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Intellectual Structure and Evolution of Accounting Conservatism Research: Past Trends and Future Research Suggestions

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Abstract: Accounting conservatism (AC) is one of the components of financial reporting, and has been widely studied by academicians to identify its impact on information quality. Scholars in accounting have started to explore how AC is related to different fundamental functional areas of organizations. The interest of the scholars has resulted in an increasing number of publications in this field. In this study, we examined 408 indexed publications related to AC. This work's objectives include analyzing the regional distribution, size, and evolution of this knowledge base by identifying key authors, documents, and journals while exploring current literature, scholarly structure, and highlighting contemporary trends. The findings of the study concluded that most of the studies are conducted in developed nations contexts. However, there are still areas that need further exploration to obtain more profound insights on the subject. This bibliometric review inspires a new generation of researchers on the topic by giving them an overview of the past studies related to AC.

Keywords: accounting conservatism; bibliometric analysis; co-citation; bibliographic coupling; co-occurrence

1. Introduction

Accounting conservatism (AC) is one of the components of financial reporting, and has been widely studied by academicians to identify its impact on information quality (Sterling 1982). It is defined as “accounting policies to show the net asset value of assets downward relative to the economic utility of the assets”. For tangible and intangible assets, accounting standards have conservatism principles, such as impairment accounting and lower cost or market (Kabir and Laswad 2014). In the last two decades, the topic has garnered academicians’ interest, and the results suggest that financial reporting is conservative (Basu 1997; Watts 2003). Still, the joint framework proposed by International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) and the Financial Accounting Standard Board (FASB) has not included conservatism as one of the characteristics of reporting principle (FASB 2010), even though conservatism plays a crucial role in financial reporting. There is still a debate among

researchers and regulators on the extent that conservatism is beneficial or costly to users of financial reports. Researchers have conflicting views about the concept of AC, and some echoed the notion that conservatism biases financial statement figures downward (Gigler et al. 2009; Guay and Verrecchia 2006). On the other hand, some researchers believe conservatism naturally arises among different parties, and it helps maintain an efficient contracting mechanism (Basu 1997; Watts 2003). In this review, we will look at the studies focused on AC and see different aspects of the research conducted on the issue.

The recent decade has seen the growing importance of accounting conservatism research. For instance, previous literature has suggested that the use of AC improved the investment efficiency of an organization (Lara et al. 2016) and enhanced stock value during the crisis period (Francis et al. 2013). It also helps in reducing the information asymmetries, which then improves IPO pricing (Boulton et al. 2017). Scholars also discussed the negative impact of AC on firms. For instance, Chang et al. (2013) argued that AC might hamper innovation performance, and managers might make less risky decisions due to market pressure. The studies also classified accounting conservatism into conditional and unconditional conservatism and discussed features of both (Khalilov and Osma 2020). In addition to these quantitative studies, several qualitative studies (Glover and Lin 2018) have also been conducted.

Moreover, many researchers studied the antecedents of the AC and how it is affected by different factors (Ahmed and Duellman 2013; Ho et al. 2015; Li 2013). As a result, the study on AC has increased exponentially. This study reviews the different factors associated with accounting conservatism.

Even though the AC concept has increasingly received attention from practitioners and researchers, this research area suffers from a lack of comprehensive bibliometric analysis. Hence, this research applies bibliometric techniques to explore how scholarly literature on AC is being developed. The bibliometric methodology makes it possible to give shape, structure, and direction to the research domain as it grows and advances. Bibliometric techniques also allow us to analyze articles and citations employed by scholars in their studies. This study aims to recognize and evaluate the main articles' impact, relationships, and critical contributions regarding AC.

As a result, the present study contributes to identifying the theoretical grounding, most relevant authors, the topics already covered, and new perspectives and lines for future investigation. Moreover, the present paper analyzes popular issues, research trends, chronological development, and key outcomes of AC. For accompanying this purpose, the present study employs the Scopus database, which contains 408 publications until 2019. This paper focuses exclusively on analyzing the publications on the topic of AC from 1994 to 2019 to evaluate their scholarly impact. These 408 publications are devoted to investigating AC during the period.

The remainder of the current study is structured as follows: The next section discusses a comprehensive literature review regarding AC and its influence in accounting management. The third section describes the method adopted to conduct the bibliometric study, while the fourth section describes the findings of bibliometric analysis. In the final section, study implications, research limitations, and possible future research directions are given.

2. Methods

Scientific Tools and Support

Bibliometric studies (Björk et al. 2014; Bouyssou and Marchant 2011; Cadavid Higuaita et al. 2012; Daim et al. 2006; De Bakker et al. 2005; Donthu et al. 2020; Duque-Oliva et al. 2006; Durieux and Gevenois 2010; Farrukh et al. 2021; Garfield 2006; Gu et al. 2021; Kessler 1963; Merigó et al. 2016; Nerur et al. 2008; Persson et al. 2009; Pilkington and Meredith 2009; Small 1973; Van Eck and Waltman 2010), also known as quantitative bibliographic analysis, aid in the exploration and organization of published work in a particular subject or domain of study (Farrukh et al. 2021; Gu et al. 2021). Bibliometric studies involve counting citations in existing literature articles and using those counts to create a statistical distribution

(Farrukh et al. 2021, Farrukh et al. 2020). The research makes use of published articles to look at the trends and patterns of what has been published in a particular topic (Gao et al. 2020; Wu et al. 2021). The bibliometric approach is an important component in evaluating published research articles. Reports, books, and a collection of other relevant sources may be analyzed using bibliometric methods (Farrukh et al. 2020; Nawaz et al. 2020). The primary goal of bibliometric analysis is to examine patterns and trends in current research (Ahmed et al. 2021; Nawaz et al. 2020). In this study we used bibliometric technique to analyze the publication structure of accounting conservatism research.

To extract publications on accounting conservatism we run a search using query: (TITLE-ABS-KEY("ACCOUNTING CONSERVATISM")) in the web of sciences and Scopus database, our search showed that there are 304 publications in web of sciences whereas Scopus record showed 408 publications, thus given this significant difference in number of publications we extracted bibliographic data from the Scopus database. VOSviewer software was used to construct the bibliographic coupling as well as co-authorship maps. VOSviewer software has been widely used in the previous bibliometric studies.

3. Results

3.1. Publication Trend

The result (Figure 1) illustrates the evolution of a number of publications on AC from 1994 to 2019. This demonstrates that the early era from 1994 to 2010 saw a dearth of publications. From Table 1 we can notice that between 2011 and 2020, the number of articles climbed dramatically. Between 2015 and 2019, the highest number of publications was recorded. Figure 1 demonstrates an increase in the publishing of studies on AC. According to the statistics, the most prolific year was 2019, with 56 publications and 1624 citations. These statistics demonstrate that AC research is gaining traction, although at a slower pace than comparable areas in management and strategy. Due to the fact that AC is garnering the attention of policymakers and academics, we anticipate an increase in the number of studies conducted in this subject.

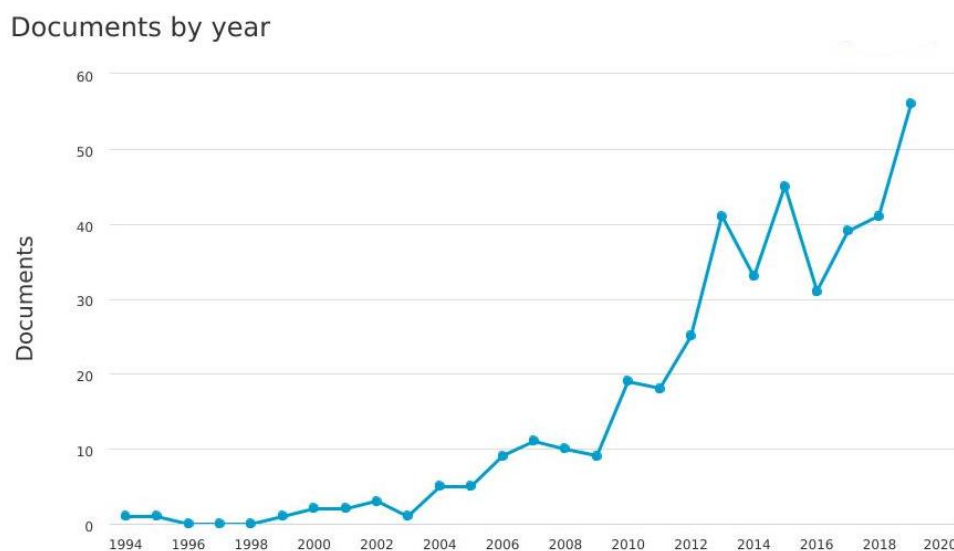


Figure 1. Documents by year.

Table 1. Trends of publication and citations.

Year	Publication	Citations
2019	56	1624
2018	41	1240
2017	39	967
2016	31	955
2015	45	856
2014	33	627
2013	41	609
2012	25	409
2011	18	430
2010	19	297
2009	9	210
2008	10	154
2007	11	115
2006	9	82
2005	5	83
2004	5	47
2003	1	50
2002	3	36
2001	2	33
2000	2	29
1999	1	25
1998	0	14
1997	0	14
1996	0	14
1995	1	2
1994	1	0
Total	408	8922

3.2. Countries and Languages of Publications

To get a sense of the most prolific countries, we studied the number of papers published by contributing countries. Although publications came from 41 nations across the globe, the majority of this scholarly contribution came from the USA, China, and the UK. Table 2 presents the results of the top 10 contributing nations.

Table 2. The most productive countries.

Rank	Country	Total Publications
1	United States	156
2	China	71
3	United Kingdom	39
4	Canada	31
5	Australia	30
6	South Korea	23
7	Hong Kong	20
8	Spain	20
9	Iran	17
10	Taiwan	15

We established a bibliometric coupling to better understand the networking across the nations publishing in AC. It happens when two documents both reference a third research. When a document from two distinct nations references the third document in their publications, this is known as bibliometric coupling. It demonstrates how researchers from various nations and writers use comparable literature in their studies.

The bibliometric coupling findings are shown in Figure 2; each circle represents a nation, and the size of the circle denotes the contribution. The more the input, the larger the size. Figure 2 depicts three groupings based on the papers' bibliographic coupling. The

United Kingdom leads the green cluster, while the United States, Australia, and China dominate the red cluster. France and Tunisia are part of the blue color cluster. Another fascinating topic is how authors from other countries have collaborated with authors from other countries. We do a co-authorship analysis with nations.

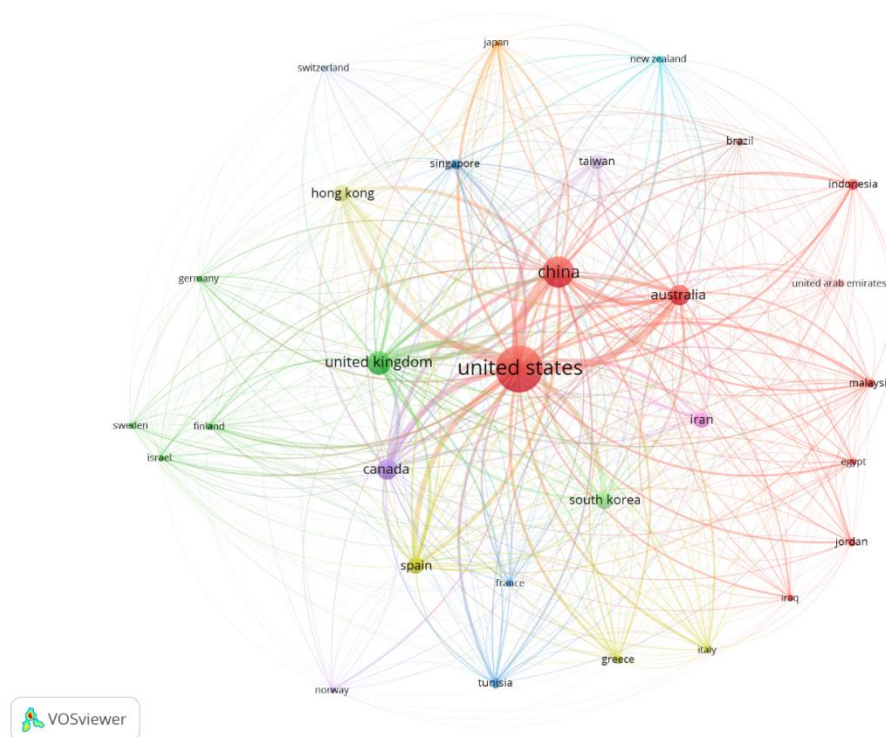


Figure 2. BC of countries.

In the case of nations, Figure 3 illustrates the co-authorship arrangement. Remember that by examining co-authorship, we can determine a country's total number of publications and the key ties it has with other nations. Figure 3 illustrates the co-authorship network in a different color. China has significant ties to Australia and Taiwan (China), whereas the UK has significant ties to Spain and Tanzania. Similarly, the United States of America has a strong co-authorship relationship with South Korea and Singapore. These findings are based on a country's five mandatory papers.

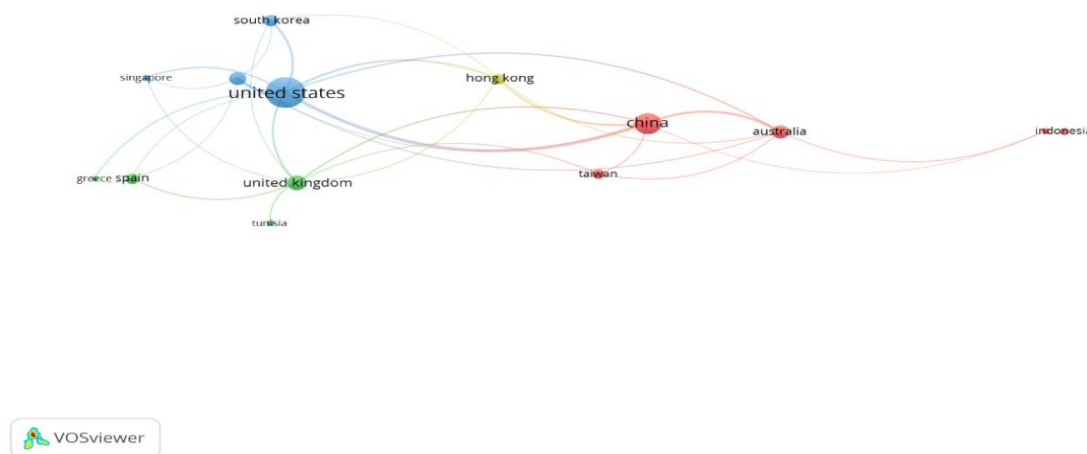


Figure 3. Co-authorship among countries.

3.3. The Most Productive Universities

The critical aspect of the bibliometric analysis is to see which are the most productive institutes or universities are involved in researching a topic. Table 3 shows that National Taiwan University the most productive university with seven document publications. The University of Houston is ranked 2nd with seven publications, while the University of Missouri Terengganu shares the 3rd rank with seven documents each. Based on the citation, National Taiwan University ranked 1st as its seven documents obtain more citations than other universities with the same publications.

Table 3. Five the most productive Universities.

Rank	Name of Institute	No. of Documents
1.	National Taiwan University	7
2.	University of Houston	7
3.	University of Missouri	7
4.	The University of Texas at Austin	7
5.	MIT Sloan School of Management	7
6.	Islamic Azad University	7
7.	Universidad Carlos III de Madrid	6
8.	University of Valencia	6
9.	Korea University	6
10.	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	6

3.4. Leading Journals

The research papers are an excellent source for readers to obtain information regarding discoveries, innovations, new trends and learn about opportunities to research a specific topic. The published researches in the peer review journals are reviewed and endorsed by the experts of the field. The rigorous review process makes these peer-reviewed papers a reliable source of information for scholars, policymakers, and all other concerned people. The studies in these journals are sources of vast scientific information that help researchers extend the study on the particular field. The scientific journal provides a platform to researchers to share ideas and generate new ideas in the field of study. They also help to sequence studies on the particular topic with the help of these journal publications. The researchers are looking for recognition for their work, and these journal publications recognize the researcher's contribution to the field. The researchers can increase prospects of development in their careers by publishing their work in top-quality journals.

As there is a revolution in information technology, it also impacts the field of education and research. The revolution in technology facilitates the launch of new journals, and in the last two decades, there is an exponential rise in the number of new journals. This growth in the number of journals challenges the researchers to locate and classify the most relevant journals in the particular study area. Additionally, due to multidisciplinary journals, those accept papers from multiple fields, make it more challenging to search for the relevant research paper for specific purposes. This section lists the most active and relevant journals publishing and contributing on the topic of accounting conservatism.

The articles included in this study are published in 91 journals and conferences, although most of these publications came from only 17 journals. Table 4 presents the journals list that published AC research. *Contemporary Accounting Research* is the top journal with 23 publications, followed by the *Journal of Accounting and Economics* with 20 papers on AC between 2000 to 2019. The *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting* ranked 3rd with 18 publications. *Accounting Review* and *Review of Accounting Studies* come at 4th and 5th, having 17 and 16 publications, respectively.

Table 4. Top productive journals that publish AC research.

Rank	Title	NP
1	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	23
2	<i>Journal Of Accounting And Economics</i>	20
3	<i>Journal Of Business Finance And Accounting</i>	18
4	<i>Accounting Review</i>	17
5	<i>Review Of Accounting Studies</i>	16
6	<i>European Accounting Review</i>	13
7	<i>Journal Of Accounting Research</i>	11
8	<i>Journal Of Applied Business Research</i>	11
9	<i>Accounting And Finance</i>	10
10	<i>Journal Of Accounting And Public Policy</i>	8
11	<i>Journal Of Accounting Auditing And Finance</i>	8
12	<i>Review Of Quantitative Finance And Accounting</i>	8
13	<i>Accounting Horizons</i>	7
14	<i>Journal Of International Accounting Auditing And Taxation</i>	6
15	<i>Asian Review Of Accounting</i>	5
16	<i>International Journal Of Accounting And Information Management</i>	5
17	<i>Revista Espanola De Financiacion Y Contabilidad</i>	5

3.5. The Most Productive Authors in AC

To see who publishes most frequently in AC, we present results in Table 5. Lobo, G.J. tops the list with six publications and 172 citations to these publications. It is followed by Pae, J. and Ahmed, A.S. with six publications and five publications each. In terms of citations, Ahmed, A.S. takes the lead with 842 citations in 5 publications.

Table 5. The most productive authors in AC.

Rank	Authors	Affiliation	No. Papers	TC
1.	Lobo, G.J.	C. T. Bauer College of Business, Department of Accountancy and Taxation, Houston, United States	6	172
2.	Pae, J.	Korea University, Seoul, South Korea	6	127
3.	Ahmed, A.S.	Texas AandM University, College Station, United States	5	842
4.	Zhang, F.	The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia	5	89

3.6. The Most Cited Publication

Table 6 shows the most cited source or reference on the topic. It is another important aspect of judging the performance of authors or journal. In this section, we identified the most cited publications. For this, we depended upon the data collected from the Scopus database. We followed the same protocol, as stated in the method section. This provided us with a list of all those publications which have AC in their title, abstract, or in keywords. We selected all publications with 50 or more citations.

The Feltham and Ohlson (1995) paper “Valuation and Clean Surplus Accounting for Operating and Financial Activities” got the highest citation number. This paper investigated the relationship between a firm’s market value and accounting data linking operating and financial activities. They asserted that due to conservative accounting practices, the organization was not altering the future cash flow. Consequently, it did not affect the market value of equity. The authors of the study also developed a model to measure accounting conservatism.

Table 6. The most cited publication.

Authors	Title	Year	Source Title	Cited by
FELTHAM G.A., OHLSON J.A.	<i>Valuation and Clean Surplus Accounting for Operating and Financial Activities</i>	1995	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	853
Barth M.E., Beaver W.H., Landsman W.R.	<i>The relevance of the value relevance literature for financial accounting standard setting: Another view</i>	2001	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	578
Francis J.R., Wang D.	<i>The joint effect of investor protection and big 4 audits on earnings quality around the world</i>	2008	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	394
Khan M., Watts R.L.	<i>Estimation and empirical properties of a firm-year measure of accounting conservatism</i>	2009	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	383
Penman S.H., Zhang X.-J.	<i>Accounting conservatism, the quality of earnings, and stock returns</i>	2002	<i>Accounting Review</i>	334
Ahmed A.S., Billings B.K., Morton R.M., Stanford-Harris M.	<i>The role of accounting conservatism in mitigating bondholder-shareholder conflicts over dividend policy and in reducing debt costs</i>	2002	<i>Accounting Review</i>	315
Zhang J.	<i>The contracting benefits of accounting conservatism to lenders and borrowers</i>	2008	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	299
Ahmed A.S., Duellman S.	<i>Accounting conservatism and board of director characteristics: An empirical analysis</i>	2007	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	297
Lafond R., Roychowdhury S.	<i>Managerial ownership and accounting conservatism</i>	2008	<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	225
Roychowdhury S., Watts R.L.	<i>Asymmetric timeliness of earnings, market-to-book and conservatism in financial reporting</i>	2007	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	220
Krishnan G.V., Visvanathan G.	<i>Does the SOX definition of an accounting expert matter? The association between Audit committee directors' accounting expertise and accounting conservatism</i>	2008	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	212
García Lara J.M., García Osma B., Penalva F.	<i>Accounting conservatism and corporate governance</i>	2009	<i>Review of Accounting Studies</i>	174
Wittenberg-Moerman R.	<i>The role of information asymmetry and financial reporting quality in debt trading: Evidence from the secondary loan market</i>	2008	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	151
Kim J.-B., Zhang L.	<i>Accounting Conservatism and Stock Price Crash Risk: Firm-level Evidence</i>	2016	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	148
Nikolaev V.V.	<i>Debt covenants and accounting conservatism</i>	2010	<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	145
Dietrich J.R., Muller III K.A., Riedl E.J.	<i>Asymmetric timeliness tests of accounting conservatism</i>	2007	<i>Review of Accounting Studies</i>	138
Altamuro J., Beatty A.	<i>How does internal control regulation affect financial reporting?</i>	2010	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	135
Ahmed A.S., Duellman S.	<i>Managerial Overconfidence and Accounting Conservatism</i>	2013	<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	127
Francis J.R., Martin X.	<i>Acquisition profitability and timely loss recognition</i>	2010	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	127
Ramalingegowda S., Yu Y.	<i>Institutional ownership and conservatism</i>	2012	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	121
Gigler F., Kanodia C., Sapra H., Venugopalan R.	<i>Accounting conservatism and the efficiency of debt contracts</i>	2009	<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	115
García Lara J.M., García Osma B., Penalva F.	<i>Accounting conservatism and firm investment efficiency</i>	2016	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	106
Qiang X.	<i>The effects of contracting, litigation, regulation, and tax costs on conditional and unconditional conservatism: Cross-sectional evidence at the firm level</i>	2007	<i>Accounting Review</i>	103

Next, the most cited research on the topic of AC research is: *“The relevance of the value relevance literature for financial accounting standard setting: Another view”*, written by [Barth et al. \(2001\)](#). The authors contended that to assess the information quality of the organization, value relevance is one of many traits. So the study concludes that value relevance is only a part of evaluating the merits of AC. The findings confirmed that the value relevance is important only to gauge the impact of conservatism from the equity market perspective and not from a contracting standpoint.

The study by [Khan and Watts \(2009\)](#) also gained many citations from the researchers' community on the topic of AC. Their research has constructed a model to measure conditional conservatism based on differential timeliness measure, where the greater value of slope indicates more conservatism than the other positive sample points. They argued that both intercept and slope value in their model are based on the linear function of the market to book value ratio (MTB), size, and leverage.

4. Discussion and Future Research

This study demonstrates a bibliometric analysis of AC literature between 1994 and 2019 from the Scopus database. The current paper provides a general overview of AC to determine the prevalent issues, research trends, and main outcomes. Therefore, this study provides a literature review by summarizing the available research and findings published to date. To sum up, this research offers a guide to new explorers in the AC field, facilitating them with firsthand knowledge regarding AC past, present, and future to develop a worthy literature review or build interesting empirical models.

The analysis of the evolution of citations and publications on AC allows us to appreciate the development of the field enabling the literary world to know the years with the highest number of citations and publications. The present study also sheds light on this field's research trends and popular matters. Still, many research opportunities exist on the topic of AC. The researchers need to develop a proper conceptualization of accounting conservatism. The existing measures have noise and do not reflect conservatism inclusively ([Ball and Shivakumar 2005](#); [Basu et al. 2001](#)). In the future, their need to have the means to differentiate between conditional and non-conditional conservatism ([Beatty et al. 2008](#)). Past researchers have studied the impact of AC alone on an organization's different fundamental performance measures; in the future, we suggest that AC should be studied to see its holistic impact on an organization in conjunction with other governance measures. Additionally, managers' incentives for conservative accounting must be considered, and it needs to be explored that under what conditions managers are more inclined to conventional accounting ([Cao and Pham 2021](#)). In the recent past, changes have been made in regulations by FASB and IASB regarding conservatism ([Dhaliwal et al. 2014](#); [FASB 1975, 2009](#)), so researchers need to check changes in regulations' impact on the use of conservatism by accountants and its effects on the organizations.

Furthermore, it will be an exciting study to see how AC impacts the bankruptcy risk of an organization and how it plays a vital role in checking managerial activities ([Gao et al. 2020](#)). The specialization of audit committee members' effect on accounting conservatism needs to be investigated, as, in previous studies, managerial attributes are linked with accounting conservatism. Still, audit committee members' qualifications may impact the use of AC by the organizations; it needs to be further studied. There is always a need for studies on the costs and benefits of AC on the organization's future, so we recommend a study on these aspects to fully understand the concept of accounting conservatism.

We hope to see more research on AC, integrating academia, practitioners, and the process-based approach to AC. The studies focusing on the effect of the overall AC system rather than individual practices may have more impact on the organization, ultimately making this world a better place to live in.

The topic is relevant, and its diffusion occurs mostly in symposiums, conferences, annual scholarly meetings. It seems that publishing papers in a relatively new field are easier because there is still much to discover.

It has been noted that authors from the European and South Asian countries have not contributed too much, so the authors from European and South Asian countries should add to the literature of AC in more depth (Healy and Wahlen 1999; Holthausen and Watts 2001; Hui et al. 2009; Jackson and Liu 2010). This area of AC deserves more attention as employees are the most important stakeholders of any organization. They contribute a lot to the success of any organization in the form of profitability, competitive advantage, organizational success, and innovation. As far as Asian countries are concerned, India is the one that has a higher number of publications and citations. So, other countries from Asia should also focus on this stream of research.

The study result has implications for practitioners as well as for researchers in the field of accounting conservatism. Firstly, from this study, we can suggest some future research opportunities on the topic and helps to converge the interests of academia and industry (Kim et al. 2013; Kothari et al. 2010; Lafond and Roychowdhury 2008). The current research on the topic provides opportunities to the researchers to understand the extent to which the topic addressed the issue and its relevance to the practice. For example, agency issues are the point of concern for shareholders (Lara et al. 2009; Nikolaev 2010). Hence, a study on accounting conservatism explains how different accounting practices help reduce the agency problem and its importance to converge the objectives of agent and principal in the agency relationship.

The most important contribution of this study is the summarization of the studies on the particular topic. It informs future researchers about the existing and recent work on the subject, which will help them target the top-notch journal for their publications. This study is also helpful to journal editors, as this research provides an insight for future research growth on the topic. The students can also get this contribution to obtain information about professors and universities working on the issue. It will help students to identify and select the best universities contributing to the field. Policymakers can also get help to pursue their accounting policies from this study, and they can get an idea of new trends in firms and of how they evolve with time.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

The last few decades have seen substantial growth in the AC field, reflecting its significance and competitiveness in the current academic world. Hence, AC makes up a topic that has been developing and currently entails greater relevance for both practitioners and academics (Collazo-Reyes 2014). Although the concept of AC is mostly employed as an independent variable where its theoretical background remains under construction, there is a broad heterogeneity concerning the outcomes of AC. It might be explained by the diversity of scholars approaching this issue, which in turn reflects the keen interest that this research topic has currently attained.

This research also offers several limitations. First, the present research includes academic material published in Scopus. More studies on AC were published in other databases that cannot be accessed through the Scopus database (Farrukh et al. 2020). Second, the publication number and citation index are frequently employed to measure quantity and quality, respectively, despite the actual document quality. The influence and impact of the researcher can be evaluated well through his citation numbers rather than article numbers (Podsakoff et al. 2008). However, only considering the importance or relevance of an author often convinces other authors to develop a particular or decisive view regarding their content or cite that specific author without reading his/her articles (Albort-Morant and Ribeiro-Soriano 2016). Third, the method being used in this study can encounter different authors with the same names. Fourth, although the findings provide a picture of the prevailing scenario, this may change over time, particularly for those published in the last few years, as they still have to grow considerably regarding the citations (Fagerberg et al. 2012). Finally, generalizing this study conclusion can be a limitation as the present research has been developed within a specific field: AC.

In the future, researchers might conduct a bibliometric analysis employing other databases, such as Web of Sciences (Gaviria-Marin et al. 2018). Future studies can arrive at a better understanding of AC by collecting more information on this topic. Future studies could also employ a structural indicator, which measures the relationships between authors, knowledge areas, and publications using sociograms. Moreover, it could be interesting to analyze the current topics and their evolution over time.

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