

A Bibliometric Analysis of Trade Wars in the Globalization Era.

ABSTRACT

The trade war that escalated in 2018 had a profound and lasting impact on international trade, political relations, global supply chains, and economic growth. This study explores the research landscape and identifies research directions related to the topic of 'trade war'. The data were collected by accessing the Scopus (856 documents) and Web of Science (480 documents) databases, both of which were published from 1990 to 2025. The study employed bibliometric analysis in R Studio. The evidence consistently demonstrates that trade wars impose substantial welfare losses on participating economies, with GDP contractions, consumer price increases, and supply chain disruptions affecting both primary combatants and third-party nations.

Keywords: *Globalization, Anti-Globalization, Trade War, Bibliometric Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The growing interconnectedness in the era of a globalized world has profoundly shaped the modern world. We can connect with people instantly by teleconferencing, phone, e-mail, and travel anywhere incredibly fast. In addition, millions of workers have migrated around the world in search of thousands of jobs from advanced countries to emerging markets. Globalization has resulted in the development of global value chains, where production processes are distributed across multiple countries, and has promoted the expansion of multinational corporations (Deese and Baisi, 2022). Adam Smith advocated for free trade in his book "The Wealth of Nations," challenging the practices of Mercantilism. The traditional trade theories believe that trade is beneficial based on the comparative advantage of countries (Xu, 2024). However, completely abolishing all tariffs could lead to high levels of unemployment due to a decrease in domestic production and the dominance of foreign goods in the country's internal markets (Oermann and Wolff, 2022).

The international trade regime is firmly regulated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which prominently features the essential Most Favoured Nations clause that ensures countries reap significant benefits from trade agreements (Parsapour, 2024). The engagement levels among member countries grant trade preferences, either bilaterally or multilaterally, and foster regional cooperation among them (Akman et al., 2020). However, this

33 interconnectedness has also led to tensions, which give rise to conflicts between nations,
34 particularly in the form of trade wars over trade policies that often involve tariffs and other
35 protectionist measures (Akman et al., 2020).

36 This escalation indicated a move away from decades of trade-liberalization and prompted
37 crucial questions about the costs and effects of protectionist policies, especially in a time of
38 deeply interconnected global value chains.

39 **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

40 The trade war exhibits recurring patterns from historical times to the present, originating from
41 the World Wars. Historically, the U.S. has used high tariffs to safeguard its developing
42 industries. This pattern is reflected in legislation such as the Underwood-Simmons Tariff of
43 1913, the Emergency Tariff Act of 1921, the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act of 1922, and the
44 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of the 1930s. In recent years, similar trade disputes have emerged
45 during Trump's presidency, especially targeting China and its allies. Issues like unfair trade
46 practices, intellectual property theft, and trade deficits have prompted the adoption of
47 protectionist measures (Bimantara, 2019). Today, trade wars often turn into a cycle of
48 retaliation, with countries imposing reciprocal tariffs on each other's goods and services.
49 Such conflicts disrupt global markets and reflect the complex interests of nations. Often
50 driven more by political motives than economic ones, these disputes highlight the intricate
51 nature of international trade (Zeng and Liang, 2022).

52 In the current global trade landscape, many countries rely on China because of its significant
53 economic scale, extensive manufacturing capacity, extensive global integration, and strategic
54 policies. China's deep integration into the global market has created value chains in which a
55 significant number of businesses depend on it as a final destination. For example, the iPhone
56 was designed in California, with parts sourced from Japan and South Korea, and assembled in
57 China. Lead foreign firms can leverage their significance to influence the host government,
58 either as key market players or as sources of supply and investment for the local economy.
59 Additionally, the expansion of global value chains (GVCs) has fostered the development of
60 free trade-oriented transnational coalitions. These coalitions aim to counter import-competing
61 interests in support of maintaining the current economic arrangements. The increasing
62 influence of foreign interests in domestic politics has led to a significant backlash against
63 globalization (Manger, 2009). China's role in global value chains poses a risk to other nations
64 because of its supremacy in manufacturing, its management of essential resources such as

65 rare earths, and the resulting reliance of other countries on its supply chains, which can result
66 in trade conflicts and economic power leverage.

67 The expansion in China's economy at the expense of the United States and other economies
68 is creating fear of job loss and welfare in other countries. The growing trade deficits between
69 the United States and China have provided evidence of a trade war between the countries
70 (Parsapour, 2024). As a result, the United States is creating alliances with Asia and Europe,
71 shifting the global supply chain dependence from China to other countries, such as Vietnam,
72 India, and European countries through a strategy of "de-risking" and "diversification". Many
73 other countries are also shifting their supply chains to Mexico, Vietnam, and India, as a
74 wake-up call against China, with the policy China Plus One.

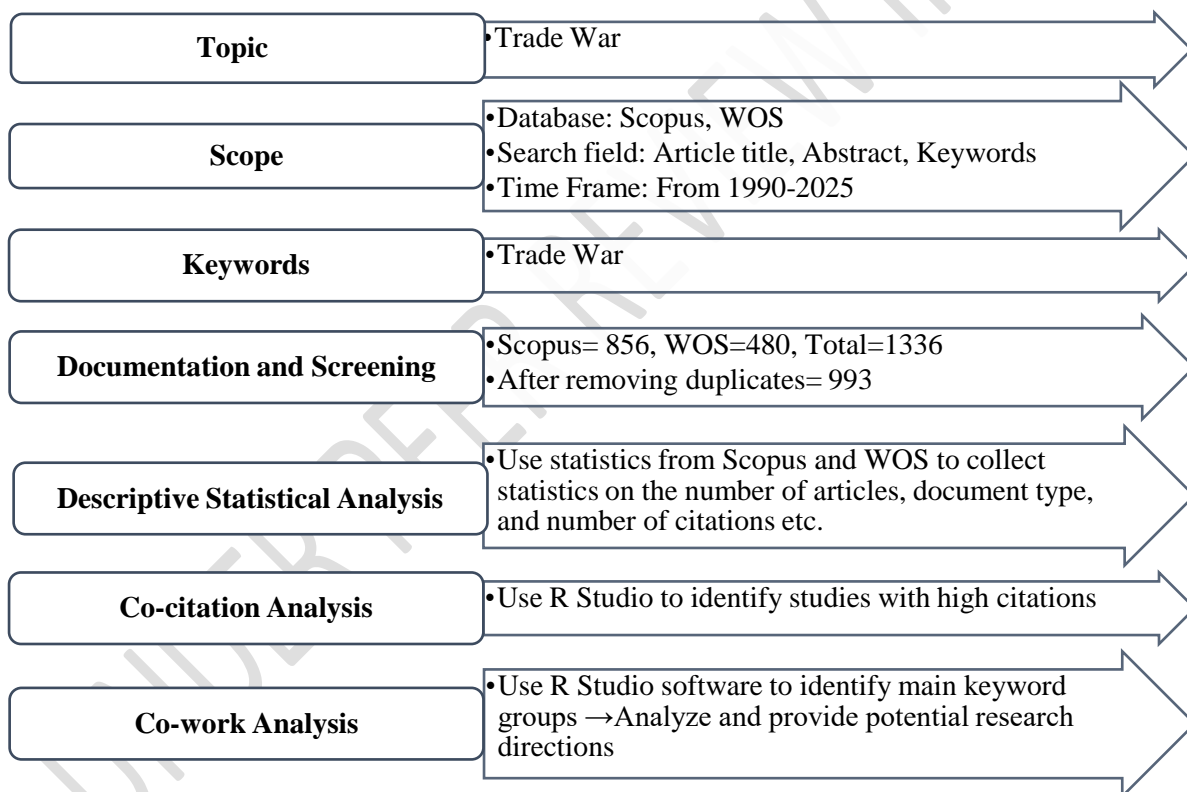
75 US-China trade relations grew substantially after China joined the World Trade Organization
76 (WTO) in 2001. China's membership acted as a catalyst, leading to an "explosion of trade
77 between countries." This rapid integration was also partly driven by China's important role in
78 global value chains (Savchenko et al., 2023). However, increasing trade imbalances, concerns
79 over intellectual property rights, and technological competition created tensions that
80 eventually escalated into an open trade conflict starting in 2017-2018 (Knobel et al.,
81 2024). The trade war initiated by the United States employed several legal tools, such as
82 Section 232 National Security Investigations (including steel, aluminum, and possibly
83 automobiles) and Section 301 investigations into China's intellectual property practices
84 (Ciuriak et al., 2018). These actions challenged the post-World War II liberal trading order
85 and the WTO's multilateral dispute resolution systems.

86 In the past, the United States economy had a global advantage in terms of industrial strength,
87 technological advancement, the dollar's value, and military hegemony. As globalization
88 continues, many countries, particularly developing ones, are benefiting. There has been
89 significant economic expansion in these countries due to the availability of cheap resources
90 and labor, attracting considerable investment (Maidinuer, 2024). Globalization has increased
91 international trade and capital flows, creating new opportunities. As a result, China has
92 become the largest trading country and the second-largest economy in the world. This
93 economic expansion in China has provoked reactions from Western countries, particularly the
94 United States (Maidinuer, 2024). The present study used bibliometric analysis to examine the
95 trade war's effect.

96 **METHODOLOGY**

97 The present study utilizes Biblioshiny to conduct the bibliometric analysis. The Scopus database has
 98 been retrieved using the keyword “trade war”, which was used to extract data from articles, titles,
 99 abstracts, and keywords. This search retrieval produced 856 articles spanning from 1990 to 2025, and
 100 these results reflected the application of exclusion criteria. Similarly, an effort was made to retrieve
 101 data from Web of Science, yielding 480 articles from 1990 to 2025 using the same keyword "trade
 102 war". The exports from Scopus were in a BibTeX file while Web of Science exported in csv format.
 103 Using R Studio, both datasets from Scopus and Web of Science were merged, duplicates identified
 104 and removed resulting in a total of 993 articles as shown in Fig 1. This duplication is primarily
 105 because some of the published articles or journals were available in both databases Scopus and Web
 106 of Science.

107 **Fig 1: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analysis (PRISMA)**
 108 **for Bibliometrics**



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Source: Authors' Compilation

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112 **Annual Production of Articles**

113 From 1991 to 2010, article production remained consistently low, averaging only a few
 114 publications each year. A gradual increase began around 2011, with a significant surge
 115 occurring after 2017. The number of articles rose sharply from 44 in 2018 to a peak of 147 in

116 2020, marking a major shift in output. The trade war between the United States and China
 117 transformed international trade. It began with retaliatory tariffs imposed due to national
 118 security concerns, leading to a significant decline in trade and investment (Bown and Kolb,
 119 2018). This high productivity continued into the early 2020s, with between 135 and 142
 120 articles produced annually from 2021 to 2024. Overall, the data reflect a clear upward trend
 121 in article output, particularly in the last decade (Table 1). The U.S., being the most traded
 122 country in China, had a trade deficit. This was the result of China's exports to the US being
 123 more than four times the US's exports to China. As a result, the US trade deficit rose to 375
 124 billion dollars (Swanson, 2018). At first, the target was on large import items such as
 125 washing machines, steel, aluminium, and solar panels. But soon it became apparent that US
 126 trade policies were targeting China (Fajgelbaum and Khandelwal, 2021). The US-China trade
 127 war became a global concern, disrupting supply chains, slowing economic growth, causing
 128 financial instability, and posing challenges for global governance.

129

Table 1: Annual Production

Year	Articles	Year	Articles	Year	Articles	Year	Articles
1991	4	2001	0	2011	2	2021	135
1992	1	2002	2	2012	6	2022	142
1993	3	2003	1	2013	1	2023	117
1994	1	2004	3	2014	7	2024	134
1995	3	2005	3	2015	3	2025	91
1996	1	2006	2	2016	3	-	-
1997	5	2007	3	2017	6	-	-
1998	5	2008	2	2018	44	-	-
1999	5	2009	1	2019	102	-	-
2000	4	2010	4	2020	147	-	-

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Source: Authors' Compilation from Biblioshiny

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132 Article Production in Various Country

133 Though the US-China trade war mainly impacted the two nations involved, it also caused
 134 considerable spillover effects on third-party countries and the global economy. The extent
 135 and nature of these effects depended on each country's trade ties, competitive standing, and
 136 level of integration into global value chains. Table 2 presents the distribution of article
 137 production among various countries. China leads with 527 articles, followed by the United
 138 States with 385 and the United Kingdom with 76, indicating substantial output from these
 139 regions. Noteworthy contributors include South Korea, Australia, Germany, and India, each

140 producing between 40 and 63 articles. A mid-tier group of nations, such as Canada, Japan,
 141 France, and Malaysia, contributed between 20 and 30 articles. Bolt et al. (2019) highlight that
 142 the euro area, even as a third party not directly involved in the conflict, experienced positive
 143 outcomes, including trade diversion, more affordable imports from China, and enhanced
 144 competitiveness. These factors contributed to increased output and employment. Meanwhile,
 145 Tan et al. (2019) point out that bystander countries like Germany and Japan could also benefit
 146 from activity diversion, although these gains were relatively modest when compared to the
 147 significant losses faced by the US and China. Many additional countries from Europe, Asia,
 148 Africa, and the Middle East published fewer than 10 articles each, with several nations
 149 contributing only a few. This indicates broad yet uneven engagement in article production
 150 worldwide. Satoru et al. (2019) similarly observe that certain Asian countries gained from the
 151 US-China trade war, as production and trade flows shifted to other locations. Shagdar et al.
 152 (2018) conclude that although other countries might experience positive changes, their gains
 153 would be substantially smaller than the losses faced by the two major economies, resulting in
 154 an overall negative impact on the global economy. Žemaitytė et al. (2020) report that \$43,777
 155 million (0.22 percent of real GDP) of US imports were sourced from other countries
 156 following the imposition of tariffs, indicating a significant redirection of trade. However, this
 157 trade diversion came with a cost, as new suppliers were often less efficient than the original
 158 Chinese suppliers, leading to welfare losses.

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Table 2: Country Production

Country	Frequency	Country	Frequency	Country	Frequency
China	527	Thailand	8	Russia	3
USA	385	Pakistan	7	Tunisia	3
Uk	76	Sweden	7	Uruguay	3
South Korea	63	Austria	6	Kazakhstan	2
Australia	52	Brazil	6	Peru	2
Germany	46	Israel	6	Philippines	2
India	40	Finland	5	Portugal	2
Canada	27	Mexico	5	Saudi Arabia	2
Japan	27	Nigeria	5	United Arab Emirates	2
France	26	Belgium	4	Bahrain	1
Malaysia	21	Denmark	4	Belarus	1
Switzerland	21	Greece	4	Colombia	1
Italy	19	Lebanon	4	Cyprus	1
Singapore	17	Lithuania	4	Egypt	1
Indonesia	14	Norway	4	Hungary	1
Vietnam	14	Poland	4	Kyrgyzstan	1

South Africa	13	Ukraine	4	Libya	1
New Zealand	11	Bangladesh	3	Monaco	1
Turkey	11	Czech Republic	3	Slovakia	1
Ireland	9	Ghana	3	Sri Lanka	1
Netherlands	8	Romania	3		

Source: Authors' Compilation from Biblioshiny

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162 Most Cited Countries

163 A comparative analysis of article production and citation impact highlights a significant gap
 164 between research volume and scholarly influence across countries. China, with 527 articles,
 165 leads in publication count and has the highest number of citations at 2,702, reflecting both
 166 high productivity and impactful research. The United States, with 385 publications and 2,682
 167 citations, is close behind, indicating strong international visibility and influence per paper
 168 (Fig. 2).

169 In contrast, countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia exhibit moderate levels of
 170 production, with 76 and 52 articles respectively, yet they attain substantial citation counts of
 171 735 and 445. This indicates a higher citation-per-article ratio and, consequently, a greater
 172 impact per research contribution. Pakistan, despite producing only 7 articles, accumulates 281
 173 citations, suggesting that its outputs are highly influential relative to volume.

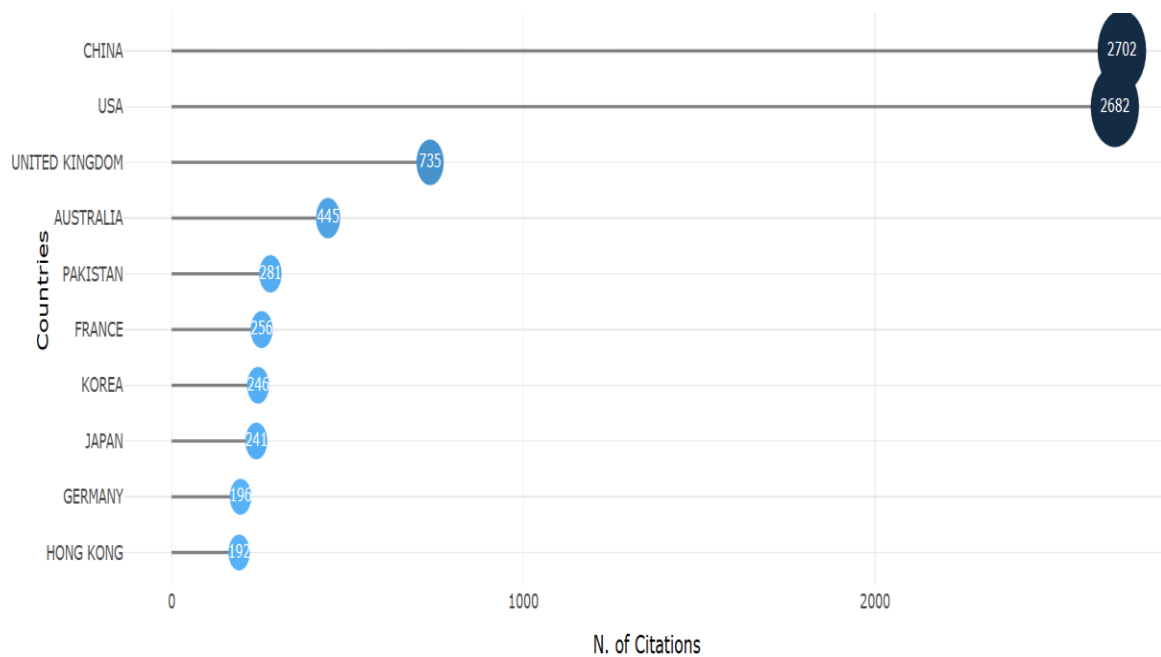
174 Conversely, some countries with moderate to high production, such as India (40 articles) and
 175 Malaysia (21 articles), do not appear on the top-cited list, indicating a possible gap between
 176 research quantity and international impact. This mismatch highlights the need not only to
 177 increase research output but also to enhance the quality, relevance, and visibility of scholarly
 178 work to boost global citation performance. Overall, the data emphasise that while research
 179 productivity is important, citation impact more accurately reflects the influence and reach of
 180 scholarly contributions, and the two do not always align.

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Fig 2: Most Cited Countries



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Source: Authors' Compilation from Biblioshiny

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187 Keyword Analysis

188 Table 3 clearly illustrates the long-term frequency of key economic terms from 1991 to 2025,
 189 effectively highlighting the shifting research interests in global trade discussions. A
 190 significant trend is evident with the term "*Impact*," which was not utilized before 2019 and
 191 skyrocketed to 51 mentions by 2025. This sharp increase underscores a growing emphasis on
 192 impact-focused analysis. The term "*China*" demonstrates remarkable and steady growth,
 193 rising from a mere single mention in 1997 to an impressive 47 mentions in 2025, reinforcing
 194 China's prominent role in trade conversations. Furthermore, terms such as
 195 "*InternationalTrade*" and "*Policy*" have consistently been at the forefront, with
 196 "*InternationalTrade*" standing out as the most frequently used term overall, growing from
 197 just four mentions in 1997 to 28 in 2025. Additionally, "*Trade*" and "*Tariffs*" are trending
 198 upward, especially following 2018, indicating a heightened academic focus on trade
 199 dynamics and protectionist policies. Knobel et al. (2024) note that positive effects on certain
 200 industrial sectors resulted from reduced dependency on imports or exports subjected to higher
 201 duties, or from options to quickly redirect trade flows to alternative suppliers and customers.
 202 This variation in sectoral impacts highlights the complex nature of modern global value
 203 chains and the different levels of substitutability among products and suppliers. Agricultural
 204 industries were especially affected by retaliatory tariffs. Žemaitytė et al. (2020) noted that the
 205 US agriculture and automotive sectors were the most impacted by the trade war. Adjemian et

206 al. (2021) provide a detailed analysis of the soybean market, highlighting significant financial
 207 losses for US farmers resulting from Chinese retaliatory tariffs on agricultural exports. Chow
 208 et al. (2020) also note that these tariffs severely damaged US agricultural exports, particularly
 209 soybeans, resulting in significant financial setbacks for farmers. Ramos et al. (2020) observe
 210 that agricultural and animal products, as well as some final goods such as footwear and
 211 electronics, were heavily impacted, whereas mineral products faced less disruption.

212 The terms "*Liberalization*," "*Prices*," and "*Performance*" demonstrate clear and noticeable
 213 growth, particularly after 2020, a direct response to global economic disruptions and reforms.
 214 The increase in mentions of the "*United States*," reaching 20 occurrences by 2025, decisively
 215 highlights this country's critical role in global trade analysis. The data unequivocally shows a
 216 significant shift in academic focus from the broad trade concepts of the 1990s to more
 217 complex and politically sensitive topics, including "*Impact*," "*Tariffs*," and specific country
 218 references such as China and the United States from 2018 onward. This trend aligns
 219 seamlessly with major geopolitical events, including the US–China trade war and the
 220 substantial trade realignments that have taken place in the wake of the pandemic. Cheng et al.
 221 (2020) found that the US-China trade war markedly decreased US final and intermediate
 222 demand for Chinese products, especially impacting the Electronic, ICT, and Electrical
 223 sectors, which saw the largest declines. The overall US deadweight losses amounted to \$1.5
 224 billion, with total losses to consumers and importers reaching \$3.3 billion, equivalent to 0.05
 225 per cent of the gross US output.

226 The earlier period from 1991 to 2000 clearly showed limited thematic diversity and minimal
 227 term usage. In stark contrast, data from the post-2010s reveal a significant increase in
 228 specialisation and depth. Notably, the term "*Policy*," which appeared only four times from
 229 2000 to 2011, rose to 39 mentions by 2025. This notable trend underscores the growing
 230 importance of policy analysis in trade research. The accompanying table not only documents
 231 the dynamic shifts in thematic focus over time but also vividly illustrates the increasing
 232 complexity and geopolitical emphasis in international trade scholarship in recent decades.

233 **Table 3: Word Frequency Over Time**

Year	Impact	China	Policy	Trade	International Trade	Tariffs	Performance	Prices	Liberalization	United States
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1992	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

1994	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
1995	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
1996	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
1997	0	1	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	0
1998	0	1	3	0	4	2	0	0	0	0
1999	0	1	4	0	5	3	0	0	1	0
2000	0	1	4	0	7	3	0	0	1	0
2001	0	1	4	0	7	3	0	0	1	0
2002	0	1	4	0	7	3	0	0	1	0
2003	0	1	4	0	7	3	0	0	1	0
2004	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2005	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2006	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2007	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2008	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2009	0	1	4	0	9	3	0	0	1	1
2010	0	1	4	0	10	3	0	0	1	1
2011	0	1	4	0	10	3	0	0	1	1
2012	0	2	4	1	11	3	0	0	1	2
2013	0	2	4	1	11	3	0	0	1	2
2014	0	2	5	1	11	4	0	0	1	2
2015	0	2	5	1	11	4	0	0	1	2
2016	0	2	5	1	11	4	0	0	2	2
2017	0	3	5	1	12	4	0	0	2	2
2018	0	4	7	2	13	5	0	0	2	3
2019	1	8	10	5	16	5	0	0	2	6
2020	3	12	13	10	19	5	2	1	4	9
2021	7	15	18	12	24	5	5	2	6	13
2022	16	23	21	15	25	10	5	8	11	14
2023	27	30	29	23	26	14	10	14	13	16
2024	44	41	34	26	28	22	14	18	15	20
2025	51	47	39	32	28	25	21	21	20	20

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Source: Authors' Compilation from Biblioshiny

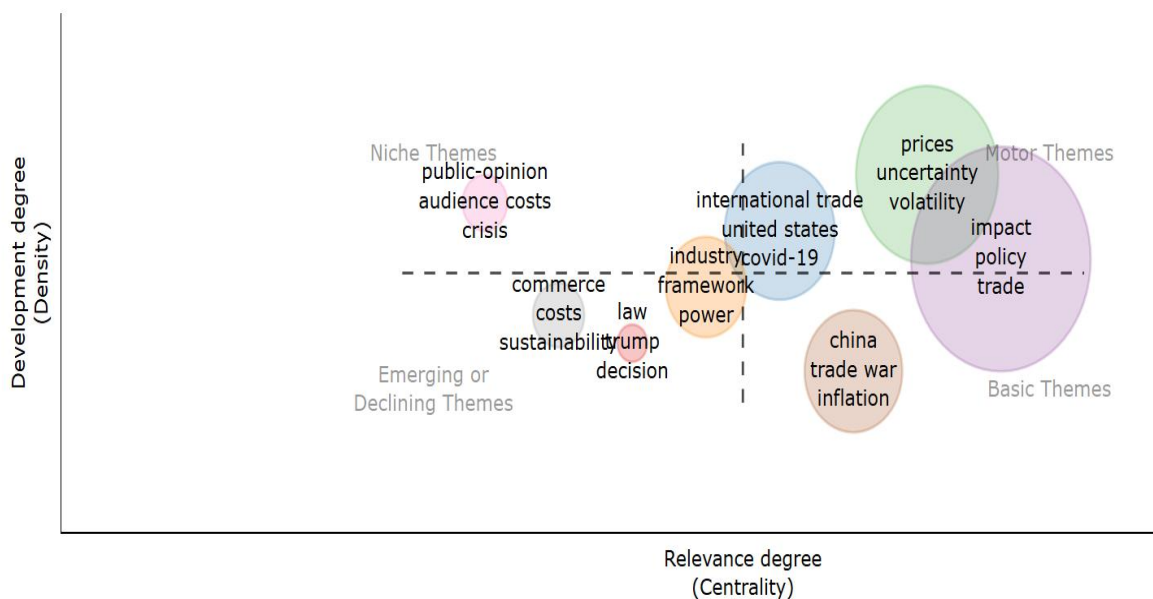
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236 **Thematic Map Identified by the Co-Occurrence Network**

237 Figure 3 presents a thematic map based on co-occurrence network analysis, organizing key
 238 research themes in the field of international trade according to their centrality (relevance) and
 239 density (development). The analysis reveals that themes such as “prices,” “uncertainty,” and
 240 “volatility” are positioned as motor themes, indicating that they are well developed and
 241 highly influential within the literature. In other words, it represents high centrality and high
 242 density. In contrast, “impact,” “policy,” and “trade” fall under basic themes, suggesting
 243 that, while central to the field, they remain conceptually broad or underdeveloped. This

244 shows high centrality and low density. Thematic clusters such as “China,” “trade war,” and
 245 “inflation” also appear in this quadrant, reflecting their strong relevance to current debates
 246 but ongoing theoretical consolidation. Niche themes, including “public opinion,” “audience
 247 costs,” and “crisis,” are well-structured yet peripheral, indicating focused but limited
 248 influence. Niche theme represents low centrality and high density. Meanwhile, themes like
 249 “commerce,” “costs,” “sustainability,” “law,” “Trump,” and “decision” are situated in the
 250 emerging or declining quadrant, suggesting they are either losing prominence or have not yet
 251 matured. This shows low density and low centrality. Bridging themes, such as “international
 252 trade,” “United States,” “COVID-19,” “industry,” “framework,” and “power”, lie near the
 253 center of the map, acting as connectors across thematic areas, representing conceptual
 254 linkages between various quadrants. Overall, the figure illustrates an evolving research
 255 landscape increasingly shaped by economic instability, geopolitical shifts, and policy-driven
 256 inquiry.

257 **Fig 3: Thematic Map Identified by the Co-Occurrence Network**



259
 260 **Source: Authors' Compilation from Biblioshiny**

261
 262 **CONCLUSION**

263 Globalization and trade wars are interconnected. Though globalization offers numerous
 264 advantages, it also causes tensions and conflicts among nations. Evidence highlights the
 265 dangers of protectionist escalation in a connected global economy and is manifested in

266 significant costs imposed on the economies involved, including lower GDP growth, welfare
267 losses from increased consumer prices, disruptions in supply chains, and sector-specific
268 dislocations. The rise of trade wars has exposed the difficulties of maintaining an open and
269 rules-based international trading system amid increasing economic nationalism and
270 protectionism. To tackle these issues, it is crucial to strengthen international institutions,
271 foster cooperation among countries, and address the root causes of trade conflicts.

272 The trade wars of the mid-2020s have reshaped the global economy, moving from basic price
273 competition to a more complex contest over “green protectionism” and technological
274 independence. As manufacturing shifts to emerging hubs within the BRICS+ bloc, these
275 countries discover that their traditional edge of low-cost labour is being challenged by new
276 environmental trade barriers, such as the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment
277 Mechanism (CBAM). This policy change affects specific sectors: heavy industries like steel
278 and cement in India and Brazil now need to quickly adopt “Green Steel” and hydrogen-based
279 methods to avoid costly carbon tariffs that could make their exports uncompetitive in the
280 Western markets.

281 The business sector is responding to this tension by reconfiguring supply chains, shifting
282 from the lean efficiency of “Just-in-Time” to a more resilient “Just-in-Case” approach. This
283 trend is clear in industries like automotive and energy, where the race for control over the
284 Electric Vehicle (EV) supply chain has prompted countries such as Indonesia to utilize their
285 critical mineral resources like nickel through local processing and added value
286 manufacturing. Meanwhile, multinational companies are embracing “friend-shoring” and
287 “China + 1” strategies to broaden their geographic footprint, aiming to reduce the risks of
288 trade wars and climate-related disruptions at major ports. The broader effect on global trade
289 is a growing divide: some emerging markets are advancing rapidly into high-tech green
290 manufacturing, while others face increasing “Green Premiums” and a technological gap that
291 could hinder their growth if they fail to navigate the increasingly politicized climate policies
292 and international trade challenges. Future research should explore long-term structural
293 impacts, distributional effects, and the interaction of trade policy with other aspects of
294 economic strategy to offer a more comprehensive analysis of trade conflicts in the 21st
295 century.

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