The Maturation of Management, Spirituality and Religion as a Research Discipline

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Abstract

This bibliometric analysis examines the ontological and epistemological evolution of the management, spirituality and religion (MSR) field, tracing nascent origins to the contemporary domain of scholarly inquiry. We analyse a corpus of 5,566 publications indexed on the Web of Science using a number of bibliometric indicators including: thematic keywords, geographical distribution, institutional affiliations, publication outlets, seminal contributions and influential scholars within the MSR domain. The analysis illuminates the field's intellectual foundations by identifying the most impactful contributions and seminal theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, we report the thematic evolution of the field across four decades and establish a conceptual cartography of MSR-related domains. The findings demonstrate a distinct developmental trajectory of the MSR field since 1956, characterized by increasing methodological sophistication, theoretical consolidation and expanding interdisciplinary connections. This study provides insight into theoretical gaps, promising avenues for future inquiry, and insights to inform curriculum development and enhance pedagogical approaches in management education. Consequently, we advance empirically substantiated insights into the field's maturation from a peripheral specialization into a globally recognized academic discipline with distinctive theoretical contributions. Our study also addresses extant critiques of MSR research and establishes a robust epistemological foundation for advancing future scholarly endeavors in this domain.

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Introduction

The formal study of spirituality and religion in management and organizational performance first emerged in the late 1980s. Sargent (1987) pointed out that religious practices were (re-)entering the workforce, and van Steenbergen (1989) predicted the growing influence of Eastern spiritual and religious practices given the cultural crises in Western society. The influence of spirituality and religion in work environments progressed throughout the 1990s: McCormick (1994) described the influence of a spiritual approach to managerial performance, including its challenges; Neck and Milliman (1994) strongly advocated for the positive effects of spirituality at work and the increased consciousness it can invoke; and *Rochester Business Journal* Staff (1995) reported on a roundtable discussion regarding spirituality and how it might change work-related approaches and decisions. Researchers explored how to integrate spirituality in the management classroom (Neal, 1997) and the relevance of these phenomena within organizations (Cavanagh, 1999), with the research becoming more substantive as the decade progressed. Mitroff and Denton's (1999a) seminal 2-year empirical study identified that religion was perceived as an inappropriate form of expression in the workplace, while spirituality was perceived as appropriate. Mitroff and Denton (1999b) defined spirituality as non-formal; non-denominational; inclusive, universal and timeless; relating to a search for meaning; an awareness of the transcendental and interdependence of everything; and a search for inner peace.

Interest in workplace spirituality has continued over the last two decades (e.g., Allen & Fry, 2022; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Benefiel, 2003, 2007; Benefiel et al., 2014; Cavanagh & Bandsuch, 2002; Duchon & Ashmos Plowman, 2005; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008; Marques et al., 2007, 2009; Mitroff & Denton, 1999a, 1999b; Pawar, 2009a, 2009b, 2016; Poole, 2009). Special issues have been dedicated to this subject in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Pawar, 2023), and in 2001, the Academy of Management set up a special-interest group for management, spirituality and religion (MSR) (Poole, 2009). The impact of workplace spirituality on well-being, organizational performance and work attitudes including job involvement, job commitment and job satisfaction (e.g., Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Pirkola et al., 2016) has been studied. In addition, themes such as organizational spirituality (Rocha & Pinheiro, 2021), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) and corporate spirituality-based culture (Delbecq, 2010) have gained prominence.

The MSR field examines how spirituality and religion are connected and how they are influencing and being influenced by various aspects of management and organizations. Several reviews have been published on MSR topics, such as workplace spirituality (Mhatre & Mehta, 2023; Oswick, 2009), spirituality and leadership (Dent et al., 2005) and spirituality and culture (Rocha & Fry, 2023). However, to date, there is no published bibliometric analysis of the overall field. As is often the case with new subdisciplines in established fields, MSR still encounters ambivalence and scepticism within parts of the management scholarship domain. By engaging in an expansive bibliometric analysis, the authors' goal was to clarify the maturation of this interdisciplinary area of inquiry. This analysis was key in demonstrating evolution in the field for a report submitted by the MSR interest group to acquire division status in the Academy of Management in April 2023 (for more information, see MSR, 2023).

Purpose of This Article

The primary goal of this article was to quantitatively explore the field of research on spirituality and religion in management since it emerged as a formalized area of scientific investigation. Specifically, the analysis was guided by the research question: *How has the MSR research domain evolved over the last decades?* Accordingly, our research meaningfully advances the field of MSR by providing a clear view of the field's maturation, serves as a foundation for new explorations and offers a structured road map for aspiring MSR scholars. We begin with a description of the methods employed.

Methods

We undertook bibliometric and journal quality analysis in order to answer the above research question. In this section, we detail the steps of the systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis. In addition, we clarify the ranking systems employed in the analysis of journal quality (i.e., Journal Citation Report™ (JCR) impact factor, Academic Journal Guide (AJG) rating and the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC)).

Systematic Review

We performed a systematic review by adopting a replicable and transparent process to identify the crucial scientific research in the field (Tranfield et al., 2003). The first stage involved deciding on the search protocol (Figure 1) including the database, search terms, software and bibliometric analyses. Decisions regarding the search terms were guided by the literature and discussions amongst the research team (Tranfield et al., 2003).

We chose the Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (WoS) as the sample for our research, as it has a reputation for accuracy and the necessary metadata, covering more than 2,000 journals (Aria et al., 2020). Aria et al. (2020) suggest using a single database for a bibliometric analysis. We conducted the search on 22 November 2021, using the search expression 'TOPIC (Title, Abstract, Author Keywords, and Keywords Plus)': [spiritual* OR religio*] on the Core Collection without time restrictions. We included only articles in the WoS categories of Business, Management and Economics, encompassing published, early access and review articles as document types. The resulting corpus comprised 5,566 documents.

Bibliometric Analysis

A bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method which measures a corpus of published research or bibliographic units (Broadus, 1987). We selected the bibliometric method to map the MSR research field by defining its intellectual structure and examining the conceptual structure and social network (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). We used VOSviewer version 1.6.17 to build and visualize the bibliometric maps (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).
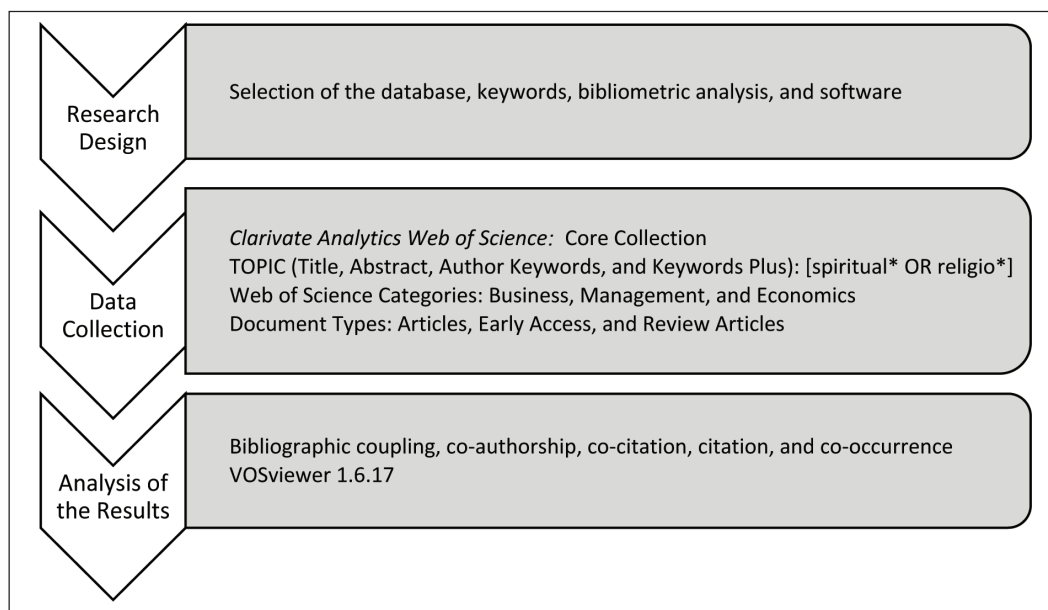
Figure 1. Systematic Search Protocol.

We developed a comprehensive bibliometric comparative analysis (e.g., Rocha & Ferreira, 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015), selected various units of analysis (papers, journals, authors, institutions, countries and keywords) and analysed co-authorship, citation, co-citation, bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence. Co-authorship analysis presents a network where 'researchers, research institutions, or countries are linked to each other based on the number of publications they have authored jointly' (van Eck & Waltman, 2014, p. 289). Citation analysis refers to a citation link where one item cites another item, although there is no distinction in the direction of the citation, that is, who cited whom. Co-citation analysis explores the strength of relationship between two bibliographic units, where 'the larger the number of publications by which two publications are co-cited, the stronger the co-citation relation [is] between the two publications' (van Eck & Waltman, 2014, p. 288). Conversely, bibliographic coupling 'is about the overlap in the reference lists of publications' (van Eck & Waltman, 2014, p. 288). As Figure 2 displays, bibliographic coupling and co-citation analysis are opposite but complementary analyses. To further clarify, co-citation looks at the references in the corpus and occurs when D and V are cited by S, J and R (Figure 2). Conversely, bibliographic coupling looks at the papers in the corpus that share a select number of references; it occurs when D and V cite S, J and R (Figure 2).

In this research, we explored keywords in two ways: (a) we analysed the co-occurrence of authors' keywords,[1] and (b) we mapped the network of most commonly occurring keywords over time (1990s, 2000s, 2010s and 2020s). The default settings in the software were used for both analyses. The keywords' co-occurrence analyses are displayed in the format of a network visualization, where the size of the circle and the label indicate its relative weight, the colour of the item identifies it with a specific cluster and the distance between items represents their relatedness (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).
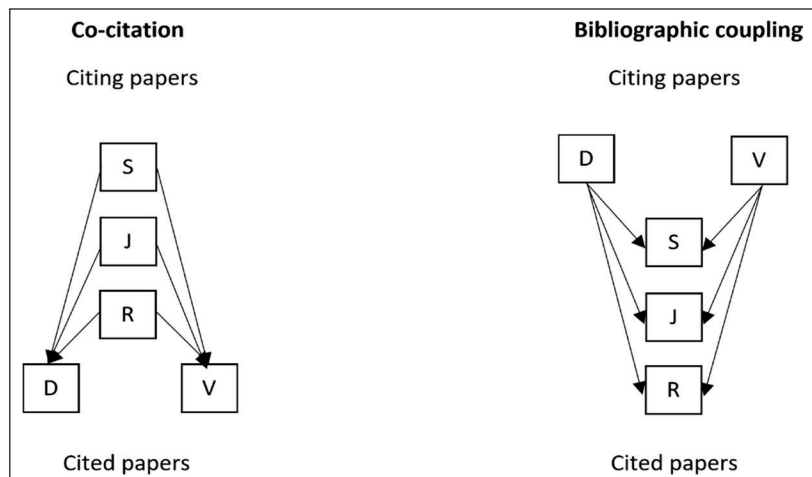
Figure 2. Co-citation and Bibliographic Coupling.

Source: Inspired by Surwase et al. (2011).

Note: For example, co-citation occurs when D and V are cited by S, J and R. Conversely, bibliographic coupling occurs when D and V cite S, J and R. Thus, co-citation looks at the references (in the corpus) that are being cited together, while bibliographic coupling looks at the papers (in the corpus) that share a select number of references.

The parameters utilized to determine inclusion in the analysis were consistent with the attributes listed by Van Eck and Waltman (2017): (a) occurrences, indicating the number of documents in which a keyword occurs; (b) documents, indicating the number of documents published by a source, an author, an organization or a country; (c) citations, which, in instances of co-authorship, citation or bibliographic coupling links, indicates the number of citations received by a document or the total number of citations received by all documents published by a source, an author, an organization or a country; (d) total link strength, indicating the total strength of the links of an item with other items.

Journal Ranking Analysis

We analysed journal impact factors (JIFs) to establish the quality of the journals publishing MSR research and assess the field's maturity. JIFs are often used to compare a journal's relative importance and quality (de Jong & Veld, 2020). Researchers often use JIFs to decide upon the journal to submit their manuscript (Mahmood & Khan, 2019). Despite controversy regarding the effectiveness of using impact factors to measure the quality of articles, there is general agreement that journals with higher impact factors have a better reputation (Garfield, 2006; Waluyo, 2022). We draw on three distinct journal ranking metrics: the JCR impact factor (for more information, see Clarivate, n.d.); the AJG (for more information, see CABS, 2025), previously known as the Association of Business Schools (ABS) rating; and the ABDC ranking (Australian Business Deans Council, 2021).

Analysis of the Results

In this section, we present results of the following analyses: (a) authors' keywords, (b) authors' key words over time, (c) country of authorship, (d) institutional representation, (e) journals, (f) academic field and rating/ranking of journals, (g) academic field and rating/ranking in terms of journal co-citations, (h) academic field and rating/ranking in terms of journal bibliographic coupling, (i) influential papers in terms of citations, co-citations and bibliographic coupling, and (j) influential authors.

Authors' Keywords

There were 11,336 author-selected keywords within the corpus of papers. After using a thesaurus file to identify and eliminate duplicates, 10,627 authors' keywords remained, of which 244 met our threshold of five or more occurrences. The frequency of the 50 most common authors' keywords ranged from 22 to 517 occurrences, with only eight words appearing more than 100 times: *religiosity* ($n = 517$), *Islam* ($n = 484$), *ethics* ($n = 220$), s*pirituality* ($n = 212$), *leadership* ($n = 172$), *EDI* ($n = 168$), *India* ($n = 127$) and *consumer behaviour* ($n = 103$). The majority of keywords (62%, $n = 151$) occurred between five and nine times. The majority of the top 50 keywords (52%, $n = 26$) consisted of traditional management concepts such as *leadership, EDI, consumer behaviour, marketing, entrepreneurship, job satisfaction,* etc. Some keywords were explicitly religious and/or spiritual (18%, $n = 9$) such as *Islam, Halal, belief* and *Christian*, while other keywords were somewhere between these two categories (22%, $n = 11$): *ethics, trust, philanthropy, corporate social responsibility* and *values*. Unexpectedly, *spirituality at work* does not appear within the top 50 authors' keywords, although related concepts such as *job satisfaction* ($n = 48$) and *identity* ($n = 61$) are present.

   A range of methodological keywords (e.g., thematic analysis, case study, discourse analysis, structural equation modelling, survey) were present, which indicates the variety of research methods employed in MSR scholarship. These methodological works have played a significant role in shaping the research landscape of MSR. For example, works by Fornell and Larcker (1981), Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Hair et al. (2014) all appear within the top 12 papers co-cited in our corpus.

Authors' Keywords over Time

We explored the evolution of authors' keyword co-occurrences by decade from 1990 through 2021: 1990s, 2000s, 2010s and 2020s. We started in 1990 because this was the first decade with metadata available, as previously most of the papers did not include keywords (van Eck & Waltman, 2022). Figure 3 displays the network visualization of keyword co-occurrences from 1990 through 1999; it is sparsely populated with some disconnected themes. The largest node is the keyword *religion*, followed by *belief* and *values*.

   Figure 4 displays the network of corpus keyword co-occurrences from 2000 through 2009. The keyword *religion* remains the largest node and has increased in size, reflecting a growth in the number of times it appears in the literature. The terms *business ethics*, *religiosity, workplace spirituality* and *spiritual leadership* appear, and the image is noticeably denser with keywords that overlap much more than in Figure 3. In actuality, the network is a three-dimensional image which is not possible to reproduce in full in two dimensions.

   Figure 5 displays the network of keyword co-occurrences from 2010 through 2019. *Religion* remains the largest node, the density of keywords has increased and the growth in the number of keywords is visible.

   Figure 6 displays the current network of corpus keyword co-occurrences from 2020 through November 2021. While the density appears to have waned, this image represents only two and one-half years
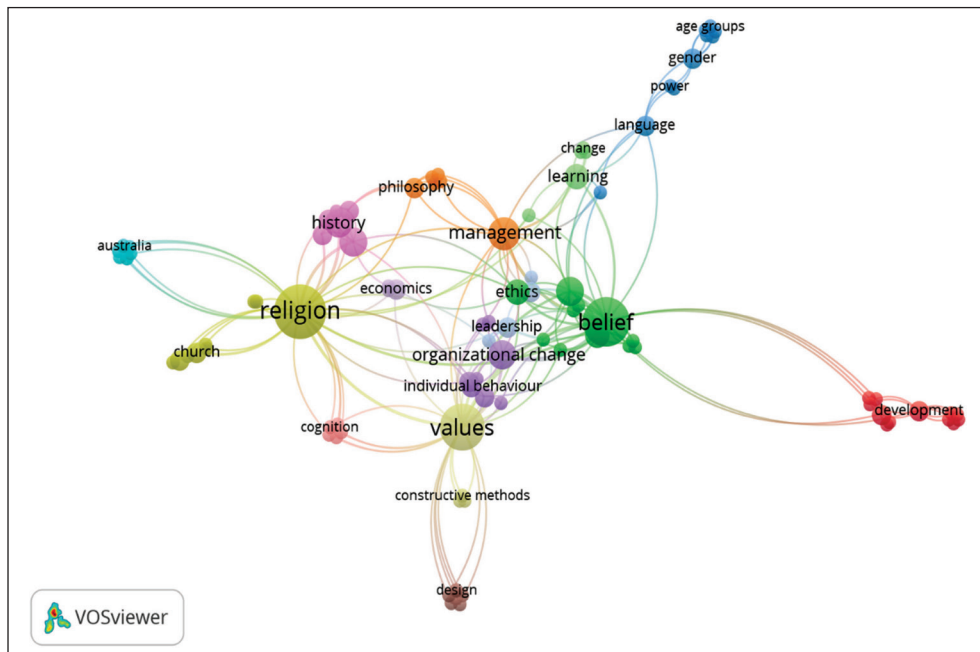
Figure 3. Network Visualization of Keywords from 1990 to 1999.
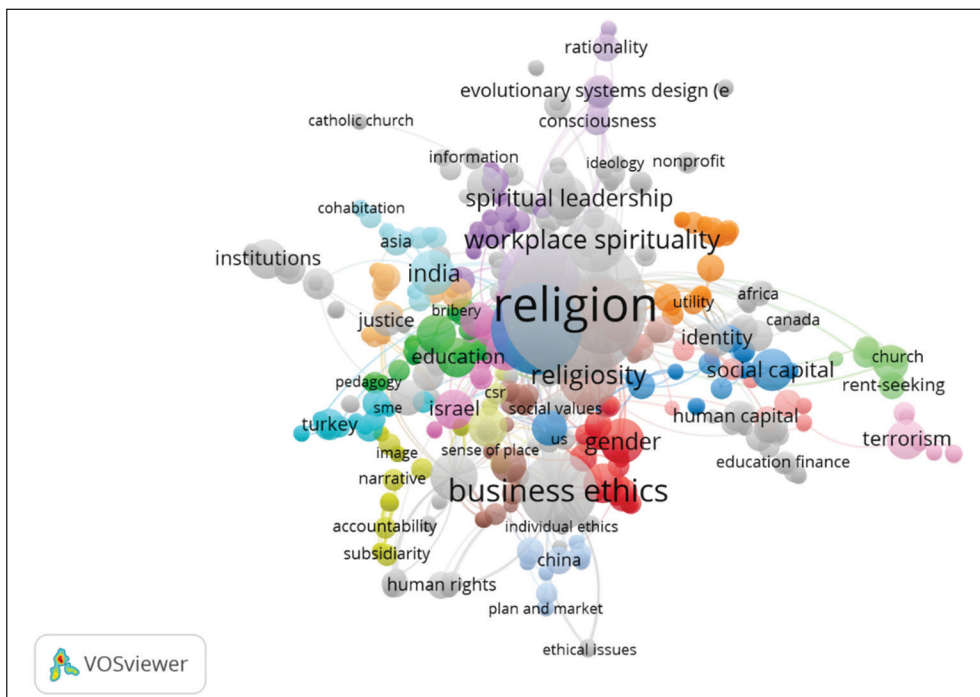
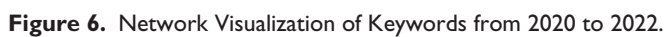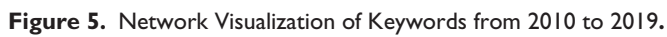**Figure 4.** Network Visualization of Keywords from 2000 to 2009.

Figure 5. Network Visualization of Keywords from 2010 to 2019.

Figure 6. Network Visualization of Keywords from 2020 to 2022.

compared to full decades in the previous figures. The term *religiosity* (*n* = 148) replaced *religion* as the largest keyword. The density of *workplace spirituality* and *spirituality* has continued to increase. *COVID-19* began trending in the early 2020s (e.g., Chetioui & Lebdaoui, 2022; Karpen & Conduit, 2020). Correspondingly, *entrepreneurship*, *corporate social responsibility* and *marketing*-related keywords have become noticeable (e.g., Kamarudin & Kassim, 2020; Miao et al., 2021; Rocha & d'Angelo, 2021).

The articles referenced in this figure explore how *religiosity, religion* or *spirituality* has positively affected creative performance (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2022), religious orientation shaping collaborations between entrepreneurs after business failure experiences (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022), innovative work behaviour including knowledge sharing (Usmanova et al., 2021), the interaction between moral seasoning and self-decentralization (Vu & Burton, 2021), how spirituality improves governance in the banking industry (Robina-Ramirez et al., 2021) and corporate social responsibility scandals (Rocha & d'Angelo, 2021).

Countries

We examined the 81 countries represented in the dataset to identify the countries with the largest number of papers, citations and bibliographic coupling (as measured by the total link strength (TLS)). The countries with the most documents are: the United States, England, Australia, People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Germany, Canada, France, Italy, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and the Netherlands. The number of papers published on MSR-related topics from each country ranged from a low of 5 from Armenia to a high of 1,728 from the United States. The analysis also identified the total number of times each paper was cited within the corpus of papers, which ranged from 6 citations of Ukrainian papers to 52,273 citations of US papers.

While there has not been a formal investigation regarding the reasons why the United States leads in the above output, the researchers collectively reasoned that this may be related first and foremost to the language, with most of the prominent resources being published in English. Other factors contributing to the high US-based contribution may be its broad diverse religious landscape; its advanced academic infrastructure with extensive funding opportunities and resources for research in the humanities and social sciences; its level of freedom in exploring topics related to spirituality and religion, which may not be similar in all nations of the world; the increasing quest of US scholars to engage in interdisciplinary approaches, including spirituality and religion in areas linked to sociology, psychology, anthropology, theology and business; and not the least, the wide range of publishing opportunities due to a large number of prominent journals being headquartered in the United States.

The TLS of the MSR-related documents from each country ranged from 1, for the subset of Ukrainian papers, to 968,116 for the subset of US papers. The TLS represents the number of references cited by the countries in the list; the higher the TLS, the stronger the link between the items. Thus, the top countries share more references than the countries at the bottom of the list. The subset of papers from the United States has the strongest TLS: more than twice as strong as the next country on the list, England, and more than 20 times larger than the last country on this list, Sweden. Conversely, there are instances where the bibliographic coupling TLS for a country moves them higher, or lower, on the list relative to their ranking for the Citations Link Strength. A citation link strength refers to the measure of how strongly two documents are connected based on the number and significance of citations between them.

Institutions

The authors within the corpus represent 500 different institutions, including universities, research centres and government agencies. The papers associated with each institution ranged from 5, the minimum boundary condition, to 64, with a mean of 11 documents. The modal number of papers is five, with 20% of the institutions ($n = 99$) with that number of papers in the corpus; 41% of the institutions ($n = 203$) had 6–10 documents, 16% ($n = 82$) had 11–15 papers and 9% ($n = 43$) had 16–20 papers.

Journals

The journals in our data set ($n = 880$) were analysed to better understand the sources contributing to the MSR field. Table 1 contains the top 10 results from three types of analysis: citation, co-citation and bibliographic coupling.

The *Journal of Business Ethics* has the most articles ($n = 397$), citations ($n = 12,081$), co-citations ($n = 9,694$) and a large TLS ($n = 184,899$). The *Journal of Organizational Change Management* has the next highest number of articles ($n = 53$) and the fourth-largest number of citations ($n = 2,571$). At the other end of the spectrum (and thus not shown in Table 1), the *Business Ethics and the Environment Journal* has the lowest number of co-citations (five articles that are cited only four times in the WoS), *Organizational Research Methods* appears last in the co-citation analysis ($n = 249$) and the *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences* has the lowest TLS at 4,777.

Table 1. Citation and Co-citation Analyses and Bibliographic Coupling Data for Cited Journals.

| Citation Analysis				Co-citation Analysis				Bibliographic Coupling		
#	Source	Papers	TC	#	Source	TC		#	Source	TLS
1	*Journal of Business Ethics*	397	12,081	1	*Journal of Business Ethics*	9,694		1	*Journal of Business Ethics*	184,899
2	*The Quarterly Journal of Economics*	20	2,876	2	*American Economic Review*	2,771		2	*Journal of Islamic Marketing*	114,859
3	*Journal of Economic Perspectives*	12	2,649	3	*The Quarterly Journal of Economics*	2,659		3	*Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*	38,318
4	*Journal of Organizational Change Management*	53	2,571	4	*Journal of Consumer Research*	2,399		4	*International Journal of Consumer Studies*	33,301
5	*Oxford Economic Papers—New Series*	5	2,423	5	*Academy of Management Review*	2,319		5	*Journal of Business Research*	24,772
6	*Journal of Economic Growth*	6	2,256	6	*Journal of Financial Economics*	2,214		6	*Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*	23,032
7	*Journal of Consumer Research*	12	2,227	7	*Journal of Islamic Marketing*	2,173		7	*Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*	20,354
8	*Tourism Management*	46	2,072	8	*Journal of Business Research*	1,877		8	*Journal of Organizational Change Management*	19,649
9	*Journal of Public Economics*	18	2,026	9	*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*	1,841		9	*Applied Economics*	16,252
10	*Journal of Political Economy*	16	1,819	10	*Academy of Management Journal*	1,708		10	*International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management*	15,026

Academic Field and Rating/Ranking of Journals

Next, we looked at the academic field and rating/ranking of the journals publishing articles in the corpus. Most journals were in the field of economics ($n = 29$) or marketing ($n = 18$). Other prominent fields of study include finance ($n = 9$), ethics/CSR/management ($n = 9$) and organizational studies ($n = 8$). Six journals did not have an academic field noted. The frequency of the rating/ranking for the top 100 most commonly occurring journals, most co-cited journals and the highest TLC journals are displayed for both the ABS (Figure 7) and the ABDC (Figure 8). With regard to the ABS rating for the 100 most commonly occurring journals in the corpus, the majority are rated at 3 or above (51%): 33 journals are rated at 3, 11 are rated at 4 and 6 are rated at the highest level of a 4*.

The ABDC ranking distribution of the 100 journals cited most often in this study (Figure 8) reveals a skew towards high-quality rankings for journals in the corpus: 25 journals were ranked at A*, 45 at A, 19 at B, 6 at C and 5 had no associated ranking.

Ten journals in the top 100 commonly occurring journals did not have a published JCR impact factor. Eight of these were not listed in the WoS because they were pamphlets, working papers, theses or handbooks. The other two journals did not meet the requirements for a JCR impact factor. The JCR impact factor for the remaining 90 journals ranged from 47.7 for *Science* to 0.8 for the *Review of Religious Research*. The mean JCR impact factor for the 90 journals was 6.5.

Academic Field and Rating/Ranking: Journal Co-citation

Next, we looked at the academic field and rating/rankings of the co-cited journals. Again, the prominent fields of study were journals of marketing ($n = 16$) and economics ($n = 15$). Other fields of study in the co-citation data set include ethics, CSR and management ($n = 11$ each), general psychology ($n = 8$), finance ($n = 7$), organizational studies ($n = 7$) and organizational behaviour/psychology ($n = 6$). Eleven journals in the data set did not have an academic field noted. The ABS ratings for the 100 journals
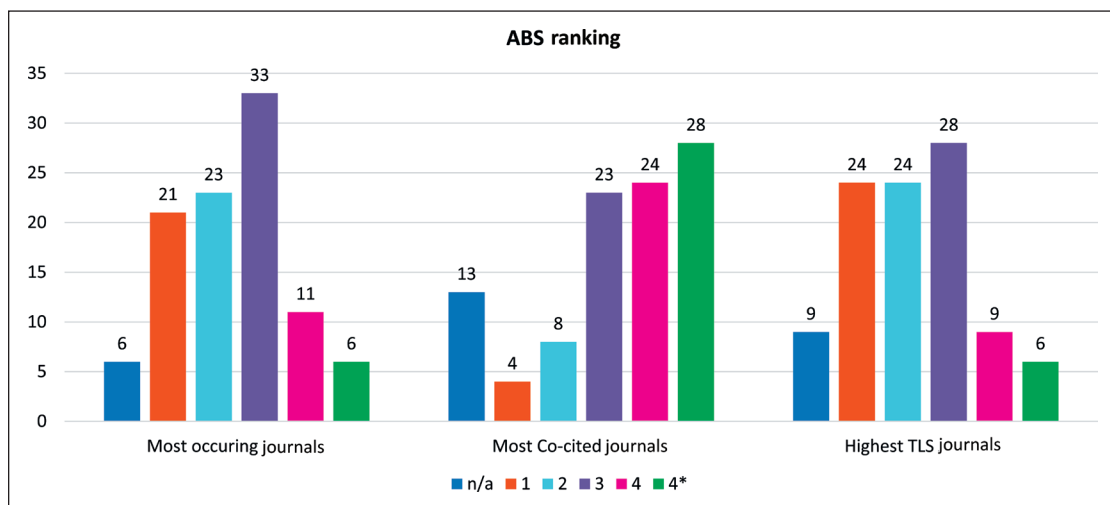
Figure 7. ABS Ratings for the 100 Most Commonly Occurring Journals, Most Co-cited Journals and Highest Total Link Strength Journals.
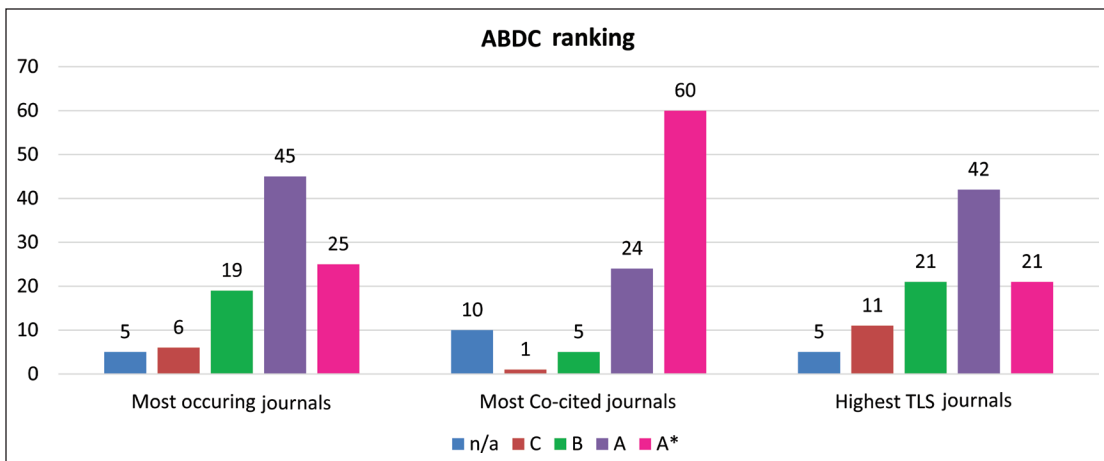
Figure 8. ABDC Ratings for the 100 Most Commonly Occurring Journals, Most Co-cited Journals and Highest Total Link Strength Journals.

co-cited most often within the corpus are detailed in Figure 7. A total of 28 journals were rated at 4*, a further 24 were rated at 4 and 23 were rated at 3. Thirteen journals were not rated. The ABDC ranking distribution of the 100 journals co-cited most often within the corpus is detailed in Figure 8; 60 journals were ranked at A*, 24 at A, 5 at B and 1 journal at C. Ten had no associated ranking.

Academic Field and Rating/Ranking: Journal Bibliographic Coupling Measured by Total Link Strength

Finally, we looked at the academic field and ranking of the top 100 journals with the highest degree of bibliographic coupling, as measured by TLS. The fields of economics ($n = 23$), followed by marketing ($n = 17$), ethics/CSR/management ($n = 11$) and finance ($n = 10$) were represented. Other fields of study included organizational studies ($n = 9$) and international business and area studies ($n = 6$ each). Nine journals did not have an academic field designation. The ABS rating distribution for the journals with the highest bibliographic coupling, as measured by TLS, is shown in Figure 7: 28 journals in the data set were rated by ABS at 3, 9 were rated at 4 and 6 were rated at the highest level of 4*. Additionally, the ABDC ranking distribution of journals with the highest degree of bibliographic coupling, as measured by TLS, is shown in Figure 8: 21 journals were ranked by ABDC at A*, 42 at A, 21 at B, 11 at C and 5 had no associated ranking.

Papers

The quantity of MSR publications and citations have grown over the last three decades, with the steepest increase happening around 2010. The corpus for our analyses contained 5,566 documents from 1956 to 2021 (Figure 9). We selected the papers with at least 25 citations ($n = 942$ papers). The average number of citations per article was 84 ($SD = 163$), the median was 25, while the mode was 46.
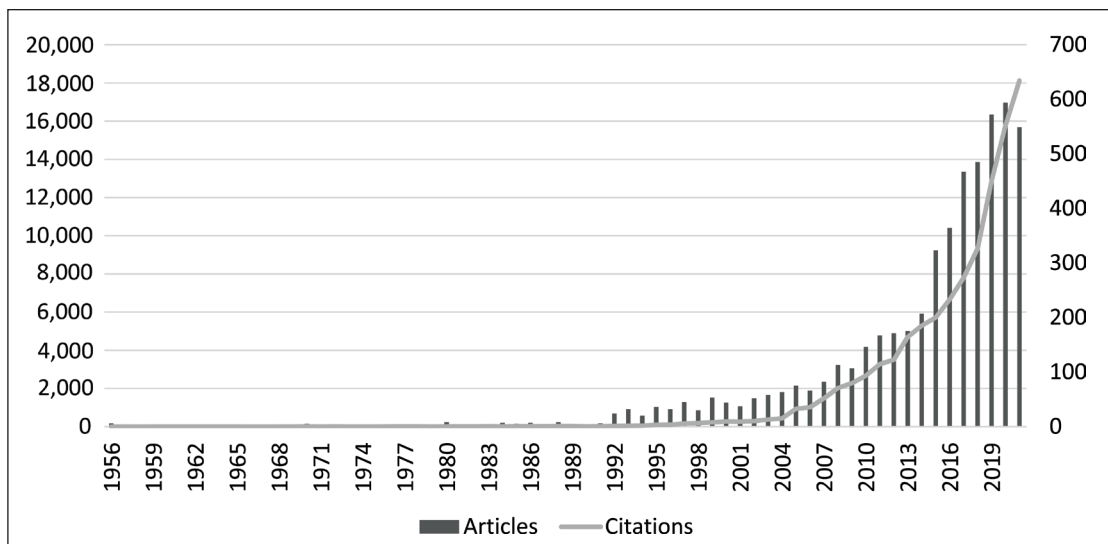
Figure 9. Publications and Citations per Year (1956–2021).

The 10 most cited articles within the corpus of analysis are listed below:

- Mael and Ashforth (1992)
- Collier and Hoeffler (2004)
- Alesina et al. (2003)
- Guiso et al. (2006)
- Alesina and La Ferrara (2002)
- Ghemawat (2001)
- Guiso et al. (2009)
- Rust et al. (1995)
- Stulz and Williamson (2003)
- Glaeser et al. (2002)

While the 10 ten most cited articles do not have religion or spirituality in their title, religio* is in their abstract. For example, Mael and Ashforth (1992) studied how people identify with their religious alma maters, Guiso et al. (2006) included religion as part of one's economic culture and Rust et al. (1995) used the term 'religious fervor' as an analogy for an organization's desire to have a successful implementation of a return on quality approach. Other work in the top 10 explored how religious diversity reduces the threat of civil war (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004), is positively correlated with several measures of good governance (Alesina et al., 2003) and improves creditors' law (Stulz & Williamson, 2003). Others suggest that religious diversity does not significantly reduce trust in racially fragmented communities (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002), and commonality of religion has the potential to positively affect economic exchange between two countries (Guiso et al., 2009). Yet, these authors also theorize that religious diversity negatively affects the 'cultural distance' during a company's internationalization process

(Ghemawat, 2001). On the other hand, in a number of the top 50 frequently cited articles or co-citations, religion and spirituality are more explicitly noted in the titles of the papers. For example, Guiso et al. (2003) debated religions' impact on people's economic attitudes, Iannaccone (1992) explored 'religious markets and the economics of religion', Bartunek (1984) studied organizational restructuring through the case of a religious order, and Hilary and Hui (2009) examined religion and corporate decision-making. The most cited articles that explicitly focused on spirituality include Milliman et al. (2003), who researched workplace spirituality and work attitudes; Mitroff and Denton (1999b), who discussed spirituality, religion and values in the workplace; Duchon and Ashmos Plowman (2005), who also studied spirituality in the workplace; and Fry (2003), who proposed the theory of spiritual leadership.

The co-citation analysis identifies the research that has been most influential in the development of the field, or what Caputo et al. (2021, p. 493) call the 'theoretical pillars'. For example, studies such as those by Iannaccone (1998), Ashmos and Duchon (2000) and Fry (2003) have strongly influenced research on spirituality and religion in organizations. The co-citation analysis also includes methodological studies, such as Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Podsakoff et al. (2003), all of which attest to the solid foundation of quantitative analysis in this field. Below are the 10 most influential articles:

- Iannaccone (1998)
- Fornell and Larcker (1981)
- Hilary and Hui (2009)
- Guiso et al. (2003)
- Barro and McCleary (2003)
- Weaver and Agle (2002)
- Ashmos and Duchon (2000)
- Fry (2003)
- Ajzen (1991)
- Podsakoff et al. (2003)

Finally, the bibliographic coupling analysis illuminated the cohesive theoretical architecture of the MSR field, revealing that the largest set of connected papers contains 5,310 papers (95.40% of the data set). This finding provides compelling evidence of MSR's evolution into a coherent scholarly domain with established theoretical foundations. Conversely, the rest of the papers in the corpus are not connected. For the 50 papers with the highest bibliographic coupling, the TC ranged from 20 to 1,219 with a mean of 95, and the TLS ranged from 527 to 985 with a mean of 654. A few papers exhibited distinctive citation patterns with below-average TC and above-average TLS: Kurt et al. (2016) with TC = 20 and TLS = 680; Arli and Pekerti (2016) with TC = 23 and TLS = 755; Leventis et al. (2018) with TC = 32 and TLS = 950—suggesting their critical function in theoretical integration despite limited scholarly recognition. Conversely, some papers demonstrate substantial scholarly impact with above-average TC and below-average TLS: Rego and Pina e Cunha (2008) with TC = 210 and TLS = 548; Guiso et al. (2006) with TC = 1,219 and TLS = 545—potentially reflecting their role as pioneering contributions that have influenced the field without extensive integration into its contemporary reference network. The 10 papers with the highest index of bibliographic coupling were:

- El Ghoul et al. (2012)
- Mazereeuw-van der Duijn Schouten et al. (2014)
- Leventis et al. (2018)

- Chen and Tang (2013)
- Iyer (2016)
- Du (2014)
- Callen and Fang (2015)
- Chan-Serafin et al. (2013)
- Arli and Pekerti (2016)
- Arli and Tjiptono (2014)

Authors

The corpus includes 10,622 authors and 1,410 (13%) single-authored documents. However, only 93 scholars demonstrated substantial engagement in the field, having produced a minimum threshold of five publications and at least five citations. The mean number of papers is 6.8, with a median of 6 and a mode of 5. Citations of these authors' work showed a mean of 108, a median of 76 and a mode of 37. Finally, 32 of these authors were cited at least 100 times. In the co-citation analysis (concerning the citations in the corpus's reference), of 120,871 authors, only 18 have a minimum of 100 citations. The citation analysis results show the most widely cited author is Alesina, A., who has been cited 3,620 times. The co-citation analysis shows that the top 10 were cited 189–788 times. This suggests the critical importance of these authors in shaping the field. However, there is evidence that a small group does not dominate the domain, as 75 of the authors were cited at least 80 times. Finally, the bibliographic coupling showed that the authors with a higher centrality in the network of citations were: Arli, Tjiptono, Cui, Jo, Du, Minton, Zeng, Lobo, Chowdury and Kanagaret.

Discussion

Our analysis reveals the field's developmental trajectory from nascent interest to established academic discipline through three interconnected inquiries: the temporal evolution of MSR themes, the contours of its intellectual landscape and promising avenues for theoretical advancement. The findings demonstrate MSR's transformation into a coherent scholarly domain with distinct theoretical foundations that both legitimizes past contributions and establishes robust parameters for future scholarly discourse.

Evolution of MSR Themes over the Last Decades

The authors' keyword analysis identified four broad categories of keywords: traditional management keywords, explicitly religious/spiritual keywords, managerial keywords that are religious/spiritual adjacent and methodological keywords. The prevalence of traditional management concepts within the keyword analysis is evidence of the breadth of connections to the larger research domain. And the network visualization analysis showed a clear evolution in the density, composition and relationship between keywords. These findings indicate that interest in the discipline has evolved (i.e., the labels of nodes have changed) and continues to expand (i.e., the number of nodes has increased). MSR is a growing field utilizing a variety of methods of inquiry and analysis.

The MSR Landscape

Our analysis focused on a corpus of 5,566 documents, representing the work of 10,622 authors, from over 500 institutions (i.e., universities, research centres and government agencies) located throughout 81 countries. These findings are evidence that the majority of papers are co-authored and produced by a large and globally distributed academic community; the field is not dominated by a small set of academics. However, the United States dominates with the largest number of documents, TC and TLS. This is followed by two countries with English as their official language (England and Australia) and then the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Germany, Canada, France, Italy, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and the Netherlands. Further support for the distributed nature of the domain is the fact that many countries are represented by multiple institutions, of which seven are Malaysian, nine are Australian and four are Canadian.

In addition to a global community of scholars, this research provides evidence that MSR research has been published in a diverse range of journals, including many top-tier publications. *The Journal of Business Ethics* is the top journal for this corpus in terms of the total number of papers, TC, co-citation TC and TLS. Co-citation analysis indicates that research in spirituality and religion is published in high-quality journals across various disciplines such as accounting, economics, ethics, finance, marketing, organizational studies and psychology.

We identified 942 papers with at least 25 citations in the corpus and found that the 10 most cited papers cover topics such as organizational identification, culture, trust, globalization and spirituality/religion. The implication is that MSR research has a broad application to a range of organizational and managerial topics. Interestingly, religion or spirituality appears in the titles of 7 of the 10 most co-cited papers, and all 10 papers with the highest bibliographic coupling contain the word 'religion' in their title. The explicit naming of these terms is evidence of the broader acceptance of these terms within traditional academic journals. Finally, we analysed the authors and found that researchers continue to publish work, while some exert above-average influence as theoretical pillars. Our findings support the assertion that MSR is a maturing management discipline with a prominent, globally dispersed legion of high-achieving scholars behind it and a reputable database of research and thought work to substantiate its validity.

Research Avenues to Continue the Field Evolution

By identifying the key theoretical constructs and seminal works, this study equips researchers with a road map for addressing unresolved issues within the field. Moreover, it lays the groundwork for curriculum development in management education, emphasizing the integration of spirituality and religion in organizational contexts.

Future research should analyse in depth the articles collected in this study, perhaps with attention to specific subsections or nuances. For example, one can analyse the articles published only in top-ranked journals (e.g., ABS 3 or more, and ABDC A), identify the idiosyncrasies of the clusters encountered and/or use artificial intelligence and bibliometric software to uncover insights in the metadata. Future research may utilize other analyses, databases (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar, EBSCO) or software (R studio) to map the field. Most importantly, future research should seek to scaffold the theoretical and methodological framework of the field.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis from 2020 to 2021 (Figure 6) provides insights into the primary subjects that have drawn scholarly attention within the MSR domain in recent years. Based on the analysis of the evolving landscape of MSR scholarship (Figures 3–6), and the perspectives of the authors, we

have identified potential thematic domains for future research: religiosity and religion, workplace spirituality, entrepreneurship, marketing and CSR. Each thematic domain harbours the relevant potential for multifaceted exploration.

Religiosity and Religion

Given the centrality and size of religiosity and religion in the network, and the surrounding keywords, there is more work to be done in understanding the dynamics between these concepts and fostering inclusive workplaces, enhancing employee well-being and promoting ethical practices. Future research could explore various aspects of religiosity in business, organizational culture, organizational behaviour, diversity management, ethical decision-making, tourism, trust, knowledge dynamics and more.

Workplace Spirituality

The emergence and centrality of workplace spirituality (Figure 6) in the network holds promise for future research. As organizations increasingly embrace remote work and virtual collaboration, understanding how spirituality is expressed, experienced and nurtured within digital settings is crucial, particularly regarding employees' sense of community and belonging. Exploring online platforms, virtual communities and digital tools as facilitators of spiritual practices in the remote workplace and connections among employees opens new horizons for research. By investigating the dynamics of digital and remote workplace spirituality, scholars can uncover unique challenges, opportunities and impacts on employee well-being, engagement and sense of meaning in a digitalized workplace. Even more timely, exploring how artificial intelligence (AI) intersects with workplace spirituality is imperative. Combining AI and workplace spirituality presents a pioneering research direction.

Entrepreneurship

The prevalence of entrepreneurship within the keywords and articles, combined with the growing importance of gig economies and small businesses in general, suggests a potential for further research in this area. Few scholars have explored the potential impact that spiritual and religious beliefs and practices can have on entrepreneurial behaviour and success. Future studies can explore how spiritual and religious beliefs shape the attitudes and beliefs of entrepreneurs, for example, influencing their risk-taking behaviour, decision-making processes and motivation. Also of interest is the relationship between spiritual and religious practices and entrepreneurial outcomes, exploring how meditation, prayer and mindfulness can enhance an entrepreneur's ability to innovate, create and persevere in the face of challenges. A tangential area for exploration might be the relevance of spirituality, religion and pro-social values in alternate forms of organizing, such as employee owned companies.

Marketing

As seen in the prominent journals publishing MSR research, the intersection of marketing and spirituality/religion is of interest to scholars. The reciprocal dynamic between these phenomena holds significant

potential for further exploration. Researchers could explore how spiritual and religious beliefs shape consumer attitudes and behaviours towards products and services, marketing messages and brand identities. This may positively impact the use of spiritual and religious themes in marketing communication, the effectiveness of these strategies and their impact on consumer behaviour. Also, researchers could investigate how spirituality and religion impact stakeholder engagement, exploring the potential of these beliefs to promote ethical and socially responsible marketing practices.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The intersection of CSR and spirituality/religion is of growing interest to scholars as they increasingly understand the potential impact of this mutual influence. With Rocha and d'Angelo (2021) underscoring the impact of spiritual and religious values on CSR strategy, future research could explore the effect of spiritual and religious values on organizations' CSR initiatives and how these values could promote ethical and socially responsible practices. Future research could also investigate how spiritual and religious beliefs and practices impact employee attitudes, behaviours and participation regarding CSR initiatives.

Expanding MSR Research Beyond Western-centric Paradigms

Future research in MSR should address the field's Western-centricity, particularly its US dominance, as identified in our bibliometric analysis. This epistemological expansion requires systematic investigation of non-Western spiritual and religious traditions that remain under-represented despite their potential theoretical contributions. Scholars should consider whether conventional theory-building paradigms adequately capture non-Western cultural perspectives and whether new methodological approaches might be required for empirical studies in these contexts. The concept of 'non-translatables' in Sanskrit, as articulated by Malhotra and Babaji (2020), presents a particularly salient challenge—certain spiritual concepts may resist translation into the predominant academic discourse, potentially limiting theoretical development and cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, the development of integrative conceptual schemas, as proposed by Bindlish et al. (2019), could facilitate more comprehensive theorization across diverse worldviews. Their framework encompasses dimensions including aetiology (origins), explanation (present), futurology (future), epistemology (knowing), axiology (values) and praxeology (actions-how) as elements necessary for adequately representing indigenous perspectives in management theory (Bindlish et al., 2019).

To advance this agenda, we propose a multiphase research programme: First, the replication of the current bibliometric analysis with non-Western journals would illuminate differences in knowledge production across cultural contexts. Second, focused investigation of specific cultural paradigms—including Buddhist, Taoist/Confucian, Islamic, African, Indigenous, Indian and Latin American knowledge systems—would enrich theoretical foundations. Bhawuk (2019) exemplifies this approach through the development of an Indian leadership model based on the Gita's concept of *lokasaṁgraha* (BG: 3.20; 3.25), which emphasizes leadership as service oriented towards universal wellbeing (*sarvabhutahite*). This model demonstrates how indigenous perspectives can transcend conventional leader-centric approaches by contextualizing leadership within cultural frameworks of self, life stages (*varṇāśrama-dharma*) and life objectives (*puruṣārthas*). As Bhawuk (2019, p. 290) argues, 'we need to develop indigenous models of leadership that can provide insights to guide people's daily behavior in work and social

settings'—a sentiment that applies broadly to the entire MSR field as it strives for greater global representativeness and theoretical sophistication.

Implications for Research

In addition to mapping out the current landscape of MSR research, the study provides critical insights for future investigations. The systematic bibliometric analysis has demonstrated a progressively evolving field and supports the following implications:

- First, results from the analysis suggest that the MSR field has moved beyond the status of being a fad or located on the fringe. Emerging scholars can have confidence the field is relevant and influential with increased publications, citations and a high quality of journals publishing this work.
- Second, results from our analyses provide a foundational map of theoretical constructs and seminal documents. This aggregation is valuable for further mapping and research in this interdisciplinary area.
- Third, our outputs add evidence-based counter-arguments to assertions regarding the quality, citation strength and expansion of the MSR field. The analyses of journal impact factors and the breadth of the most impactful articles clarify the field's strength and health.
- Fourth, our research is a foundation for inviting new discussions and explorations in the field from other domains. Learning about the state of the art of research and the strength of this area is a stimulus to scholars unfamiliar with MSR and intending to venture into the field.
- Fifth, the wide range of analytical foci applied in this research (e.g., search terms, journals, authors, countries, institutions and more) not only attests to an intricate investigative process but also provides upcoming researchers with various avenues of further research to consider.
- Sixth, based on our finding that *spirituality at work* does not appear within the top 50 authors' keywords—although several related concepts are present—this may serve as an impetus for future researchers to investigate how spirituality is labelled and/or whether this term is still considered one to be cautious about in the workplace.
- Seventh, given the expansion of global connectivity through increased communication and reciprocal translation avenues, the true expansiveness of religion and spirituality could be investigated among the thus-far-excluded category of non-English-speaking scholars.

Implications for Practice

In addition to the above, this study has implications for practice as well. The bibliometric analysis described in this article has served as a basis for elevating MSR from an interest group into a division in the Academy of Management. This will enable the division to better serve as a hub for worldwide researchers and practitioners dedicated to maintaining and advancing a robust and productive international community dedicated to MSR.

Consultants, workers and leaders who wish to know more about MSR research will have the chance to do so with greater access by scrutinizing this field mapping. They can use these maps to further conversations within organizations and assist decision-making processes. The evolution of the field supports

endeavours to foster spiritual and religious practices in organizations. In an era marked by movements towards greater social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, and eradication of subjugation of minorities, this article serves as an inspiration to scholars and practitioners in their efforts to enhance moral and spiritual awareness within their professional environments.

Additionally, the topics of spirituality and religiosity may gain even more traction than in previous decades in our contemporary global climate with its increased insecurity caused by augmenting changes, animosity and turbulence on national, regional and global fronts. This article may provide global readers with an opportunity to consider our overarching humanness and our demonstrated collective interest in spiritual and religious practices, which invariably have mutual understanding and acceptance at their foundation.

Limitations

While this study offers substantive insights into the evolution of MSR as a research discipline, constraints warrant consideration to contextualize our findings appropriately and guide future scholarly inquiry. First, the limiting parameters set for analysis, such as timeline, type of documents (articles), research terms, disciplines (i.e., WoS categories of Business, Management and Economics) and language selection, will have limited the analysis to a specific sample. The time frame used for data collection and analysis imposes limitations; the WoS is continually updated, whereas the JCR, AJG and ABDC are all taken from a snapshot in time.

The sample was limited to English-language resources and therefore provided an advantage to English-speaking nations, authors and institutions (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017). More than 7,100 languages worldwide, many with noteworthy scientific output, have been excluded from this research. We therefore underscore a need for caution in interpreting the presented data, since they are skewed towards providing visibility to those with the means and infrastructure to publish in the above-mentioned outlets and keep those who lack this access invisible, regardless of their degree of spiritual and religious involvement in management practices. For example, countries in Africa and South America score rather low in output and citations despite the major spiritual and religious awareness in those areas.

Further, the quantitative metadata analysis eliminates the ability to qualify nuances. Using metadata has limitations because it depends on accurate data entry in the databases, and some, for example, authors' keywords, have only recently come into use. Some journals may not be adequately represented in our results. Due to its indexing on the WoS beginning in 2017, we could only log a fraction of the *Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion* (JMSR) articles in our analysis. Furthermore, there is also the limit of being a forensic research method looking only at the past of the field studied. Finally, using citations as a comparison method leaves the potential for citation distortion (Osareh, 1996) through self-citation and citation staking (Collier, 2021).

Conclusion

Our study establishes the intellectual architecture of the MSR domain, revealing its transformation into a coherent scholarly field with substantive theoretical foundations. The analytical framework employed illuminates the progressive theoretical consolidation, methodological diversification and interdisciplinary expansion characterizing MSR's maturation process.

This investigation contributes to management scholarship by constructing a conceptual cartography that delineates promising research trajectories. Scholars can leverage the identified theoretical intersections between spirituality, religiosity and traditional management constructs to advance more nuanced theoretical frameworks. The pronounced bibliographic coupling among seminal works provides empirical evidence of an emerging theoretical consensus within the field.

By mapping the intellectual foundations of MSR research, we offer substantive insights for curriculum development that authentically represent the complexity and richness of spiritual and religious dimensions in organizational contexts. Educators can utilize the identified theoretical constructs and seminal contributions to enhance management pedagogy, particularly regarding ethics, leadership and organizational culture.

The empirical evidence presented regarding journal quality metrics, citation impact and scholarly engagement addresses extant critiques of MSR research legitimacy. This comprehensive mapping establishes a robust epistemological platform for future scholarly inquiry, while fostering greater theoretical integration of spiritual and religious dimensions within mainstream management discourse.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. The term refers to keywords used by authors in research papers. Also, these are metadata used in databases such as WoS and Scopus. For more information, see https://webofsciencelearning.clarivate.com/learn/course/external/view/elearning/72/web-of-science-essentials

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