

Innovative work behavior: A bibliometric analysis and future research opportunities



Nina Farliana^a   | Muhammad Feriady^a  | Maulana Amirul Adha^b  | Hanifia Arlinda^c 

^aFaculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia.

^bFaculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia.

^cFaculty of Economics and Business Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.

Abstract Innovation, especially employee innovative work behavior (IWB), plays a vital role in improving organizational performance by developing and implementing new ideas. This study aims to analyze the research trends on IWB using a bibliometric approach to identify publication patterns, leading authors, countries, and institutions, and provide directions for future research. This study uses a bibliometric analysis of Scopus data (2015-2025) using keywords such as "innovative work behavior," "employee innovative behavior," or "individual innovation." A total of 1,556 articles were obtained and analyzed using VOSviewer to evaluate productivity, research trends, and intellectual networks related to employee innovative work behavior. The results of this study show a positive trend in publications on IWB during 2015–2025, totaling 1,556 publications, peaking in 2024 with 371. China leads as the most productive country, followed by Pakistan and Indonesia, indicating the Asian region's dominance in this study. Regarding individual productivity, Afsar, B. stands out with 22 publications, while Hazara University, Pakistan, is the top institution with 27 publications. Innovative work behavior, innovation, human psychological empowerment, and human experiment are the main areas of this research. Future research is expected to address methodological gaps, integrate individual and organizational factors, and explore the impact of IWBs across sectors, including education and industry.

Keywords: creativity, scientometrics, productivity, trends

1. Introduction

Innovation is essential to enable businesses to adapt to rapid changes in economic conditions and achieve a competitive advantage (Afsar et al., 2019). Recent studies have shown that innovation is crucial to organizational performance, as it helps organizations adapt quickly to market changes and create new products and services. Among the various types of innovation, employee innovative work behavior (IWB) is considered the foundation, as individuals, not organizations, generate ideas (Gupta, 2020; Mansoor et al., 2021).

Janssen et al. (2004) defined IWB as "a tangible expression of employees' internal creativity; it is a method used to develop creative products and a process by which employees generate and implement new ideas to improve performance or solve work-related problems." IWB encompasses individual behaviors that generate, introduce, and implement new ideas for the betterment of the organization (Afsar et al., 2021; Grošelj et al., 2021). Over the last decade, research on IWBs has increased significantly. Some studies examine the factors influencing IWB, whereas others focus on its impact. Given the increasing number of publications on IWB and its diversity, the following questions must be answered to better understand this field.

1. What are the latest performance trends, research methods, and theories related to IWBs?
2. Where are the global hotspots located, and which countries, regions, and institutions have the highest number of articles and citations?
3. Who are the most influential writers in this field?
4. Which publications have had the most significant impact on IWB research?
5. What are the main trends or themes in IWB research, and what are the opportunities for future development?

The researcher believes that from a research perspective, it is essential to categorize and present the publishing trends on a particular topic; this allows a better understanding of the research developments in the field. Therefore, to guide research on IWB effectively, this study aims to answer the above questions through bibliometric analysis (BA). BA analyzes published literature quantitatively to provide a comprehensive view of a research field (Gu et al., 2021). Recently, BA has become increasingly common in business and management research. Several previous studies have addressed various topics, such as publishing patterns on a particular subject (Gao et al., 2021a; 2021b), the most cited articles (Ritter, 2015), leading authors (Heyduk & Fenigstein, 1984), journals (Shahzad et al., 2021), and universities (Cancino et al., 2017).



Similarly, a recent study (Santos & De Domenico, 2015) used BA to investigate the evolution of person–organization fit. The study identified the most cited documents, leading journals, influential authors, and leading countries in technological innovation. However, to our knowledge, no BA has been conducted for the IWB literature. Therefore, we conducted a systematic BA for IWB research to fill this gap. This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it presents trends in productivity and impact, measured by the number of publications and citations, to help researchers reflect on the literature. Second, it provides a broader overview of the most cited countries, universities, publications, authors, and articles.

Third, this study provides an overview of the intellectual networks of these countries, allowing us to understand how countries and authors are interconnected. Fourth, and most importantly, this study offers future research directions through various correspondence analyses and topic trend techniques to help researchers identify potential research ideas. Finally, this study can help journal editors understand potential areas for future development. In addition, this study will help prospective researchers and students identify the right regions and universities to pursue their research. This study can also help policymakers identify leading countries in IWB research to understand the optimal ecosystem for conducting research and development.

1.1. IWB concept

IWB (innovative work behavior) refers to behavioral tasks that help employees develop, promote, and implement new and innovative ideas (Afsar et al., 2019; Al-Ghazali & Afsar, 2021; Zhang & Yang, 2021). IWBs also include employees' conscious efforts to produce new services or products, as well as new ways of doing work by developing, promoting, and implementing ideas effectively (Chen et al., 2021; Kmiecik, 2021; Zreen et al., 2021). This definition emphasizes that IWB is related not only to innovation but also to creating valuable and innovative ideas (Hussain et al., 2020; Mansoor et al., 2021). However, by adding the elements of idea development and implementation, this concept goes beyond mere creativity. Since early research (Scott & Bruce, 1994), which viewed IWB as a multistage process describing how people innovate at work, the concept of IWB has been a major focus of much research.

1.2. Why is bibliometric analysis necessary?

In recent years, the number of published studies has increased dramatically, making it difficult for researchers to keep up with the latest trends in the literature. To overcome this challenge, researchers rely on quantitative analysis of publications to organize large amounts of data, assess the impact of key research, and build intellectual structures within a field. The literature mentions two traditional review methods: meta-analysis and structured literature review. Meta-analysis synthesizes empirical results from published quantitative studies, combining relevant results into a single finding. While this technique is very effective, its scope is limited to certain studies. In contrast to meta-analyses, structured literature reviews can include studies with various methodologies and approaches, providing contextual understanding, although they are more subjective and prone to researcher bias and take longer (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

On the other hand, science mapping offers a more macro approach. Science mapping uses bibliometric techniques to analyze disciplines, fields, papers, and authors. While a structured literature review looks deeper into subjectivity, science mapping provides a broader picture, spanning thousands of publications. It also allows visualization of relationships between different research sources, countries, institutions, journals, and authors. In short, bibliometric analysis (BA) complements systematic reviews rather than substitutes for them. Zupic & Čater (2015), BA remains useful even when ad hoc, providing a more objective and comprehensive view than narrative literature reviews do.

The quantitative analysis of publications helps synthesize the literature more objectively, without researcher bias, and can help journal editors understand publication trends and design new directions for the journal. Bibliometric techniques are becoming increasingly popular in academia because of technological advances and free access to bibliographic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. Recently, these methods have been used to conduct BA in journals (Farrukh et al., 2020), disciplines (Suominen et al., 2019), institutions, and countries (Cancino et al., 2017).

In this study, two aspects of the BA are performance mapping and science mapping. To analyze the performance of IWB research, we look at the number of publications and citations. Moreover, science mapping integrates bibliographies, cocitations, and keyword occurrences. Citation frequency measures semantic similarity in cocitation analysis (Small, 1973). If two documents are cited in a third document, they are considered to be cited together. The more frequently cocitations occur, the stronger the relationship between the articles. These cocitations reveal the structure of knowledge on a topic. If two works cite the same source, this is called bibliographic coupling. The more references they have in common, the stronger the coupling. This method helps determine the similarity of the subject matter of two publications and is helpful in all research fields, allowing researchers to find similar previous research.

2. Materials and Methods

The bibliometric analysis in this study is based on bibliographic data taken from the Scopus database to conduct BA on IWB. This approach helps evaluate scientific activities quantitatively and helps manage information in a particular field (Rey-

Martí et al., 2016). BA uses keywords to investigate key research topics in a particular domain and relationships at the micro level. The steps of this study include (1) the selection of databases and search keywords, (2) data cleaning, (3) the use of indicators, and (4) the use of software and analysis techniques.

The authors collected IWB data from Scopus via keywords such as "innovative work behavior," "employee innovative behavior," or "individual innovation". We limited articles published from 2015–2025 (the last 10 years) to English, and the type of document was an article indexed by Scopus. After the restrictions were lifted, 1,556 documents were found. Scopus was chosen because of its broad coverage and because it is one of the largest databases available (Farhan & Iqbal, 2021). Scopus covers all the information needed to conduct BA and is recognized as having advantages over other databases because of its broader coverage of social science literature.

After the data were collected, cleaning and coding were performed. A unique set of publications was created on the basis of the keywords mentioned, including various bibliographic indicators such as authors, countries, year of publication, research fields, and keywords. Only English-language publications were included in the analysis. Next, the indicators used for the BA were selected. Academics recommend two types of indicators: performance mapping and science mapping (Durieux & Gevenois, 2010). Performance analysis measures productivity on the basis of the number of citations and publications, whereas science mapping evaluates the structure and dynamics of the research field.

VOSviewer software is used in bibliographic data analysis because of its user-friendly interface and ability to effectively display graphical representations of intellectual networks. Both can produce good visualizations of intellectual structures, which facilitate data interpretation. These visualizations allow the identification of research focuses, emerging trends, and intellectual networks within the study topic (Gu et al., 2021).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Performance trends

The results in Figure 1 show a significant increase in the number of publications in the field of IWB. This trend is observed from 2015–2025. This increase is likely driven by the launch of new journals, doctoral programs in innovation, and the importance of innovation in business research. The surge in publications also indicates that IWB is starting to gain recognition in management research. On the basis of data from Scopus, the number of publications in this field has continued to increase every year since 2015.

The search records revealed a total of 1,556 publications from 2015–2025. This trend peaked in 2024, with 371 publications, making it the most productive year. Moreover, the 20 publications recorded in early 2025 show a promising start to maintain or even increase the number of publications in the field of IWB. This increase in publications reflects the relevance of this topic for current and future academic research. With the increasing attention of policymakers and academics to innovative work behavior, research in this area is expected to continue to grow.

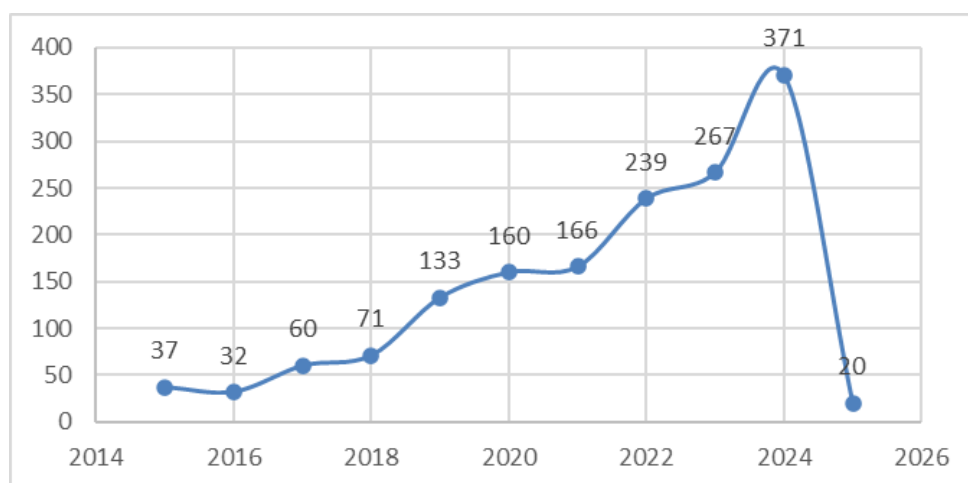


Figure 1 IWB publication performance trends 2015–2025. *Source:* Scopus database (2025).

3.2. Most productive countries

Scientific progress is the main foundation for a country's economy and cultural development (Matcharashvili et al., 2014). Therefore, an objective evaluation of scientific productivity is essential. Currently, more than 80 countries and regions contribute significantly to IWB-related research. To help students determine the right regions and universities to research innovative behavior and support policymakers in identifying the best ecosystems for R&D activities, we analyze the productivity and impact of the leading countries. This analysis includes the number of publications by country/region, total citations, and

average citations per article to assess their impact. Figure 2 lists the top 10 countries that are most active in publishing innovative behavior-related research. The ranking is based on the number of publications produced.

With 363 publications, China is the most productive country on the chart, indicating that Chinese academics increasingly value innovative work behavior as a tool for corporate strategy. Pakistan is in second place with 135 publications, reflecting the country’s significant commitment to the topic. This is followed by Indonesia with 110, indicating a significant interest in IWB in Southeast Asia. Malaysia follows with 108 publications, closely competing with Indonesia in terms of research productivity. India is fifth with 102 publications, confirming its important role in IWB research in South Asia.

The United States is sixth with 82 publications, indicating a significant contribution from this country despite being outside the Asian region. The United Kingdom, with 67 publications, is in seventh place, confirming its involvement in global research on IWB. Thailand is in eighth place with 66 publications, adding to the contribution of the Southeast Asian region. Australia is in ninth place with 64 publications, indicating a fairly stable role in IWB research. Turkey is in tenth place with 61 publications, completing the list of countries active in this research. These data show that Asian countries, especially China, dominate research on IWB, with significant contributions from countries outside Asia, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

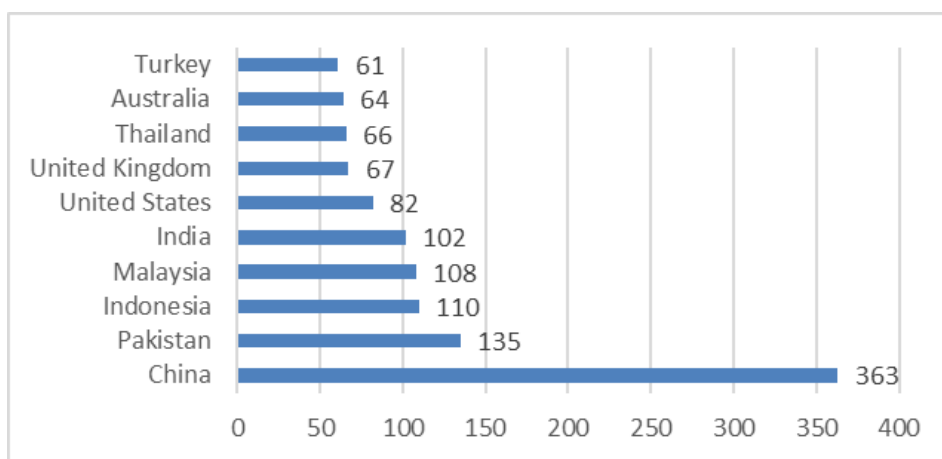


Figure 2 10 Most productive countries. Source: Scopus database (2025).

3.3. The most productive author in innovative work behavior

To answer the research question of this study, “Who are the most influential authors?” In this section, we analyze the bibliographic data to determine who publishes the most on innovative work behavior; we present the results in Figure 3. Afsar, B. tops the list with 22 publications, making him the most prolific author in the field. This shows his dedication and significant contribution to IWB research, followed by Battistelli, A., and Bani-Melhem, with 15 and 13 publications, respectively, confirming his position as one of the main contributors to IWB research. These data show that several authors actively contributed to the development of IWB research. The top position occupied by Afsar, B., with a significant margin of publications, highlights his leadership role in this topic.

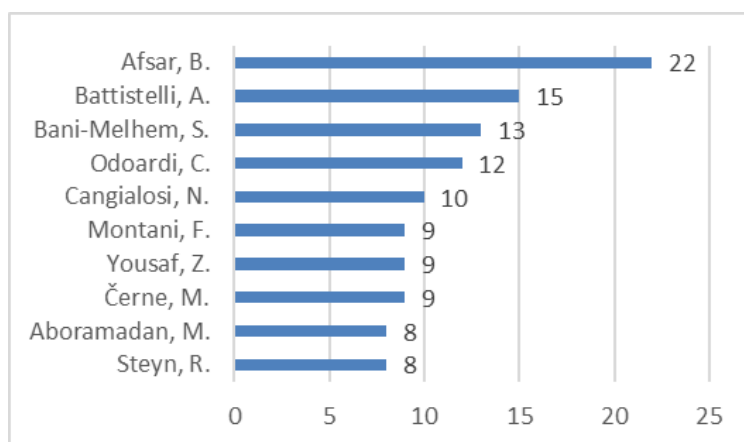


Figure 3 10 Most productive IWB topic writers. Source: Scopus database (2025).

3.4. The most productive institutions and universities



In terms of approach, quantitative methods are most commonly used, especially in behavioral research. Based on these findings, we have identified several important issues that need to be addressed to sustain the growth of research in this field. Considering the changes, current conditions, and review of IWB publications, we provide recommendations for future research directions in the following sections of this paper.

One interesting topic that deserves further exploration is the research methods used in previous studies. Most studies still use a single-method approach, and many areas lack integration across approaches. Our review revealed that most studies on IWB have been conducted with cross-sectional study designs. Given that IWB is an extrarole behavior that does not occur with high frequency, longitudinal studies are needed to better understand the dynamics of IWB and the factors that influence it.

This study analyzes bibliographic data to provide a holistic picture of publications on the basis of criteria such as the total number of publications, citations, most productive authors, universities, and countries. This bibliometric review also highlights that innovative work behavior (IWB) is an emerging field of research (Wojtczuk-Turek & Turek, 2015) and suggests that the antecedents of IWB at the individual level are still underexplored (Maqbool et al., 2019). Therefore, future research needs to consider the individual characteristics of employees to investigate IWB.

Most current research focuses on individual- or organizational-level factors. However, very few studies have adopted an antecedent synthesis approach. Combining individual-level factors with organizational or environmental levels would provide a more comprehensive understanding of IWB. This integrated approach could produce a composite model that helps identify important factors to predict organizational behavior. Unfortunately, research that integrates various models and links individual and organizational factors is still limited, making an important agenda for the future. Such integration would help understand the top-down and bottom-up approaches to IWB.

In addition, most studies have focused on the antecedents of IWB, while the outcomes or impacts of IWB have rarely been studied. Future research can measure the outcomes of IWB as a new area of exploration, including the role of IWB as a mediator between specific antecedents, such as work complexity and performance (Li & Hsu, 2016). In the university context, educational institutions face various challenges and now tend to become “entrepreneurial universities” (Zreen et al., 2021). To achieve this, universities must develop innovative behaviors among staff and employees. Academic institutions can develop models to foster innovative mindsets, redefine the role of universities in society, and facilitate the transition from traditional to entrepreneurial universities. However, research on IWBs in universities remains limited. Therefore, exploring the innovative culture in universities and developing competencies to support efficient knowledge transfer are important areas for research.

The industry context also needs to be considered, including differences between manufacturing and service organizations regarding employee innovative behavior. Future research could examine whether these differences are due to differences in work environments or variations in job roles. In addition, research designs could be linked to theories from other disciplines to broaden understanding.

With respect to theory, while existing innovation theories need to be tested and refined, interesting opportunities also arise from developing new theories. For example, innovation models should be developed and evaluated at the team or workgroup level. Although there is laboratory research on idea generation in groups (Shakil et al., 2023), these groups are often ad hoc. Further research is needed to understand the social and organizational elements that influence the creative output of intact work teams. Research must also examine how interaction or social network patterns influence workplace innovation. Previous studies (Khan et al., 2022) have shown that cross-workgroup connections and communication with professionals outside the organization can enhance creativity. These hypotheses need to be further tested empirically.

In addition, the evolution of the innovation process over time is an interesting topic. Research can investigate the various stages in generating innovative ideas, from problem identification to the final selection of creative solutions. Research can also explore the influence of individual and environmental factors on each stage of the innovation process. Another area worth investigating is the impact of job characteristics on IWB. For example, skill diversity significantly influences IWB, whereas high job autonomy may not increase innovative behavior if task identity is low (Shakil et al., 2023). Future research could focus on the interactive effects of job characteristics on IWB to provide deeper insights.

This study revealed a significant trend in publications on IWB from 2015–2025, with 1,556 publications identified through the Scopus database. The peak number of publications occurred in 2024, with 371 publications. This increase in publications reflects the relevance and importance of IWB in academic research. Factors such as the launch of new journals, the expansion of doctoral programs in innovation, and greater attention to innovation in the business world have contributed to this trend. The presence of IWB as a field of study is gaining recognition in management (Farrukh et al., 2023) shows that this topic is relevant to academics and practitioners. With academics increasingly focusing on innovative work behavior, this trend is expected to continue.

Eighty countries contributed to IWB-related research, with China being the most productive country (363 publications), followed by Pakistan and Indonesia. The dominance of Asian countries such as China, Pakistan, and Indonesia underlines the importance of the Asian region in IWB research. Contributions from non-Asian countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, indicate that IWB research has a global dimension. This analysis supports the importance of evaluating each

country's scientific productivity to assist policymakers in creating an ecosystem that supports research and development (Sudibjo & Prameswari, 2021).

With respect to individual productivity, Afsar, B. is the most productive author, with 22 publications, indicating his significant contribution to IWB research. From an institutional perspective, Hazara University, Pakistan, is the most productive institution, with 27 publications, followed by Universiti Sains, Malaysia (21 publications), and the University of Sharjah (19 publications). The dominance of institutions from Asia and the Middle East underscores the region's significant role in the development of IWB studies.

This study identifies key topic trends in IWB, such as psychological empowerment, human experimentation, employee behavior, and innovation. However, several gaps can still be explored, including the following: (1) Research methods: Most studies use a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the dynamics of IWB in depth. (2) Synthesis approach: Current research focuses on individual or organizational antecedents separately. A combined approach that integrates these two factors will provide a more holistic understanding. (3) IWB Outcomes: There is still a lack of research exploring the impact of IWB, such as its role as a mediator between work complexity and performance (Li & Hsu, 2016). In addition, research can focus on the education sector, especially in developing a culture of innovation in universities to support the transformation toward entrepreneurial universities (Zreen et al., 2021).

The development of new theories and the integration of other disciplines provide interesting opportunities for IWB research. For example, research could examine the influence of social networks on workplace innovation (Shakil et al., 2023). This study also highlights the need to further explore the impact of job characteristics, such as skill diversity and task identity, on employee innovative behavior (Khan et al., 2022). Research on IWB has shown a positive trend and increasing relevance. However, there is still much room for research development regarding methodology, theoretical approaches, and practical impact. IWBs can significantly contribute to innovation in organizations and society by broadening research approaches and integrating multiple perspectives.

4. Final Considerations

This study revealed a significant upward trend in publications on innovative work behavior (IWB) from 2015 to 2025. This increase reflects the relevance and importance of the IWB topic in academic and management practice. Of the 1,556 publications identified, peak productivity occurred in 2024, with 371 publications. The dominance of Asian countries such as China, Pakistan, and Indonesia in this study confirms the region's importance, while contributions from non-Asian countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, highlight the global dimension of this topic.

Regarding individual productivity, Afsar, B. is the leading author with 22 publications, while Hazara University, Pakistan, is the most productive institution. The key topic trends in this study include psychological empowerment, human experimentation, and employee behavior, indicating a focus on the relationship between individual behavior and organizational innovation. However, this study also identified several gaps that could be explored, including the need for more diverse research approaches, such as longitudinal studies, to understand the dynamics of IWBs and the integration of individual- and organizational-level factors. Furthermore, few studies have explored the impact of IWBs in organizational and educational contexts.

Future recommendations include developing new theories, exploring the influence of social networks on innovation, and researching job characteristics that influence employees' innovative behavior. By broadening methodological approaches and integrating multiple disciplines, IWB research has the potential to make significant contributions to innovation in organizations, universities, and society as a whole. Other recommendations include research focusing on specific contexts, such as technology-based organizations, the healthcare sector, and universities, to understand the unique factors influencing IWB in these sectors. Research in the education sector can also explore strategies for creating a culture of innovation that supports the transformation of educational institutions into entrepreneurial universities.

5. Declarations

5.1. Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

5.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool Grammarly was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

5.3. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

5.4. Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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