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EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S COMPETENCIES IN BUSINESS

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Purpose: This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of existing research on women's competencies in business, with particular emphasis on the evolution of research trends, key thematic areas, and potential directions for future development in this field.
Design/methodology/approach: The study employed a scoping review complemented by bibliometric analysis. The analysis encompassed publications indexed in the Scopus database between 1990 and 2025. Keyword co-occurrence and temporal dynamics analyses were conducted, enabling the identification of thematic clusters and the assessment of developmental trends in research on women's competencies in business.
Findings: The study employed a scoping review complemented by bibliometric analysis. The analysis encompassed publications indexed in the Scopus database between 1990 and 2025. Keyword co-occurrence and temporal dynamics analyses were conducted, enabling the identification of thematic clusters and the assessment of developmental trends in research on women's competencies in business.
Research limitations/implications: This study relies exclusively on data from the Scopus database and on metadata analysis, which may limit its ability to fully capture the diversity of the literature. Future research should expand the analysis to include other databases and apply more in-depth content analysis methods.
Originality/value: The originality of this study lies in the integration of the scoping review approach with bibliometric analysis to comprehensively map the structure and evolution of research on women's competencies in business. The study provides a structured classification of thematic clusters and identifies trends in the development of the literature from a dynamic perspective.
Keywords: competencies; women's entrepreneurship; competency map; bibliometrics.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the discourse on women in business has gained increasing prominence in both academic literature and public debate (Mitra, Basit, 2021; Adamus et al., 2021; Gonçalves et al., 2025). Existing studies highlight that women constitute a significant pillar of entrepreneurial activity (Aidis, Schillo, 2017; Georgieva, 2022; Mari et al., 2024) and play a crucial role in economic development by generating employment, fostering innovation, and contributing to gross domestic product (Hechevarría et al., 2019; Bahmani-Oskooee et al., 2013). Despite the growing importance of women in the economy, the literature consistently identifies numerous barriers that limit their entrepreneurial activity. The most frequently cited challenges include restricted access to financing, persistent gender stereotypes, institutional inequalities, and difficulties in balancing professional and family responsibilities (Brush et al., 2009; 2018; Batra et al., 2024). Despite numerous challenges, women continue to develop sustainable and successful business models across a wide range of industries (Rejeb et al., 2025). However, the majority of women-owned enterprises remain concentrated in low-value-added and low-technology sectors, such as retail, healthcare, and education (Lindberg et al., 2016; Poggesi et al., 2024). In recent years, there has been a significant increase in scholarly interest in women's entrepreneurship. Researchers have examined the diverse motivations, barriers, and achievements of women in business, often placing particular emphasis on the challenges they encounter (Belingheri et al., 2021; Achtzehn et al., 2023; Gonçalves et al., 2025). A substantial portion of this body of work consists of bibliometric analyses that identify key trends and research gaps within the field. For instance, Prabha et al. (2025) highlight financial constraints, limited social networks, cultural norms and discrimination, as well as the underrepresentation of developing countries in existing research. Rejeb et al. (2025) point to emerging themes such as digitalization, crisis resilience, and the role of institutional conditions. Despite the increasing number of bibliometric studies addressing trends and barriers in women's entrepreneurship, there remains a notable gap in research explicitly focused on the competencies of women entrepreneurs. Existing literature has predominantly concentrated on structural and institutional determinants (House, 2025; Arévalo, 2025), while comparatively little attention has been given to competencies as a key factor influencing the effectiveness and development of women-led businesses (Biea et al., 2024). In response to this gap, the present study seeks to provide a comprehensive mapping and analysis of the academic literature on women's competencies in business. Particular attention is given to the evolution of research trends, the identification of thematic structures, and the exploration of future research directions in this field.

2. Methodology

This study employed a scoping review following the approach outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), extended by the recommendations of Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010), and supplemented with the PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines described by Tricco et al. (2018), further enriched with bibliometric analysis (Rodríguez-Vera et al., 2025). In line with the recommendations of Gavel and Iselid (2008) as well as Cobo and Herrera (2011), the Scopus database was selected for analysis, as it is considered one of the most comprehensive and multidisciplinary sources for indexing scientific publications. The analysis covered publications from 1990 to 2025, identified through search queries conducted in two stages. In the first stage, a general keyword referring to women in business was used, which enabled the inclusion of a broad spectrum of studies addressing this topic. As a result of the initial search in the Scopus database, 29,440 records were identified. In the second stage, additional keywords related to competencies in entrepreneurship, leadership, innovation, and management were applied. Refining the query to this thematic scope resulted in 388 records, which constituted the basis for further analysis. To enhance the transparency of the literature selection process and minimize the risk of systematic errors, the research procedure was conducted in accordance with PRISMA standards (Haddaway et al., 2022) (Figure 1).

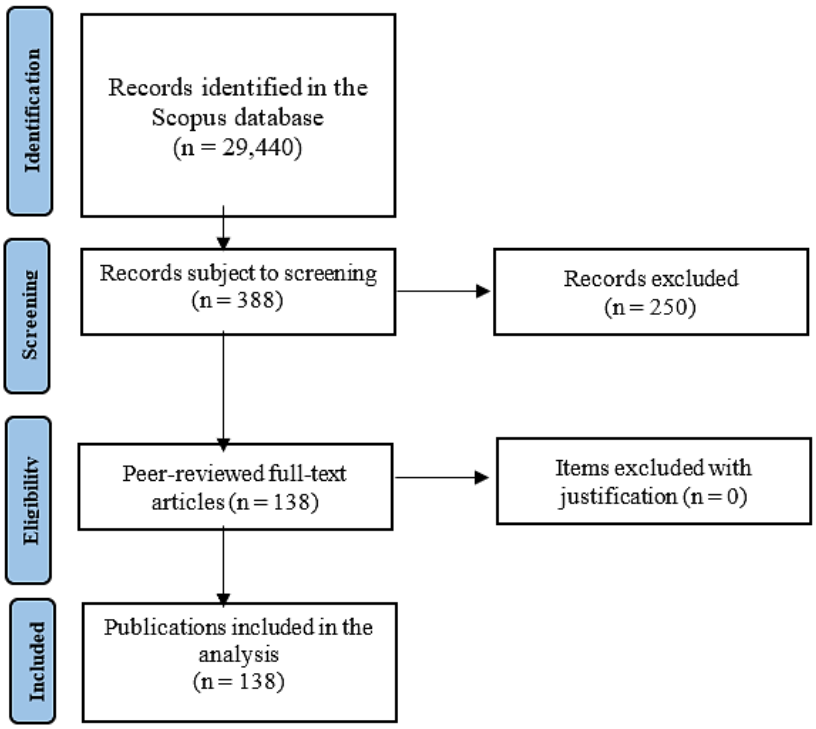


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.

Source: own research.

In the next stage of the study, bibliometric analysis was applied to quantitatively assess the scientific literature on women's competencies in business. This method enabled the identification of key thematic areas, authors, journals, and keywords related to the competency dimension of women's entrepreneurship (Verma, Gustafsson, 2020). The VOSviewer tool was used as part of the bibliometric analysis, playing a key role in identifying and visualizing the relationships between research topics concerning women's competencies in business.

3. Research Results and Discussion

The bibliometric analysis conducted on a set of articles indexed in the Scopus database allowed for the identification of six main clusters of competencies attributed to women in business.

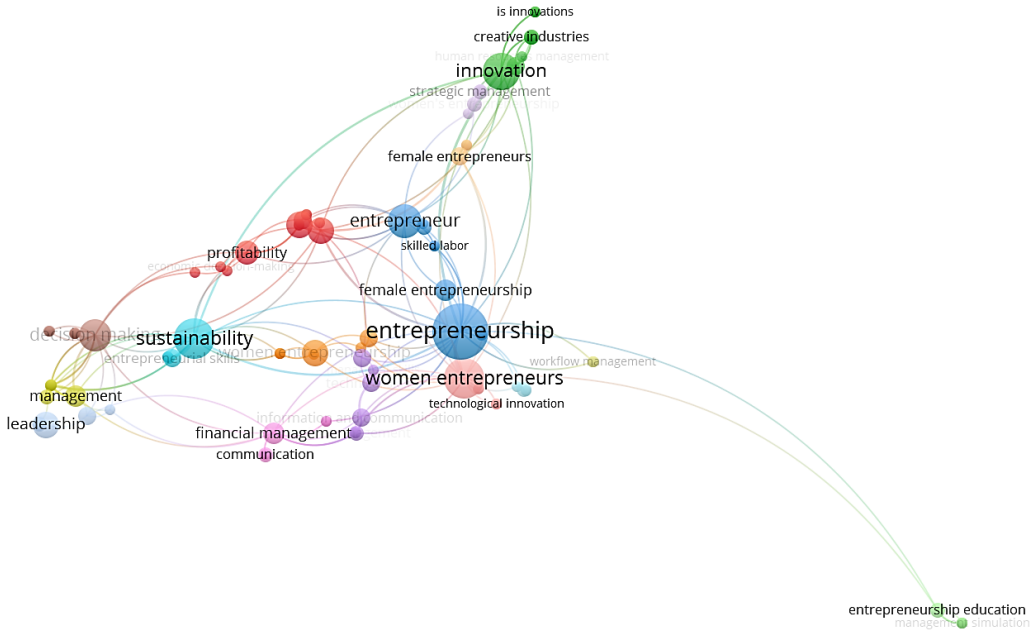


Figure 2. Competency Clusters.

Source: own research.

Research indicates that entrepreneurial competencies (Cluster 1) are crucial, encompassing initiative, the identification of market opportunities, risk management, and sound economic decision-making (Stephan, El-Ganainy, 2007; Adekola, Olawole-Isaac, 2014). The importance of strategic planning, managerial competencies, and innovation for the development and stability of women-owned firms is also emphasized (Hodges et al., 2015; Rantšo, 2016; Poggesi et al., 2024), as well as financial skills and the ability to build a competitive advantage (Fang et al., 2022; Chiplunkar, Goldberg, 2024). More recent studies highlight the role of digital, adaptive, and internationalization competencies in the context of global competition (Fauzi et al., 2020; Sraha, Arthur, 2025; Ssekiziyivu et al., 2025).

Cluster 2 covers women's leadership and managerial competencies. Between 1995 and 2005, management was analyzed primarily in the context of restructuring and organizational change, with the gender dimension largely marginalized (Lewis, 1995; Roh et al., 2008). Between 2007 and 2015, research focused on barriers to promotion, differences in decision-making, the importance of gender diversity, and criticism of androcentric leadership models (Herzlinger, 2007; Apesteguia et al., 2012; Johns, 2013; Bierema, 2016). Between 2017 and 2020, the positive impact of women in leadership on firm performance and the role of strategic competencies were emphasized (Wu, Li, 2017; Jolović, 2019). The most recent studies (2022-2025) examine women's leadership in the context of organizational transformation, HR, and corporate governance, highlighting its importance for profitability and strategic effectiveness (Nur, Darvin, 2023; Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Scheepers, 2025).

Cluster 3 illustrates the evolution of perceptions of women's innovation—from their involvement in creative sectors (Gao, 2004) to a strategic organizational competence. Over time, emphasis has been placed on women's ability to generate new ideas and redefine values in entrepreneurship (Mascarenhas, Veer, 2014; Brydges, Hracs, 2019; Zeb, Ihsan, 2020; Omolekan, Alli, 2020). Subsequently, innovation has been linked to corporate performance and the empowerment of women in business (Jabeen et al., 2015; Chamlou, van Gorp, 2016; Wu, Li, 2017). It has also been integrated into the concept of sustainable value creation (Faridi, Mir, 2022; Sjåfjell et al., 2022). Recent studies frame innovation as a key strategic competence associated with management professionalization, technology, and social capital (Poggesi et al., 2024; Biea et al., 2024; Humaira, Hatammimi, 2026).

An analysis of the technical and ICT competency cluster reveals a shift in research approaches to women in business. Initially, the focus was on barriers to accessing technology and digital exclusion resulting from infrastructural, educational, and cultural constraints (van Gorp, 2006; 2007). Over time, technical competencies began to be viewed as a prerequisite for competitiveness in knowledge-based sectors (Brydges, Hracs, 2019), and subsequently as a key resource supporting knowledge transfer, internationalization, and the development of human capital among women entrepreneurs (Al-Roubaie et al., 2020).

Cluster 5 highlights the growing importance of financial competencies in research on women in business. Initially, these competencies were approached from an institutional perspective without a clear gender context (Nainar, 2000). Since the mid-2010s, they have been analyzed as crucial for the sustainability and success of women-led firms in terms of cost management and resource allocation (Rantšo, 2016), as well as long-term accountability and sustainability (Gavrilut et al., 2021). More recent studies link financial literacy to profitability, crisis resilience, and digital transformation (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Chouksey, Bedarkar, 2022; Nur, Darvin, 2023), as well as to corporate governance and regulations (Scheepers, 2025) and practical financial management in SMEs (Omar et al., 2025).

Cluster 6 illustrates the evolution of approaches to sustainability in research on women's competencies. Initially, the focus was on the economic sustainability of microenterprises and the role of microcredit, emphasizing the importance of managerial competencies for long-term stability (Delgado et al., 2008; Al-Shami et al., 2017; 2019). Since around 2018, sustainability has been integrated with innovation and business models, highlighting the importance of subsidies, gender balance, and sustainable value creation (Varela-Candamio et al., 2018; Kovaleva et al., 2022; Sjåfjell et al., 2022; Faridi, Mir, 2022).

Based on the analysis conducted, it is possible to identify trends in the development of women's business competency clusters from 1990 to 2025, highlighting changes in the level of interest in specific research areas.

Table 1.
Trends in women's competency clusters

Cluster	Competencies	Trend
1	Entrepreneurial	FASTEST growth
2	Leadership and management	Stable growth
3	Innovation	Rapid growth after 2018
4	Technical and ICT	Moderate growth
5	Financial	Moderate growth
6	Sustainable development and responsible management	STRONGEST upward trend

Source: own analysis.

The results indicate a clear increase in the importance of entrepreneurial, innovative, and sustainable development competencies in recent years, which confirms the evolution of the academic narrative toward future-oriented and strategic competencies of women in business (Figure 3).

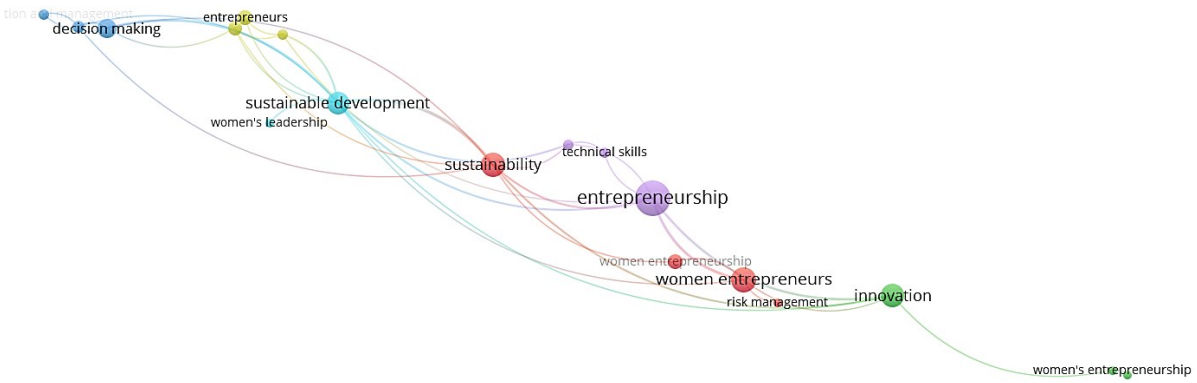


Figure 3. Map of growing competencies.

Source: own research.

An analysis of the map of evolving competencies indicates the emergence of a new competency model for women in business, based on three integrated pillars: entrepreneurship, sustainability, and innovation. A shift is evident from the traditional view of the entrepreneur toward a model that incorporates a gender perspective, social responsibility, and technological competencies. The particularly dynamic growth of competencies related to sustainability and innovation suggests a transition toward a transformative role for women in the economy.

In the context of further research, it is justified to deepen analyses of the integration of entrepreneurial, technological, and sustainability competencies, as well as the role of women as leaders of digital and ecological transformation. Future research should focus on competency models of the future and their impact on the competitiveness and sustainability of organizations.

4. Summary

A literature review and bibliometric analysis indicate an evolution in the discourse on women in business between 1990 and 2025—from gender-neutral perspectives focused on management and entrepreneurship toward an analysis of competencies as a key factor in development. Six competency clusters have been identified, with a clear rise in the importance of entrepreneurial, innovative, and sustainable competencies, reflecting trends in digital and ecological transformation. An integrated model based on three pillars—entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability—is taking shape, and women are increasingly viewed as leaders of socio-economic transformation. The literature has shifted its focus from barriers to women's competency potential, pointing to the need for further research on the integration of entrepreneurial, digital, and sustainable competencies in the context of long-term organizational competitiveness.

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