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# Mapping Research Trends in Circular Economy and Logistics: A Bibliometric Analysis Based on Web of Science

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this study is to determine the direction of the literature's development and to identify trends in scholarly publications in the fields of logistics and circular economy. The PRISMA framework was used in the systematic review procedure. The Web of Science database was thoroughly searched using the "All Fields" option and the query "circular economy" AND "logistics," covering all years and indexes. A total of 1784 publications were initially acquired. Following the screening process, 1771 papers from 2004 to 2026 were incorporated into the final study. Bibliometric analytic techniques were employed in the study, and bibliometric networks were visualised using VOSviewer software. The most productive and referenced scholars and nations were identified by analysing the distribution of publications across Web of Science categories, years, and types. Keyword structures were also assessed. The results offer a framework for directing further studies in this area.

**KEYWORDS**
Circular economy
Logistics
Bibliometric analysis

## INTRODUCTION

The old linear economic model, predicated on the "take-make-dispose" strategy, is no longer as valid as it once was due to growing awareness of resource limits. The need to minimise resource waste necessitates more conscious use and consumption of resources both now and in the future, making the transition to circular economy principles inevitable (Ji-Hyland *et al.* 2025). The circular economy is based on a closed-loop supply chain approach aimed at increasing resource efficiency and improving environmental performance (Masudin *et al.* 2025). It also encompasses the restructuring of production and logistics processes and the effective management of supply chains (Makarova *et al.* 2018). In this respect, it is directly related to logistics and supply chain management (Ding *et al.* 2023). Indeed, it is stated that logistics processes and supply chain design play a critical role in the success of circular economy practices (Gonbadi *et al.* 2021).

A review of the literature revealed that, to the best of our knowledge, no study directly examined the intersection of circular economy and logistics from a bibliometric perspective. In contrast, existing bibliometric studies largely focus on circular economy and sustainable supply chain management or circular supply chain issues. In this respect, the present study systematically maps the literature at the intersection of circular economy and logistics, revealing research trends, collaboration networks, and prominent themes, thereby helping to fill this gap in the literature. In the study, bibliometric analysis, which has emerged as an effective method for revealing research trends in recent years, was preferred because traditional literature review methods are limited in scope and objectivity. In this way, the literature review has gained a more systematic and functional structure (Donthu *et al.* 2021). Various bibliometric techniques were applied to identify trends in the field (Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). Specifically, the study analysed the distribution of publications by Web of Science (WoS) categories, years, and types; identified the countries and researchers with the most publications and citations; and examined prominent keywords in the literature. Accordingly, the study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state of the literature and to guide future research.

This study is organised into six sections. After the introduction, the second section discusses the circular economy and logistics. The third section outlines the research methodology, while the fourth section presents the findings. The fifth section offers general evaluations and recommendations for future research. In the final section, the study's limitations are explained.

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## CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND LOGISTICS

The circular economy is a concept based on industrial ecology and various other disciplines, and it is generally an approach that aims to protect natural capital, increase resource efficiency, and make systems restorative and regenerative by minimising waste (Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). The comprehensive use of a circular economy, based on the conservation of resources, climate, and the environment, helps to dispose of waste in a way that is both climate-friendly and environmentally sustainable, enabling the systematic removal of pollutants (Ji-Hyland *et al.* 2025). Unlike the linear economic model, this approach, contrary to the "take-make-discard" system, aims to keep resources in use for as long as possible, minimise waste, separate welfare from the consumption of virgin resources (Sauvé *et al.* 2016), and reintegrate resources into production processes at the end of their useful life (Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). Accordingly, the circular economy is defined as a holistic economic model that preserves the economic value of materials through recycling, reuse, and recovery processes, maximises the benefits derived from resources within technical and biological cycles, and makes production and consumption systems more sustainable (Neves and Marques 2022).

Today's business models must be restructured to simultaneously address economic, environmental, and social goals, and the circular economy plays a key role in this transformation (Butt *et al.* 2024). While the circular economy offers an industrial framework that reduces waste generation and promotes reuse oriented design by ensuring that products are reintroduced into the system at the end of their useful life, the effectiveness of this framework depends largely on the proper management of material and energy flows and on coordination among businesses (Valenzuela *et al.* 2021; Seroka-Stolka and Ociepa-Kubicka 2019). In this context, reverse logistics, green logistics, and ecological logistics are highlighted as some of the fundamental building blocks of the circular economy, particularly through closed-loop supply chains (Genovese *et al.* 2017; Theeraworawit *et al.* 2022; Mallick *et al.* 2023). Reverse logistics, encompassing the processes of collecting, recycling, and reintegrating used products into the system, reduces resource losses and, working in conjunction with forward logistics, ensures that waste streams are redirected back into production processes (Rogers and Tibben-Lembke 2001; Ding *et al.* 2023; Zhang *et al.* 2021). This contributes to both reducing environmental impacts and lowering the carbon footprint by increasing resource efficiency (Wang *et al.* 2019; Butt *et al.* 2024). Therefore, while the circular economy provides a strategic framework focused on resource conservation and waste prevention, reverse logistics transforms these goals into actionable recycling and recovery processes (Ji-Hyland *et al.* 2025).

Green logistics is defined as a comprehensive set of supply chain practices and strategies encompassing material management, waste reduction, packaging methods, and transportation activities, aimed at minimising the environmental impact and energy consumption arising from product distribution processes (Seroka-Stolka and Ociepa-Kubicka 2019). Therefore, when green logistics, which focuses on minimising emissions and optimising transportation and storage, is combined with the circular economy, these practices allow for more efficient logistics operations, further enhancing sustainability outcomes (Masudin *et al.* 2025). Ecological logistics is considered a subsystem that manages the collection, transportation, and recycling of waste in a way that minimises environmental impact (Seroka-Stolka and Ociepa-Kubicka 2019). Taken together, these logistics approaches emerge as fundamental elements supporting the closed-loop structure of the circular economy and make significant contributions to the development of sustainable supply chain management (Geissdoerfer *et al.* 2017; Nascimento *et al.* 2019).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a method that enables the systematic examination and evaluation of large-scale scientific data and has become increasingly common in recent years (Oztürk *et al.* 2024). This approach has gained importance, particularly because of its ability to effectively analyse large volumes of academic data and reveal research trends, and the limitations of traditional literature review methods in terms of scope and objectivity have made bibliometric analysis a more functional alternative (Donthu *et al.* 2021). In bibliometric analyses, databases like Scopus and WoS provide extensive data access, while software such as Gephi, Leximancer, and VOSviewer facilitate the analysis and visualisation of the obtained data (Donthu *et al.* 2021; Lim *et al.* 2024). This allows for a more holistic evaluation of the literature spanning many years. Researchers use bibliometric methods to evaluate the performance of publications and journals, analyse collaboration networks, examine the structure of scientific fields, and identify research trends (Donthu *et al.* 2021). In addition, this method helps identify gaps in the literature, develop new research topics, and contextualise studies (Yörük *et al.* 2024).

### Data and Analysis

The methodological approach used in this study is based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which ensures transparency and systematicity in the selection of data sources and the analysis process (Moher *et al.* 2010; Akar *et al.* 2024). The PRISMA flowchart is presented in Figure 1 However, the WoS database was preferred for this study. WoS's selective indexing policy, which contains publications that adhere to strict worldwide academic quality standards, its standardised bibliographic record structure, and its reputation as a trustworthy data source frequently utilised in bibliometric analysis are important factors in the decision (Fang *et al.* 2018; Yan and Zhiping 2023; Oztemiz 2024; Altıntop 2025; Wan Mustapa *et al.* 2025; Lau *et al.* 2026; Taner and Kahveci 2026). Furthermore, the ability to export WoS data in a format compatible with bibliometric analysis software and the technical infrastructure supporting the analysis process were also influential factors in choosing this database. Additionally, combining records from other databases such as Dimensions and Scopus can raise the risk of methodological issues during the data merging process, like duplicate records and bibliographic discrepancies (Taner and Kahveci 2026). Therefore, the analysis was restricted to the WoS database alone in order to preserve methodological consistency in the study. However, the exclusion of some relevant publications indexed in other databases such as Scopus or Dimensions should be considered a limitation of the study. The protocol followed during the creation of the dataset is listed below:

· Identification time: April 16, 2026

· Database: WoS

· Search query expression: ("circular economy" AND "logistics"), "All Fields"

· Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed articles, proceedings papers, review articles, early access publications, book chapters

· Exclusion criteria: Corrections, editorial content, publications raising concerns, and retractions

· Sampling time constraint: 2004-April 16, 2026

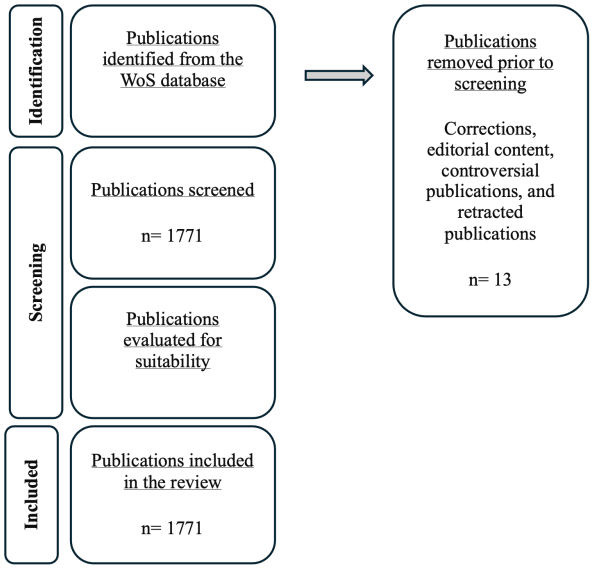


**Figure 1** The PRISMA Flowchart

On April 16, 2026, a search was conducted in the WoS database using the "All Fields" option with the search query ("circular economy" AND "logistics"). All years and all WoS indexes were included in the filtering process. In this context, a total of 1784 publications were identified, including articles, proceedings papers, review articles, early access publications, book chapters, corrections, editorial materials, publications with expressions of concern, and retracted publications, all published between 1999 and 2026 (through April 16). However, during the analysis process, corrections, editorial content, publications raising concerns, and retractions were excluded. Ultimately, 1771 studies published between 2004 and 2026 were included in the sample. The dataset created in this process was made more reliable and suitable for analysis.

During the analysis process, VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) software was used to visualise bibliometric networks and analyse relational data. This tool offers collaborative, web based methods that cover basic types of analysis, such as co-occurrence, bibliographic matching, co-citation, and co-authorship (Boni *et al.* 2026; Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). VOSviewer's visualisation, mapping, and multidimensional analysis features, which enable detailed examination of datasets, have been key factors in its selection. In addition, thanks to its user friendly interface, VOSviewer enables researchers to more easily identify relationships and developmental trends in the literature (Dirik *et al.* 2023).

Within the studies examined, various techniques were employed in bibliometric analyses to identify the field's structural characteristics and trends (Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). In this context, the distribution of publications by WoS categories, publication years, and types was examined, the countries and researchers that produced the most publications and received the most citations were identified, and the keywords that stand out in the literature were analysed. In all network analyses, the Full Counting method was preferred, and the Association Strength normalisation method was used. Clustering operations were performed based on VOSviewer's default clustering algorithm and default parameters. The threshold values used in the analyses are explained under the relevant analysis headings.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the distribution of the publications examined in this study according to WoS categories. According to Table 1, the studies are primarily grouped under the fields of Environmental Sciences and Green Sustainable Science Technology. However, it is also noteworthy that significant research has been conducted in environmental, industrial, and manufacturing engineering. Table 2 shows the distribution of the studies examined by year.

**Table 1** WoS Categories of the Studies Reviewed

| WoS Categories | Number of Studies | % |
|---|---|---|
| Environmental Sciences | 535 | 13.60 |
| Green Sustainable Science Technology | 505 | 12.84 |
| Operations Research Management Science | 346 | 8.80 |
| Management | 335 | 8.52 |
| Environmental Studies | 295 | 7.50 |
| Engineering Environmental | 248 | 6.31 |
| Engineering Industrial | 246 | 6.25 |
| Engineering Manufacturing | 196 | 4.98 |
| Business | 156 | 3.97 |
| Computer Science Interdisciplinary Applications | 115 | 2.92 |

**Note:** The top 10 categories with the most publications are listed. A publication may appear in more than one category.

**Table 2** Distribution of the Studies by Year

| Publication Year | Number of Studies | Publication Year | Number of Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2026 | 125 | 2015 | 8 |
| 2025 | 367 | 2014 | 5 |
| 2024 | 263 | 2013 | 5 |
| 2023 | 236 | 2012 | 4 |
| 2022 | 250 | 2011 | 3 |
| 2021 | 187 | 2010 | 8 |
| 2020 | 124 | 2009 | 4 |
| 2019 | 93 | 2008 | 9 |
| 2018 | 58 | 2007 | 7 |
| 2017 | 15 | 2006 | 3 |
| 2016 | 9 | 2004 | 1 |

According to Table 2, WoS publications in the field in question were published between 2004 and 2026. It is also evident that the number of publications has increased in recent years. Of these studies, 1218 are articles, 314 are proceedings papers, 244 are review articles, 72 are early access, 21 are book chapters, and 13 are other types. Figure 2 shows a distribution of the compiled publications by type.

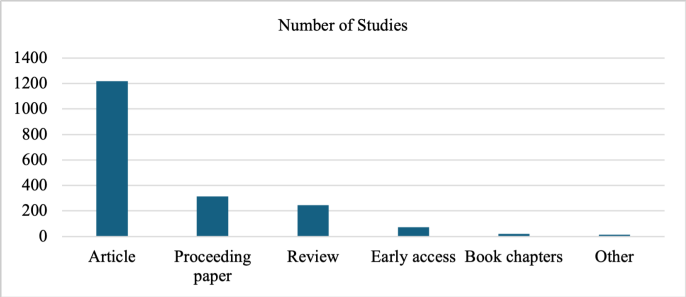


**Figure 2** Distribution of studies by type

As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of studies are journal articles. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the number of conference papers, review articles, and, in particular, book chapters is quite limited.

### Co-author Analysis

Based on a co-authorship analysis, a network map was created using the criteria of at least 1 publication and at least 1 citation to identify the most linked and collaborative authors. According to the authors with the most links, there are 547 authors grouped into 35 clusters, totalling 1559 links.

**Table 3** Most Productive and Most Cited Authors

| Author | Studies | Author | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Joseph Sarkis | 12 | Joseph Sarkis | 1683 |
| Kannan Govindan | 12 | Abraham Zhang | 1431 |
| Borja Ponte | 11 | Yigit Kazancoğlu | 1128 |
| Yigit Kazancoğlu | 10 | Mahtab Kouhizadeh | 1005 |
| Patricia Guarnieri | 10 | Stefan Gold | 996 |
| Sunil Luthra | 9 | Pasquale Del Vecchio | 994 |
| Sachin Kumar Mangla | 9 | Steve Evans | 972 |
| Anil Kumar | 8 | Donald Huisingh | 970 |
| Abraham Zhang | 8 | Ana B. Lopes de Sousa Jabbour | 970 |
| Javier Puente | 8 | Piera Centobelli / Roberto Cerchione | 959 |

**Note:** The top 10 most cited authors are listed.

Table 3 lists the top 10 most cited authors. According to the table, Joseph Sarkis and Kannan Govindan were identified as the authors with the most publications in the field, each with 12. Borja Ponte (11 publications), Yigit Kazancoğlu (10 publications), and Patricia Guarnieri (10 publications) are among the researchers with the most publications. In terms of citation numbers, Joseph Sarkis, Abraham Zhang, and Yigit Kazancoğlu stand out as the top three most cited authors. Figure 3, shows the co-authorship links and a graph illustrating the changes over the years.

When evaluated by colour distribution (Figure 3), the purple tones (2020–2021) indicate that some early stage studies were conducted through scattered collaborations. In contrast, the green tones (around 2022–2023) indicate a marked increase in collaborations during this period, while the yellow tones (2024–2025) are primarily observed in newly formed small clusters, revealing that the field is still expanding and that new researchers are joining the network.

### Citation Analysis by Country

Geographic mapping represents the spatial distribution of research productivity across countries and institutions (Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). As part of this study, an analysis was conducted on 83 observation units linked to one another, based on the criteria that a country must have published at least 1 paper and received at least 1 citation, in order to create a network map of citations received by studies in the fields of the circular economy and logistics, categorised by their countries of origin. 18 clusters and 8809 total link strength were identified. Table 4 shows the number of citations and publications by country.

**Table 4** Number of Citations and Publications by Country

| Country | Studies | Citations |
|---|---|---|
| China | 259 | 8756 |
| United Kingdom | 205 | 12314 |
| India | 201 | 7663 |
| Italy | 156 | 5937 |
| United States | 150 | 7895 |
| Brazil | 137 | 5543 |
| Germany | 118 | 5264 |
| Spain | 103 | 2758 |
| Australia | 93 | 4299 |
| France | 83 | 5660 |

**Note:** The top 10 countries with the highest number of published articles are listed.

Among the countries with the most publications are China (259 publications), the United Kingdom (205 publications) and India (201 publications); among the countries with the most citations are the United Kingdom (12314 citations), China (8756 citations), the United States (7895 citations), India (7663 citations) and Italy (5937 citations). Turkey ranks 16th in the number of publications (46) and 14th in citations (1847). Citation networks illustrating the citation analysis of countries and changes over the years are shown in Figure 4.

When Figure 4 is evaluated primarily in terms of colour distribution, the fact that purple tones (2021) appear in more limited areas indicates that the citation network was narrower in the early period. In contrast, the green tones concentrated at the centre of the network (particularly during the 2022–2023 period) are striking. This situation indicates that citations between countries increased significantly during those years and that scientific interaction intensified. On the other hand, the fact that yellow tones (2024) are more observed across the network and on new links indicates that new countries have recently been added to the network and

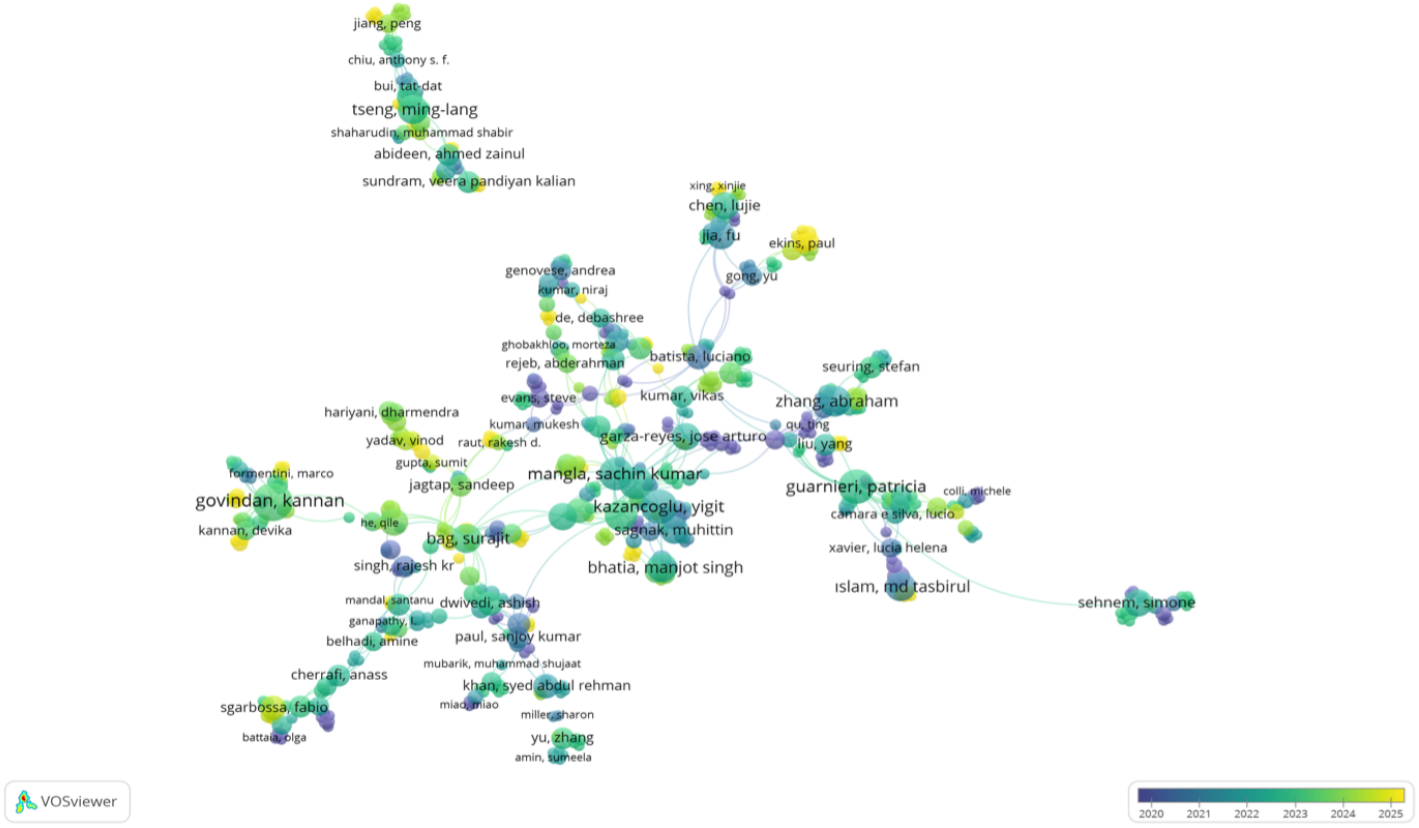


**Figure 3** Co-author links and densities by year

that citation relationships continue to expand. In terms of density, the network has a distinct core structure, particularly comprising countries such as the USA, the UK, China, India, and Brazil. The fact that these countries are represented by larger nodes and have numerous connections indicates their central position in the citation network. In contrast, countries located farther from the centre of the network and represented by smaller nodes have a limited number of connections.

### Keywords Analysis

Keyword analysis identifies the most common terms by analysing the keywords authors include in their works, providing insight into the most frequently researched topics and the evolution of the relevant field (Donthu *et al.* 2021; Garcilazo-López *et al.* 2026). In the present study, the minimum number of repetitions for a keyword was set at 5. The analysis, conducted on 179 observation units, identified 13 clusters and 5448 total link strengths. The most frequently occurring keywords are shown in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, the terms "circular economy," "sustainability," "reverse logistics," "supply chain management" and "closed-loop supply chain" are the keywords most frequently used by researchers in their publications. These terms form the core of the relevant literature and are the keywords most frequently linked to other terms. Keyword links and the density of word usage by year are shown in Figure 5.

When Figure 5 is examined in terms of colour distribution, it is thought that the purple tones (2021), representing the early period, indicate that there was initially a focus on more specific topics. In contrast, the concept of circular economy, which is at the centre of the network, is predominantly concentrated in green tones and has become significantly prominent in the literature, especially in the 2022–2023 period, with studies concentrating around this axis.The fact that shades of yellow (2024) are seen more frequently in terms such as machine learning, recycling, and sustainable management indicates that new technologies and application focused initiatives have been on the rise recently.

When evaluated by density, the circular economy is by far the largest and most central node in the network. This indicates that the concept is a central theme in the literature and has strong

**Table 5** Most Frequently Repeated Keywords

| Keyword | Number of Repetitions |
|---|---|
| Circular Economy | 1035 |
| Sustainability | 314 |
| Reverse Logistics | 287 |
| Supply Chain Management | 175 |
| Closed-Loop Supply Chain | 169 |
| Industry 4.0 | 103 |
| Recycling | 79 |
| Remanufacturing | 78 |
| Waste Management | 71 |
| Sustainable Development | 63 |

**Note:** The top 10 most frequently occurring keywords are listed.

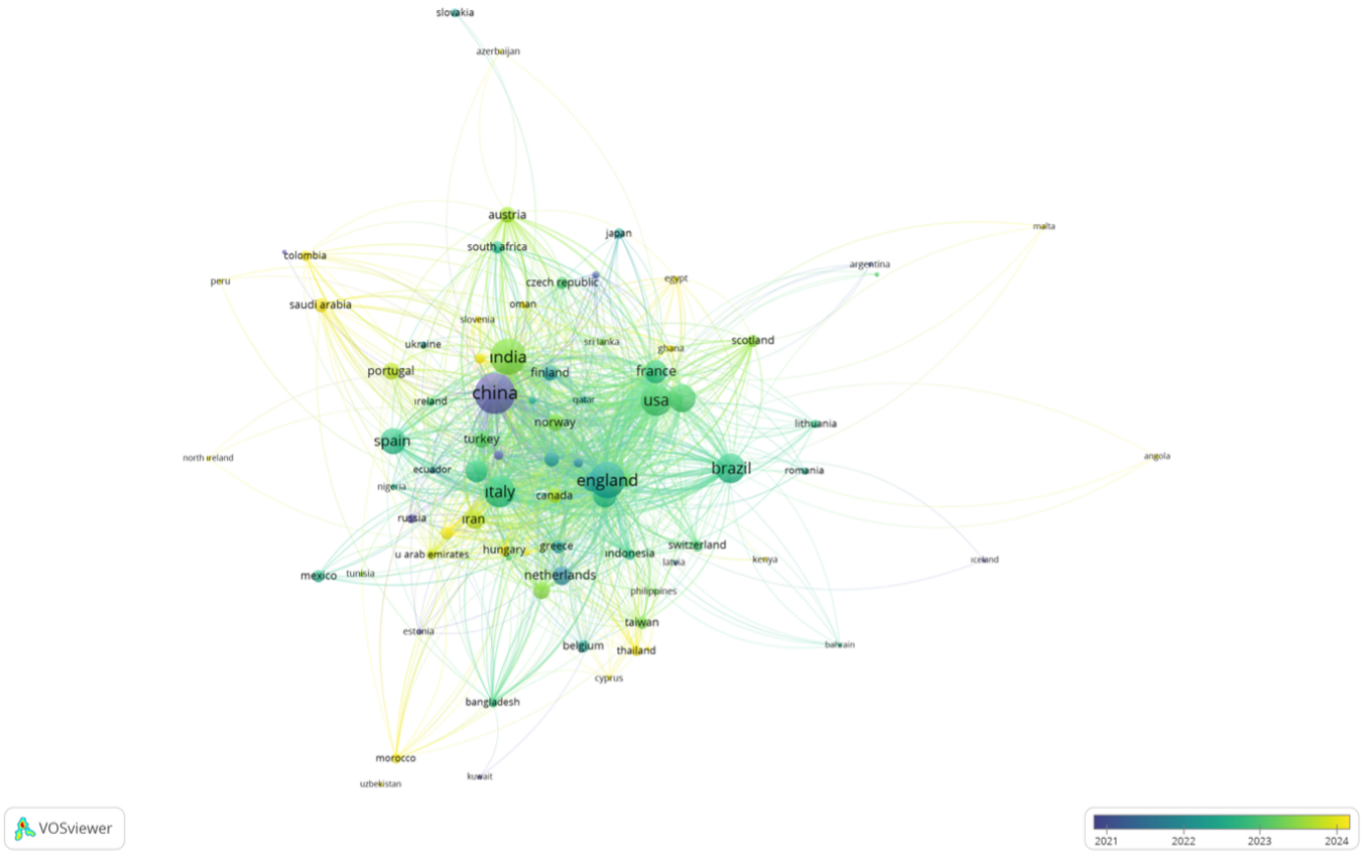


**Figure 4** Country-Citation Links and Their Densities by Year

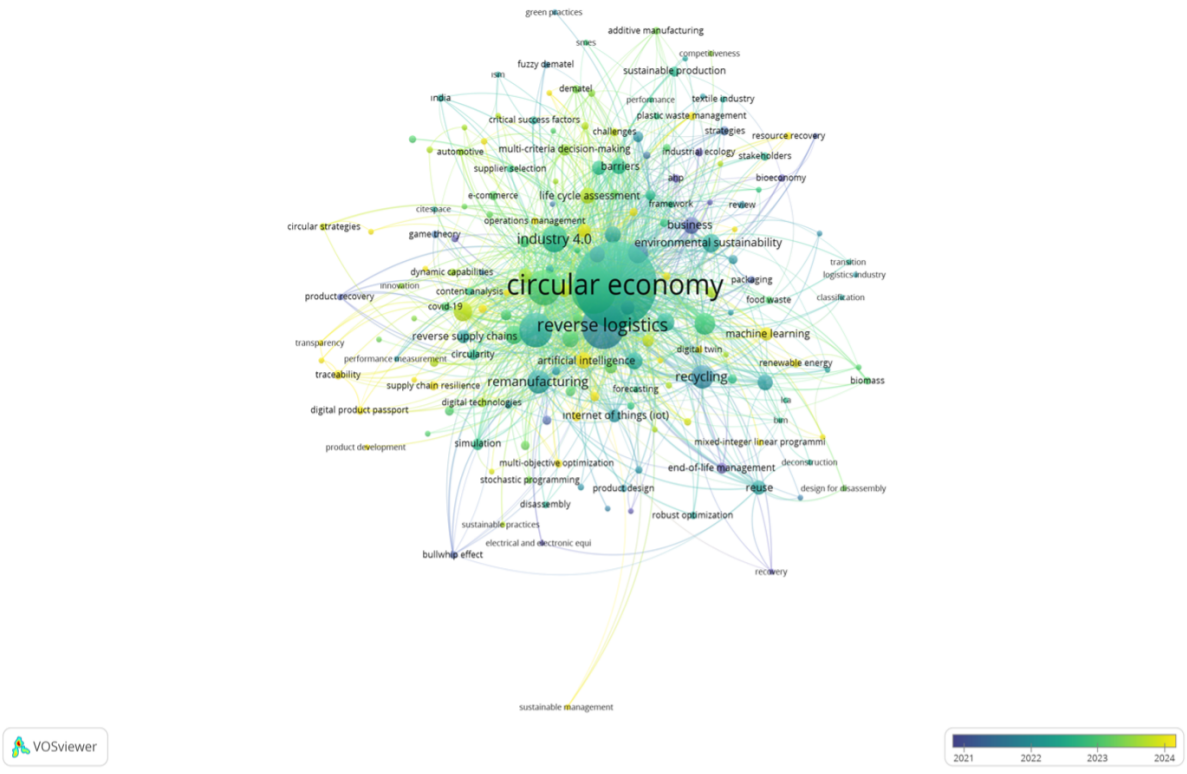


**Figure 5** Most Frequently Used Keyword Links and Their Density by Year

links to other keywords. In addition, the fact that concepts such as reverse logistics, recycling, remanufacturing, and Industry 4.0 are represented by relatively large nodes demonstrates that these topics are among the fundamental components of the circular economy literature. Furthermore, the identification of links between the relevant field and keywords such as environment, digital transformation, and sustainability indicates interdisciplinary interaction.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, which aimed to review publications in the fields of the circular economy and logistics and to identify development trends, a methodological approach based on the PRISMA framework was adopted to ensure transparency and systematicity in selecting data sources and conducting the analysis. In this context, bibliometric analysis techniques were used to identify the field's structural characteristics and trends. VOSviewer software was used to visualise bibliometric networks and analyse relational data. The findings are summarised below.

In the distribution of the publications by WoS categories, the field of Environmental Sciences accounts for the largest share. When examining the distribution of publications by year, an overall upward trend is evident, with the highest number in 2025. By publication type, articles make up the vast majority of studies. The author's analyses reveal that Joseph Sarkis and Kannan Govindan are the researchers with the most publications in the field. In addition, it has been determined that Joseph Sarkis is also the most cited author. An analysis of the temporal evolution of co-authorship networks reveals that early period studies featured more dispersed collaborations, whereas collaborations increased significantly between 2021 and 2024, with smaller, new clusters emerging after 2024. In country based analyses, China had the most publications, while the United Kingdom had the most citations. When evaluated in terms of country citation relationships and network density, it is evident that the United States, the United Kingdom, China, India, and Brazil form a strong core at the centre of the network.

According to the keyword analysis, the three most frequently used terms are "circular economy", "sustainability" and "reverse logistics". In particular, it was determined that the concept of the "circular economy" is the most dominant node in terms of both frequency of use and centrality within the network. However, the strong links between different keywords indicate that the field has an interdisciplinary structure. The findings present important implications for future studies. In particular, the small clusters that have emerged in recent years among co-authors are increasing collaboration opportunities for new researchers. At the same time, the identification of links between the circular economy, logistics, and other concepts, along with the recent increase in research on new technologies and applications such as machine learning, highlights significant potential for interdisciplinary research.


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### Ethical standard

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.


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### Availability of data and material

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### Conflicts of interest

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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