

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING TECHNIQUES OF ACTIVITY-BASED COSTING (ABC): A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL RESEARCH TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

Activity-Based Costing (ABC) has emerged as a significant research domain within modern management accounting and is widely recognized as a core technique of strategic management accounting, characterized by diverse developments in concepts, methodologies, and practical applications. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of global research trends related to ABC through a bibliometric analysis approach. The research focuses on identifying prominent research themes, influential authors, leading academic journals, highly productive countries, and key references in this field. Data were collected from the Scopus database for the period 1990 - 2025, yielding a total of 508 scientific publications related to activity-based cost management accounting. The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer in combination with Microsoft Excel to visualize knowledge networks and explore the structural relationships within the research ecosystem. The findings contribute to the systematic consolidation of the theoretical foundations of ABC and offer valuable guidance for researchers in developing research models, selecting topics, and choosing appropriate methodologies for future studies.

Keywords: *Activity-Based Costing (ABC); Bibliometric analysis; Strategic management accounting; VOSviewer.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and increasingly intense competition, organizations face not only growing pressure to reduce costs but also the need to enhance the quality of information used for strategic decision making. Traditional cost accounting systems, which rely on simple

allocation bases such as direct labor hours or machine hours, have revealed significant limitations as the proportion of indirect costs increases and business and production processes become more complex. In response to these challenges, Activity based costing (ABC) has been developed as a key tool of strategic management accounting, aiming to provide more accurate cost information to support planning, control, and long-term decision making. In response to the growing demand for improving business performance and strengthening cost control, ABC has been developed and extensively studied as a modern costing approach in management accounting. ABC represents a significant advancement over traditional costing methods. Since the 1990s, a substantial body of research has examined its theoretical foundations, practical applications, benefits, challenges, and future development trends.

ABC was introduced to address the inherent limitations of traditional costing systems, which often allocate overhead costs arbitrarily, leading to distorted product costs and suboptimal managerial decisions. The core assumption of ABC is that products and services consume activities, and activities, in turn, consume organizational resources. This perspective shifts the focus of cost management from direct cost objects to the activities that generate and drive costs [1]. ABC traces costs from resources to activities and subsequently assigns them to products or services based on the actual consumption of those activities, thereby providing a more accurate representation of cost behavior [1].

Previous studies indicate that the level of adoption of ABC varies across countries, with significantly higher adoption rates observed in developed economies than in developing ones [2]. Successful implementation depends

on effectively addressing behavioral, technical, and organizational factors. Key challenges include high implementation costs, the complexity of data collection and system maintenance, the need for organizational cultural alignment and strong managerial support, and technical difficulties in identifying appropriate activities and cost drivers [2]. Time-Driven activity-based costing (TDABC) has been introduced as a simplified variant that reduces complexity and implementation costs by focusing on time as the primary cost driver, thereby enhancing organization wide applicability and enabling integration with advanced technologies such as real time costing and data analytics [1, 3].

ABC provides substantial benefits for cost control and managerial decision making by enabling more accurate product and service costing, thereby supporting more effective pricing decisions and more reliable profitability analysis [2]. Greater cost transparency at the activity level enhances planning, control, and decision-making processes. By analyzing specific activities, organizations can identify non value added activities, thereby supporting cost reduction initiatives and driving continuous process improvement [4]. ABC also functions as a strategic management tool, contributing to benchmarking, the balanced scorecard, and total quality management initiatives. It is particularly suitable for organizations operating in complex manufacturing environments or service industries, especially those with diverse and substantial overhead costs [3].

Despite its many advantages, ABC has several limitations highlighted in prior studies, including high resource requirements, lengthy implementation time, the need for detailed activity level data, and reliance on specialized expertise for system implementation and ongoing maintenance [1]. It is also a relatively complex costing method, which makes it difficult to implement in certain organizations. Some firms experience difficulties in changing cost management practices and addressing organizational cultural factors. The adoption rate of ABC remains limited, particularly among small and medium sized enterprises and in developing countries, largely due to its cost and complexity [2].

Recent studies indicate the integration of ABC with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and real time costing systems in order to enhance costing accuracy and reduce operational burdens [5]. TDABC continues to attract considerable attention as a practical alternative that addresses many of

the traditional challenges associated with ABC. The ongoing evolution of ABC aims to maintain its relevance in dynamic business environments by improving usability and strengthening its support for strategic decision making [6].

The rapid evolution of the modern business environment, characterized by increasing pressures for cost optimization, performance control, and the creation of sustainable competitive advantage, has made ABC an increasingly important topic of both practical and strategic research. Reviewing and synthesizing international studies on ABC not only reflects the level of academic interest in this field but also provides opportunities to identify core issues, research gaps, and emerging innovation trends in the practical application of ABC within contemporary organizations. Existing review studies have largely relied on traditional systematic review approaches, while research employing bibliometric analysis combined with scientific mapping techniques to explore knowledge networks, research clusters, influential authors and journals, and long term development trends in the ABC field remains limited, particularly in developing countries.

This study aims to systematically assess the extent to which the topic of ABC has been addressed and discussed in international academic forums through bibliometric analysis. By examining publication volume, document types, disciplinary areas, academic journal outlets, and distributions by country and institutional affiliation, the study identifies the diffusion of ABC as an advanced cost management tool and highlights the growing trend toward integrating ABC with strategic management frameworks and enterprise information systems.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Bibliometric data collection and Screening process

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using publications indexed in the Scopus database covering the period from 1990 to May 2025. The search was performed using the keyword “*activity-based costing*” in the article title field to ensure a high level of relevance to the research topic. The initial search retrieved 1,162 documents. A subject area filtering process was then applied to refine the dataset. Only publications classified under the following fields were retained “*Business, management and accounting, economics, econometrics and finance, decision sciences, and social sciences*”. After this step, the dataset was reduced to 516 documents. Subsequently, the document types were screened to

include only scholarly outputs with substantial academic content, namely journal articles, conference papers, review articles, and book chapters. This filtering resulted in a refined dataset of 510 publications. In the final stage, two "articles in press" that had not yet been formally published were excluded. The final sample therefore consisted of 508 publications that are directly relevant to ABC and were used as the basis for the bibliometric analysis. This rigorous screening process ensured the reliability, consistency, and academic relevance of the dataset used in this study.

2.2. Data extraction and information processing

Table 1 presents the data collection and information processing procedure applied in this study. All retrieved publications were converted into bibliographic data and incorporated into the analytical dataset. During the data processing and analysis stages, two main tools were employed. (i) Microsoft Excel was used to organize the dataset, calculate publication frequencies, determine percentage distributions, and construct descriptive tables and graphical illustrations, (ii) VOSviewer (version 1.6.20) was utilized to generate and visualize bibliometric networks, including co-citation networks, keyword co-occurrence networks, and the linkages among publication sources.

Table 1. Bibliometric research procedure

No.	Research Phase	Description
1	Topic identification	Activity-based costing (ABC) in management accounting
2	Scope definition	Database: SCOPUS Search field: Article title Time span: 1990 - 2025 Subject areas: Business, management and accounting; economics, econometrics and finance; decision sciences; social sciences. Document types: Articles, conference papers, reviews, book chapters.
3	Keywords and search string	"Activity based costing"
4	Data collection date	14/05/2025
5	Data storage and screening	Preliminary reading and screening by the authors; 508 documents retained for bibliometric analysis.
6	Descriptive statistical analysis	Use of Scopus analytical tools to examine publication volume, time distribution, document types, and citation counts.

7	Co-citation analysis	Use of VOSviewer software to identify highly cited documents and intellectual structure of the field.
8	Keyword analysis	Use of VOSviewer software to identify major keyword clusters and emerging research themes.

Source: Compiled by the authors

3. RESULTS

3.1. Publication volume and citations

Based on data retrieved and analyzed from the Scopus database, a total of 508 publications related to ABC were identified for the period from 1990 to May 2025. This result indicates a sustained scholarly interest in ABC over more than three decades, reflecting its significance as a strategic cost management technique within the field of management accounting.

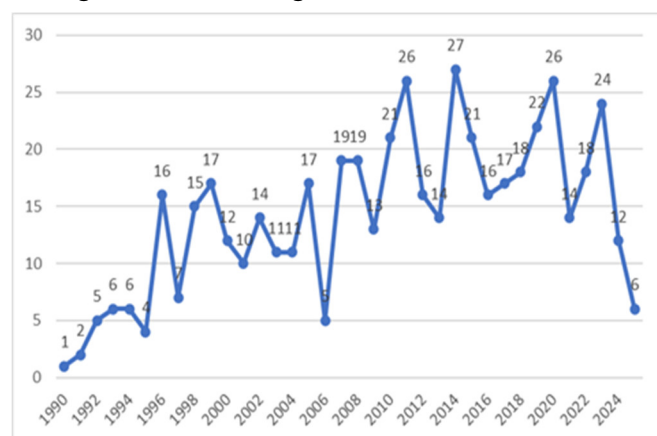


Figure 1. Annual distribution of publications on activity-based costing (1990 - 2025) (Source: Compiled by the authors from Scopus data, 2025)

Based on Figure 1, it can be observed that following the first publications addressing ABC in 1990, the number of related studies remained relatively low during the period 1990 - 1996, typically ranging from one to six publications per year. In the subsequent period from 1997 to 2005, the number of publications increased noticeably, reaching up to 16 publications per year, which represents an increase of more than ten articles annually compared to the earlier stage. This trend indicates that ABC began to attract growing scholarly attention during this period. Although there was an unexpected decline in publications in 2006, with only five studies published, the number of articles increased again from 2007 onward and peaked in 2014, with 27 publications in Scopus indexed journals. This peak reflects the strong research momentum and heightened academic interest in ABC as a strategic management accounting technique. During the period 2015 - 2018, the number of publications declined

slightly but remained relatively high, averaging approximately 18 publications per year. The upward trend resumed in 2019 - 2020. After 2020, the number of publications decreased somewhat; however, it increased again in 2023, reaching 24 publications. This pattern demonstrates that ABC continues to be a highly relevant and active research topic, particularly within the field of management accounting and business economics.

The number of publications increased steadily from 1990 to 2025, reaching its peak in 2014 with 27 articles published. However, the highest citation impact was associated with articles published in earlier years. In particular, publications from 1999 received the highest total number of citations, with 17 articles accumulating 1,009 citations, followed by publications from 2004 (11 articles with 901 citations), 1997 (7 articles with 813 citations), and 2002 (14 articles with 616 citations) (Figure 2). Most of these highly cited works are early foundational studies that contributed to the theoretical development of ABC within the field of management accounting. This pattern suggests that the intellectual foundations of ABC were established primarily through seminal research, which continues to influence subsequent studies in the field.

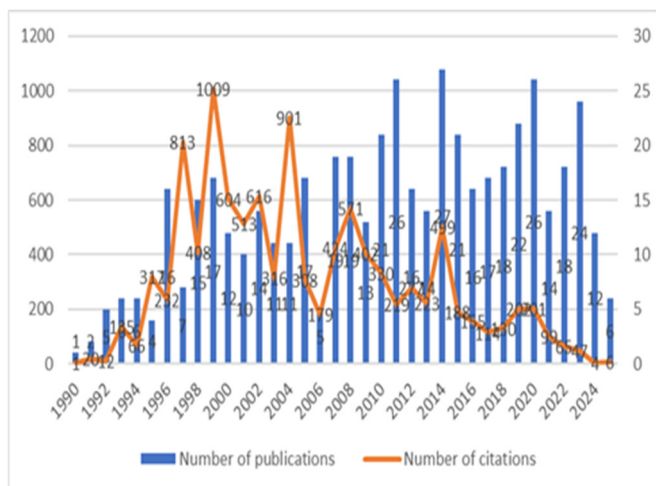


Figure 2. Number of citations by publication year (Source: Compiled by the authors from Scopus data, 2025)

3.2. Publication years

Although early studies on ABC in management accounting emerged as early as the 1980s, the number of publications during the period 1990 - 1996 remained limited, ranging from one to six articles per year. After 1996, the volume of publications increased steadily, with new studies being published every year, indicating

sustained academic interest in this topic. Research activity intensified significantly during the period 2010 - 2023, and by 2025, new findings and contributions continue to be published. This sustained growth in publication output demonstrates that ABC has become a prominent research topic attracting considerable attention from scholars across different countries and academic communities worldwide.

3.3. Countries of publication

According to Figure 3, publications related to ABC have attracted particular attention from authors based in developed and emerging economies, with a strong concentration of contributions from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Brazil, China, Australia, Spain, and Belgium. This distribution indicates that ABC has been widely examined in both mature and rapidly developing economic contexts, reflecting its relevance as a strategic cost management tool across diverse institutional environments.

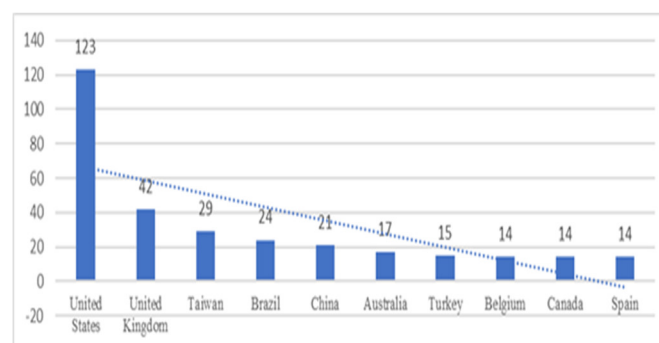


Figure 3. Analysis of the number of publications from the top 10 countries (Source: Compiled by the authors from Scopus data, 2025)

The United States leads in terms of publication output, with a total of 123 articles, followed by the United Kingdom with 42 studies, Brazil with 24 publications, China with 21, Australia with 17, Turkey with 15, and Canada and Spain, each contributing 14 articles. This distribution indicates that research on ABC has attracted considerable attention, particularly in countries with highly developed economies. The diversity of publications across countries also suggests that ABC has been examined in a wide range of geographical contexts and organizational environments. Furthermore, VOSviewer software was used to analyze international co-authorship networks, applying a minimum threshold of at least five publications per country. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 4, which visualizes the collaborative relationships among countries in ABC research.

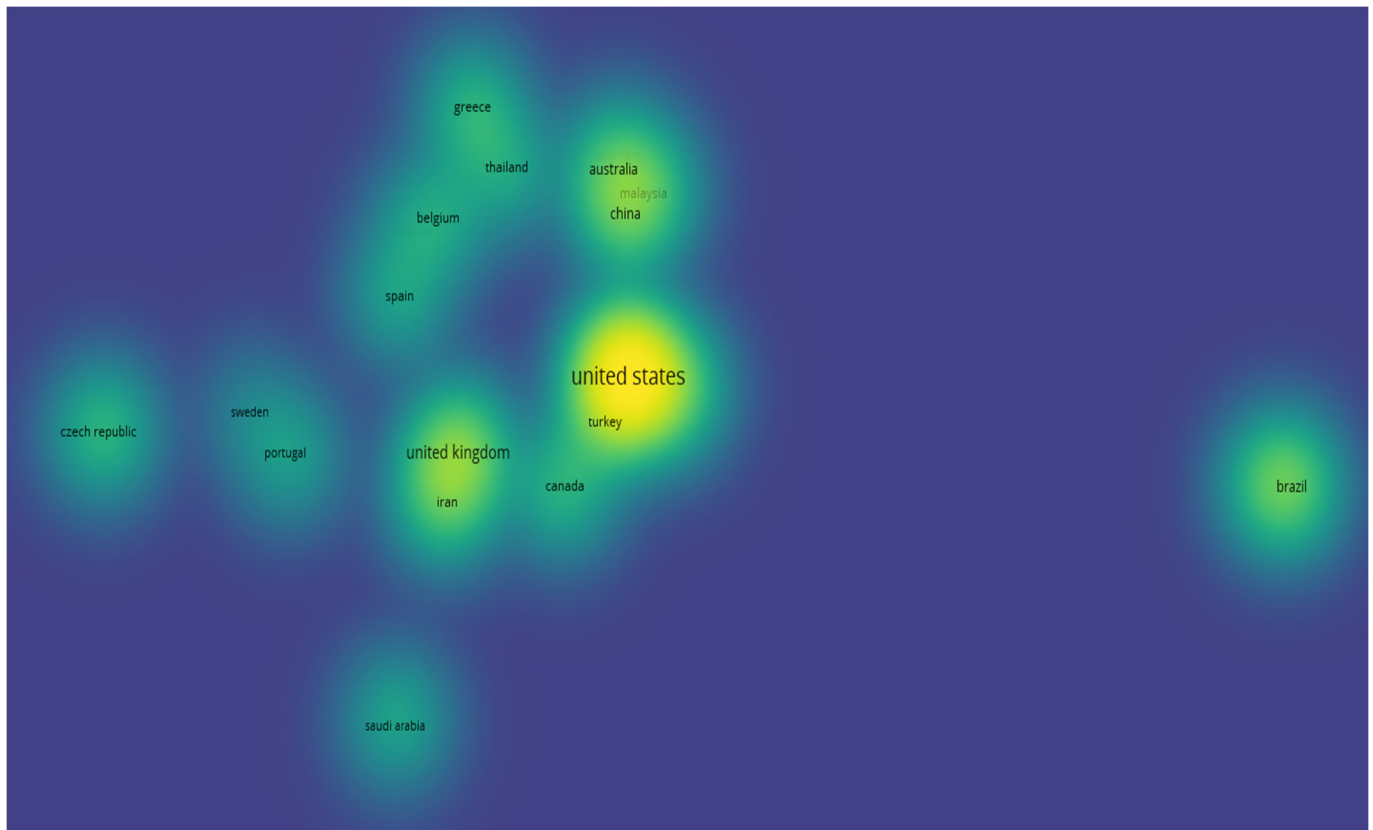


Figure 4. Visualization map of international collaboration networks among countries with a minimum productivity of five publications (Source: Output generated by VOSviewer software)

Based on this collaboration network map, several distinct clusters of international co-authorship can be identified. One major cluster is formed by researchers from developed countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, in collaboration with scholars from Australia, China, Thailand, Belgium, and Spain. Another prominent cluster consists of researchers from Brazil, indicating a strong regional collaboration pattern. The foundational studies published before 2005 were primarily conducted by researchers based in the United States, the United Kingdom, and China. In contrast, more recent research outputs during the 2020s have increasingly originated from countries such as Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and the Czech Republic, reflecting a gradual geographical diversification and internationalization of ABC research.

3.4. Document types

A total of 508 documents were identified from the Scopus database based on document and source types. The documents include journal articles, books, book chapters, review papers, conference papers, and editorial materials. Table 2 summarizes the structure of

publications by document type. Journal articles account for the largest share of publications, representing 79% (402 documents) of the total output. This is followed by conference papers, which constitute 14% (69 documents) of the dataset. Review articles represent 5% (24 documents), while book chapters account for 3% (13 documents) of the total publications.

Table 2. Summary of retrieved data (1990 - 2025)

Document type	Number of publications	Percentage (%)
Journal articles	402	79
Book chapters	13	3
Review articles	24	5
Conference papers	69	14
Total	508	100

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Scopus data

An analysis of publication sources was conducted using VOSviewer based on the dataset of 508 documents. Under the criterion that each journal must have published at least one article, the study generated a distribution map of journals that have published research on ABC. The results of this source analysis are presented in Figure 5, which visualizes the dissemination of ABC related studies across academic journals.

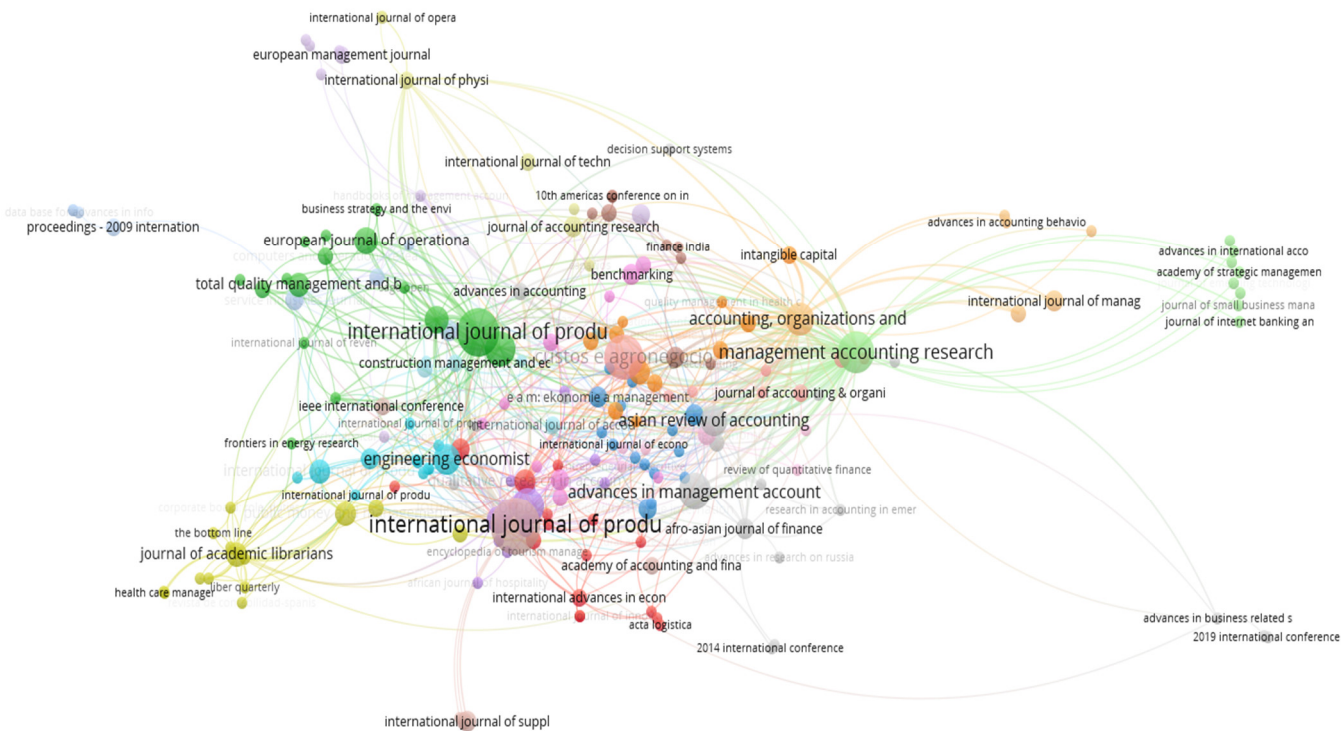


Figure 5. Visualization map of publication sources (Source: Results generated by VOSviewer)

The cluster analysis identified six major clusters within the publication source network of ABC research. Cluster 1 (red) consists of 17 journals, with *International advances in economic research* as a representative source. Cluster 2 (green) includes 16 journals, typified by *International journal of production research*. Cluster 3 (blue) comprises 15 journals, represented by *The British Accounting Review*. Cluster 4 (yellow) contains 15 journals, with *Journal of Academic Librarianship* as a representative outlet. Cluster 5 (purple) consists of 14 journals, typified by *Journal of Corporate Accounting and Finance*. Cluster 6 (light blue) includes 12 journals, represented by *The Engineering Economist*. These clusters reflect the multidisciplinary nature of ABC research and the concentration of publications across key journals in accounting, production management, and applied economics. Regarding individual journals, the analysis indicates that research on ABC has been most frequently published in journals such as the *International journal of production economics* and the *international journal of production research* (Table 3). This highlights the strong interest of these journals in the ABC topic and also provides guidance for researchers seeking suitable publication outlets for their work on ABC. The detailed statistics are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Top 8 journals publishing the highest number of articles on ABC

No.	Journal	Number of Publications	Percentage (%)
1	International Journal of Production Economy And Finance	21	4
2	International Journal of Production Research	15	3
3	Custos E Agronegocio	13	3
4	Management Accounting Research	11	2
5	Advances in Management Accounting	9	2
6	Journal of Corporate Accounting and Finance	9	2
7	Sustainability (Switzerland)	8	2
8	Annual International Conference Proceeding	8	2

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Scopus data

3.5. Research areas

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of research areas for the 508 publications on ABC retrieved from the Scopus database. The analysis shows that the majority of ABC studies are concentrated in four main fields: Business, Management, and Accounting, which accounts

for 36% of publications; Economics, Econometrics, and Finance, representing 15%; Social Sciences and Engineering, together comprising 11%; and Decision Sciences, accounting for 10%. The remaining publications are distributed across other research areas, including Computer Science (5%) and various other disciplines (12%). This distribution highlights the interdisciplinary nature of ABC research, with a strong emphasis on management accounting and strategic decision-making contexts.

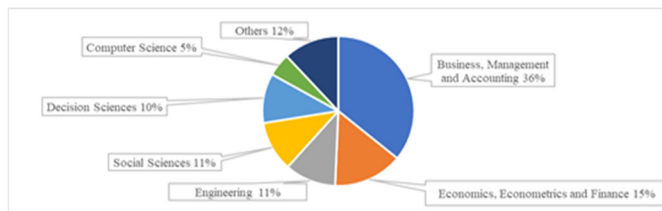


Figure 6. Analysis of publications by research area (Source: Compiled by the authors based on Scopus data)

3.6. Co-Citation analysis

VOSviewer was employed to analyze and visualize the co-citation network of publications on ABC. The software's visualization capabilities allow readers to identify the most frequently co-cited publications and to observe the citation relationships among them, as well as the clusters to which they belong [7]. From the initial set of 508 publications, a co-citation analysis was performed with a threshold of at least 20 citations per publication. The analysis revealed five distinct clusters in the ABC co-citation network.

Figure 7 presents the VOSviewer visualization of the co-citation relationships across the five clusters, with cluster size representing the number of authors within each cluster. Specifically, cluster 1 (red) comprises 46 authors, with highly cited authors including Mitchell, Gosselin, and Innes. Cluster 2 (green) includes 28 authors, featuring prominent researchers such as Young, Anderson, Govindarajan, and Bromwich. Cluster 3 (blue) consists of 23 authors, with key authors including Tsai, Sullivan, and Turney. Cluster 4 (yellow) contains 22

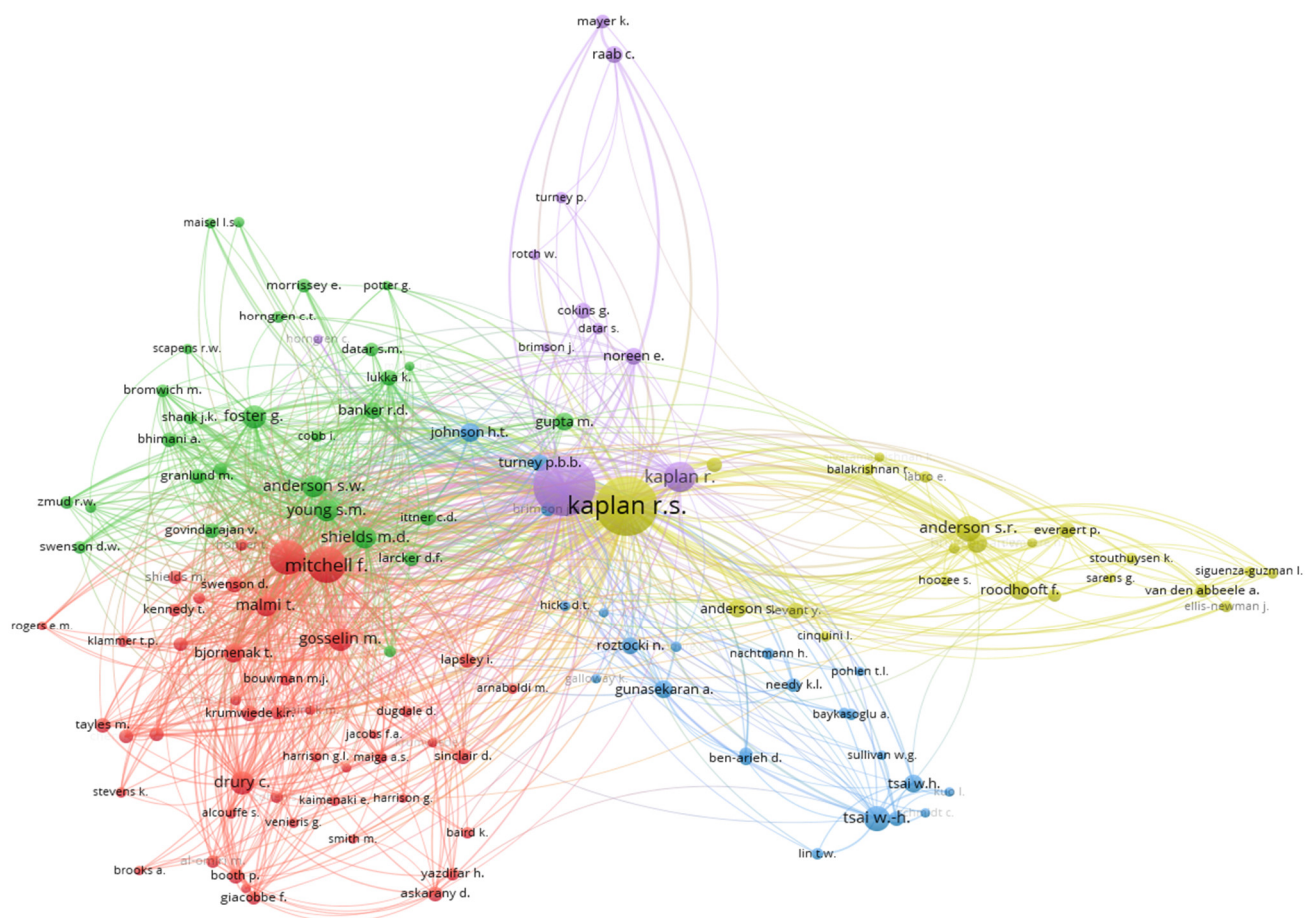


Figure 7. Co-citation analysis map (Source: Results generated by VOSviewer software)

authors, with major contributors Kaplan and Roodhooft. Cluster 5 (purple) has 11 authors, with central figures

including Cooper, Raab, and Noreen. The size of each bubble reflects the number of co-citations for the corresponding author. Notably, authors with the highest co-citation counts include Kaplan R.S. (749 co-citations), Cooper (734), Mitchell (282), and Innes (251). Table 4 further presents the top 10 most co-cited articles, providing additional insights into seminal studies and foundational research in the field of strategic management accounting and ABC.

Table 4. Top 10 most co-cited articles in ABC research

No.	Article Title	Author(s)	Year of Publication	Total Citations
1	Time-driven activity-based costing	Kaplan R.S.; Anderson S.R.	2004	685
2	The role of actor-networks and boundary objects in management accounting change: A field study of an implementation of activity-based costing	Briers M.; Wai F.C.	2001	408
3	The effect of strategy and organizational structure on the adoption and implementation of activity-based costing	Gosselin M.	1997	289
4	Activity-based costing diffusion across organizations: An exploratory empirical analysis of Finnish firms	Malmi T.	1999	276
5	A survey of activity-based costing in the U.K.'s largest companies	Innes J.; Mitchell F.	1995	218
6	A fuzzy goal programming approach for green supply chain optimisation under activity-based costing and performance evaluation with a value-chain structure	Tsai W.H.; Hung S.-J.	2009	217
7	Activity-based costing in the U.K.'s largest companies: A comparison of 1994 and 1999 survey results	Innes J.; Mitchell F.; Sinclair D.	2000	207

8	The impact of contextual and process factors on the evaluation of activity-based costing systems	Anderson S.W.; Young S.M.	1999	190
9	Using time-driven activity-based costing to identify value improvement opportunities in healthcare	Kaplan R.S.; Witkowski M.; Abbott M. et al.	2014	174
10	Towards explaining activity-based costing failure: Accounting and control in a decentralized organization	Malmi T.	1997	160

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Scopus data

3.7. Keyword analysis

Using VOSviewer 1.6.20, a keyword analysis was conducted based on author-provided keywords from the dataset of 508 publications retrieved from Scopus. A minimum occurrence threshold of four appearances per keyword was applied. In the visualization, the size of each bubble represents the frequency of the keyword, while the thickness of the connecting lines reflects the strength of co-occurrence between keywords. The VOSviewer output identified nine distinct clusters of keywords, which are summarized in Table 5. The corresponding visual representation of these clusters is presented in Figure 8.

Table 5. Keyword analysis summary

Cluster	Number of Keywords	Most frequent keywords
1 (Red)	9	Cost accounting, Cost allocation, Management accounting
2 (Green)	9	ABC, Time-driven activity-based costing, Cost analysis
3 (Blue)	7	Activity-based costing, Activity-based costs
4 (Yellow)	7	Costs, Cost system, Activity-based management
5 (Purple)	5	Accounting, Cost management
6 (Light Blue)	5	Performance measurement, Cost estimation
7 (Orange)	4	Performance, Cost accounting
8 (Brown)	2	Product diversity, ABC allocation
9 (Pink)	2	Operating costs, Logistics

Source: Results generated by VOSviewer software

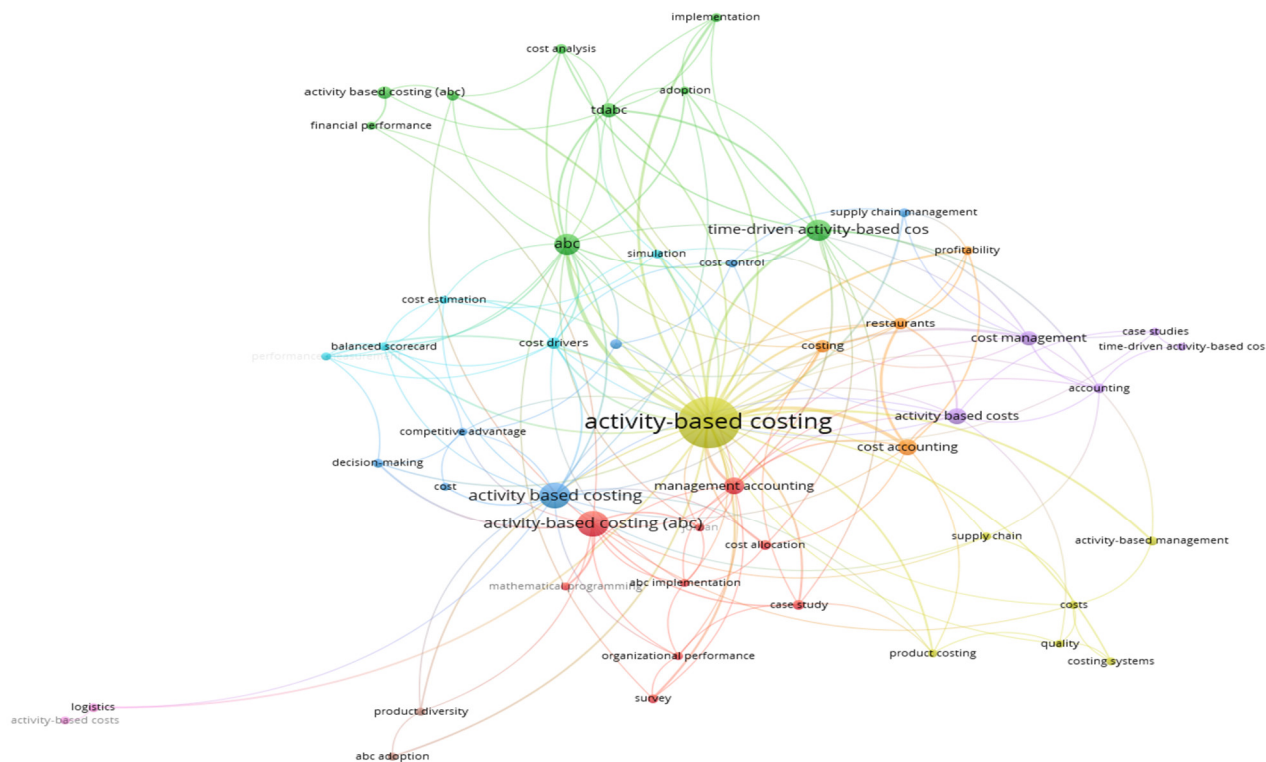


Figure 8. Keyword co-occurrence analysis map (Source: Results generated by VOSviewer software)

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the context of a global economy increasingly emphasizing cost efficiency, accurate cost allocation, and the strategic role of accounting information, ABC has emerged as a significant and influential research topic within the field of management accounting. To systematically capture and synthesize the academic development of this field, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis of 508 scholarly articles published in the Scopus database from 1990 to May 2025.

By applying modern bibliometric techniques, including co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and knowledge network mapping using VOSviewer, this study not only provides a comprehensive overview of the prominence of ABC within the academic community but also reveals the underlying intellectual structure driving the development of the topic. Furthermore, this approach enables researchers to identify scholarly connections among author groups, research streams, and application domains of ABC, such as manufacturing, public services, healthcare, logistics, and integrated management accounting models.

The analysis results indicate a significant shift in ABC research focus, from traditional approaches emphasizing

improved accuracy in cost allocation to studies integrating ABC with strategic management systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, and quantitative decision-making methods. Moreover, the co-citation network visualizations reveal the clear formation of thematic clusters, reflecting emerging research trends such as ABC and performance measurement, ABC in lean production environments, ABC combined with life cycle costing, and ABC applications in the public sector.

Table 6. Global research trends in ABC for strategic management accounting

Main research trend	Core focus
Advanced ABC	Development of ABC variants such as Time-Driven ABC (TDABC) to reduce implementation costs and enhance flexibility, or integration with Activity-Based Budgeting (ABB).
Technology integration	Investigating the role of Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Blockchain in cost data collection and automation of ABC systems.
Sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR)	Applying ABC to calculate environmental costs and activity-based environmental costing (ABEC), integrating it into sustainable management accounting, green ABC.
Application in new sectors	Studying ABC/SMA applications in healthcare, education, and particularly service organizations, where indirect costs are substantial.

ABC and strategic role of management accounting	Exploring how management accounting shifts from a control support role to actively shaping and implementing corporate strategy.
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Source: Compiled by the authors

ABC is a powerful cost allocation tool that, when applied within the framework of strategic management accounting (SMA), provides accurate and relevant cost data for critical strategic decision-making. Bibliometric analysis serves as a guiding framework to track the evolution of ABC research, revealing a shift from basic costing models toward technology integrated, more flexible models such as TDABC, and a growing focus on sustainability related issues at a global scale (Table 6). The findings also highlight research gaps, offering opportunities for scholars to advance and direct future investigations into areas such as the application of big data and blockchain in ABC costing, as well as emerging trends in green accounting and sustainable management accounting, which integrate environmental costs and carbon emissions into ABC systems.

This study also makes a significant contribution by presenting the development of ABC research in a visualized format not only facilitating new researchers in gaining a comprehensive overview of the field, but also providing a directional tool for scholars pursuing more specialized research paths. The use of bibliometric analysis extends beyond traditional theoretical synthesis, establishing a foundation for subsequent empirical studies based on the identified research gaps.

5. LIMITATIONS

Although this study applies bibliometric analysis to provide a comprehensive overview of research in ABC, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data scope is limited to the Scopus database, which, while extensive, does not capture the full range of publications available on other platforms such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, or specialized national databases. Consequently, the total number of articles and the depth of the knowledge network may not fully represent the global development of ABC research. Second, the data cutoff in 2025 means that newly published studies particularly amid increasing interest in cost management and operational efficiency are not included, potentially overlooking emerging trends or recent shifts in ABC research perspectives. Third, using citation counts as a measure of academic influence may be biased by the publication age, as older studies tend to accumulate

more citations, and it may not fully reflect the intrinsic scholarly value or theoretical innovation of individual works. Fourth, despite efforts to include all relevant ABC studies, some publications may have been omitted because they do not explicitly include the keyword “activity-based costing” in the title, even if the content is closely related. Finally, this study is primarily a qualitative overview using VOSviewer visualizations to identify trends and academic relationships in ABC research. To clarify causal relationships between ABC and organizational outcomes such as performance, productivity, profitability, or managerial factors, future research should employ quantitative models with empirical data. This would enhance the depth and reliability of conclusions drawn from the broader perspective provided by bibliometric analysis.

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