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Mapping the Landscape of Whistleblowing and Culture: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to shed light on contemporary and emerging trends of whistleblowing behavior and culture by using descriptive and network analyses to present a comprehensive bibliometric mapping. The existing body of literature has approached the examination of culture and how it influences organizational responses, ethical decision-making processes, whistleblowing behavior, and the efficacy of protective measures in a variety of ways from different disciplines. Using Scopus, 296 publications related to whistleblowing culture and behavior from 1996 to 2023, with 560 authors, 219 source documents, 46 nations, and 277 institutions, were identified for analysis using the Bibliometrix R program, which included bibliometric preprocessing that included scanning, cleaning, and harmonization of the chosen articles. Overall, the results of this bibliometric study provide useful information such as networking and co-working networks, the most productive countries and sources, the most cited documents, the most productive contributors, the most used keywords, and themes mapping information from the study on whistleblowing and culture. The findings of this study can serve as a resource for academics to see how authors, documents, and journals are performing today and how topics have changed over time.

1. Introduction

One way of uncovering unethical practices such as fraud, corruption, abuse of power and abuse of public funds is through whistleblowing [34]. Reporting is a complex process, influenced by social, organisational and cultural factors. The impact of cultural norms and workplaces on whistleblowing in terms of willingness to report abuses in health care and the workplace has been extensively investigated.

In this regard, research based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory shows that cultures with a higher degree of individualism, a lower degree of power distance, and a low degree of uncertainty

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avoidance are more likely to encourage whistleblowing [36] [32]. Individual willingness to report depends strongly on cultural context. In an individualistic culture that emphasizes individual autonomy, people may feel more comfortable reporting wrongdoing, but in a collectivist culture, especially in parts of Asia, people may prefer relationships to tasks and be reluctant to report wrongdoing for fear of antagonism or social rejection [1]. In collectivist cultures, trust and open communication are more likely to succeed than the mere provision of formal reporting procedures, which underlines the need for organisations to align their whistleblowing policies with their employees' values [18].

The health care sector provides a case study in how culture affects whistleblowing. Research shows that health professionals tend to view whistleblowing as disloyal and may therefore avoid reporting misconduct [23]. For example, nurses may be reluctant to speak up for fear of damaging relations in the workplace [29]. This may be exacerbated in hierarchical environments where employees are afraid of reprisal for reporting misconduct [24]. These concerns range from being unprotected, fired, blacklisted, sued and ostracised to losing their job and being sidelined [27]. It is essential to understand and address these cultural barriers in order to create a culture in health organisations where whistleblowing is seen as a constructive contribution rather than a breach of trust.

From a behavioural perspective, Kish-Gephart et al. [20] describe defensive silence as when employees do not report misconduct because they do not wish to compromise their safety and security, and a silencing culture [40] where open communication is suppressed by communication hierarchies and standards is a known phenomenon that can undermine the ethical standards and effectiveness of organisations.

Alongside culture, Kaptein [19] and Potipiroon and Wongpreedee [34] argue that the ethical environment of an organisation plays an important role in determining the behaviour of whistleblowers. A supportive climate fosters internal whistleblowing, while a punitive or indifferent one stifles it. In addition, research shows that an ethical culture within an organisation increases the likelihood of whistleblowers [14] [45]. This ethical framework is closely linked to the frameworks of governance, compliance and accountability. According to Sengur [38], good corporate governance requires clear policies and procedures to report breaches and ensure accountability. Employees are more likely to report misconduct in the expectation of positive change rather than negative results if they feel that their company values ethical behaviour and rewards whistleblowers.

Beyond organisational factors, the legal environment is also crucial, as while weak legal frameworks expose whistleblowers to retaliation, which discourages reporting, strong legal protection of whistleblowers increases the rate of reporting (see Alleyne et al., [4]; Brody et al., [8]). The risk of reporting is higher in societies where whistleblowers face social or legal sanctions, as these sanctions interact with cultural factors which also influence whistleblowing behaviour [31]. Strong legal frameworks protecting whistleblowers are essential to promote an organisational culture of accountability, which is essential to promote moral behaviour in a variety of contexts.

At the societal level, whistleblowers are considered heroes in some societies and traitors in others, so social norms and cultural perspectives on the issue are important factors in addition to individual and organisational factors [18]. Leadership can help to set the ethical tone of a company and create an environment in which employees feel they can report ethical behaviour, but dealing with these cultural nuances is part of the challenge for organisations to create an environment conducive to ethical reporting [23]. Other strategies, such as the availability of transparent and easily accessible reporting mechanisms or the use of technologies such as anonymous reporting systems, can facilitate employee disclosure in cultures where direct confrontation is discouraged [17].

This study examines the relationship between whistleblowing and employee culture through bibliometric analysis. By analysing publication patterns and citation networks, identifying significant historical publications, important research references, major thematic clusters and trends in scientific topics, emerging and emerging literary keywords, and key elements of future research agendas, bibliometric analysis provides a unique insight into the process of knowledge creation and its impact on the scientific community. Bibliometric analysis is a relatively new method in business research that uses powerful tools to show the pattern and evolution of an area [12]. The statistical bibliometric analysis techniques were applied by R-studio bibliographic software (e.g., Bibliometrix [6] [10] [3]) to answer the following questions of the research:

Q1. What is the current status and trends in publications in the area of the study of whistleblowing and culture?

Q2. What are the most important authors, magazines, institutions, countries and collaborations?

Q3. What are the most cited papers, key words and trends in topics in publications?

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection

Bibliometric analysis and quantitative analysis of scientific publications can provide an overview of research trends and performance metrics in a specific area [46]. Bibliometric analysis, which provides a retrospective view of the literature and allows for the evaluation of the contributions of scholars in a specific field, is based on the use of statistical and mathematical techniques for the analysis of scientific publications [30].

For a variety of methodological and practical reasons, Scopus has been selected as the sole data source for this study: (1) Scopus is the most commonly used database for comprehensive journal coverage and analysis [13] [46], and offers broader coverage of journals than the databases in the area, especially in the interdisciplinary areas of whistleblowing and organizational culture; (2) Scopus provides faster and more powerful citation analysis capabilities [6], which are necessary for bibliometric studies to investigate citation patterns and the influence of research; (3) Scopus includes more articles on whistleblowing research than the Web of Science in the social sciences and business management; and (4) a standardised Scopus metadata structure makes it more compatible with the Bibliometric R package for the analysis. While we acknowledge that using a single database can lead to coverage bias and does not capture all relevant publications, the comprehensive nature of Scopus in the relevant areas, together with its improved bibliometric analysis capability, makes it the most suitable choice for this study.

Scopus was selected as the sole data source for this study for several methodological and practical reasons: (1) Scopus is the most popular database for detailed coverage and analysis of journals [13] [46]; (2) Scopus offers faster and more powerful citation analysis capabilities for bibliometric studies to explore citation patterns and impact of research [6]; (3) it has a larger journal coverage of whistleblowing research than the Social Sciences and Business Management databases and (4) it is more compatible with the Bibliometric R analysis package because of the standardised structure of the Scopus metadata. Although we recognise that the use of a single database may lead to coverage bias and may not include all relevant publications, Scopus is the best choice for this study due to its wide coverage of relevant areas and improved bibliometric analysis capabilities.

2.2 The search query string

On 10 November 2024, a search was made in the Scopus database for articles on whistleblowing studies. The search used keywords and their synonyms, using only terms that were in the title of the article, as the title is the first point of contact for the reader and needs to be interesting and informative [11]. This search was made in Scopus using TITLE and KEY functions, without any other search restrictions, for publications containing the words whistleblower or whistleblowing and culture in their title or keywords, to obtain a comprehensive list of relevant literature to analyse.

2.3. Data cleaning and data processing

The flowchart in Figure 1 describes the systematic approach to literature selection based on the PRISMA guidelines modified for bibliometric studies. The initial search query in Scopus on 10 November 2024 produced 355 records with "whistleblowing" or "whistle blower" AND "culture" in their title or keywords. A total of 355 records were exported to Microsoft Excel for processing.

Following this initial step, the raw Scopus data contained a few discrepancies which required manual correction. These include: (1) variations in the formatting of the author's name (for example, 'Smith, J.' versus 'Smith, John') and missing author names (n=8), (2) duplicate journal entries (n=1), and (3) incomplete and missing metadata fields (n=50). In order to ensure the integrity of the data, missing author information and incomplete fields have been cross-checked with the original publications and the institutional website. As no additional search restrictions were applied to ensure a comprehensive search, including year, time frame, language and source type, the final collection of 296 publications from the Scopus database was exported in CSV format for analysis.

Once the data cleaning process was completed, the study used the R-studio bibliographic method, specifically using the Bibliometrix package as recommended by previous researchers [6] [3] [10]. Biblioshiny, an open source tool in the R environment, enables a comprehensive scientific mapping of the scientific literature. It offers flexibility, integration with other statistical and graphical packages and easy upgradeability [6].

Despite these rigorous efforts, certain data cleaning limitations remained. In particular, certain author names and institutional affiliations could not be verified with certainty. These constraints may have affected the accuracy of the analysis of the collaboration network and the ranking of authors. For example, if an author is published under various names which have not been identified, their h-index and total number of citations may be underestimated. Similarly, data on institutional mergers or changes in names may influence affiliation statistics. These problems are inherent in large-scale bibliometric studies and are recognized limitations rather than fundamental methodological errors.

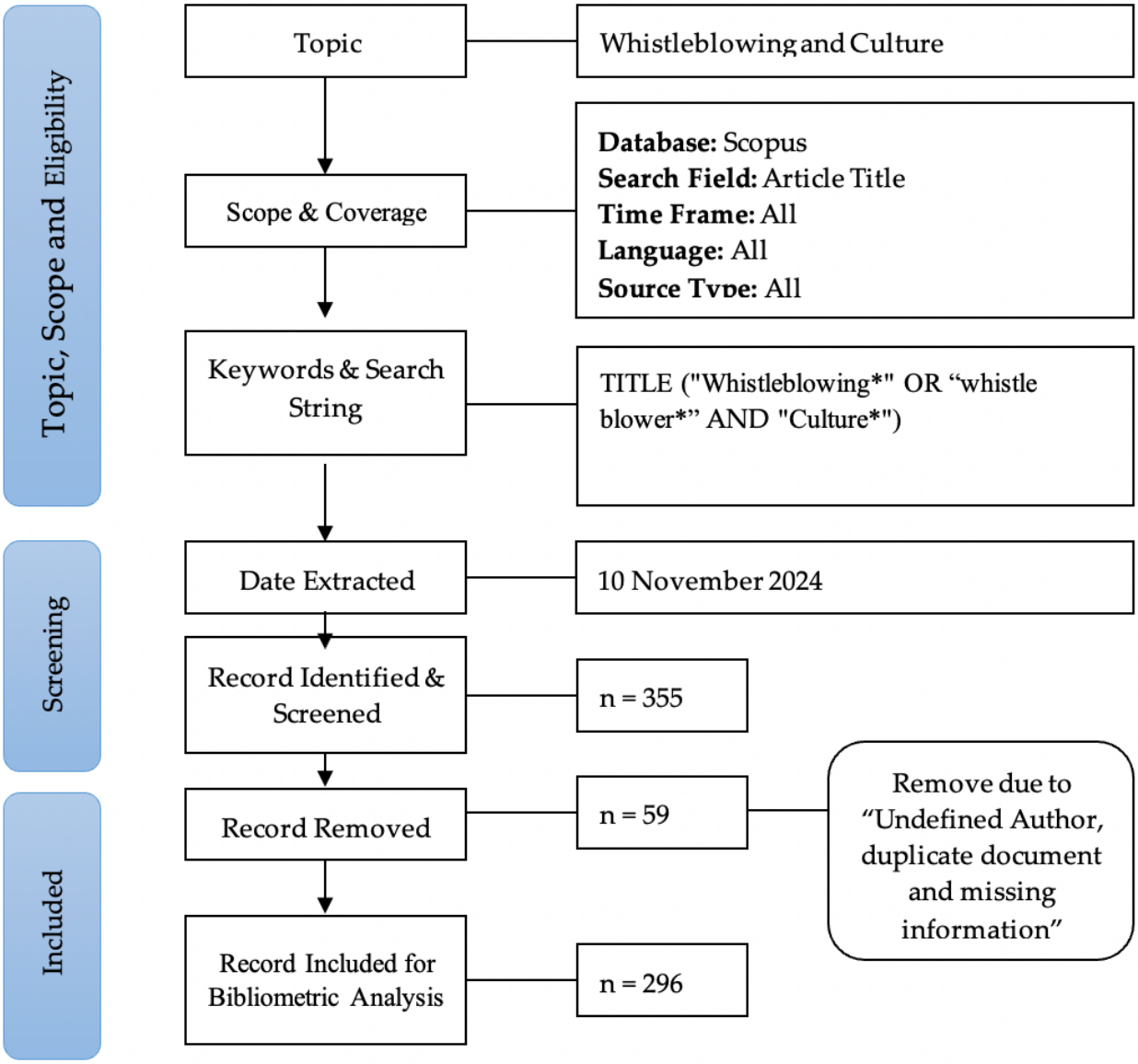


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the search strategy, Source: Zakaria et al. [45]

3. Finding and discussion

3.1 Main information

Table 1 presents key data from the study, summarizing whistleblowing and culture research from 1996 to 2023. A total of 296 documents were submitted, averaging 15.12 citations per document. The average annual growth rate was 13.7 per cent, which shows the significant growth and increasing interest in this area of research. The fact that 13.18 percent of the documents have international co-authors demonstrates that research into whistleblowing is a global endeavour. These documents come from 219 sources and represent a diversity of views, particularly in the cultural context and in the context of international cooperation. There are 560 authors, on average 2.11 authors per document, and 747 keywords that authors provide.

Table 1
Main information of the publication collection

Description	Results
Timespan	1996 - 2023
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	219
Documents	296
Annual Growth Rate %	13.7
Document Average Age	8.88
Average citations per doc	15.12
Keywords Plus (ID)	829
Author's Keywords (DE)	747
Authors	560
Authors of single-authored docs	118
Single-authored docs	125
Co-Authors per Doc	2.11
International co-authorships %	13.18

Figure 2 shows the information on and documents relating to whistleblowing obtained from Scopus, which classifies documents in different formats, such as books, articles, reports and other documents. As can be seen, articles account for 187 of the total (63 per cent), followed by book chapters (11 per cent), reviews (8 per cent), commentaries (6 per cent), articles (4 per cent), conference speeches (3 per cent), opinions (2 per cent), letters (1 per cent) and one short research paper (0.3 per cent).

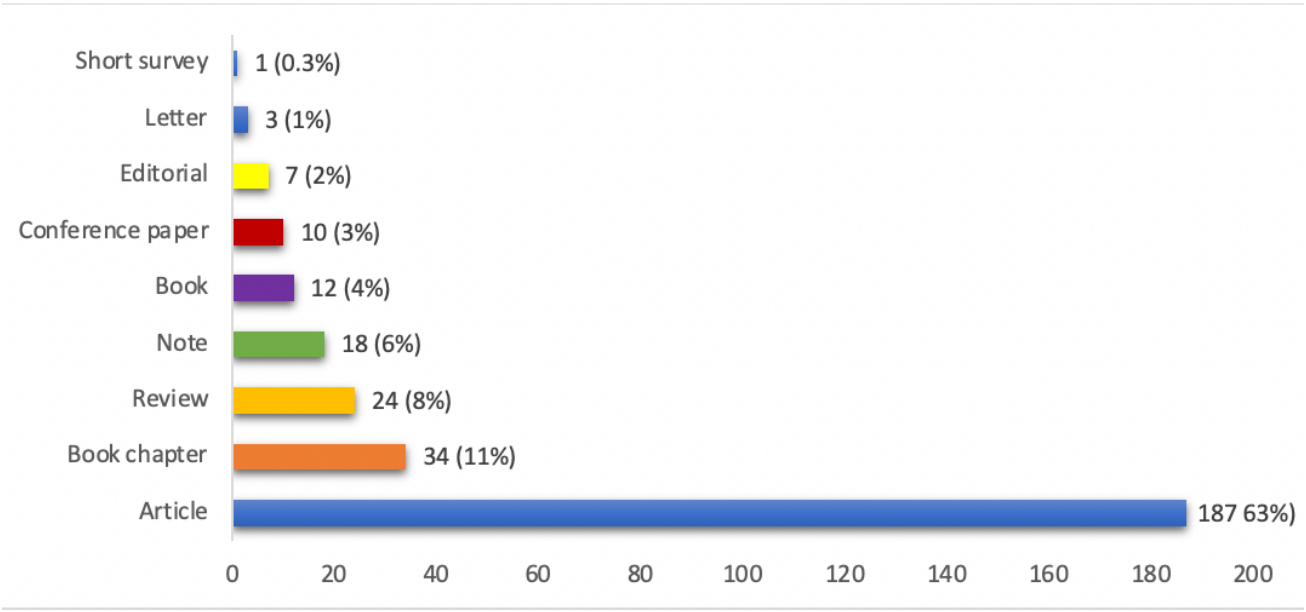


Fig. 2. Document Type

The languages used in the 290 documents on academic whistleblowing and cultural studies are illustrated in Figure 3, showing that English is the dominant language (98 per-cent) and that German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese are very marginal (fewer than four documents each, less than one percent of the total). The dominance of English in academic publishing reflects a wider trend towards its use as a lingua franca, a common language for sharing research outside the original language.

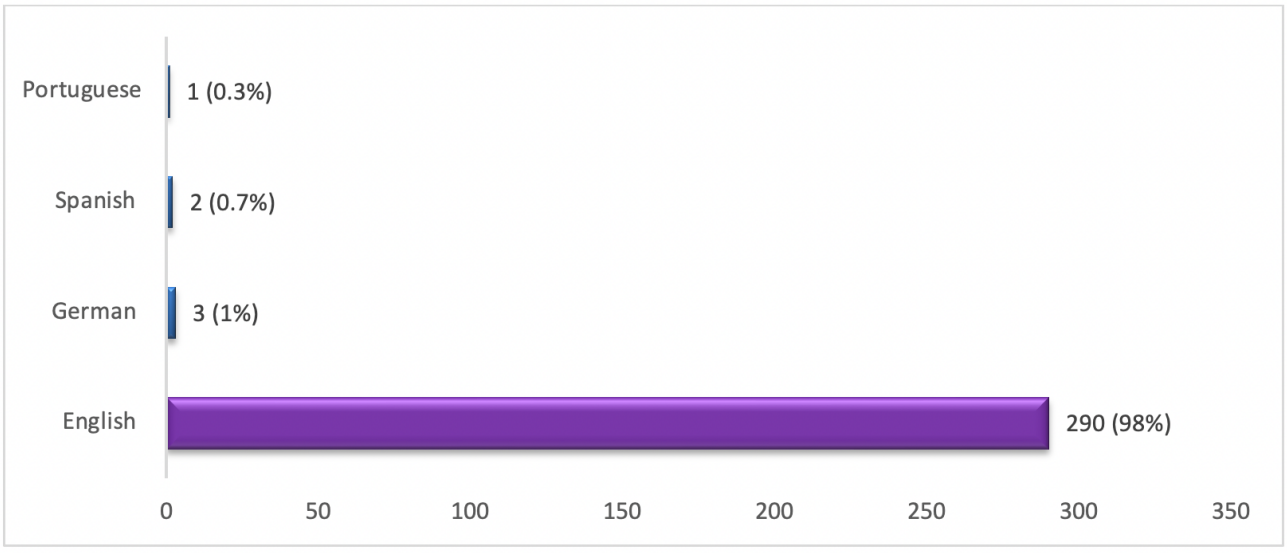


Fig. 1. Language used for publications

Table 2 shows the distribution of publications on whistleblowing and culture from the Scopus database. Most studies are in social sciences (24.28%, 134 documents), followed by business, management, and accounting (18.30%, 101 publications), medicine (13.59%, 75 publications), economics, econometrics, and finance (10.33%, 57 publications), nursing (8.70%, 48 publications), and arts and humanities (8.15%, 45 publications). Additionally, several subject areas have fewer than 20 publications each, including engineering, environmental science, computer science, decision

sciences, health professions, psychology, agricultural and biological sciences, energy, mathematics, biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology, and dentistry.

Table 2
Subject Area

Subject Area	Total Publications (TP)	Percentage (%)
Social Sciences	134	24.28%
Business, Management and Accounting	101	18.30%
Medicine	75	13.59%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	57	10.33%
Nursing	48	8.70%
Arts and Humanities	45	8.15%
Engineering	17	3.08%
Environmental Science	17	3.08%
Computer Science	13	2.36%
Decision Sciences	11	1.99%
Health Professions	11	1.99%
Psychology	8	1.45%
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	6	1.09%
Energy	3	0.54%
Mathematics	3	0.54%
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	2	0.36%
Dentistry	1	0.18%

3.2 Annual publication trends

Figure 4 shows the development of scientific output in the field of research from 1996 to 2023. The trend in scholarly output can be divided into 1996-2010 and 2011-2023. The second period (2011-23) was characterised by very high production (232 publications, or 78 percent of the total, four times higher than the first period) and high annual output, with positive but variable annual growth rates. On the other hand, production was low in the first period (64 documents) and annual output was less than 10 in the first 28 years. Another indication of the continuing interest in this area is the high output in the last five years (2018-23), accounting for 44 percent of all the articles published in the last 28 years. The figures clearly show the development of the field during the period studied, with a noticeable increase in the interest in the field from 2012 (11 papers, or 4 percent) to now. This shows that whistleblowing and culture have received more attention in recent years as research topics. The continued relevance of this topic and the potential for further expanding the knowledge base in this area are further supported by the high level of publications in recent years.

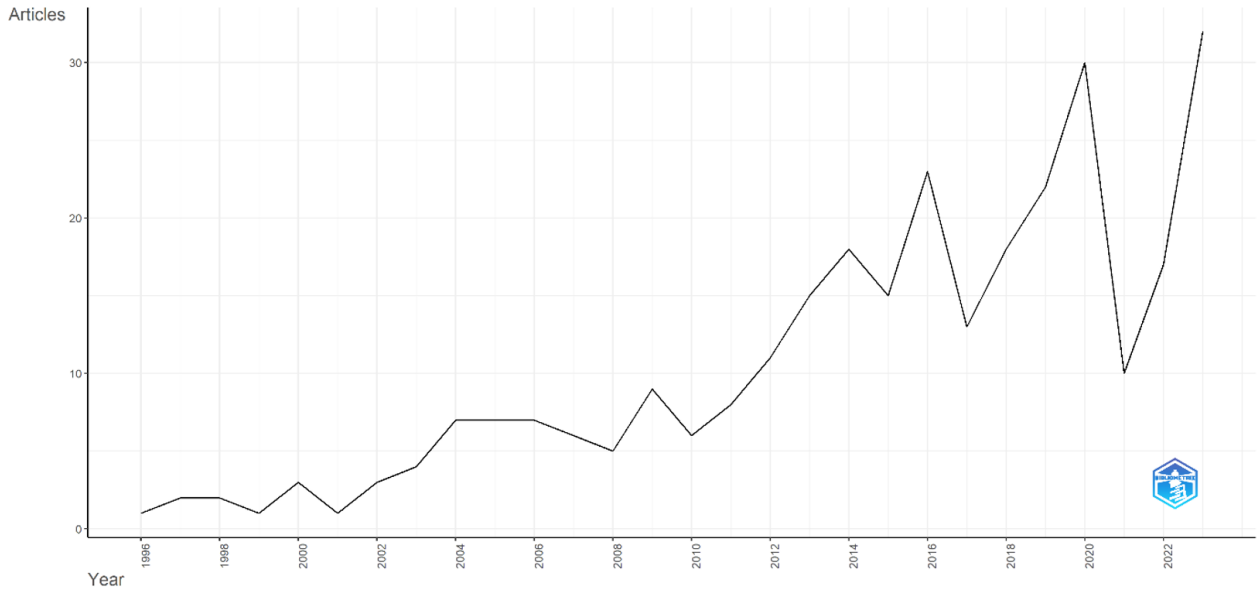


Fig. 2. Annual scientific production

Table 3 summarises the number of published articles, the average total number of citations per article and the average total citations per year in the area of research on whistleblowing and culture.

Table 3
Average Citation Per Year, TC: total citations

Year	No of Articles	Mean TC per Art	Mean TC per Year	Citable Years
1996	1	5.00	0.17	29
1997	2	39.00	1.39	28
1998	2	12.50	0.46	27
1999	1	6.00	0.23	26
2000	3	32.67	1.31	25
2001	1	7.00	0.29	24
2002	3	35.00	1.52	23
2003	4	42.75	1.94	22
2004	7	37.43	1.78	21
2005	7	19.14	0.96	20
2006	7	17.86	0.94	19

2007	6	70.50	3.92	18
2008	5	73.00	4.29	17
2009	9	23.44	1.47	16
2010	6	23.67	1.58	15
2011	8	48.25	3.45	14
2012	11	22.27	1.71	13
2013	15	11.93	0.99	12
2014	18	13.67	1.24	11
2015	15	11.73	1.17	10
2016	23	9.74	1.08	9
2017	13	13.85	1.73	8
2018	18	6.11	0.87	7
2019	22	8.05	1.34	6
2020	30	6.93	1.39	5
2021	10	3.40	0.85	4
2022	17	5.18	1.73	3
2023	32	2.09	1.04	2

Figure 5's citation graph shows the average yearly citation. The relatively low average number of citations between 1996 and 1999 indicates that the study was not well-known and had no impact. The following years saw a sharp rise in the average number of citations, which peaked in 2007, 2008, and 2011. This suggests that the research published during these years had a bigger influence. Citation averages from 2018 to 2023 are noteworthy but lower, indicating ongoing interest in current research. Significant fluctuations in average citations over time may be caused by research trends, topic relevance, and article quality. All things considered, these results show how the impact of research changes over time and how the scientific community may disagree about the field's significance and acknowledgment.

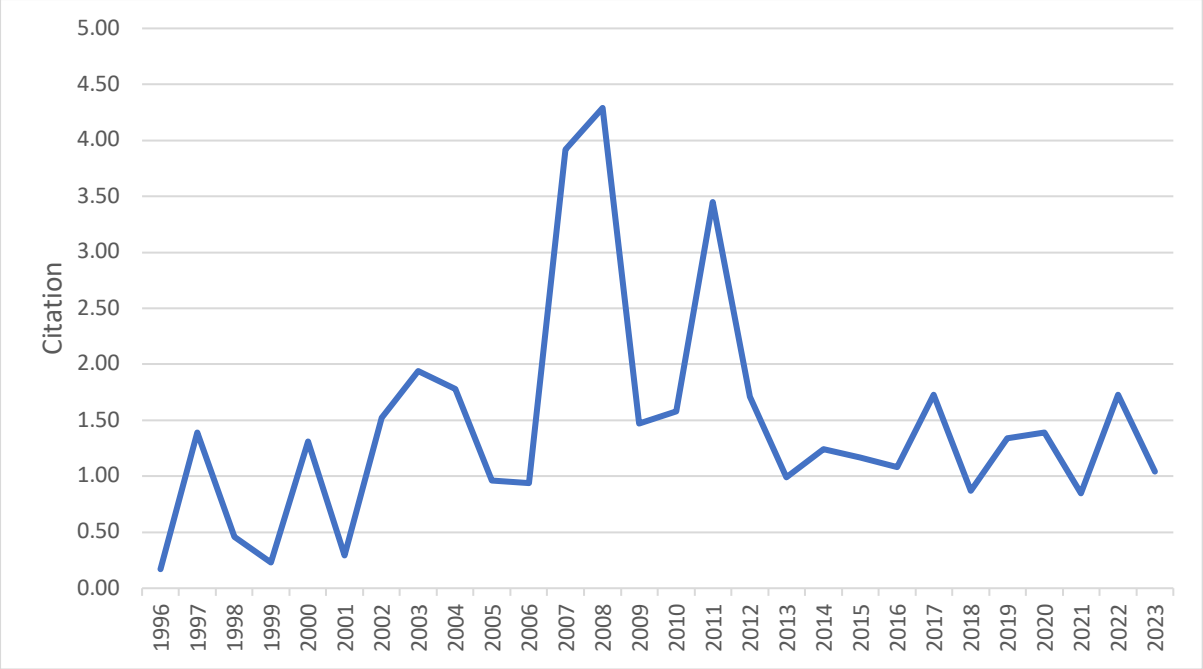


Fig. 3. Average Citation Per Year

3.3 Analysis of Relevant Journal

Table 4 shows the top 10 most relevant sources in terms of number of publications and H-index. In this study, the h index is used as the main measure for assessing both productivity and impact. The h index is the number of documents (h) which each have been quoted at least once in h. For example, an h index of 20 means that the researcher has published 20 papers, each of which has been quoted 20 times or more. This metric is useful because it assesses both the volume of work and its impact. The h-index is applicable to different bibliometric units, such as individual authors, countries, periodicals and institutes.

The Journal of Business Ethics has the highest influence with a h index of 9. Other prominent journals in the top ten are the International Journal of Health Policy and Management (h-index of 6), BMJ Journal of Medical Ethics (online) (h-index of 4), Employee Responsibility and Rights (h-index of 3), Journal of Financial Crime (h-index of 3), Journal of Advanced Nursing (h-index of 3), and Journal of Ethics (h-index of 3). In the table, TC refers to total citations and PY_start refers to the start of the year in which the publication took place.

Table 4
Top 10 most relevant journals

Source	h_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Journal of Business Ethics	9	718	10	1998
International Journal of Health Policy and Management	6	130	9	2015
Journal of Medical Ethics	4	128	4	2004
BMJ (Online)	3	28	6	2012
Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal	3	240	3	2002

International Handbook on Whistleblowing Research	3	46	3	2014
Journal of Advanced Nursing	3	109	3	2000
Journal of Financial Crime	3	33	4	2004
Journal of The Royal Society of Medicine	3	31	3	2019
Journalism	3	63	3	2012

Notes: TA=total articles; TC=total citations

Bradford's Law, the bibliometric principle, suggests that the distribution of journals contributing to a particular field of research follows a different pattern. Under this law, a small number of journals (zone 1) account for the majority of publications in this area, while a larger number of journals contribute a smaller proportion of the publications in this area. Figure 6 shows the journals in Zone 1 that produce the most volume of research in this area. Zone 2 includes journals publishing an average number of scientific documents, and Zone 3 includes a number of journals publishing only a few scientific documents. As can be seen from Table 4, the Journal of Business Ethics is the first with 10 publications, followed by the International Journal of Health Policy and Management with 9. Both of these journals fall within Zone 1 and their importance as essential sources contributing significantly to the literature is underlined.

In addition, 18 other journals, such as BMJ (Online), BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.), Journal of Financial Crime, Journal of Medical Ethics, Nursing Times, British Journal of Nursing, Corporate Ownership and Control, Corporate Whistleblowing Regulation: Theory, Practice, and Design, Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, International Handbook on Whistleblowing Research, Journal of Advanced Nursing, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, Journalism, Managerial Auditing Journal, Nursing Ethics, The Health Service Journal, Accountability in Research, and the Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, contribute fewer but still valuable publications.

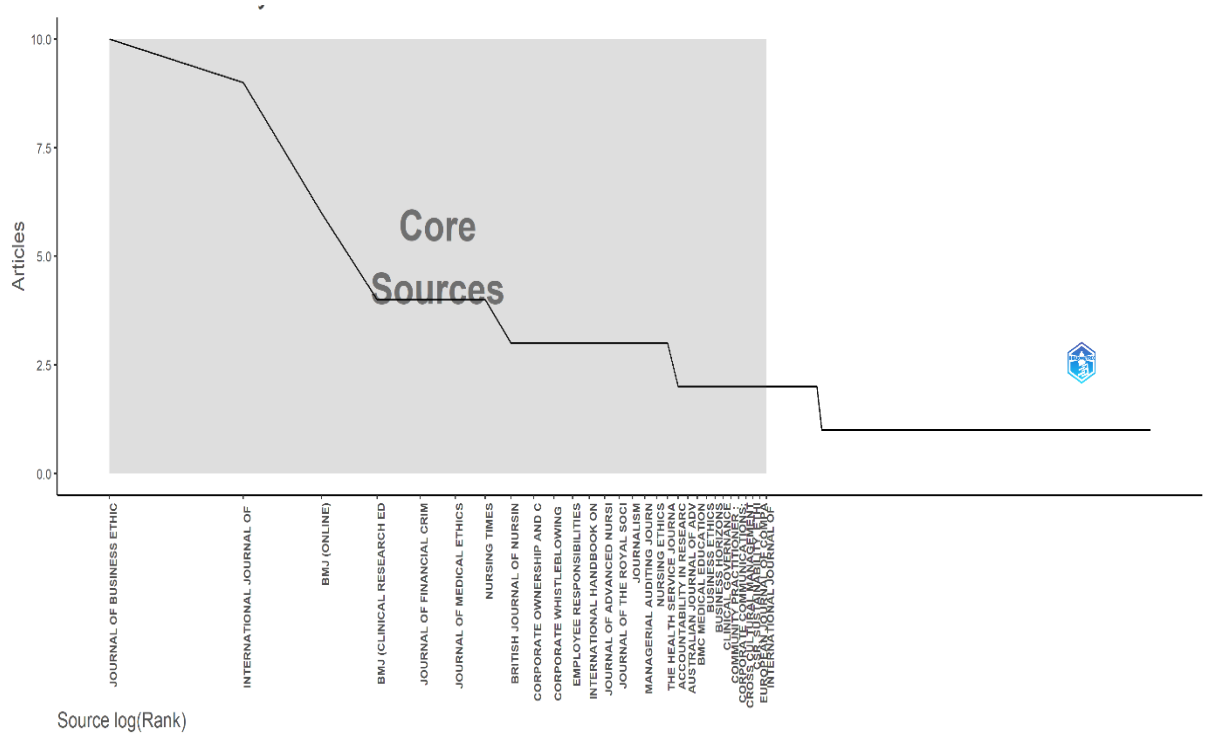


Fig. 4. Core sources by Bradford's law

Figure 7 shows resource generation over time, supporting the Bradford's law findings. The analysis reveals that the Journal of Business Ethics experienced a significant increase in scientific output after 2011. From that year onward, this journal consistently published more than five articles annually.

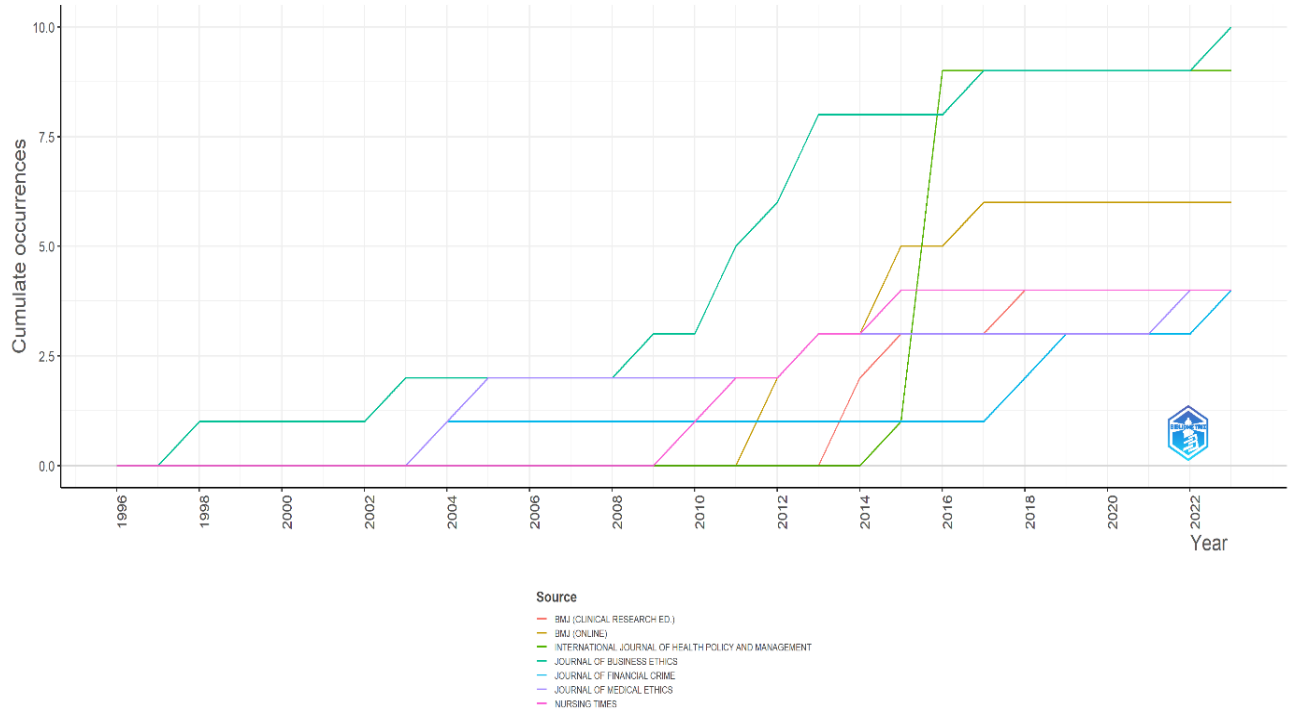


Fig. 5. Top 5 sources' production over time

3.4 Analysis of authors

Table 5 shows the top 10 authors in terms of productivity and impact on citations using the h index. The UK, US and Canadian authors dominate the rankings. Jones A. and Vandekerckhove W. are in first place with h-indices 5 and 4, respectively. Gagnon M., Keenan J.P., Kelly D., Mannion R., Perron A. and Vinten G., each with a h-index of 3, are the other runners. Blenkinsopp J. completes the list with 2 h-index.

Figure 8 shows different patterns in authors' output over time. The dots represent the number of articles published and the citations received. Larger dots indicate more publications, while the stronger blue shading indicates more citations. Some authors have published more in certain years and have more citations, while others may have a more homogenous publication pattern over time. For example, Jones (2013) has 113 citations, Jones and Kelly [18] have 113 citations, and Mannion [24] has 71 citations. As can be observed, Higgins, J, who recorded the earliest publication in 2001, with an article titled "Hospital Inquiries: The Listening Blank" (not found in the provided reference list, maintained as is), has consistently contributed to the field. Despite these citation peaks, the majority of authors published less than three articles a year. Despite these peaks in citations, most authors publish less than three articles per year. The examination of authors' production patterns over time provides important information on their influence and contribution to the field of study.

Table 5
Top 10 authors by h-index

Author	h	TC	TD	YFP	Institution
Jones A	5	146	5	2013	Cardiff University, UK
Vandekerckhove W	4	56	4	2014	University of Greenwich, USA
Gagnon M	3	35	3	2020	University of Victoria, Canada
Keenan JP	3	236	3	2002	ACCEL - Medaille College, USA
Kelly D	3	127	3	2013	Cardiff University, UK
Mannion R	3	114	3	2015	University of Birmingham, UK
Perron A	3	35	3	2020	University of Ottawa, Canada
Vinten G	3	23	3	1996	European Business School, UK
Blenkinsopp J	2	34	2	2016	Northumbria University, UK
Brody RG	2	12	2	2020	University of New Mexico, USA

Note(s): h = h-index; TC = Total citations; TD = Number of publications; YFP = Year of first publication

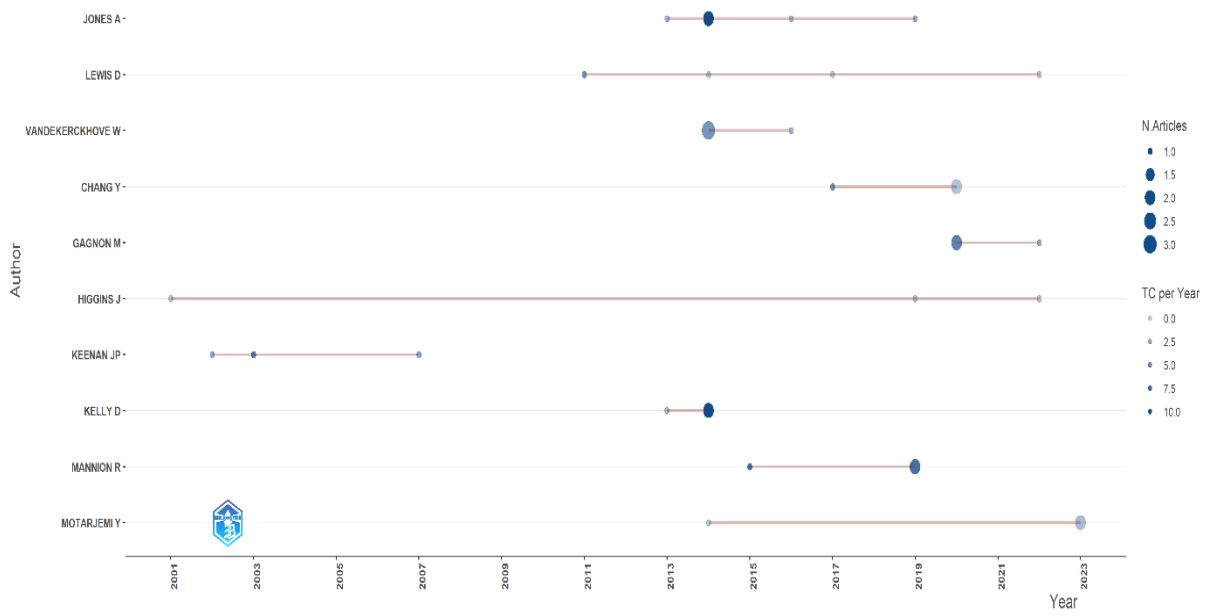


Fig. 6. Authors' production over time by number of published documents and total citations per year

3.5 Analysis of Affiliations

This subsection shows the top ten affiliations (organisations or institutions) as determined by bibliometric analysis. The examination of the authors' links to various organisations provides insight into their knowledge and impact on issues related to culture and whistleblowing. Knowledge of academic networks and interinstitutional cooperation is essential in this field. The study will better understand their contribution and role in the dissemination of knowledge in this area by identifying and analysing the most relevant links.

Figure 9 shows that the Association of Surgeons in Training, Cardiff University, Universiti Teknologi Mara, and the University of Western Sydney lead with eight whistleblowing and culture research articles. Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, University College, and the University of California contribute seven articles. Additionally, Macquarie University and the University of

Birmingham contributed six articles. Other affiliations, such as Khairun University, MCI Management Center Innsbruck, Open University of Catalonia, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the University of New Mexico, the University of Ottawa, the University of Victoria, Applied Science University (ASU), and Hull University Business School, contribute fewer than five articles.

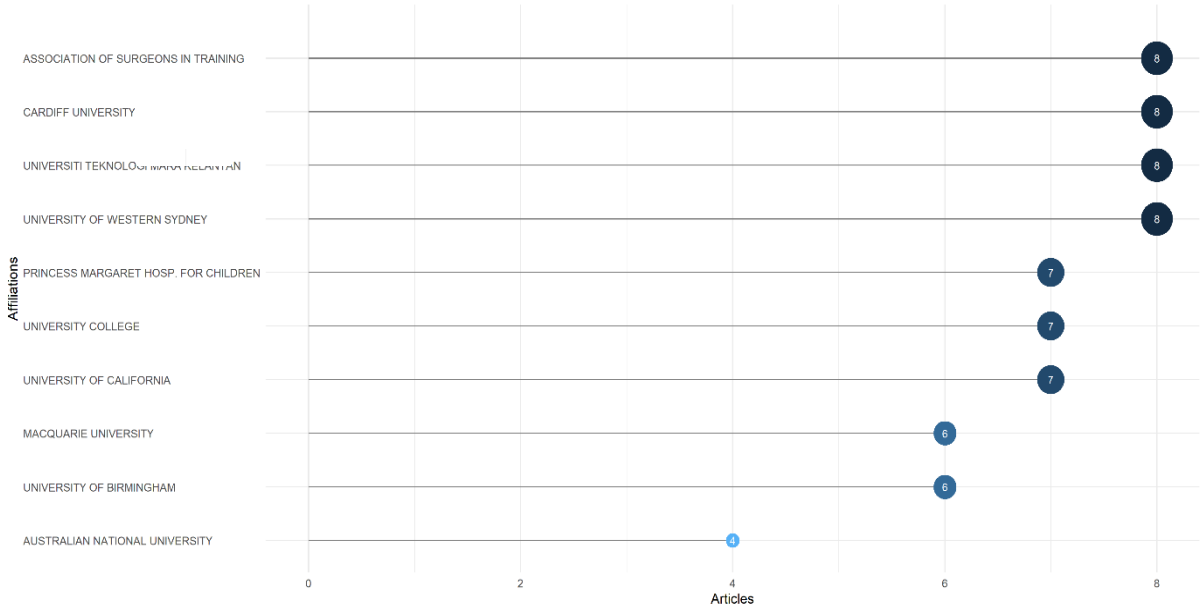
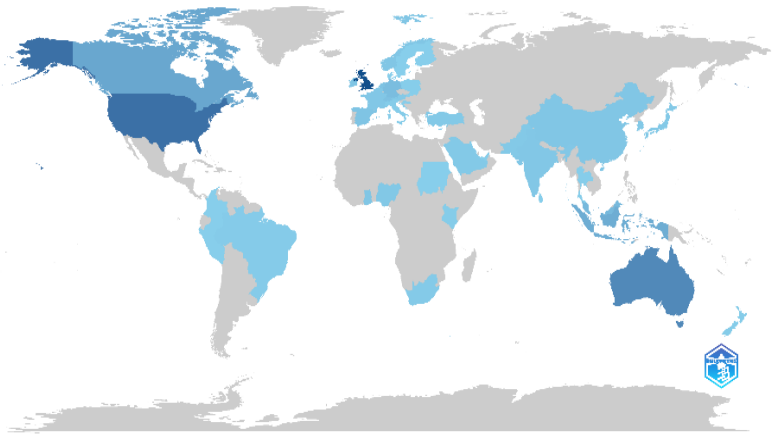


Fig. 7. Top 10 relevant affiliations

3.6 Analysis of relevant Countries

Graph 10 gives an overview of scientific output by region and shows the frequency of publications by country. The stronger the blue colour, the higher the number of articles published in the country concerned. The UK, for example, is the most prolific contributor with 133 publications, followed by the USA with 95 and Australia with 69. Other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Spain contribute less than 40 publications each. This distribution highlights the global commitment and diversity of participation of different countries in whistleblowing and cultural research. It also reflects the wide interest and participation in this area in different regions of the world.



Country	Frequency
United Kingdom	133
United States	95
Australia	69
Canada	39
Indonesia	33
Malaysia	21
Germany	17
Switzerland	13
Netherlands	12
Spain	11

Fig. 8. Countries' scientific production.

As regards the top ten most cited countries, Figure 11 shows the USA at the top of the list with the highest number of total citations (1 602), followed by the UK with 661 total citations, Australia (393), Canada (379 total citations) and the Netherlands (247 total citations). All the other countries on this top ten list have a cumulative number of fewer than 100 citations.

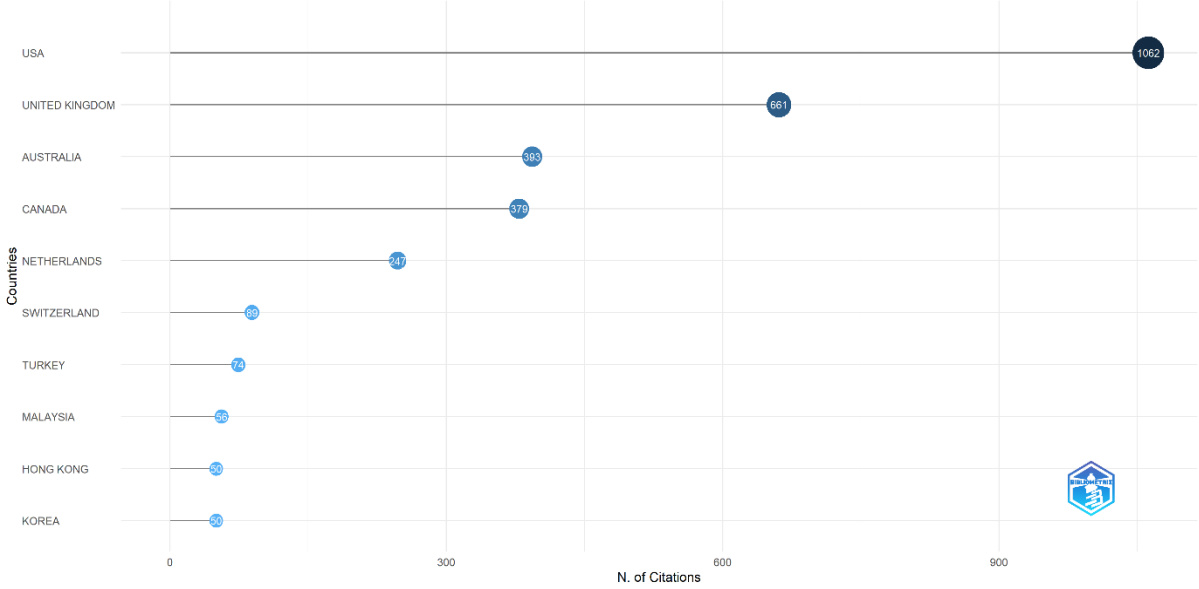


Fig. 9. Top 10 cited countries.

Figure 12 and Table 6 highlight the distribution of authors by country of affiliation in our study, based on number of articles, single country publications (SCPs), multi-country publications (MCPs), frequency and proportion of MCPs. The SCP indicator refers to the number of publications by all authors in the same country and the MCP indicator refers to cooperation with other countries. Among the top ten countries, Canada (29), India (25), the Netherlands (20), Germany (17), the USA (13), Australia (13) and the UK (10) show a high level of participation in international cooperation based on MCP.

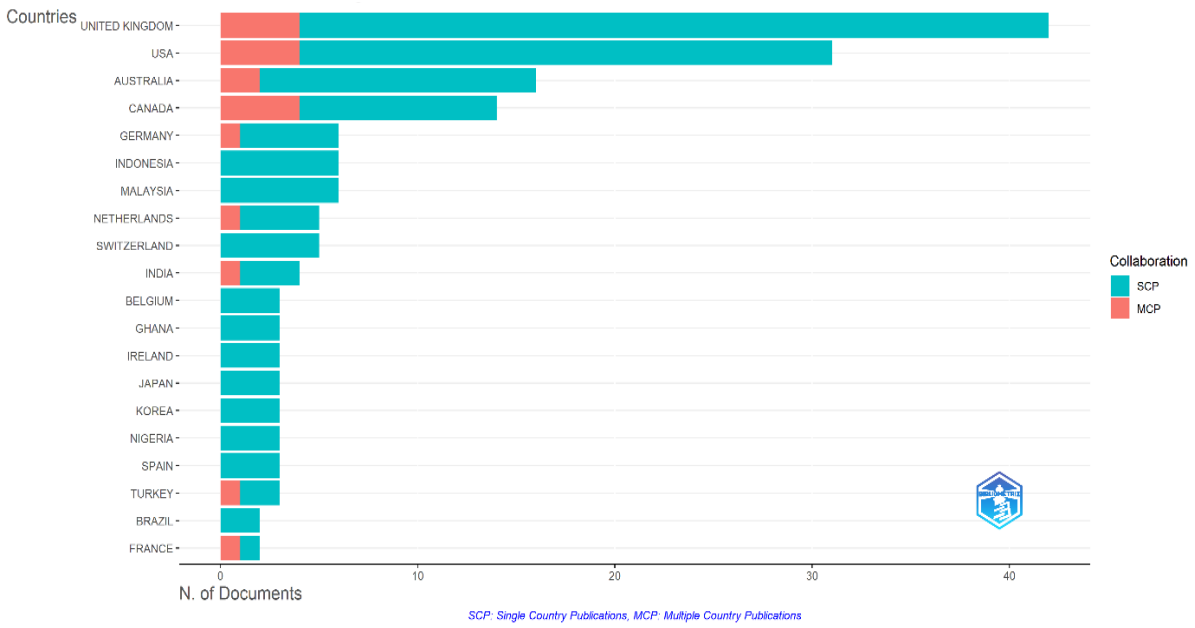


Fig. 10. Corresponding author's countries.

Table 6
Corresponding Authors' Countries.

Country	Single-Country Publication	Multiple-Country Publication	Multiple-Country Publication Ratio
United States	38	5	11.6
United Kingdom	9	6	40
France	4	1	20
India	4	1	20
Australia	3	1	25
Germany	4	0	0
Indonesia	3	0	0
Italy	1	2	66.7
Japan	3	0	0
Netherlands	2	1	33.3

3.7 Analysis of Collaboration between countries

Table 7 shows cooperation between countries. The most important cooperation seems to be being fostered by scholars from the US and UK, who are forging links with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Their main offices are in Australia, China, South Africa, the USA and the Netherlands. However, the top ten cooperation countries show limited involvement of Asian countries, which indicates a relatively lower level of international cooperation by the region.

Table 7
Top 10 collaborations between countries

Rank	From	To	Collaborations
1	United Kingdom	Australia	3
2	United Kingdom	United States	3
3	United States	China	3
4	Australia	Canada	2
5	Australia	South Africa	2
6	China	Hong Kong	2
7	United Kingdom	South Africa	2
8	United States	Australia	2
9	United States	Netherlands	2
10	Australia	Colombia	1

Figure 13 shows cooperation between the top 50 countries on the world map. Lines indicate global cooperation, and thicker lines indicate stronger links. Seven clusters have been identified within the network. The UK leads the largest cluster, which is shown in red, and includes countries from different continents, such as Belgium, Belgium, Turkey, France, Indonesia, India, Norway, South Africa, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Ireland, and Colombia. The second grouping, which is shown in green, is led by the US and includes countries such as Ghana, New Zealand, Kuwait, China, Singapore, the Netherlands, Finland, and Finland. Other clusters are: cluster 4 (for example, Croatia, Slovakia), cluster 5 (for example, Italy, Denmark), cluster 6 (for example, Switzerland, Austria), and cluster 7 (for example, UAE, Bahrain).

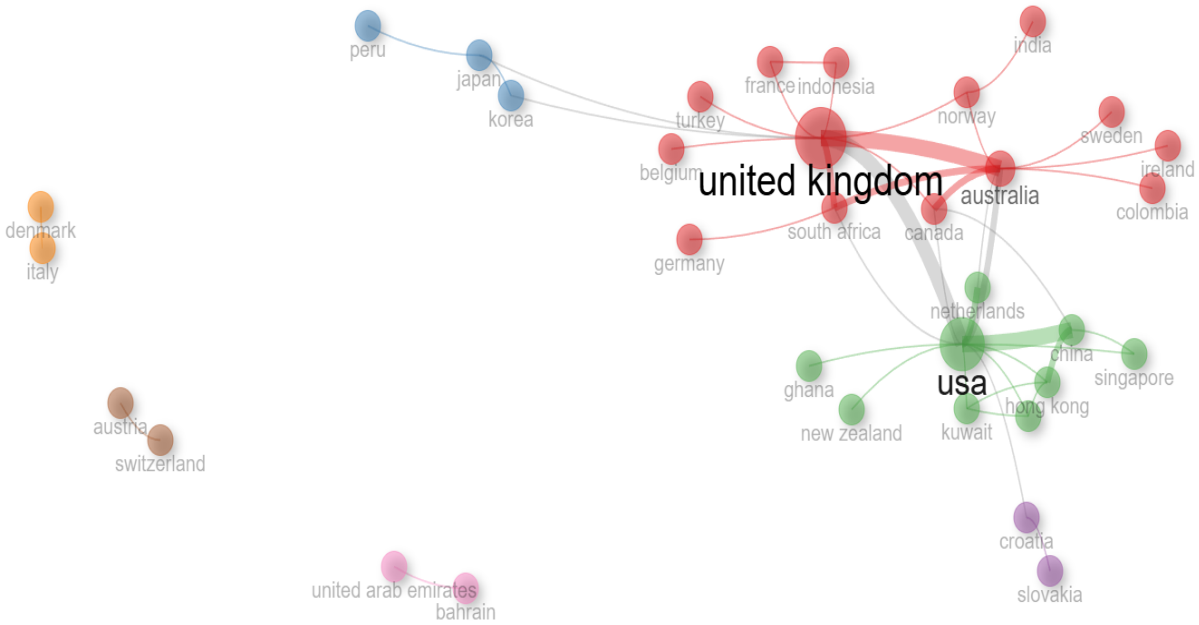


Fig. 11. Collaboration network of countries

3.8 Analysis of relevant document

Table 8 provides a comprehensive overview of the high-cited academic works. The top three papers, based on total citations, are Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez [28] with 245 citations, Appelbaum, Iaconi, and Matousek [5] with 242 citations, and Kaptein [19] with 216 citations. Monin et al. [28] examined how individuals perceive and react to moral rebels, focusing on the perceived threat to self-worth. Their research suggests that self-affirmation may reduce rejection felt by those who resist unfair or immoral situations. In the context of whistleblowing, employees who report unethical behaviour may be met with resistance or ostracization from colleagues, particularly from organisations that tolerate or discourage such behaviour. Appelbaum et al. [5] and Kaptein [19] examined social deviance, ethical organizational culture, and ethics in reporting. Berry [7] and Tavakoli, Keenan, and Crnjak-Karanovic [39] studied corporate governance, organizational integrity, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and managerial challenges. It is noteworthy that no author appears more than once as first author of the top 20. In addition, health journals dominate the list, including the Journal of Nursing Practice, International Journal of Health Policy and Management [24], BMJ Quality & Safety [18], Australian Medical Journal, Social Problems, and Medical Care.

Table 8
Top 20 highly cited documents

No	Author	Title	TC	C/Y
1	Monin et al. [28]	The rejection of moral rebels: resenting those who do the right thing	245	14.41
2	Appelbaum et al. [5]	Positive and negative deviant workplace behaviors: causes, impacts, and solutions	242	13.44
3	Kaptein [19]	From inaction to external whistleblowing: the influence of the ethical culture of organizations on employee responses to observed wrongdoing	216	15.43
4	Berry [7]	Organizational culture: a framework and strategies for facilitating employee whistleblowing	137	6.52
5	Tavakoli et al. [39]	Culture and whistleblowing: an empirical study of Croatian and United States managers utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions	133	6.05
6	Attree (2007)	Factors influencing nurses' decisions to raise concerns about care quality	103	5.72

No	Author	Title	TC	C/Y
7	Zhang et al. (2009)	Decision-making process of internal whistleblowing behavior in China: empirical evidence and implications	98	6.13
8	Hwang et al. (2008)	Confucian culture and whistle-blowing by professional accountants: an exploratory study	87	5.12
9	Jackson et al. (2010)	Understanding whistleblowing: qualitative insights from nurse whistleblowers	79	5.27
10	Mannion and Davies [24]	Cultures of silence and cultures of voice: the role of whistleblowing in healthcare organizations	71	7.10
11	Nayir and Herzig [31]	Value orientations as determinants of preference for external and anonymous whistleblowing	69	5.31
12	Jones and Kelly [18]	Deafening silence? Time to reconsider whether organizations are silent or deaf when things go wrong	67	6.09
13	Faunce and Bolsin (2004)	Three Australian whistleblowing sagas: lessons for internal and external regulation	66	3.14
14	Beamish (2000)	Accumulating trouble: complex organization, a culture of silence, and a secret spill	61	2.44
15	McDaniel (1997)	Development and psychometric properties of the ethics environment questionnaire	60	2.14
16	Teo and Caspersz (2011)	Dissenting discourse: exploring alternatives to the whistleblowing/silence dichotomy	59	4.21
17	Lewis [23]	Whistleblowing in a changing legal climate: is it time to revisit our approach to trust and loyalty at the workplace?	58	4.14

No	Author	Title	TC	C/Y
18	Keenan (2002)	Comparing Indian and American managers on whistleblowing	55	2.39
19	Brown et al. (2016)	Modeling accountant whistleblowing intentions: applying the theory of planned behavior and the fraud triangle	53	5.89
20	Curtis et al. (2012)	A cross-cultural study of the influence of country of origin, justice, power distance, and gender on ethical decision making	50	3.85

Note(s): TC = total citations; C/Y = total citations per year

3.9 Analysis of relevant words and topic trend

Researchers select keywords to define their article's field, topics, and methodologies, making it easier for others to locate relevant studies, which is crucial for identifying research content within specific domains [43] [16] [9]. As a result, keyword analysis is frequently used to identify areas of interest and track scientific trends, particularly in whistleblowing research [33]. Table 9 and Figure 14, which present the top 50 most frequently used keywords, show that "whistleblowing" and "ethics" are among the most prominent terms. Furthermore, key terms related to this field, such as "culture," "organizational culture," "whistle blower," "patient safety," "corruption," "business ethics," and "corporate governance," have emerged as central to this area of study.

Research on whistleblowing covers a wide range of topics, such as organisational dynamics, ethical frameworks and basic ideas about whistleblowing. Given this diversity, whistleblowing is being looked at as a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon. The emphasis on corporate responsibility, ethics and governance implies that whistleblowing is often discussed in the larger discussions on corporate ethics and accountability. The prevalence of cultural keywords also highlights the importance of understanding how cultural norms and values in companies and organisations have a significant impact on whistleblowing practices. The increasing interest in cross-cultural studies is further evidenced by the inclusion of country-specific keywords, recognising that whistleblowing practices and perceptions can vary significantly from one national context to another.

Table 8
Top 50 keywords by number of occurrences

Rank	Words	Occurrences	Percentage
1	Whistleblowing	106	26.37%
2	Ethics	28	6.97%
3	Culture	20	4.98%
4	Organizational Culture	14	3.48%
5	Whistleblower	13	3.23%
6	Patient Safety	12	2.99%
7	Corruption	11	2.74%
8	Business Ethics	10	2.49%
9	Corporate Governance	10	2.49%

10	Fraud	9	2.24%
11	Whistleblowers	9	2.24%
12	Corporate Culture	8	1.99%
13	Leadership	6	1.49%
14	Reporting	6	1.49%
15	Transparency	6	1.49%
16	Whistle Blowing	6	1.49%
17	China	5	1.24%
18	Ethical Culture	5	1.24%
19	India	5	1.24%
20	Retaliation	5	1.24%
21	Risk	5	1.24%
22	Risk Management	5	1.24%
23	Safety Culture	5	1.24%
24	Trust	5	1.24%
25	Whistle-Blowing	5	1.24%
26	Wrongdoing	5	1.24%
27	Accountability	4	1.00%
28	Compliance	4	1.00%
29	Management	4	1.00%
30	Nurses	4	1.00%
31	Nursing	4	1.00%
32	Organizational Culture	4	1.00%
33	Bribery	3	0.75%
34	Company Culture	3	0.75%
35	Corporate Social Responsibility	3	0.75%
36	Corruption Prevention	3	0.75%
37	Crisis Communication	3	0.75%
38	Crisis Management	3	0.75%
39	Effectiveness	3	0.75%
40	Food Safety	3	0.75%
41	Gender	3	0.75%
42	Governance	3	0.75%
43	Higher Education	3	0.75%
44	Informal Social Control	3	0.75%
45	Integrity	3	0.75%
46	Internal Whistleblowing	3	0.75%
47	Japan	3	0.75%
48	Journalism	3	0.75%
49	Legislation	3	0.75%
50	Media	3	0.75%

Fig. 12. Word cloud (keywords author)

As shown in Figure 15, an additional analysis was carried out to examine topics of discussion that were trending according to the keywords of the authors. In order to assess the development of publications over time, the analysis shall take account of the earliest occurrence, the latest occurrence and the year of the median occurrence. The size of the bubbles in the visualization shows how often each term occurred in the mean year. Transparency, ethical culture, fraud and corruption are just some of the many issues that have been the subject of recent research (2020-22). In contrast, corporate governance, organizational culture and basic whistleblowing concepts such as whistle-blower and misconduct have been the focus of much debate in previous years (2017-2019). These results show that the focus of research has changed, with newer studies exploring a wider range of issues related to whistleblowing. This may be due to changing societal concerns and a better understanding of the nuances of whistleblowing practices.

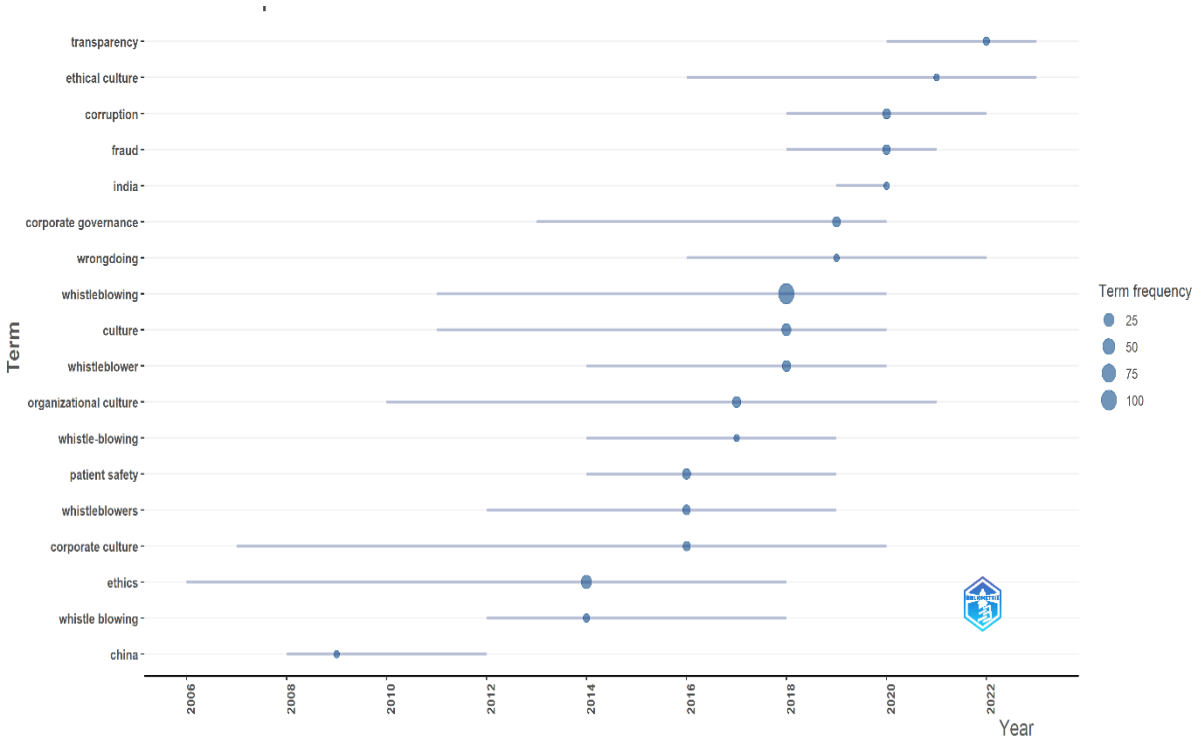


Fig. 13. Trend topics based on the authors' keywords

4. Discussion and conclusions

The study aimed to perform bibliometric analysis of 296 Scopus articles from 1996 to 2023 using the Bibliometrix interface in the Bibliometrix R package (Figure 4). The number of publications increased steadily in the first subperiod (1996-2010) but has been steadily increasing in the second subperiod (2011-23), with 78.4 per cent of the articles published in the latter subperiod. The increase in research output since 2011 is likely to be the result of a combination of several factors. First, a number of well-known cases, such as the Petrobras bribery scandal (2014), the Volkswagen emissions scandal (2015), the Toshiba accounting scandal (2016), the Wells Fargo scandal (2018), the Nissan-Ghosn scandal (2018), and the Danish money-laundering scandal (2018), demonstrated the critical role of whistleblowing in organizational accountability. Second, evidence from practice reinforced whistleblowing's effectiveness as a detection mechanism, with the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) reporting that nearly 40% of fraud cases are discovered through whistleblower tips, compared to only 19.4% through internal audits and 23.3% through internal controls [2]. This empirical evidence has demonstrated the practical importance of whistleblowing and has sparked academic interest in the subject, with publications in 2023 accounting for 11.3 percent of all published articles (n=32), almost doubling the previous year's figure (n=17). This suggests that the volume of research in this area can continue to increase as professionals and academics recognise whistleblowing as a key mechanism to ensure the integrity of the organisation and to prevent fraud.

In terms of publication sources (Table 2), the Journal of Business Ethics (n=134), International Journal of Health Policy and Management (n=101), and Journal of Medical Ethics BMJ (Online) (n=75) were the leading outlets. Altogether, 219 sources published articles on culture and whistleblowing (Table 4). The most cited sources were the Journal of Business Ethics (718 citations), the International Journal of Health Policy and Management (130 citations), the BMJ Journal of Medical Ethics (128 citations) and the Journal of Employee Liability and Rights (240 citations). It is noteworthy that the

top 10 most relevant sources were mainly health-related journals, indicating a strong disciplinary focus in this area of research.

In this context, the prominence of health journals as high-profile sources, such as the Journal of Nursing Practice, the BMJ Quality and Safety [18] and the Australian Medical Journal, highlights the unique problems of whistleblowing in the health care sector. Healthcare organisations are particularly vulnerable to what Tiitinen [40] calls a culture of silence due to their highly hierarchical environment and the strong division of labour [24]. In such settings, there are significant barriers to speaking up, as nurses and younger staff may witness misconduct but are afraid of medical or administrative retaliation. Indeed, Attree (2007) found that health professionals often consider whistleblowing to be disloyalty, a view that is deeply embedded in a professional culture that favours teamwork and protecting the reputation of the profession. As these cultural barriers have a direct impact on patient safety, it is essential to remove them, as evidenced by the high representation of healthcare professionals in our data set. Moreover, the shift from studying the psychology of individual whistleblowers to examining the culture of an organization is a significant theoretical step forward and reflects a growing understanding that protecting individual whistleblowers is not sufficient to effect lasting change.

Beyond disciplinary patterns, the geographical distribution of scientific output in this area shows a striking difference, with the vast majority of publications being produced in developed countries (Figure 10). In particular, the UK, US and Australia each accounted for at least 11 percent of the total number of publications, which explains why the top nine publishing institutions (Figure 9) and the top 10 researchers (Table 5) were concentrated mainly in these three countries. By contrast, the second tier--which includes Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain--each contributed less than 6 percent of total output. This pattern underlines the significant under-representation of Asian countries in this field of research. Without a substantial increase in output from these countries, the gap with the major countries is likely to continue to widen. However, there were some positive trends, notably in Indonesia, which showed a significant increase with 33 publications (6.5 percent of the total) and ranked fifth overall, while Malaysia came in a close sixth place with 21 publications. The dominance of the Anglophone countries in research output goes beyond a mere bias in the coverage of databases and instead highlights underlying cultural factors that shape research priorities. These countries have a relatively low degree of power distance and a high degree of individualism, according to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, traits that are theoretically associated with a greater willingness to challenge authority and report wrongdoing [32] (Puni & Hilton,). Their research productivity may therefore be partly due to a cultural context in which whistleblowing is more socially accepted and therefore a more prominent research theme. Conversely, the lower performance of Asian countries, despite recent growth, may reflect a cultural context in which collectivism and greater power distancing have traditionally discouraged challenging corporate hierarchies [1].

In addition, there is a clear geographical distribution of scientific output in this area, with developed countries accounting for the vast majority of publications (Figure 10). The top nine publishing institutions (Figure 9) and top 10 researchers (Table 5) were concentrated mainly in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, accounting for a combined total of at least 11 publications. By comparison, the countries in the second tier such as Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain account for less than six percent of total production. This model underlines the significant under-representation of Asian countries in this area of study. The gap with the big countries is likely to grow further unless their output increases significantly. However, there have been some encouraging trends, especially in Indonesia, which came fifth overall with a significant increase of 33 publications (6.5 percent) and Malaysia, which

came close to sixth with 21 publications. Beyond the bias in the coverage of databases, the dominance of Anglophone countries in research output reveals underlying cultural factors influencing research priorities. According to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, these countries have a high degree of individualism and a relatively low degree of power distance, traits that are in theory associated with greater willingness to challenge authority and report wrongdoing [32]. A cultural context in which whistleblowing is more socially acceptable and therefore a more prominent research topic can therefore contribute to the productivity of research. On the other hand, despite recent growth, the poorer performance of Asian countries may be due to a culture in which challenging corporate hierarchies has historically been discouraged by collectivism and greater power distance [1].

At the same time, the remarkable recent increase in research output in Indonesia and Malaysia shows that there is a growing recognition of the need for cultural adaptation to develop effective whistleblowing systems in this context. Our keyword analysis findings show an increasing emphasis on ethical culture, transparency concepts and skills that require careful cultural translation rather than the wholesale adoption of Western models, which is in line with this trend. Moreover, as our analysis of the networks suggests, the limited cooperation between Asian and Western researchers may reflect what Hofstede would describe as a cultural distance in research approaches and priorities, with Western researchers perhaps emphasizing individual rights and formal guarantees, while Asian researchers focus more on relational harmony and informal conflict resolution.

With regard to individual scholarly contributions, the most active authors were identified on the basis of their total publications, citations per document and h-index. Only a small number of authors had an h-index greater than three. Most of the top ten authors (Table 5) were from the United States. A. Jones published five papers and received 146 citations, ranking them among the top five h-index papers. In planning future research, this information may help scientists to focus on the work of these influential writers. In order to explore new avenues of research and advance the field, young researchers could also consider collaborating with these prolific authors.

The International Cooperation Network (ICN) has been analysed (Figure 12) on the basis of factors such as number of articles, single country publications (SCPs), multi-country publications (MCPs), frequency and proportion of MCPs. The UK had the highest number of publications, accounting for a significant share of the national publications. Although the UK has engaged in a number of international co-operation activities, the rate of co-operation with other countries has been relatively low compared to other major contributors. The US, on the other hand, has shown a higher rate of international cooperation, in particular involving more than one country. Cooperation between Asian countries was minimal, with Indonesia and Japan only collaborating on the basis of joint publications. This limited cooperation between Asian and Western researchers, as the present analysis of the networks suggests, may reflect what Hofstede's culture would call a cultural distance in research approaches and priorities. In particular, Western researchers may focus on individual rights and formal mechanisms of protection, while Asian scholars may focus on relational harmony and informal conflict resolution. They therefore represent different cultural lenses through which the same phenomenon can be viewed.

Additionally, the shift from the development of organisational culture and corporate governance (2017-2019) to transparency, ethical culture and fraud prevention (2020-2022) shows a significant practical shift from diagnosis to action. Specifically, early research first documented the problem by showing that corporate culture affects whistleblowing behaviour, while more recent research has focused on the solution by examining how to create ethical cultures that allow transparency and effectively prevent fraud. In practice, this shift means that organisations now have access to actionable research in several key areas: how to assess their current ethical culture of silence and

whistleblowing, which leadership behaviours foster whistleblowing, how to communicate whistleblowing in a culturally appropriate way, and how to respond to reports in a way that reinforces future whistleblowing behaviour. Moreover, the prominence of the keywords "fraud prevention" and "corruption" as trend keywords reflects a significant practical reframing of whistleblowing discourse. Instead of a defensive framing of whistleblowing as protecting individuals, the focus has shifted to a strategic framework where it is a vital tool for organisational resilience and fraud detection. This reframing has considerable practical value, as presenting whistleblowing systems as a business necessity rather than just as ethical requirements can help overcome resistance to implementation, especially in profit-driven organisations that prioritise operational efficiency and risk management. As a result, this shift in research focus has created stronger arguments for the inclusion of robust whistleblowing mechanisms in key corporate strategies.

Despite these contributions, a number of limitations were identified in terms of analytical tools and data sources: (1) the study relied exclusively on bibliographic data from the Scopus database, which may not include all relevant publications on cultural studies and whistleblowing; (2) the manual removal of irrelevant Scopus documents may have led to the inclusion or deletion of relevant documents; (3) the Scopus database did not normalise the names and institutions of authors, leading to errors and inconsistencies which could not be rectified manually; and (4) the technical limitations of Bibliometrix prevented certain analyses, such as the demographic data on scholars. In future studies, the integration of multiple databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar), advanced author disambiguation algorithms and complementary analysis tools (SciATE, CITNet Explorer, CiteSpace, VOSViewer) should be considered to reduce bias and provide a more objective view of the global research landscape (Maqbool et al., 2025). Moreover, sophisticated author disambiguation algorithms will improve the ability to distinguish between different authors and their works (Moustafa, 2024). In addition, a more comprehensive understanding of the research landscape can be achieved by combining quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative systematic reviews (Spinellis, 2023). Taking all these factors into account, this integrated approach can improve the quality and scope of bibliometric research and provide more reliable and robust results. This approach would ultimately allow for progress in cultural research and whistleblowing as well as more accurate and robust results.

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