credit Activity journal and different conference proceedings, contribute fewer papers, highlighting the field's fragmented nature. Since many findings are first presented at conferences, the preponderance of conference papers reflects the research development stage. This implies that to improve the discipline's academic foundation, more research must be consolidated in prestigious publications.

Table 2. *Most Relevant Sources*

Sources	**Articles**
JOURNAL OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL	3
PROCEEDINGS OF THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, ECKM	3
FINANCIAL AND CREDIT ACTIVITY: PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE	2
PROCEEDINGS OF THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL	2
PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING, ICICKM	2
4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION WARFARE AND SECURITY, ICIW 2009	1
ACCOUNTING, AUDITING & ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNAL	1
AFRICAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES	1
COMPETITIVENESS REVIEW	1
CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR REVIEW	1

With only five articles in the core zone, ten in the second, and twelve in the third, Core Sources by Bradford's Law shows an unequal distribution of publications across the three zones. This shows fragmentation throughout the field and deviates from the predicted exponential distribution. Prominent publications such as the Journal of Intellectual Capital and ECKM Proceedings are among the key sources; nonetheless, the absence of a single leading source indicates that the area is still in its infancy and does not yet have a centralized system for disseminating research. The impact and coherence of the area could be improved by publishing discoveries in prestigious journals.

Journal Distribution by Zone (Table 3) indicates how many articles and sources are in each zone. Two journals contribute five articles in the first zone, four journals contribute ten articles in the second zone, and one journal contributes twelve articles in the third zone. This distribution shows an imbalance among zones and a concentration of articles in a small number of sources. The distribution deviates from Bradford's anticipated pattern, suggesting that the field is still fragmented and that there are few important sources. This implies that more evenly distributed contributions across journals are required to boost the exposure and influence of research on intellectual capital and its strategic management.

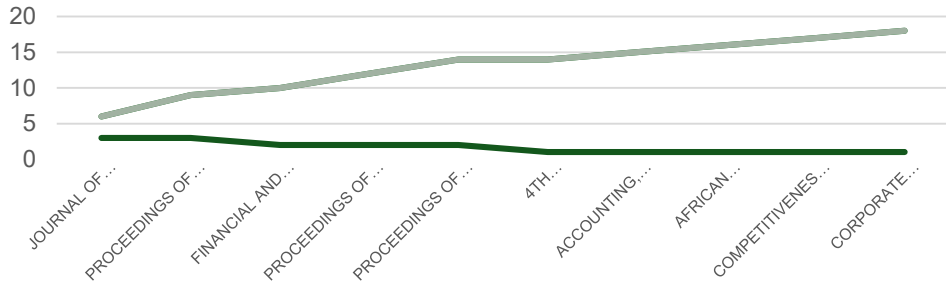

Figure 2. *Source clustering through Bradford's law.*

Table 3. *Journal Distribution by Zone*

Zone	Journal	%Journal	Article	%Article
1	2	28.57	5	18.51
2	4	57.14	10	37.03
3	1	14.28	12	44.44
Total	7	100	27	100

Nearly 95% of authors only contributed one publication to the field, while only one contributed two, as seen in Table 4 and Figure 3 (Lotka's Law). According to Lotka's Law, a few authors create several works, while most scholars publish seldom. With few consistent contributions from individual experts, this pattern suggests that intellectual capital research is still in its infancy. It emphasizes how strengthening the field and establishing important thought leaders require more extensive, long-term research from a core group of authors.

Table 4. *Calculations for the Lotks's law*

Documents written	N. of Authors	Proportion of Authors
1	95	0.99
2	1	0.01

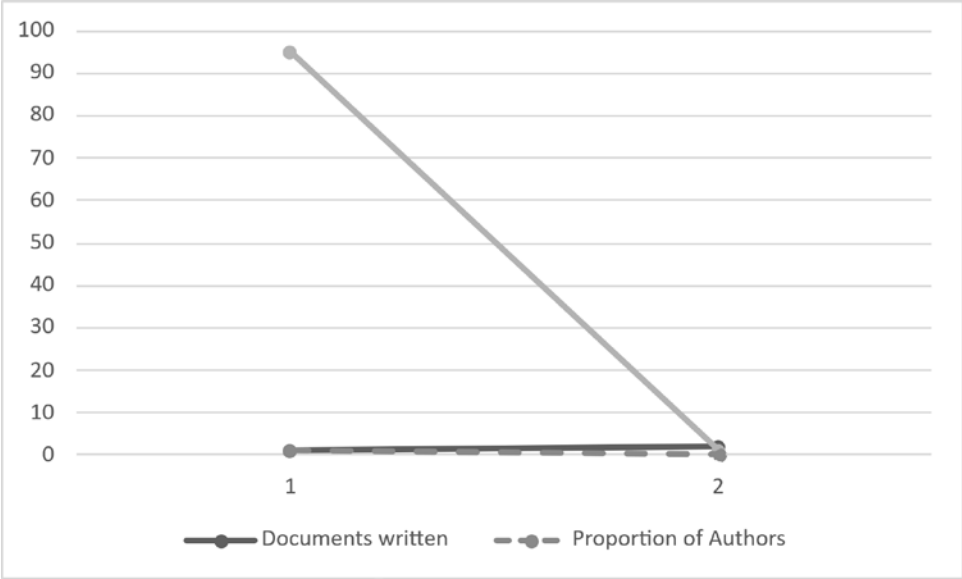

Figure 3. *Lotka's low*

Authors that have produced 2 articles, as shown in Figure 4, are considered the most significant in the subject.

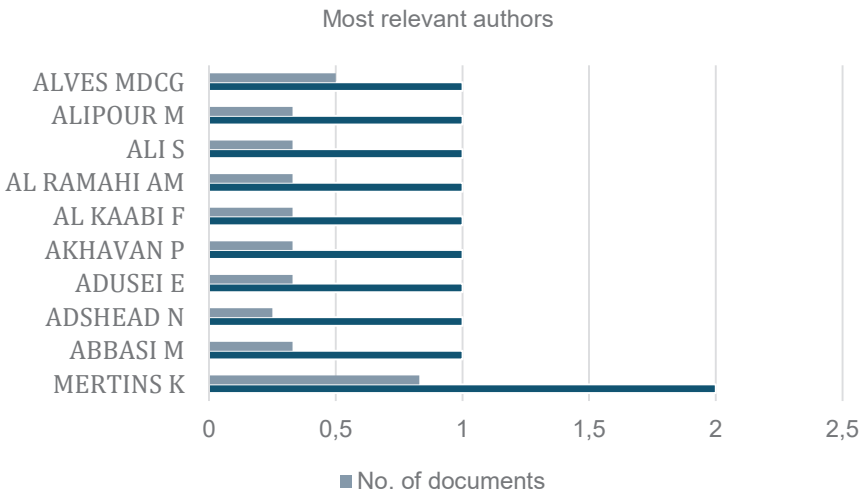

Figure 4. *Most relevant authors*

Through checking the initial data, the descriptive analysis revealed that the relationship between intellectual capital, competitive advantage, and strategic management is still in development and requires more attention and study.

Literature clustering

Four separate clusters are depicted in Table 5 and Figure 5 (Thematic Map): information management, knowledge economy, sustainable development, and intellectual capital. With strong centrality and density values, the intellectual capital** cluster stands out as the primary theme guiding the field's study. This implies that scholars continue to return to the idea of intellectual capital as the primary focus of strategic management. The last three clusters—knowledge economy, sustainable development, and information management—are less established yet still in their infancy. Though it is not yet as central, sustainable development and intellectual capital are beginning to intersect as a result of its growing significance in international commerce. Although it is still secondary, the knowledge economy cluster, which represents a move towards knowledge-driven sectors, is also gaining traction. Compared to intellectual capital, information management is another specialized cluster that seems significant but is less incorporated into the larger conversation. The interdisciplinary nature of the study is reflected in these subject clusters, where intellectual capital serves as the cornerstone and, more general, global themes like sustainability and the information economy begin to shape the conversation. The map identifies a possible direction for further study: examining the ways in which these themes might be more successfully combined, particularly in relation to new international business issues like sustainability.

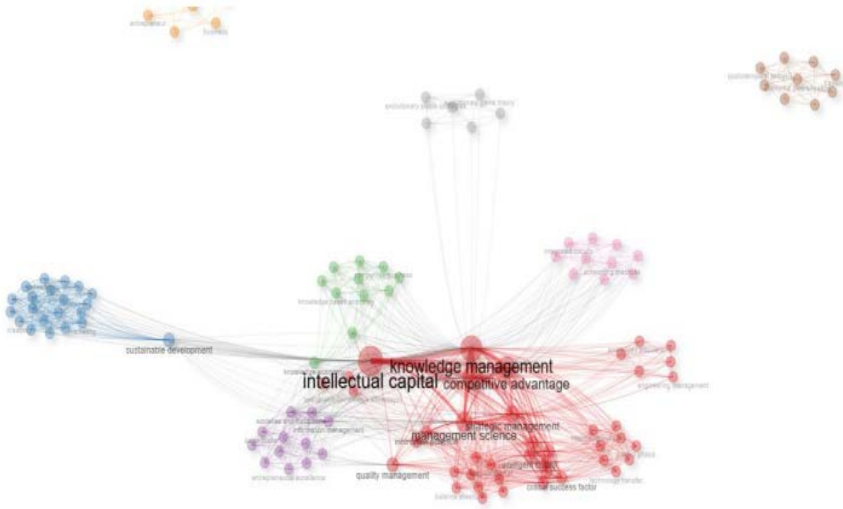

Figure 5. *Thematic map*

Table 5. *Literature clusters.*

Cluster	CallonCentrality	CallonDensity	RankCentrality	RankDensity	ClusterFrequency
intellectual capital	6.332	216.777	4	4	58
sustainable development	0	50	1	1	2
knowledge economy	1	62.5	2	2	4
information management	3	100	3	3	6

The development of these themes over time is seen in Table 6 and Figure 6 (Thematic Evolution). The dominance of intellectual capital is a reflection of its longstanding significance in organizational studies and strategic management. It continues to be crucial, demonstrating that it has been a priority for a long time and is being developed in novel ways. However, in recent years, the knowledge economy and sustainable development have gained prominence, indicating that scholars are growing more interested in intellectual capital's role in these global issues. In the context of intellectual capital, the knowledge economy—which is fuelled by technological advancement and the growing dependence on knowledge rather than tangible assets—is especially pertinent. This theme's emergence alongside sustainable development indicates a larger change in corporate priorities, as social and environmental factors are becoming increasingly important in determining long-term competitive advantage. Although intellectual capital is still important, the thematic evolution shows it increasingly intersects with other urgent global challenges. This implies that in order to link corporate plans with long-term social objectives, future studies might concentrate on comprehending how intellectual capital can support sustainable practices and the development of the knowledge economy. The development of these themes demonstrates a move towards a more comprehensive understanding of corporate management, where intellectual capital is vital to solving environmental and economic issues.

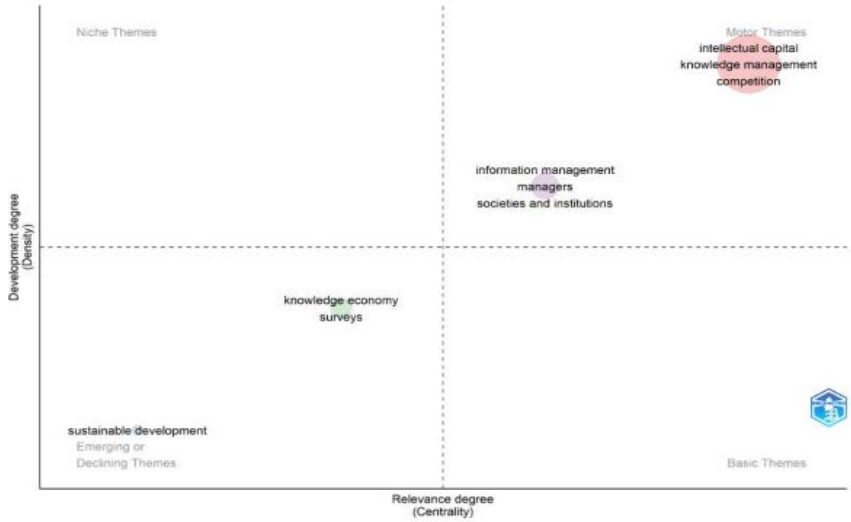

Figure 6. *Main themes resulted from cluster grouping into themes.*

Table 7. *Main themes resulted from cluster grouping into themes.*

Theme	Words	Occurrences	Cluster	Cluster_Label	btw_centrality	clos_centrality	pagerank_centrality
Motor theme: intellectual capital	intellectual capital	8	1	intellectual capital	1,537.463	0.007	0.04
	knowledge management	8	1	intellectual capital	913.618	0.007	0.038
	competition	7	1	intellectual capital	343.618	0.007	0.033
	competitive advantage	6	1	intellectual capital	351.537	0.006	0.028
	management science	5	1	intellectual capital	121.381	0.006	0.024
	strategic management	4	1	intellectual capital	87.871	0.005	0.02
	critical success factor	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012
	decision support systems	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012
	enterprise resource planning	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012
	European commission	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012

	innovation potential	2	1	intellectual capital	47.266	0.005	0.011
	intelligent control	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012
	quality management	2	1	intellectual capital	116.984	0.005	0.012
	small and medium-sized enterprise	2	1	intellectual capital	47.266	0.005	0.011
	SME	2	1	intellectual capital	8.752	0.004	0.012
	information management	2	4	information management	20.457	0.005	0.01
Motor theme: information management	managers	2	4	information management	20.457	0.005	0.01
	societies and institutions	2	4	information management	20.457	0.005	0.01
Emerging theme: sustainable development	sustainable development	2	2	sustainable development	401.974	0.006	0.012
Emerging theme: knowledge economy	knowledge economy	2	3	knowledge economy	43.537	0.005	0.01
	surveys	2	3	knowledge economy	52.776	0.005	0.01

Theme 1: Intellectual capital

Intellectual capital refers to the aggregate knowledge resources that a company possesses and can utilize for various purposes (Vătămănescu et al., 2020). As described in the literature, intellectual capital is categorized into three components: human capital, structural capital, and relational capital (Jordão & Novacs, 2024). The phrase "human capital" pertains to the human component of an organization, encompassing the amalgamation of skills, knowledge, and expertise that shape an individual's character (Hafiz et al., 2023). Furthermore, it represents the significance of knowledge and talent possessed by the organization's personnel, including their abilities, knowledge, talents, competencies, attitudes, intellectual agility, and creativity (Rus et al., 2019). Structural capital is firm data left after personnel leave, including operational procedures, policies, strategies, processes, routines, organizational charts, and manuals (De Luca et al., 2020).). An organization's structural capital, comprising of tangible assets like hardware, software, databases, patents, and trademarks, as well as intangible elements like organizational structures and procedures, enhances worker productivity by optimizing their intellectual and organizational potential (Jardón and da Silva, 2021).

Theme 2: Information management
Information management (IM) is the methodical gathering, arrangement, upkeep, and distribution of information within an organization to maximize its usefulness (Sharma et al., 2021). The connection between IM and intellectual capital is significant, as intellectual capital encompasses the knowledge, expertise, and creative capacity of employees and organizational processes (Smith and Brown, 2019). Efficient information management facilitates ease of access, accuracy, and actionability of information, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation and transforming information into intellectual assets to enhance decision-making, knowledge sharing, retention, and competitive advantage within an organization (Ali et al., 2021). Therefore, having a strong and effective system for managing information is essential for developing and utilizing intellectual resources to accomplish strategic goals (Hutahayan, 2020).

Theme 3: Sustainable development
Intellectual capital and sustainable development are closely related since the former seeks to satisfy present requirements without jeopardizing the latter's ability to meet its own (Alvino et al., 2021). Sustainable development requires the use of intellectual capital, which includes relational, structural, and human assets (Phonthanukitithaworn et al., 2023). Human capital promotes innovation and education to tackle social and environmental issues, while structural capital facilitates developing and implementing green solutions through advanced technology and efficient procedures (Nawangsari, 2022). Relational capital fosters collaboration on sustainable goals through strong networks and alliances, while intellectual capital bolsters a shift toward a more resilient and sustainable future by enhancing knowledge, creativity, and teamwork (Vale et al., 2022).

Theme 4: Knowledge economy
Unlike traditional economies reliant on physical inputs and natural resources, the knowledge economy banks on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge, utilizing intellectual abilities, expertise, creativity, and technology for growth and expansion. (Choong and Leung, 2021). This economy relies on human capital, including worker education, skills, competencies, and knowledge management methods that help organizations create, share, and apply information (Serban, 2020, p. 108-128). In the knowledge economy, competitive advantage comes from developing and utilizing new information, promoting innovation and sustainable economic growth (Nonaka et al., 2000).

Conclusion

This study highlights the strategic importance of intellectual capital in creating competitive advantage, especially within knowledge-driven industries. According to the bibliometric analysis, research in this domain remains fragmented, with a limited number of principal authors and dispersed publication sources. Despite this fragmentation, intellectual capital continues to be a dominant theme, increasingly intersecting with emerging fields such as information management, the knowledge economy, and sustainability. The use of the PRISMA framework and bibliometric methods proved effective in identifying research gaps and trends. Future research should focus on consolidating the sector and exploring how intellectual capital can drive long-term innovation and adaptation.

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