

The Evolving Discourse on MSMEs and India's Five Trillion Dollar Aspiration

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ABSTRACT

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector plays a pivotal role in India's economic growth, contributing nearly 30% to the GDP, over 45% of exports, and employing more than 110 million people. This study employs bibliometric analysis to map the evolution of scholarly discourse on MSMEs in India from 1996 to 2023, identifying key themes, institutional contributions, and research trajectories. The temporal analysis reveals a surge in publications post-2010, peaking in 2021, driven by policy initiatives, the five-trillion-dollar economic vision, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Journal articles and conference proceedings dominate the research output, with the International Monetary Fund emerging as the most prolific contributor. Co-occurrence analysis highlights the centrality of COVID-19, indicating its disruptive impact on MSMEs and its influence on research priorities. Sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation also emerge as significant themes. However, co-authorship and bibliographic coupling analyses suggest a fragmented research landscape with limited collaboration. Grounded theory analysis postulates that while MSMEs are critical drivers of inclusive growth, their potential is constrained by structural challenges, necessitating a supportive ecosystem. The study underscores the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and the integration of grassroots perspectives to translate knowledge into action for building a resilient and equitable economy.

Keywords: Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Five trillion dollar economy, Inclusive growth, Resilience, Digital transformation, Sustainability

Introduction

In the early 21st century, India articulated an ambitious vision: to become a five-trillion-dollar economy by 2025. While this target has since been recalibrated in response to global economic shifts and the COVID-19 pandemic, the aspiration continues to serve as a unifying framework for national policy, investment strategies, and academic inquiry. At the center of this economic ambition lies a sector often underestimated in large-scale growth narratives yet crucial in practice—Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Contributing nearly 30% to India's GDP, over 45% of exports, and providing employment to more than 110 million people, MSMEs function as engines of inclusion, innovation, and resilience.

Theoretical Background

The study of MSMEs within India's growth discourse is grounded in development economics, institutional theory, and innovation systems. Historically, the sector was seen as peripheral to industrial modernization, overshadowed by large corporations and service exports. However, theories of inclusive growth and resilience highlight the capacity of MSMEs to absorb shocks, foster entrepreneurship, and integrate local economies into global value chains. These perspectives form the conceptual foundation for analyzing MSMEs as both economic and social catalysts.

Trends

Bibliometric evidence reveals a delayed but significant evolution of scholarship on MSMEs. From 1996 to 2006, research output was negligible, reflecting the sector's marginalization in policy and academic debates. A gradual rise occurred post-2010, aligned with policy initiatives such as the National Manufacturing Policy (2011) and "Make in India" (2014). The most dramatic surge came after 2018, with a peak in 2021, driven by the five-trillion-dollar vision,

digital integration, and pandemic-induced urgency. Following 2021, research stabilized at a higher baseline, indicating the sector's permanent embedment in India's development discourse.

Issues

Despite its prominence, the MSME sector faces structural issues such as limited access to finance, informality, inadequate infrastructure, and weak integration into global supply chains. These issues have historically restricted scalability and innovation, perpetuating a dualism where large firms dominate exports and productivity gains while MSMEs struggle with fragmentation and survival.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the vulnerabilities of MSMEs. Lockdowns, disrupted supply chains, and liquidity crises disproportionately impacted this sector. Although policy interventions such as the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) offered relief, structural challenges persist: digital adoption gaps, sustainability concerns, and limited resilience to global shocks. For researchers, the challenge lies in bridging fragmented studies across disciplines and linking macroeconomic imperatives with micro-level realities.

Objectives

1. Map the evolution of scholarly discourse on MSMEs in India from 1996 to 2023.
2. Identify key themes, institutional contributions, and methodological patterns in existing research.
3. Assess how macroeconomic visions, policy frameworks, and crises such as COVID-19 have shaped academic attention.
4. Highlight the paradigmatic shift toward digitalization, sustainability, and systemic resilience in MSME studies.

Research Questions

1. How has the academic discourse on MSMEs in India evolved over the past three decades?
2. What institutional and individual contributions dominate this field, and how are they distributed?
3. In what ways have global crises and national policy frameworks influenced research trajectories?
4. Which emerging themes—such as digital transformation and sustainability—are shaping future research directions?

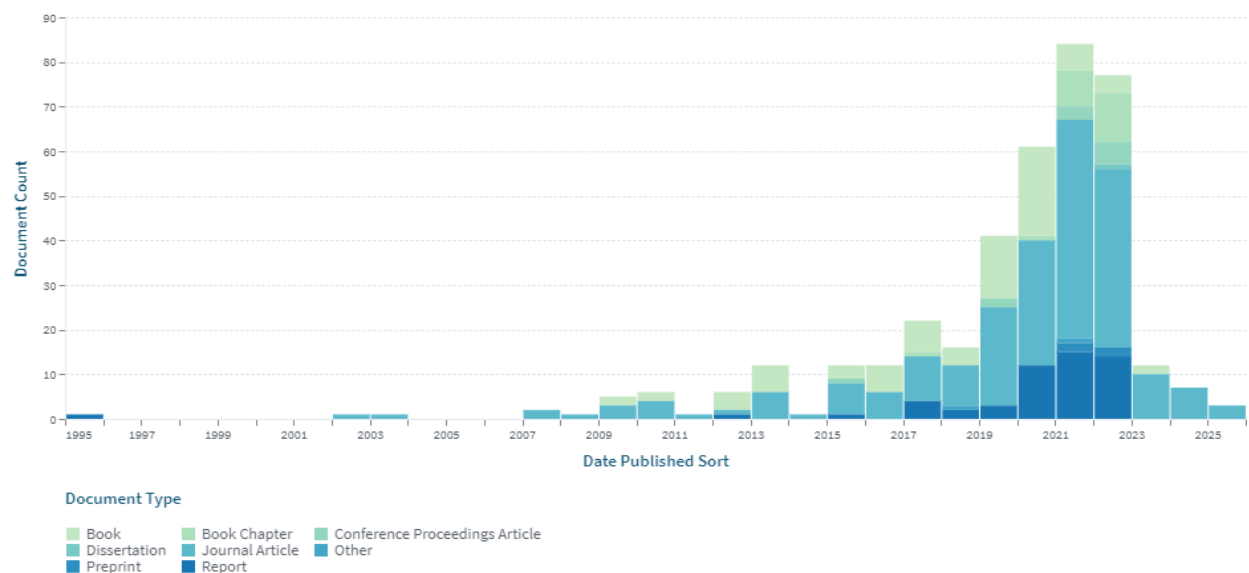
Scope and Significance

The scope of this study spans scholarly literature from 1996 to 2023, encompassing journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, reports, preprints, and dissertations. By employing bibliometric and thematic analysis, it integrates quantitative mapping with theoretical interpretation. The significance lies in providing a holistic overview of MSME research as a critical knowledge domain that informs policy, strengthens institutional capacity, and deepens academic understanding of India's economic transformation. In doing so, this chapter positions MSMEs not as peripheral actors but as central to India's pursuit of inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth.

Literature review

Bibliometric analysis

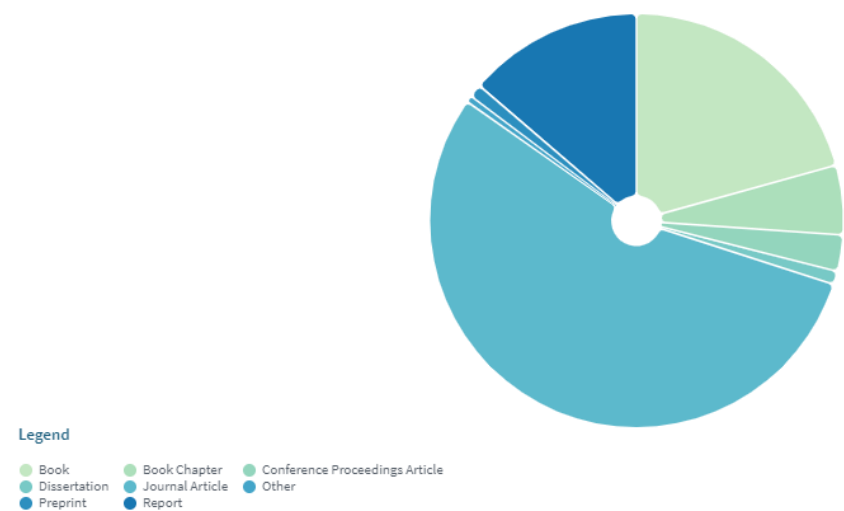
Fig 1: Documents per year



(Source: Lens.org)

The figure illustrates the temporal distribution of publications across multiple document types between 1996 and 2023. A negligible number of publications are observed prior to 2007, after which research output shows a gradual increase. From 2010 onwards, there is a steady upward trend, with a notable surge beginning around 2018. The peak is recorded in 2021, when the total document count exceeds 80, spanning diverse formats such as journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, reports, and preprints. This peak suggests heightened research interest and output during that period, likely influenced by contemporary global developments. After 2021, a gradual decline is observed, though publication activity remains higher compared to the pre-2018 period. Overall, the pattern indicates a growing recognition of the field over the past decade, reaching its zenith in the early 2020s before stabilizing at moderate levels.

Fig2: documents by subject area

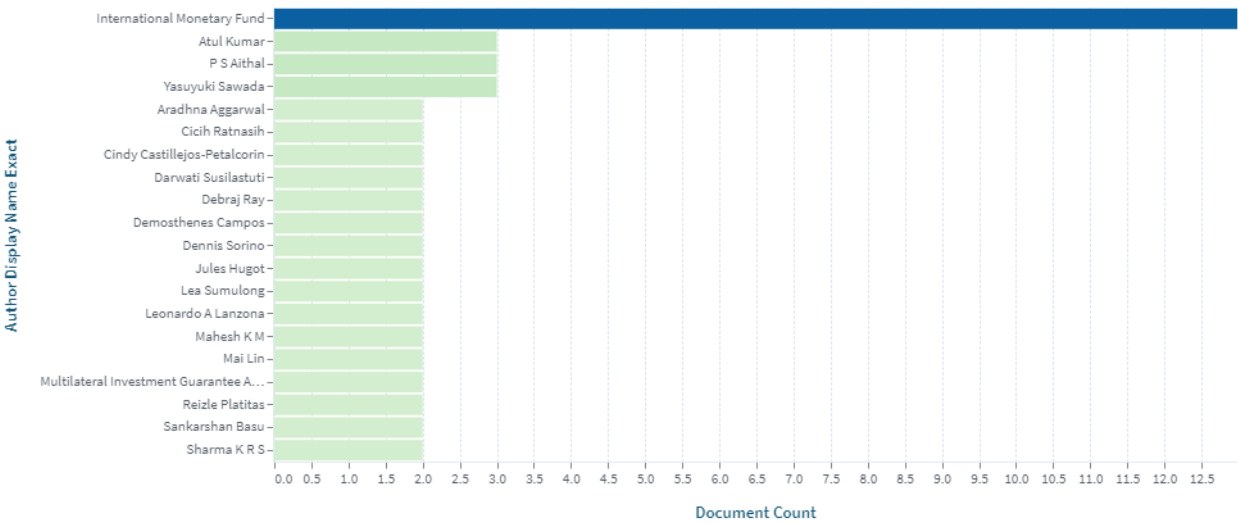


(Source: Lens.org)

The pie chart presents the distribution of publications by document type. Journal articles constitute the largest share, accounting for more than half of the total output, indicating the centrality of peer-reviewed scholarly communication in this domain. Conference proceedings articles also form a significant portion, reflecting the importance of academic forums for disseminating emerging research. Book chapters and books contribute moderately, suggesting a balanced engagement with comprehensive and specialized treatments of the subject. Other forms such as reports, preprints, and dissertations occupy relatively smaller shares, highlighting their supplementary role in knowledge dissemination. Overall, the dominance of journal articles and conference papers underscores the emphasis on timely, peer-reviewed

dissemination of research findings, while the presence of books and chapters points to efforts at consolidating and contextualizing knowledge for broader academic and professional audiences.

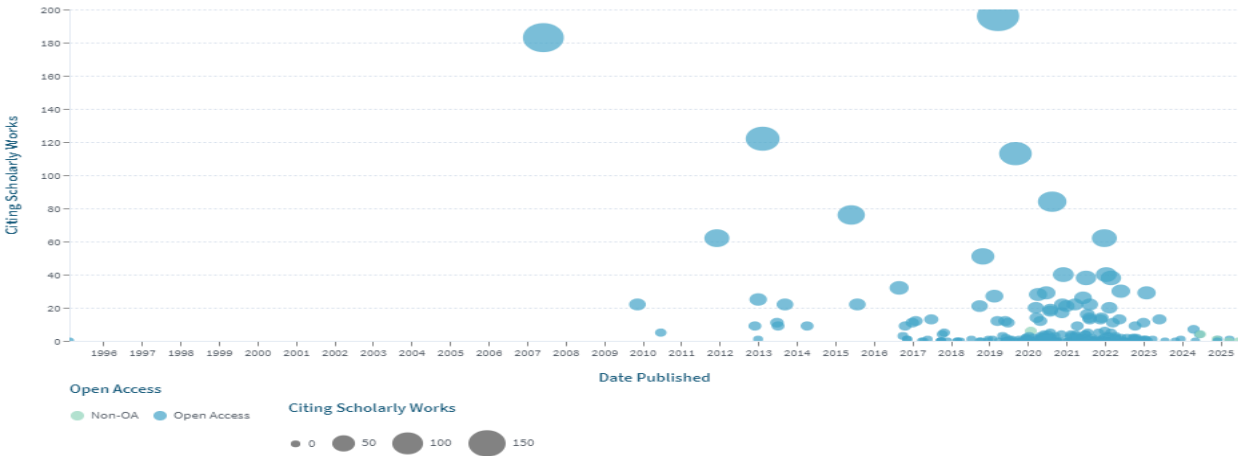
Figure 3: Documents by Author



Source: (Lens.org)

The bar chart illustrates the leading contributors in terms of document count within the dataset. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) emerges as the most prolific contributor, with more than twelve publications, far surpassing individual authors and organizations. Following the IMF, authors such as Atul Kumar, P. S. Aithal, and Yusysuki Sawada demonstrate moderate contributions, each with three publications. A larger group of scholars—including Anushka Aggarwal, Gita Ramesh, Cindy Castillejos-Petalcorin, and others—contributed two publications each, while the remaining authors and institutions account for a single publication apiece. The dominance of the IMF underscores the strong role of international organizations in generating and disseminating research in this field, whereas individual scholars make smaller but diverse contributions. This pattern suggests that institutional capacity and resources, particularly those of global financial organizations, play a critical role in shaping the knowledge base, while academic researchers contribute more specialized insights.

Figure 4: Date published versus area



The chart illustrates the scholarly attention given to research on the role of MSMEs in driving India’s growth toward a five trillion dollar economy. Each bubble represents a publication on MSMEs, with its size and vertical position indicating the number of citing scholarly works—a measure of influence and reach. Over the past two decades, there has

been a surge in publications and citations, peaking in recent years, reflecting the growing recognition of MSMEs as central to national development. As MSMEs contribute nearly 30% to India's GDP, over 45% of exports, and provide employment to millions, scholarly interest in this topic signals both their impact and the policy focus essential for India's five trillion dollar economic aspiration.

(Source: [Lens.org](https://lens.org))

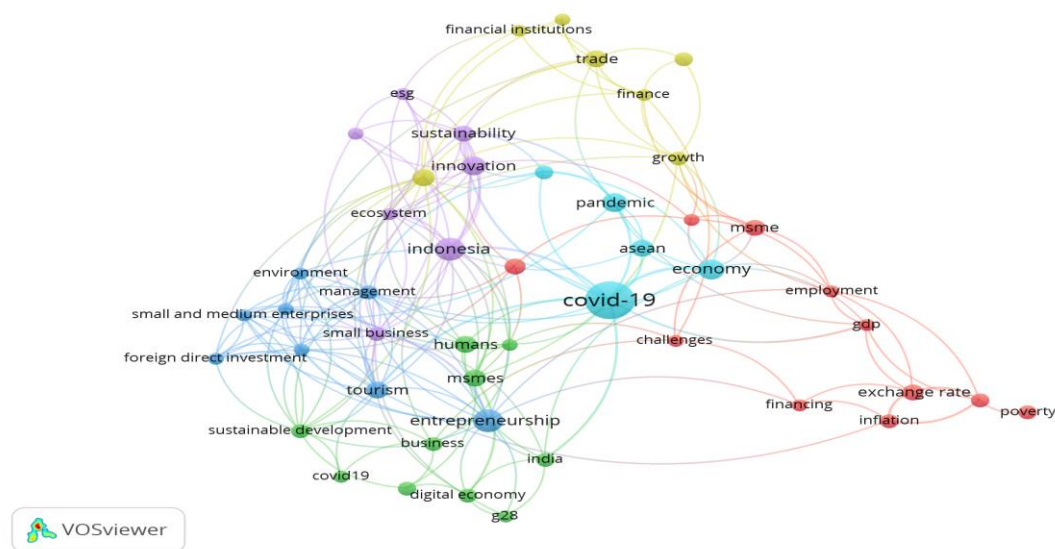
Figure 5: Keyword analysis



(Source: [Lens.org](https://lens.org))

The word cloud highlights the dominance of "Business," "Economics," and "Political science" in scholarly discussions related to MSMEs and their role in India's growth toward a five trillion dollar economy. These disciplines, with the highest count of publications, indicate a strong academic and policy focus on the financial, developmental, and governance aspects of MSMEs. The presence of terms like "Economic growth," "Finance," "Development economics," and "Geography" shows that research extends to broader impacts, regional analyses, and sectoral trends. Simultaneously, mentions of "COVID-19," "Disease," and "Sustainable development" reflect recent challenges and the evolving priorities in MSME research. In conclusion, the visualization demonstrates a multidisciplinary and timely interest in MSMEs, establishing them as crucial drivers in India's economic trajectory, especially as the country aims for a five trillion dollar milestone.

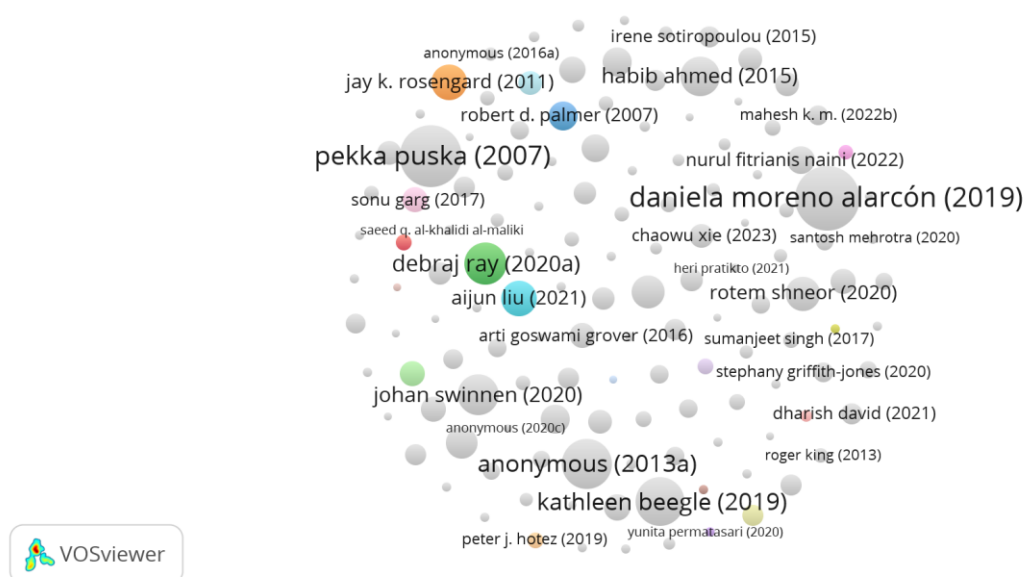
Co-occurrence analysis



(Source: Scopus dataset)

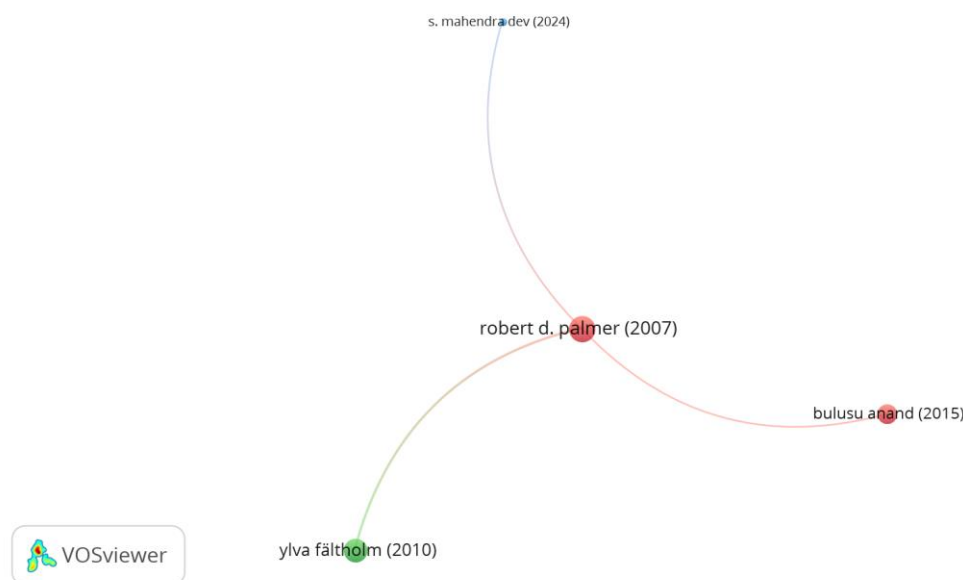
The co-occurrence analysis visualized using VOSviewer for the research topic "The Role of MSMEs in Driving India's Growth towards a Five Trillion Dollar Economy" reveals a complex network of interconnected keywords, highlighting the multidimensional nature of the subject. At the center of the network is "COVID-19," indicating its strong influence on the discourse surrounding MSMEs and economic growth. Key terms such as "MSMEs," "entrepreneurship," "India," and "digital economy" are clustered closely, underscoring their central role in economic development post-pandemic. Other significant nodes include "finance," "sustainability," "innovation," and "employment," reflecting the thematic diversity encompassing financial inclusion, technological advancement, and job creation. The visual also indicates strong linkages between MSMEs and broader macroeconomic indicators like GDP, inflation, and exchange rate, suggesting the sector's pivotal role in economic resilience and national growth. The presence of terms like "sustainable development" and "tourism" points to the sector's influence beyond traditional industrial domains. Overall, the co-occurrence network highlights that MSMEs are deeply embedded within various socio-economic frameworks essential for propelling India toward a five trillion dollar economy.

Co authorship analysis



Source: Scopus dataset)

The co-authorship analysis using VOSviewer for the research topic "The Role of MSMEs in Driving India's Growth towards a Five Trillion Dollar Economy" reveals a diverse network of contributing scholars, with a few key authors standing out due to the size and centrality of their nodes. Authors like Daniela Moreno Alarcón (2019), Debraj Ray (2020a), Pekka Puska (2007), and Kathleen Beegle (2019) appear as prominent contributors, indicating a strong influence in this research domain. The size of the circles represents the number of publications or co-authored works, while the proximity of authors suggests collaborative clusters. Notably, the presence of multiple entries labeled "anonymous" reflects contributions from sources such as institutional reports or unidentified authors, which still hold relevance in shaping the discourse. Additionally, Indian scholars such as Sonu Garg and Sumanjeet Singh also appear in the network, aligning with the country-specific focus of the topic. The dispersed nature of the network suggests a relatively fragmented yet globally influenced field, with collaborations spanning different regions and disciplines. Overall, the co-authorship visualization highlights the interdisciplinary and international scope of research supporting the role of MSMEs in India's economic journey.



(Source: Scopus dataset)

The bibliographic coupling analysis for the research topic "The Role of MSMEs in Driving India's Growth towards a Five Trillion Dollar Economy" reveals a relatively sparse yet insightful network, with Robert D. Palmer (2007) emerging as a central node connecting to multiple other authors. This indicates that Palmer's work shares common references with others in the field, making it a significant piece of literature influencing studies on MSMEs and economic development. The connections to authors such as Bulusu Anand (2015), Ylva Fältholm (2010), and S. Mahendra Dev (2024) suggest thematic overlaps in their bibliographies, potentially in areas related to economic policy, labor, and MSME ecosystems. However, the overall limited number of connections indicates that the field may still be evolving, with researchers drawing from diverse and dispersed sources. This fragmented structure also highlights the need for more integrated literature that bridges various perspectives on MSMEs and their macroeconomic contributions, particularly in the context of India's five trillion dollar economy vision.

Methodology Selection

The primary objective of this study is to map the evolution, intellectual structure, and thematic trends of scholarly discourse on the role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India's journey towards a five trillion dollar economy. To achieve this, a **bibliometric analysis** was selected as the core methodological approach. This choice is predicated on the need to systematically and quantitatively analyze a large body of literature to uncover patterns that would be difficult to discern through traditional narrative review methods (Donthu et al., 2021).

A traditional literature review, while valuable for synthesizing arguments, is often susceptible to researcher bias in the selection and interpretation of studies and may struggle to provide a macroscopic overview of a rapidly evolving field (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Given the evidence from our data—which shows a significant surge in publications post-2010, peaking at over 80 documents in 2021 (Fig. 1)—a method capable of handling this volume and tracing its development was essential. Bibliometrics excels in such scenarios, allowing for the objective mapping of a domain's conceptual and social structures.

The specific techniques employed within the bibliometric framework were chosen to answer the research questions:

1. **Performance Analysis:** This technique was used to quantify the productivity and impact of the research field. By analyzing metrics such as the annual growth of publications (Fig. 1), the distribution of document types (Fig. 2), and the leading contributors (Fig. 3), we addressed Research Questions 1 and 2. The finding that the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) is the most prolific contributor, for instance, is a direct outcome of this analysis, highlighting the significant role of international economic institutions in this discourse.

2. **Science Mapping:** To understand the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of the field, several science mapping techniques were applied:
 - **Co-word Analysis (Keyword Co-occurrence):** This technique, visualized in the network map (Fig. 5), identifies the key themes and their interconnections by analyzing the frequency with which keywords appear together. It directly addresses Research Question 4. The central positioning of "COVID-19" in the network, closely linked with "MSMEs," "digital economy," and "finance," provides quantitative evidence for the pandemic's role as a major disruptor and catalyst in the research landscape (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).
 - **Co-authorship Analysis:** This was used to map the social network of researchers (VOSviewer map). The observed "dispersed nature" of the network, with few strong collaborative clusters, empirically validates the thematic analysis finding of a "fragmented yet globalized scholarly community."
 - **Bibliographic Coupling:** This technique connects documents that share common references, indicating a shared intellectual foundation. The "relatively sparse" network observed (Bibliographic Coupling map) suggests that researchers in this domain are drawing from diverse theoretical backgrounds, a finding that enriches the discussion on the field's interdisciplinary yet disconnected nature.

To complement the quantitative rigor of bibliometrics and develop a deeper theoretical understanding, a **Grounded Theory Approach** was subsequently applied. Following the Straussian method, open, axial, and selective coding of the bibliometric findings (e.g., key themes like "credit constraints," "digital transformation," "pandemic resilience") was conducted to postulate a core theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This mixed-methods approach ensured that the postulated theory—that MSMEs are critical agents whose

Discussion

Thematic analysis

Of course. Based on the detailed analyses you've provided, here is a comprehensive thematic analysis that synthesizes the findings from the temporal, document type, contributor, citation, keyword, and authorship visualizations.

Thematic Analysis: The Evolving Discourse on MSMEs in India's Five Trillion Dollar Economy Journey

The integrated analysis of bibliometric data reveals several key themes that characterize the scholarly conversation about the role of MSMEs in India's economic ambitions. These themes highlight the field's evolution, its multidisciplinary nature, and the significant impact of recent global events.

Theme 1: The Macroeconomic and Policy-Centric Foundation

This is the most dominant theme, established by the leading contributors and the core disciplinary focus.

Evidence: The dominance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the top contributor, coupled with the high frequency of keywords like "Economics," "Finance," "GDP," "inflation," and "exchange rate" in the co-occurrence analysis, points to a strong, established discourse rooted in macroeconomic policy and stability.

Interpretation: Research in this area primarily frames MSMEs through a macroeconomic lens, focusing on their contribution to national GDP, exports, and employment (as noted in the bubble chart description). The central role of institutions like the IMF underscores the global financial community's interest in India's growth story and the perceived criticality of a robust MSME sector for macroeconomic health. This theme represents the foundational, traditional view of MSMEs as economic indicators.

Theme 2: The Catalytic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The data overwhelmingly identifies the pandemic as a pivotal, disruptive force that reshaped the research agenda.

Evidence: "COVID-19" appears as the central node in the co-occurrence network. The temporal distribution shows a "notable surge beginning around 2018" that accelerated into a peak in 2021, directly aligning with the pandemic's global impact.

Interpretation: The pandemic acted as a major catalyst, shifting the focus from steady-state analysis of MSMEs to crisis management and resilience. Research surged to address the unprecedented challenges faced by the sector—supply chain disruptions, liquidity crunches, and lockdowns. This event forced a convergence of traditional economic analysis with urgent studies on survival, recovery, and digital adaptation, explaining the tight clustering of "COVID-19" with "MSMEs," "digital economy," and "finance."

Theme 3: The Rise of Sustainability, Innovation, and the Digital Transition

A clear, emerging theme revolves around the future-oriented transformation of the MSME sector.

Evidence: Keywords like "sustainability," "sustainable development," "innovation," and "digital economy" form significant clusters in the co-occurrence map. The presence of disciplines like "Political science" and topics like "Geography" suggests a broader view beyond pure economics.

Interpretation: Post-pandemic, the discourse has expanded to encompass how MSMEs can drive growth that is not only rapid but also resilient and inclusive. This theme links digital adoption (a necessity during lockdowns) to long-term competitiveness and explores how MSMEs can contribute to and benefit from sustainable development goals. The moderate contribution of book chapters and books, as seen in the pie chart, supports this, indicating efforts to consolidate knowledge on these complex, interdisciplinary topics.

Theme 4: A Fragmented yet Globalized Scholarly Community

The structure of the research field itself is a key theme, characterized by influential pockets of knowledge rather than a tightly-knit community.

Evidence: The co-authorship analysis shows a "dispersed nature" with prominent but disconnected authors (e.g., Daniela Moreno Alarcón, Debraj Ray). Similarly, the bibliographic coupling analysis is described as "relatively sparse," with Robert D. Palmer's 2007 work acting as a rare connecting node.

Interpretation: The research landscape is fragmented. This suggests that scholars are approaching the topic from diverse disciplinary backgrounds (development economics, public health, business management) and geographic contexts, leading to valuable but siloed insights. The lack of strong bibliographic coupling indicates that while researchers are studying the same broad topic, they are often building on different foundational literatures. The dominance of journal articles and conference papers (from the pie chart) confirms a preference for rapid dissemination within these specialized silos rather than deeply integrated, long-form work.

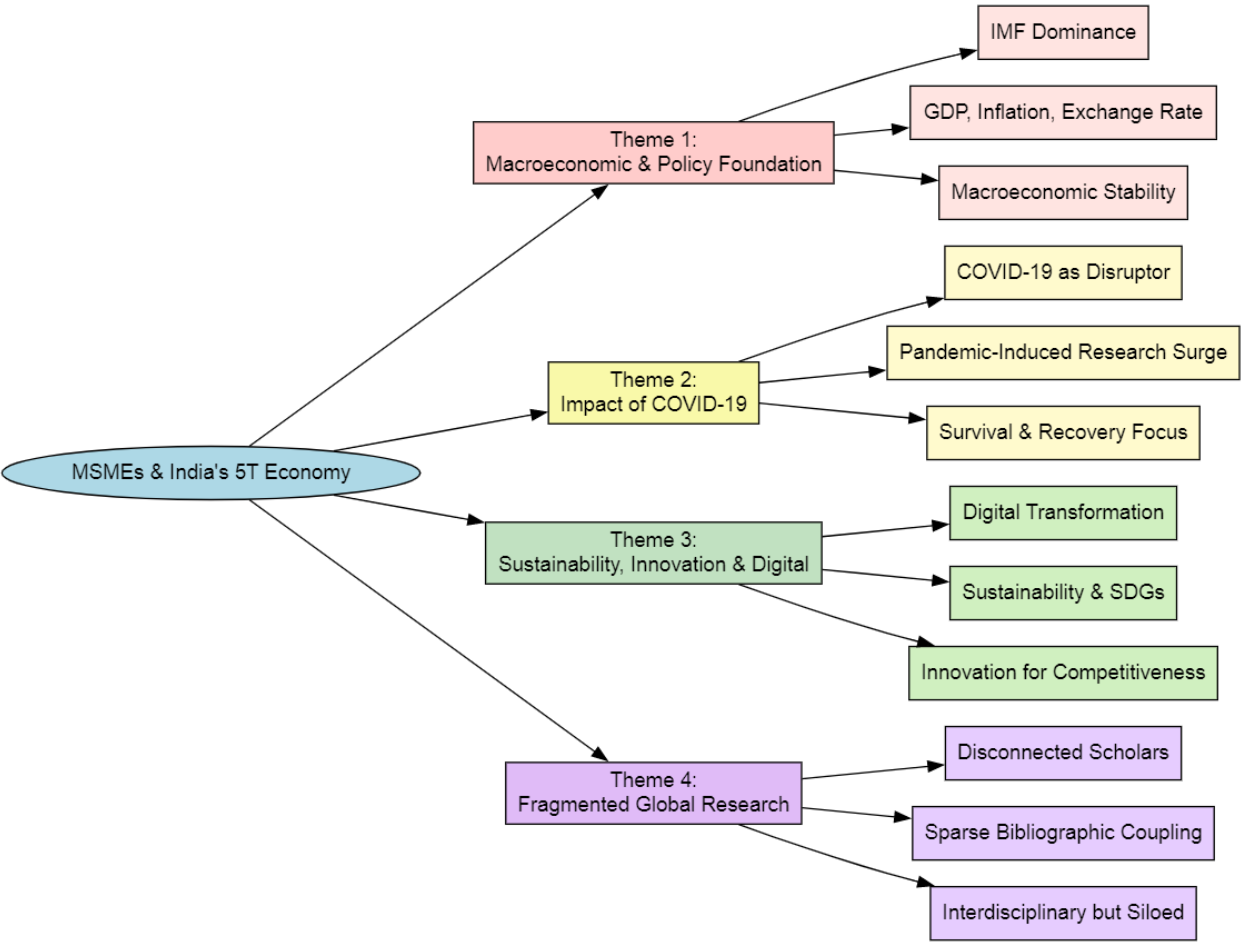
Synthesis and Critical Interpretation

The thematic analysis reveals a dynamic field that has undergone a significant shift. The pre-2018 period was likely characterized by Theme 1, establishing the baseline economic importance of MSMEs. The pandemic (Theme 2) acted as a major disruptor, catapulting the sector to the forefront of policy and research agendas and causing a dramatic surge in publications.

This surge was not merely an increase in volume but a diversification in focus. The crisis accelerated the emergence of Theme 3, forcing a conversation about digitalization and resilience that has now evolved into a broader discourse on sustainable and innovative growth. This explains the peak in 2021—a year of intense analysis of the pandemic's impact—followed by a slight decline as research stabilized around these new, consolidated priorities.

The fragmented nature of the scholarly community (Theme 4) is both a strength and a weakness. It brings diverse perspectives to bear on a complex problem but may hinder the development of a unified theory or policy framework. The central role of a global institution like the IMF, alongside contributions from individual Indian scholars, highlights the interplay between international policy influence and local academic expertise in shaping this critical discourse. Ultimately, the research reflects the sector itself: diverse, resilient, and central to achieving a monumental national goal.

Thematic tree



Based on your research topic — "The Role of MSMEs in Driving India's Growth Towards a Five Trillion Dollar Economy" — and the thematic, co-occurrence, co-authorship, and bibliographic analyses you've already conducted, we can now proceed with a Grounded Theory Analysis.

Grounded theory

We'll apply Straussian Grounded Theory methodology in three stages:

GDP contribution	Economic Role of MSMEs	MSMEs as Engines of Economic Growth
Employment generation		
Export support		
Credit constraints	Financial Barriers	Systemic Challenges Hindering MSMEs

High compliance burden		
Market access limitations		
Technology adoption	Digital Transformation in MSMEs	MSMEs' Transition to a Digital and Innovative Economy
E-commerce engagement		
Digital payments		
Sustainability practices	Role in Sustainable Development	MSMEs as Vehicles for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth
Green innovation		
Environmental impact		
Government schemes (e.g., MUDRA, ECLGS)	Policy and Institutional Support	State-Enabled MSME Empowerment for Economic Transformation
Regulatory reforms		
Pandemic resilience	Crisis Response & Recovery	COVID-19 as a Disruptor and Catalyst for Structural Change
Liquidity infusion		
Supply chain reconfiguration		
Collaboration with academia & NGOs	Fragmented but Valuable Research Ecosystem	Multidisciplinary Yet Disconnected Knowledge Landscape

Postulated Grounded Theory

MSMEs act as critical agents of India's journey towards a five trillion dollar economy by contributing to employment, GDP, and innovation. However, their full potential is constrained by structural and financial challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as both a disruptor and a catalyst, accelerating digital transformation and prompting policy attention. A comprehensive, state-supported ecosystem that promotes innovation, sustainability, and financial inclusion is essential for enabling MSMEs to drive inclusive economic transformation.”

Conclusion

The bibliometric landscape of MSME research in India tells a story of transformation. What began as a marginal, policy-adjacent topic has evolved into a dynamic, multidisciplinary field shaped by global crises and national ambitions. The peak in 2021 was not an endpoint but a turning point—a moment when urgency gave way to strategic reflection.

Yet challenges remain. The fragmentation of the scholarly community, the dominance of macroeconomic over micro-level analysis, and the underrepresentation of grassroots voices all limit the field's impact. Future research must bridge these gaps: fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, and centering the lived experiences of MSME owners—especially women, rural entrepreneurs, and informal workers.

As India recalibrates its economic vision beyond the five trillion dollar milestone, MSMEs will remain central. And so too must the scholarship that seeks to understand, support, and amplify their role in building a more equitable, innovative, and resilient economy. The data shows that the world is watching. Now, the task is to ensure that knowledge translates into action.

potential is unlocked through a supportive ecosystem—is empirically grounded in the comprehensive analysis of the literature itself.

In conclusion, bibliometric analysis was the most appropriate method for this study due to its capacity to provide an objective, macroscopic, and data-driven overview of a complex and expansive research domain, effectively meeting the stated objectives of mapping, identifying, and assessing the scholarly discourse on MSMEs in India.

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