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ECHOES OF CONFORMITY: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM IN PUBLIC SECTOR STUDIES

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Abstract:

The concept of institutional isomorphism, first introduced by DiMaggio and Powell, has increasingly shaped understandings of how public sector organisations respond to external pressures, including regulatory mandates, professional norms, and environmental uncertainty. However, previous literature often overlooks the complex interplay between these pressures across governance levels and varied contexts. To address this gap, this study employs bibliometric tools, including Scopus Analyzer, OpenRefine, and VOSviewer, to systematically analyze 304 documents published between 1992 and 2025. The analysis maps publication trends, co-authorship networks, influential authors, and keyword co-occurrences, providing a nuanced picture of research patterns and thematic developments. Key findings reveal a marked growth in publications since 2010, peaking around 2020–2022, with contributions from a diverse range of countries and interdisciplinary collaborations. The co-authorship network highlights the central roles of authors such as Powell W.W. and Oliver C., while emerging scholars and regions, including Malaysia and China, reflect a widening global interest in the field. Keyword analysis further identifies evolving research themes, from traditional concerns of legitimacy and compliance to contemporary emphases on sustainability, environmental management, and innovations. This study contributes to the literature by

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highlighting the extent and dynamics of scholarly engagement with institutional isomorphism in public sector contexts and the emerging directions for future research. The findings underscore the growing complexity and relevance of institutional theory in understanding public sector transformations in an increasingly interconnected and regulated world.

Keywords:

Bibliometric Analysis, Coercive Pressure, Institutional Isomorphism, Mimetic Pressure, Normative Pressure, Public Sector.

Introduction

The concept of institutional isomorphism, introduced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), refers to the process by which organisations become increasingly alike over time due to external institutional pressures. In the context of public sector organisations, these pressures often stem from the need to maintain legitimacy, secure resources, and conform to prevailing norms or regulatory expectations. Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) assert that such isomorphic forces, whether coercive, normative, or mimetic, play a significant role in shaping the trajectory of public sector reforms and organisational transformations. These pressures can drive public agencies to adopt similar structures, procedures, or technologies, particularly in efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and performance.

Coercive isomorphism, which originates from formal regulations, legal mandates, or authoritative oversight, is particularly influential in compelling compliance with specific standards or frameworks. For instance, Wulaningrum et al. (2020) emphasize that coercive pressures often encourage greater performance accountability by aligning organisational behavior with governmental or institutional requirements. However, as noted by Aizawa (2018), the influence of regulatory compliance is not uniform across contexts. While it can foster convergence in practices, existing research rarely explores how the effects of coercive pressure vary depending on the specific regulatory, political, or socio-economic environment in which organisations operate.

Normative isomorphism, another key dimension, is explored by Ansmann and Seyfried (2021) and Knies et al. (2022). They emphasized how professional standards and networks drive toward standardized practices, particularly in areas like human resources and quality management. Nevertheless, these studies do not adequately investigate variations in practices across different countries or organisation types. Likewise, Sari et al. (2022) and Mendonça et al. (2023) discuss mimetic isomorphism, where organisations imitate others during uncertain conditions, notably adopting similar reporting or algorithmic systems. Nonetheless, there is limited understanding of how this imitation affects long-term organisational innovation and diversity.

Gomes et al. (2022) and Konovalenko (2024) illustrate coercive and mimetic isomorphic processes through public sector accounting reforms, such as adopting International Public Sector Accounting Standards in Eastern Europe, Portugal, and Spain. These studies reveal the influential roles of external stakeholders like the European Union (EU) and international financial institutions. Nonetheless, they often neglect the internal organisational factors that influence how these reforms are accepted and implemented. On the other hand, Puspita (2017)

provides insights into how coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures interact within local government in Malang, Indonesia, highlighting gaps in understanding the long-term interplay of these mechanisms across different governance levels.

In contrast, Croucher and Woelert (2018) and Rees et al. (2022) critically examine institutional isomorphism, suggesting that organisations do not always passively accept external pressures. They argue organisations may demonstrate varying degrees of compliance or resistance depending on their unique missions and operations. However, factors influencing an organisation's choice between resistance and compliance remain underexplored. Similarly, Kwon and Lee (2023) argue that institutional uniformity resulting from isomorphism can negatively impact policy effectiveness, particularly anti-corruption measures. They suggest a need for further research on how policies might adapt or resist such constraining forces.

In summary, the literature on institutional isomorphism highlights how coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures influence public sector organisations to adopt similar practices. Conversely, many studies do not fully explore how these pressures interact across different levels of government and in varied contexts. There is also limited attention to the internal factors within organisations that shape how they respond to external pressures. Some researchers have pointed out that too much uniformity can reduce innovation and weaken policy effectiveness.

Figure 1 sums up the conceptual pathway of institutional isomorphism in public sector studies, illustrating the progression from the introduction of the concept by DiMaggio and Powell to its practical manifestations in compliance, imitation, and standardisation. It highlights how these pressures, while facilitating the convergence of practices, may also generate resistance and unintended impacts on policy effectiveness. The visual representation underscores the nuanced interplay between external drivers and organisational responses, culminating in a mixed landscape of conformity and divergence that characterises public sector transformations.

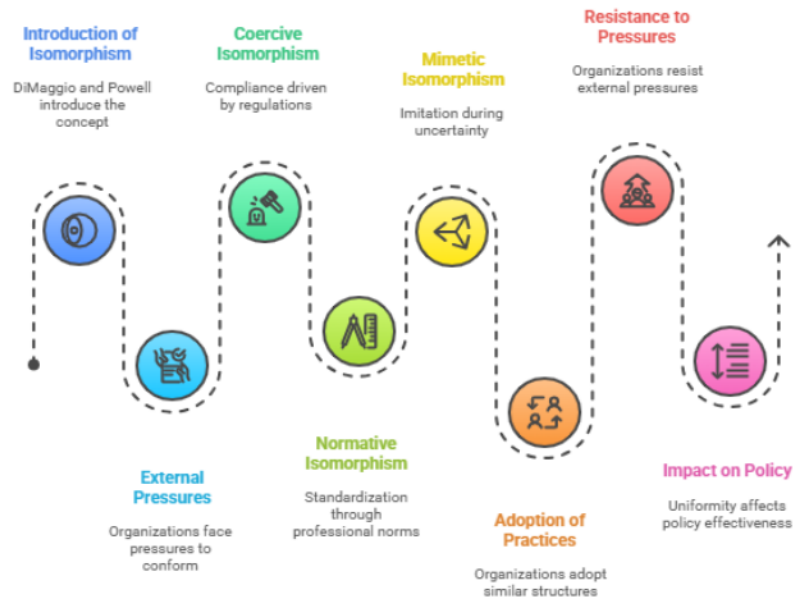


Figure 1: Overview of Institutional Isomorphism in Public Sector Studies

Research Questions

The exploration of institutional isomorphism in public sector studies has witnessed growing scholarly attention, reflecting both theoretical interest and practical relevance. To systematically examine the evolution of this field, the study employs a bibliometric approach that allows for an objective mapping of intellectual landscapes, key contributors, and emerging themes. The following research questions guide this inquiry, addressing patterns of publication, authorship, influence, geographical distribution, collaboration networks, and thematic focus, providing a comprehensive understanding of the trajectory and current state of research in this area.

- What are the publication trends in institutional isomorphism and the public sector over time?
- Who are the authors with the most publications? Which articles are the most frequently cited in the field?
- Who are the most influential authors in the study of institutional isomorphism within the public sector, and how has their work shaped the development of this field?
- Which countries are the most active contributors to the literature on institutional isomorphism and the public sector, and what do these patterns suggest about the global research engagement and priorities?
- How is the global co-authorship network structured in studies on digital transformation in public-sector auditing, and which countries serve as central or influential collaborators?

- f. What are the most frequently used keywords in the literature, and how do they reflect evolving research themes in the field?

Methodology

Bibliometric analysis involves collecting, organizing, and examining bibliographic information from scholarly publications (Alves et al., 2021; Assyakur & Rosa, 2022; Verbeek et al., 2002). In addition to basic statistics like identifying key journals, publication dates, and leading authors (Y. C. J. Wu & Wu, 2017), bibliometric techniques also include more advanced methods, such as document co-citation analysis. A thorough literature review depends on a systematic and repeated process of selecting appropriate keywords, searching for literature, and conducting a detailed analysis. This process helps in building a comprehensive bibliography and ensuring reliable findings (Fahimnia et al., 2015). For this reason, the study focused on highly cited publications, as these provide valuable insights into the key theories guiding the field. To maintain data reliability, Scopus was chosen as the main database for data collection (Al-Khoury et al., 2022; di Stefano et al., 2010; Khiste & Paithankar, 2017). To ensure high-quality data, only articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals were included, while books and lecture notes were excluded (Gu et al., 2019). The publication data, covering the period from 1992 to May 2025, were sourced from Elsevier's Scopus, known for its extensive coverage of scholarly work.

Data Search Strategy

The data search strategy employed in this study was designed to ensure a systematic and focused retrieval of relevant literature on institutional isomorphism within public sector contexts. The primary data source was Scopus, a comprehensive bibliographic database recognized for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications. The search query was formulated to capture articles explicitly addressing institutional isomorphism and its associated pressures—mimetic, normative, coercive, and general institutional pressures—within the public sector and governmental domains. The search string, as outlined in Table 1, employed a combination of Boolean operators and wildcard characters to encompass variations in terminology and ensure comprehensive retrieval.

Specifically, the query targeted document titles, abstracts, and keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY) for occurrences of key terms such as "institutional isomorphism," "mimetic pressure," "normative pressure," "coercive pressure," and "institutional pressure," in conjunction with "public sector" or "government." The results were further refined by applying multiple filters, as depicted in Table 2: inclusion was limited to journal articles published in English, indexed under the subject area of Business, Management, and Accounting, and at the final publication stage, excluding in-press articles, conference papers, books, and reviews. The combination of these parameters ensured that the dataset focused on peer-reviewed scholarly contributions relevant to the study's thematic scope, providing a reliable and high-quality corpus for subsequent bibliometric analysis.

Table 1: The Search String

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("institutional isomorphism*" OR "mimetic pressure*" OR "normative pressure*" OR "coercive pressure*" OR "institutional pressure*") AND ("public sector" OR "government")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
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Date of extraction: 22 May 2025**Table 2: The Selection Criteria in Searching**

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Subject area	Business, Management, and Accounting	Other than Business, Management, and Accounting
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

Data Analysis

VOSviewer, a bibliometric software tool created by Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman at Leiden University (van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2017), has become a widely used instrument for the visualization and analysis of scientific literature. The software is particularly adept at generating intuitive network visualizations, clustering related elements, and producing density maps. Its versatility allows researchers to explore various relationships within co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks, thus offering a comprehensive overview of scholarly landscapes. The software's interactive design, combined with regular updates, supports effective and dynamic exploration of large bibliometric datasets. VOSviewer's capacity to compute bibliometric metrics, coupled with its ability to customize visual representations and compatibility with diverse data formats, renders it an essential tool for scholars investigating complex research domains.

A key feature of VOSviewer lies in its ability to translate intricate bibliometric datasets into clear and interpretable visual formats. Focusing on network visualization, the software excels at clustering similar items, analysing keyword co-occurrence patterns, and creating density maps. Its user-friendly interface makes it accessible to both novice and experienced researchers, facilitating efficient exploration of research landscapes. Continuous advancements ensure that VOSviewer remains at the forefront of bibliometric analysis, offering valuable insights through metric computations and customizable visual outputs. Its adaptability to different bibliometric data forms, such as co-authorship and citation networks, positions it as a versatile and indispensable tool for gaining an in-depth understanding of research patterns.

For this analysis, datasets containing information such as publication year, title, author names, journal, citation count, and keywords were extracted from the Scopus database in PlainText format, covering the period from 2015 to December 2024. The data were processed using VOSviewer version 1.6.19. Leveraging the software's clustering and mapping functionalities, this approach facilitated the generation of visual maps that illustrate relationships within the dataset. Unlike the Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) approach, which also aims to represent item similarities within low-dimensional spaces (Appio et al., 2014), VOSviewer focuses on positioning items so that the proximity between two items accurately reflects their degree of relatedness and similarity (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). VOSviewer departs from the MDS methodology, which typically calculates similarity indices like cosine or Jaccard measures, by employing the Association Strength (AS_{ij}) to normalize co-occurrence frequencies. This metric is computed as van Eck and Waltman (2007):

$$AS_{ij} = \frac{C_{ij}}{w_i w_j},$$

where the value reflects the ratio between the observed co-occurrences of items i and j and the expected co-occurrences under the assumption of their statistical independence.

Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings from the bibliometric analysis and explores their implications for the study of institutional isomorphism in public sector transformation. The analysis synthesizes patterns and trends observed within the dataset, providing insights into the intellectual landscape, thematic emphases, and evolving directions in the literature. By systematically examining publication trends, co-citation networks, and thematic clusters, this section highlights key contributors, influential works, and areas of scholarly convergence and divergence. The discussion contextualizes these findings within the broader academic discourse and identifies gaps and opportunities for future research. In doing so, it sets the stage for a deeper understanding of how the concept of institutional isomorphism has been applied and developed in public sector studies.

What Are The Publication Trends In Institutional Isomorphism And The Public Sector Over Time?

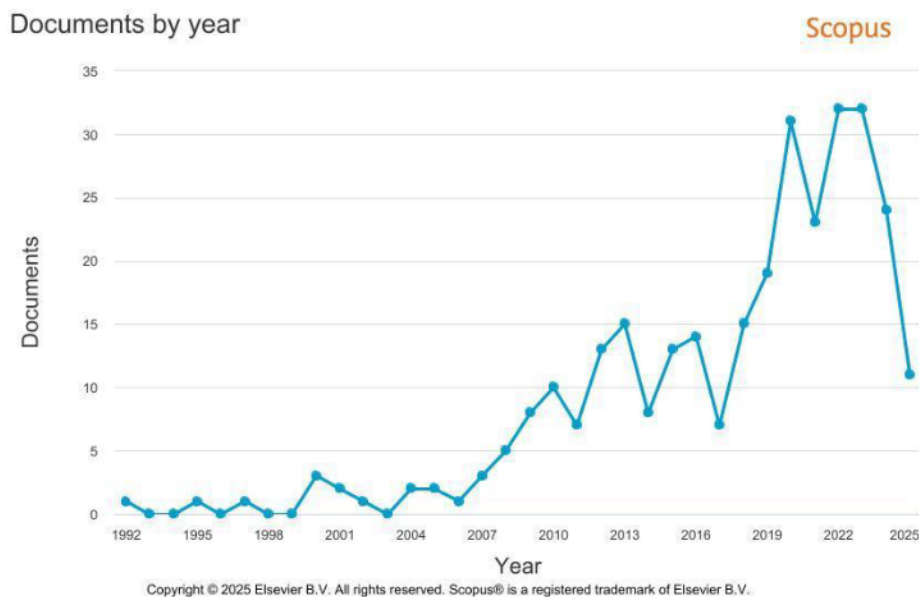


Figure 2: Trend in the Number of Documents on Institutional Isomorphism and Public Sector indexed in Scopus from 1992 to 2025

The Scopus data illustrate a clear trajectory of increasing scholarly interest in institutional isomorphism in public sector studies over the past three decades. The early period from 1992 to approximately 2005 was characterized by a low but steady volume of publications, often fewer than five per year. This suggests that while institutional theory was an established framework, its application to public sector contexts remained relatively niche and limited to isolated empirical studies. The modest but consistent output during these years reflects a foundational phase where the field was primarily theoretical and exploratory.

A notable shift occurred from the mid-2000s onwards, marked by a gradual but steady climb in publication volumes. Between 2007 and 2017, the pattern of increasing fluctuations with more frequent peaks indicated growing scholarly engagement, likely influenced by global public sector reform movements such as New Public Management (NPM) and the emergence of performance-based governance. The increase in publication output, particularly from 2013 onwards, signals a transition from a niche interest to a more mainstream research domain, driven by evolving governance structures and the rising complexity of public sector management, which created a fertile ground for applying institutional isomorphism as an analytical framework.

The most striking trend emerged from 2018 onwards, with a sharp rise in publications peaking between 2020 and 2023, where annual outputs reached nearly 30 documents. This surge likely corresponds with global interest in public sector transformation, accelerated by digitalisation, transparency initiatives, and the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on public administration. While a noticeable decline is observed in 2024 and particularly in 2025, this likely reflects publication indexing lags rather than a substantive drop in research output. Overall, the pattern highlights the evolution of institutional isomorphism research from isolated theoretical inquiry

to a dynamic, globally engaged field that continues to offer critical insights into public sector conformity and transformation.

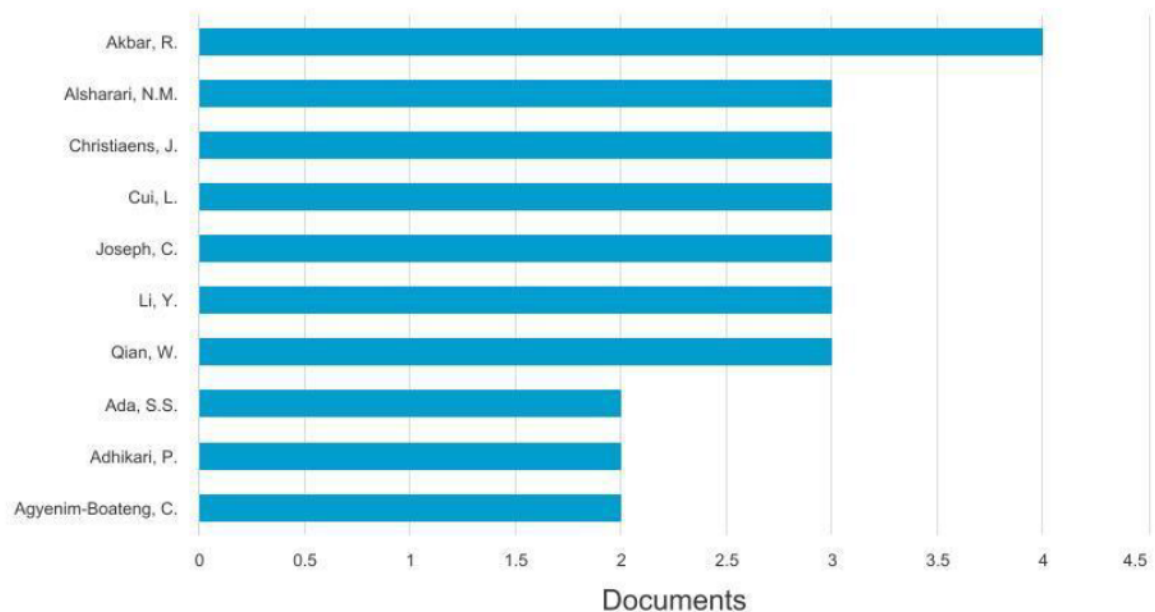
Who Are The Authors With The Most Publications? Which Articles Are The Most Frequently Cited In The Field?

Authors With The Most Publications.

Documents by author

Scopus

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.



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Figure 3: Top Contributing Authors

The analysis of the Scopus data reveals that Akbar, R., stands out as the most prolific author in the field, with nearly four publications on institutional isomorphism in the public sector. This suggests a sustained research engagement and potential leadership in advancing the discourse on how public organizations conform to institutional pressures. Akbar's consistent contributions likely reflect a targeted research agenda focused on the intersection of public sector governance and institutional theory. Following closely behind are authors such as Alsharari, N.M., Christiaens, J., and Cui, L., each with approximately three publications, indicating a cohort of scholars actively shaping the field through collaborative and independent research.

The presence of diverse authors like Joseph, C., Li, Y., Qian, W., Ada, S.S., and Adhikari, P., each contributing multiple publications, underscores the broadening of scholarly engagement with institutional isomorphism beyond a few key individuals. This diversity points to a global and multidisciplinary interest, encompassing public sector and governance scholars and those focusing on accounting, management, and sustainability. The inclusion of authors such as Cui, L., and Li, Y., who have contributed to studies of institutional pressures in Chinese contexts,

highlights the increasing geographic and thematic diversification of the field, moving beyond Western-centric frameworks to incorporate perspectives from emerging economies and diverse institutional environments.

The relatively even distribution of contributions among the top authors reflects a collaborative and expanding research landscape, where multiple voices and regional perspectives contribute to the evolving discourse on institutional isomorphism. The mix of established scholars and emerging voices suggests that the field benefits from both foundational theoretical development and innovative empirical investigations into public sector transformations. This pattern of contributions provides a robust intellectual foundation for future studies, emphasizing the relevance and adaptability of institutional isomorphism in analysing complex public governance challenges across varying political, cultural, and economic contexts.

Which Articles Are The Most Frequently Cited In The Field?

Table 3: Top Cited Article

Authors	Title	Source title	Cited by
M. Delmas & Toffel (2004)	Stakeholders and environmental management practices: An institutional framework	Business Strategy and the Environment	973
Cui & Jiang (2012)	State ownership effect on firms' FDI ownership decisions under institutional pressure: A study of Chinese outward-investing firms	Journal of International Business Studies	592
Wang et al. (2012)	Exploring the role of government involvement in outward FDI from emerging economies	Journal of International Business Studies	535
Carpenter & Feroz (2001)	Institutional theory and accounting rule choice: An analysis of four US state governments' decisions to adopt generally accepted accounting principles	Accounting, Organizations and Society	399
Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004)	Institutional isomorphism and public sector organizations	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	382
M. A. Delmas & Montes-Sancho (2010)	Voluntary agreements to improve environmental quality: Symbolic and substantive cooperation	Strategic Management Journal	362
G.-C. Wu et al. (2012)	The effects of GSCM drivers and institutional pressures on GSCM practices in Taiwan's textile and apparel industry	International Journal of Production Economics	341

Authors	Title	Source title	Cited by
Menguc et al. (2010)	The interactive effect of internal and external factors on a proactive environmental strategy and its influence on a firm's performance	Journal of Business Ethics	337
Li (2014)	Environmental innovation practices and performance: Moderating effect of resource commitment	Journal of Cleaner Production	331
Chen et al. (2018)	Does institutional pressure foster corporate green innovation? Evidence from China's top 100 companies	Journal of Cleaner Production	328

The citation data from Scopus highlights the prominence of environmental management and corporate governance within the discourse of institutional isomorphism, especially with public sector and hybrid institutional contexts. The most cited article by Delmas and Toffel (2004), with 973 citations, foregrounds stakeholders' influence on environmental management practices within an institutional framework. This reflects a broader shift in public sector studies, where environmental sustainability and regulatory compliance have become integral to organizational legitimacy, aligning with coercive and normative isomorphic pressures. Similarly, Frumkin and Galaskiewicz's (2004) article, though comparatively less cited (382 citations), specifically anchors institutional isomorphism in public sector organizations, offering critical insights into how legitimacy concerns shape organizational conformity.

The inclusion of studies focusing on emerging economies, particularly China, further illustrates the global engagement with institutional theory. For instance, Cui and Jiang (2012) and Wang et al. (2012), both published in *Journal of International Business Studies*, analyse state ownership and government involvement in Chinese firms' Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) decisions under institutional pressures, with 592 and 535 citations respectively. These works highlight the interplay between institutional constraints and strategic decisions in contexts characterized by strong government oversight and evolving regulatory frameworks. This trend suggests an expanding scope of isomorphic analysis, moving beyond Western-centric models to incorporate diverse economic and governance environments, including state-led and emerging-market contexts.

Moreover, the data underscores the thematic dominance of environmental and sustainability-related research in institutional isomorphism literature. Several articles, including Delmas and Montes-Sancho (2010), Wu et al. (2012), Menguc et al. (2010), and Li (2014), focus on the effects of institutional pressures on green innovation and proactive environmental strategies. This reflects the increasing importance of environmental considerations in public sector governance and corporate responsibility, driven by regulatory changes, stakeholder expectations, and global sustainability agendas. Collectively, the citation data reveals a field that is expanding geographically and thematically, with institutional isomorphism serving as a critical lens for analysing organizational responses to environmental and regulatory pressures in both public and private sectors.

Who Are The Most Influential Authors In The Study Of Institutional Isomorphism Within The Public Sector, And How Has Their Work Shaped The Development Of This Field?

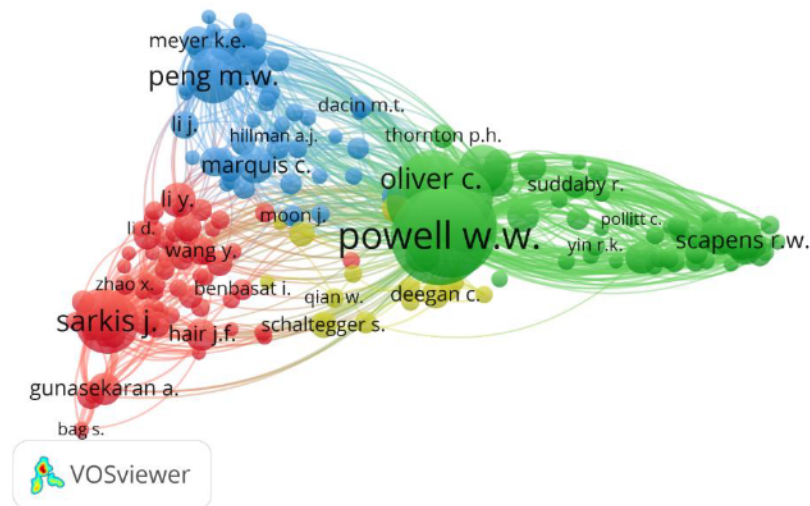


Figure 4: Co-Citation Network Visualisation of Authors

The VOSviewer co-citation analysis reveals the foundational scholars and influential thinkers driving the discourse on institutional isomorphism in public sector research. Notably, DiMaggio P.J. (246 citations, total link strength 6,848) and Powell W.W. (262 citations, 7,150 total link strength) stand out as the most cited and connected authors, underscoring their seminal role in conceptualizing institutional isomorphism and its implications for organizational behavior. Their foundational work has provided the theoretical scaffolding upon which much of the contemporary research is built, highlighting the persistence of their ideas in scholarly discussions. Similarly, Scott W.R. (231 citations, 6,631 total link strength) and Meyer J.W. (157 citations, 4,322 total link strength) have substantially shaped the field, reinforcing the centrality of neo-institutional theory in explaining conformity in public organizations.

Beyond the foundational theorists, the analysis highlights a diverse and evolving scholarly landscape. Authors such as Oliver C. (137 citations, 4,143 total link strength), Greenwood R. (101 citations, 3,534 total link strength), and Zucker L.G. (58 citations, 1,645 total link strength) reflect the sustained influence of scholars who expanded the scope of institutional theory into various domains, including strategic responses to institutional pressures and the socio-cognitive dimensions of organizational change. The presence of authors like Suddaby R. (45 citations, 1,665 total link strength) and Modell S. (75 citations, 2,900 total link strength) indicates a strong focus on empirical applications and methodological advancements, particularly in public sector accounting and governance reforms. These contributions enrich the field by linking theoretical constructs with practical challenges faced by organizations.

The data also points to the increasing prominence of emerging scholars and interdisciplinary contributions, with names like Zhu Q. (114 citations, 3,978 total link strength), Sarkis J. (147 citations, 4,770 total link strength), and Zhang J. (52 citations, 1,936 total link strength) reflecting a growing emphasis on sustainability, environmental governance, and supply chain management. These authors represent a shift towards integrating institutional theory with

contemporary challenges such as corporate social responsibility and green innovation, broadening the conceptual horizons of the field. The wide array of authors and their varying citation and link strength metrics underscores a vibrant and interconnected research community that continues to advance the understanding of institutional isomorphism in public sector contexts.

Which Countries Are The Most Active Contributors To The Literature On Institutional Isomorphism And The Public Sector, And What Do These Patterns Suggest About The Global Research Engagement And Priorities?

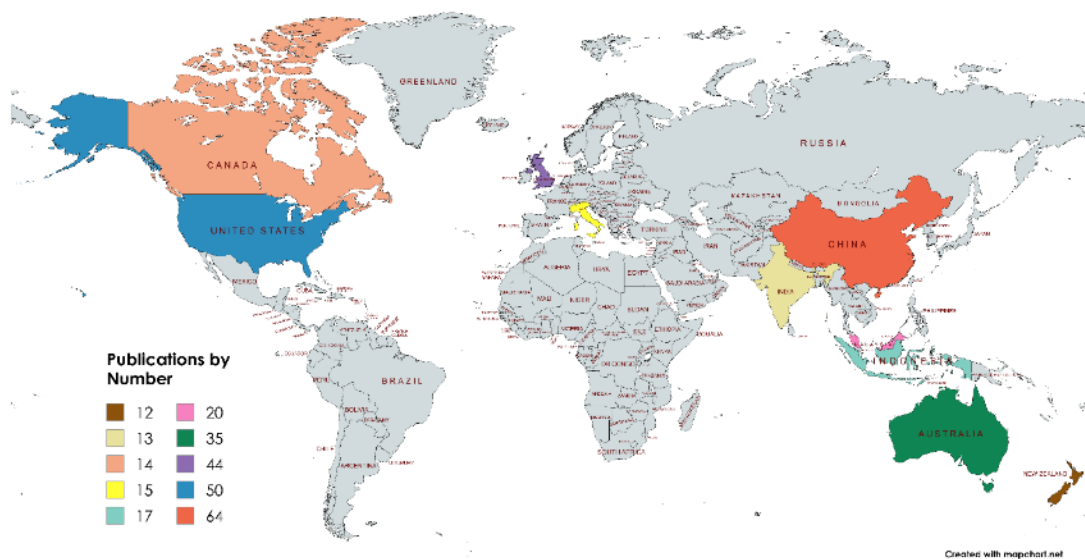


Figure 5: Global Distribution of Publications on Institutional Isomorphism and Public Sector Studies

The geographical distribution of publications, as depicted in the map, highlights the global engagement with institutional isomorphism in public sector transformations, while underscoring distinct regional concentrations. The United States leads with 64 publications, followed closely by the United Kingdom with 50 publications. These figures reflect the centrality of these countries in advancing public sector and institutional theory research, likely due to their rich academic traditions, strong publication platforms, and historical involvement in NPM and performance-based governance reforms. Canada, Australia, and China also emerge as significant contributors, each recording between 35 and 44 publications. This indicates the presence of robust scholarly communities actively engaging with public sector modernization debates in these regions.

In contrast, emerging economies such as Malaysia and Indonesia demonstrate a growing interest in the topic, with Malaysia contributing 14 publications and Indonesia 12 publications. These figures are particularly notable given the developing contexts of these nations, suggesting a regional emphasis on adapting institutional theories to local public sector reform agendas. The inclusion of these countries underscores the globalization of the discourse, reflecting diverse institutional environments where coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures interplay differently from Western-centric models. The involvement of China with a substantial

publication output further illustrates the increasing relevance of institutional isomorphism in contexts shaped by rapid economic development and strong state-led governance frameworks. The map also reveals contributions from European countries such as Italy, France, and Germany, each with publication numbers ranging from 15 to 20. This reflects a steady but less dominant engagement with the theme, often focusing on comparative public administration and the diffusion of EU governance norms. Collectively, the geographical distribution underscores the transition of institutional isomorphism from a concept primarily explored in Western contexts to a global framework with increasing relevance across varied political, economic, and cultural landscapes. This trend highlights the potential for future research to explore context-specific applications and theoretical adaptations of isomorphism within the evolving public sector governance terrain.

How Is The Global Co-Authorship Network Structured In Studies On Digital Transformation In Public-Sector Auditing, And Which Countries Serve As Central Or Influential Collaborators?

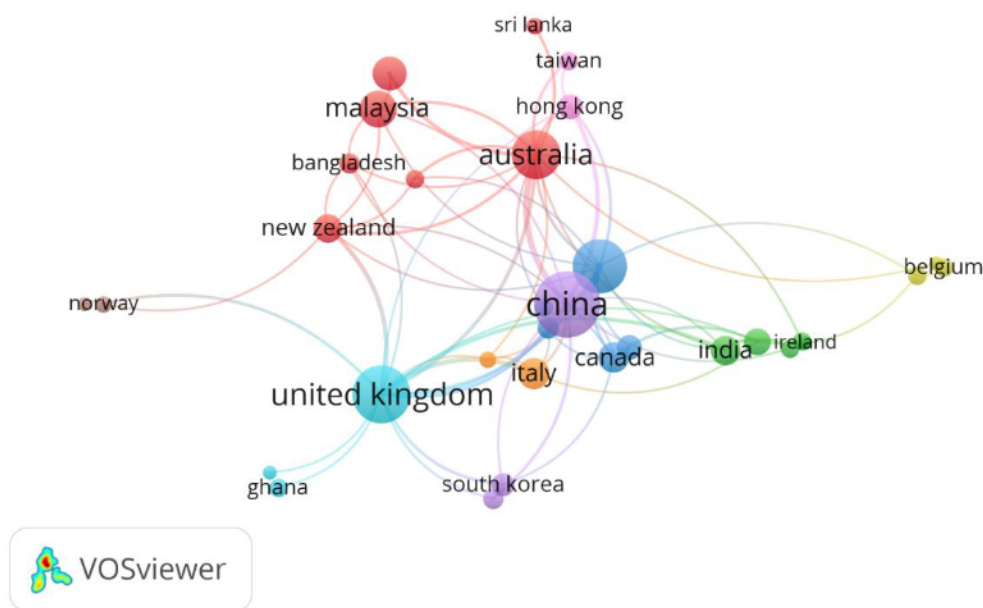


Figure 6: Co-Authorship Network Visualisation of Institutional Isomorphism Research in Public Sector Studies.

The VOSviewer analysis of countries' co-authorship patterns demonstrates the geographical spread and intensity of scholarly collaborations in institutional isomorphism research within public sector contexts. The United States leads with 44 documents, 4,279 citations, and a total link strength of 26, closely followed by China, which tops the document count with 64 publications and a robust 3,710 citations. The high citation counts and link strengths of these countries reflect their central roles in shaping the field, both through substantial research output and strong collaborative networks. The United Kingdom, with 50 documents, 2,615 citations, and the highest link strength (31), suggests a deeply integrated scholarly presence that extends beyond individual publications to form strong co-authorship ties across borders.

The data also highlights the participation of key contributors from regions such as Australia (35 documents, 1,537 citations) and Canada (14 documents, 1,324 citations), reinforcing the importance of these countries as hubs for public sector and institutional theory research. Emerging players such as Malaysia (20 documents), Indonesia (17 documents), and India (13 documents) demonstrate meaningful levels of scholarly engagement, albeit with lower citation and link strength metrics, which may reflect newer or less globally integrated research networks. The inclusion of countries like Brazil, South Korea, and Portugal with moderate levels of output and connectivity illustrates the expanding geographical scope of the field, reflecting growing interest in applying institutional frameworks in diverse socio-political contexts.

Interestingly, some countries with lower document counts, such as Belgium (5 documents) and Ghana (5 documents), exhibit minimal link strength, suggesting more isolated research efforts or limited international collaboration. In contrast, countries like Hong Kong (9 documents, 556 citations, link strength 10) and New Zealand (12 documents, 635 citations, link strength 11) display a higher degree of integration into global research networks. Overall, the data indicates a field that is both geographically diversified and increasingly interconnected, with leading contributors such as the United States, United Kingdom, and China setting the pace, while emerging contributors in Asia, Africa, and Latin America gradually strengthen their collaborative ties and research presence.

What Are The Most Frequently Used Keywords In The Literature, And How Do They Reflect Evolving Research Themes In The Field?

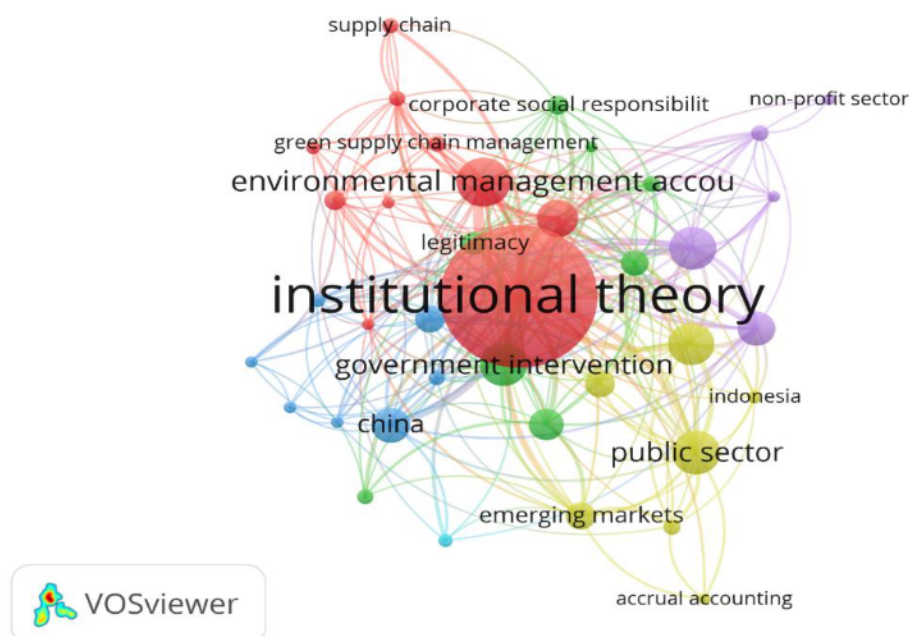


Figure 7: Network Visualization Map of Keywords' Co-Occurrence

The VOSviewer visualisation of keyword co-occurrence reveals a dense and interconnected thematic landscape in the study of institutional isomorphism within the public sector. At the core of the network, the prominent cluster centers around “institutional theory,” which appears as the dominant conceptual anchor, signifying its foundational role in shaping the discourse. Keywords such as “government intervention,” “legitimacy,” and “public sector” form immediate connections to this central node, reflecting core themes in public administration and institutional research. This configuration suggests a robust focus on how public organizations align with institutional norms and pressures to secure legitimacy and manage reform mandates. The visualisation also highlights thematic diversification, with clusters emerging around “environmental management accounting,” “green supply chain management,” and “corporate social responsibility.” These linkages indicate an expanding scope of isomorphic inquiry into sustainability, environmental governance, and ethical practices in public and hybrid organizational settings. The presence of terms like “supply chain” and “accrual accounting” reflects an interdisciplinary engagement, bridging public sector governance with private sector management practices and financial reporting reforms. Such diversity underscores the evolving application of institutional theory beyond traditional bureaucratic analysis, incorporating elements of Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) frameworks.

Notably, geographic markers such as “China,” “Indonesia,” and “emerging markets” are positioned within the network, suggesting a growing interest in examining how institutional isomorphism manifests in non-Western and developing contexts. These connections highlight a shift towards more inclusive research agendas that capture variations in institutional pressures across different economic and political systems. The co-occurrence patterns point to a field that consolidates around key concepts and embraces complex, context-specific applications of institutional theory, offering fertile ground for further research into the dynamic interplay between global norms and local adaptations in public sector governance.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken to systematically examine the patterns and trajectories of research on institutional isomorphism in public sector contexts, with a particular focus on identifying key trends, contributions, and thematic developments. Through the analysis of 304 documents extracted from Scopus using Scopus Analyzer, OpenRefine, and VOSviewer, the research mapped the evolving discourse, co-authorship collaborations, influential authors, and thematic clusters shaping this field. The analysis revealed a steady growth in publications from 1992 onwards, with notable surges around 2020–2022, driven by increased global attention to governance reforms and public sector digitalisation. Influential contributors emerged from both established and emerging regions, with the United States, United Kingdom, China, and Australia leading in terms of publication volume and collaborative networks, while Malaysia and other developing contexts reflected a growing engagement with institutional theory in localised settings. Thematic analysis highlighted a shift from traditional concerns of compliance and legitimacy towards contemporary emphases on sustainability, environmental governance, and digital transformation, indicating an expanding conceptual scope. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the global evolution of institutional isomorphism research and underscore the significance of bibliometric approaches in capturing complex knowledge landscapes. While the study provided a broad overview of scholarly engagement, limitations included potential publication lags, language restrictions, and a focus confined to journal articles. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating additional data sources, extending temporal coverage, and examining the practical impacts of

isomorphic pressures in diverse organisational contexts. Overall, this study underscores the importance of institutional theory in interpreting public sector reforms and highlights the role of bibliometric analysis in tracing intellectual developments, offering valuable insights for scholars and practitioners alike.

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