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Feelings, Functions, Familiarity: A Bibliometric Analysis of Psychological Ownership in Human-AI Interactions

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Abstract. *Artificial intelligence and robots are evolving rapidly, transforming the way people use technology. Nowadays, technology does more than just basic tasks; moving beyond mere functionality to emotional and psychological connections. Previous research reveals that psychological ownership plays a critical role in shaping user engagement, trust, and long-term adoption of AI-powered devices and robots. This feeling of ownership influences the way people trust and use AI powered devices and robots as well as the way people feel about them. The design of these technologies, including customization, interactivity, and anthropomorphic features, significantly influences how individuals relate to them, fostering a sense of ownership that can enhance user attachment and integration into daily routines. This research performs a bibliometric analysis of publications from Web of Science and identifies relevant studies for the key words "artificial intelligence", "robots", "ownership" and "psychological ownership". The methodology includes keyword searches, trend analysis, and visual mapping of research themes using VOS Viewer. The results indicate a significant increase in academic interest in these topics, particularly from 2020 onward, with AI emerging as the dominant focus in recent years. The findings indicate that AI systems enhancing user control, personalization, and transparency foster stronger psychological ownership, improving consumer trust, satisfaction, and willingness to adopt AI-based services. The study highlights ethical concerns, such as responsibility in AI-driven decision making and the psychological impact of human-like AI on consumer behavior.*

Keywords: AI, psychological ownership, social robots, service robots, anthropomorphism, bibliometric analysis.

Introduction

Robots and artificial intelligence (AI) become more and more integrated into daily life, changing how people perceive and use technology. Beyond simple functionality, individuals form psychological and emotional bonds with these intelligent systems, which influence their thoughts, feelings, and actions. A key element in this relationship is the sense of control users have over robots and AI-powered devices. Long-term adoption, trust and engagement can all be affected this sense of ownership.

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Human interactions with AI and robots are influenced by their design, such as customization possibilities, interaction, or human-like traits. Users are more likely to form attachments, see technology as an extension of themselves, and incorporate it into their daily routines when they feel in control of it and have a personal stake in it. However, there are limitations to automation and growing anthropomorphism, including ethical issues, changes in responsibility and possible discomfort in human-machine interactions.

Literature review

According to Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership is the term used to describe a person's sense of attachment and ownership to an item that arises from personal investment of time, energy, or creativity, control, and intimate knowledge. Cheng (2022) further describes psychological ownership as a state in which a person perceives an object as "theirs".

Individual perceptions and assessments of an object tend to improve a sense of strong psychological ownership, demonstrating the significant influence on human-object relationships. Liu and Shi (2024) argue that explainability is essential for improving psychological ownership in the context of AI systems. According to their research, AI data collection techniques that give users a sense of control promote greater psychological ownership than covert techniques. The secret to increasing user attachment to AI systems is this sense of control rather than possession.

Another important factor in reducing the impact of automation is consumer identity. Smith et al. (2022) point out that automation may reduce consumers' control and intimate product knowledge, which lowers their level of involvement. Remote access and other temporal and spatial benefits, however, can lessen these adverse effects and aid in regaining psychological ownership. To increase brand loyalty, post-purchase satisfaction, and product engagement, product designers must take consumer identity into account and think about how automation affects psychological ownership.

Delgosha and Hajiheydari (2020) present a dual model that explains post-adoption behaviors, including deep involvement and the intention to explore, in the context of consumer robots. According to their findings, when people perceive robots as trustworthy and helpful, they form closer relationships with them. In a similar way, Ahmed et al. (2024) argue that long-term interactions with social-assistance robots depend on fostering engagement and trust, both of which are influenced by psychological ownership.

When people can change how a robot looks or acts, they feel more like they own it, and they think it's more useful and valuable. Because they see it as valuable, they are more likely to spend time with it and trust it. Ahmed et al. (2024) also emphasize that personalization can enhance a robot's persuasive potential, as users are more likely to view it as credible and aligned with their goals when they feel a sense of ownership.

However, the inclusion of technology in inter-human relationships generates ethical concerns. Aymerich-Franch and Fosch-Villaronga (2020) point out that the immersive nature of some technologies, such as avatar-creation experiments, requires rigorous examination to avoid negative effects, such as the intensification of already existing behaviors or the wrong distribution of responsibilities. This issue is becoming increasingly important as robots acquire more human-like traits and are equipped with artificial intelligence to perform tasks that are typically related to human intelligence, such as consumer interaction and problem solving (Belanche et al., 2019; Pelau et al., 2024). Service robots, which frequently adopt human traits to improve communication, become more attractive to users when they demonstrate a higher degree of perceived humanity and intelligence, as these attributes encourage an increased sense of social inclusion and interaction (Belanche et al., 2019; Pop et al., 2024).

Flavian et al. (2023) further explore the way in which increasing the automated social presence of AI can alleviate consumers' psychological distress and improve perceptions of functional and social value, thus increasing the intention to use AI services. When AI has a more pronounced social presence, consumers feel more valued, empowered, and connected, leading to greater efficiency and social value and affecting the willingness to use AI. The study emphasizes that AI should not merely imitate human traits, but should create a sense of social presence, which is essential for improving consumer well-being and acceptance of AI technologies (Pelau et al., 2025).

The increasing use of service robots in customer communication affects how responsibility for service outcomes is determined. Jörling et al. (2019) analyze the factors that influence how customers perceive responsibility for service success and failure, whether it is attributed to themselves or to the robot. Van Doorn et al. (2017) emphasize that integrating robots into customer relationships can promote the development of a human connection with robots, even if psychological responsibility is not necessarily important in these types of interaction. In addition to these, interactions between humans and robots, especially in front-office environments, can contribute to the familiarization of customers who are not very prone to anthropomorphized robots and who are reluctant to accept new technologies.

As the use of robots becomes more widespread, they may face difficulties in complex environments, which could lead to operational errors that negatively affect user trust. Cameron et al. (2020) suggest that robots demonstrating self-awareness and ownership of their mistakes, along with socially empathic behavior, can significantly improve user experience despite imperfections. Similarly, with the evolution of digital assistants on smartphones toward more human features, consumers begin to feel a sense of connection and increased familiarity, which leads to the formation of complex relationships based on regular interactions. Cheng (2022) emphasizes that anthropomorphism improves users' perception of an object's capabilities and increases the degree of satisfaction in interactions, stimulating attachment and influencing consumer choices.

Chung et al. (2024) indicate that the emotional connection with objects, such as robots, is crucial for users to perceive them as part of their identity. This emotional connection with robots has beneficial effects on outcomes and collaboration, leading to improved performance and team involvement. The increase in the closeness of relationships between the team and the robot is more pronounced when the team participates in building the robot (You and Robert, 2018). Cui and Zhong (2023) highlight that important factors such as social influence, desire for pleasure and anthropomorphism play a crucial role in shaping consumers' initial evaluations of artificial intelligence devices. Emotions generated during the decision-making process have a considerable influence on consumers' willingness to embrace or reject AI devices. However, humanoid robots can cause discomfort and fear, as they can be perceived as a threat to human identity. This discomfort diminishes with non-humanoid robots, which are often perceived as more controllable (Cui and Zhong, 2023). El Halabi and Trendel (2024) suggest that allowing consumers to assign names to humanoid service robots can reduce feelings of unease and increase their intention to purchase services, as naming fosters familiarity and a sense of control.

Social robots are expected to gain increasing importance in both domestic and professional environments. Dang and Bertrandias (2023) point out that consumers' perceptions of power provide valuable clues about their willingness to adopt social robots. Consumers who feel powerless may gain greater well-being by exercising control over a social robot, suggesting that interactions with anthropomorphic devices may address social needs, such as the need for social acceptance. Krueger et al. (2021) argue that human relationships with their pets provide a valuable framework for understanding and developing human-robot attachment. This research examines

how individuals endow robots with emotions, social skills, and enduring bonds, similar to the way they do it to their pets. By studying the way humans interact with pets, researchers aim to develop social robots capable of establishing effective relationships with humans, particularly in therapy, education, and caregiving contexts. Paul et al. (2014) highlight that anthropomorphic understanding can enhance well-being, as the desire for socialization, composed of various motivations such as care and pet motivation, influences individual behavior and well-being.

Loureiro et al. (2023) identify how AI tools, such as chatbots and personalized assistants, influence consumer behavior by offering personalized experiences and increasing personalization. However, the spread of AI-enabled tools may lead to a diminishing sense of uniqueness. Malhotra et al. (2022) argue that fostering psychological ownership through AI can strengthen consumer relationships with brands, enhancing loyalty and engagement. Li et al. (2023) point out that chatbots powered by AI can improve customer service and lower costs, but in the same time, they deal with ethical problems related to data sharing and data protection (Menard and Bott, 2024). Kim and Kim (2024) argue that user perceptions of AI in voice assistant devices influence psychological ownership and flow experience, leading to satisfaction and loyalty.

Methodology

The objective of our research is to explore the spread of publications on topics such as artificial intelligence (AI), robots, and psychological ownership. To achieve this, a comprehensive search of the Web of Science database was conducted. Specific keyword combinations were searched to identify the relevant literature, resulting in 817 results for "artificial intelligence" and "ownership" and 448 results for "robot" and "ownership". Analyzing only the publications from business related fields such as business, economics, management, business finance, public administration, 89 published articles resulted for "artificial intelligence" and "ownership" and 38 results for "robot" and "ownership".

Analyzing "psychological ownership" as a specific type of ownership resulted in 37 publications for the combination of "AI and psychological ownership", 34 publications for "artificial intelligence and psychological ownership", and 35 publications for "robot and psychological ownership". The 2013-2024 timeline was analyzed. A line graph was generated to illustrate the annual publication trends, which shows a notable increase in the number of publications over the past 11 years and highlights the growing academic interest in this area. Afterwards, data were extracted from Web of Science and exported for bibliometric analysis using VOS Viewer software. This stage involved analyzing bibliometric networks and creating visual maps of scientific publications to highlight keyword correlations. This analysis provided insight into the key research themes.

Results and discussions

Analyzing the number of articles published on the key word combination "artificial intelligence" and "ownership" as well as "robot" and "ownership", shows that there is an increasing interest in this topic. Starting with the year 2017 there was a higher increasing trend for this topic, especially for the combination of the key words "artificial intelligence" and "ownership" reaching a number of 200 articles in 2024. For the business-related fields, the topic of AI or robot ownership started to gain importance beginning with the year 2021, emphasizing a recent interest in the topic.

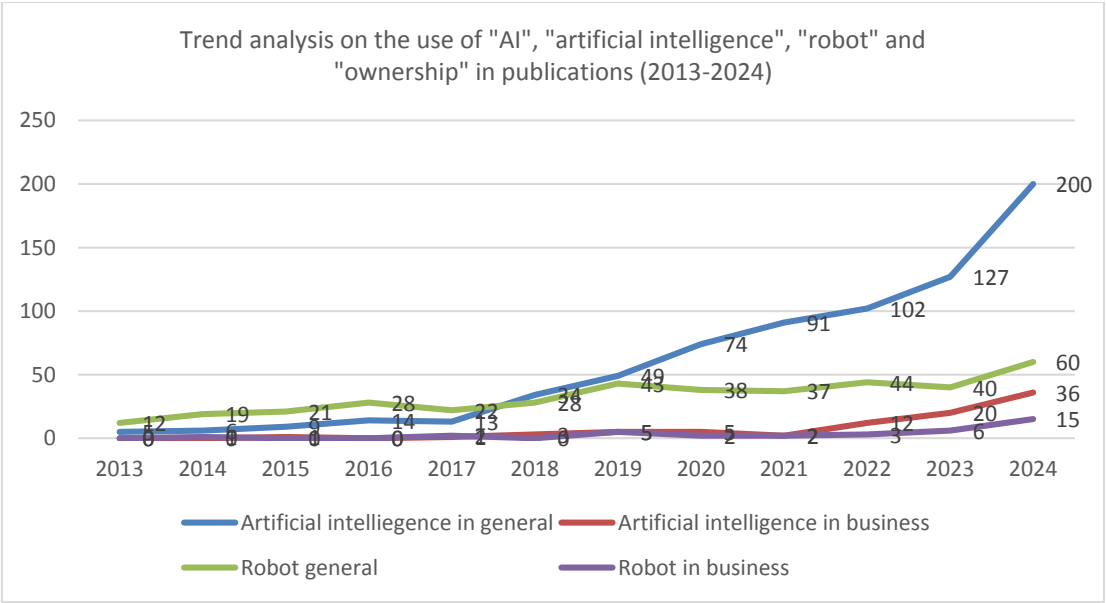

Figure 1. Trend analysis on the use of key words "artificial intelligence" and "robot" with "ownership" in Web of Science publications (2013-2024)

Source: Authors' own research.

Figure 2 illustrates the yearly spread of publications related to three combinations of key words: "AI and psychological ownership", "artificial intelligence and psychological ownership" and "robot and psychological ownership" between 2013 and 2024. Each keyword combination is represented by a distinct line: blue for "AI", red for "artificial intelligence" and green for "robot". Between 2013 and 2015, there were minimal or no publications for any of the keyword combinations. From 2016 onward, the number of publications gradually increased, with a visible increase from 2020 onward. The keyword "robot" (green line) shows a moderate increase growth trend, reaching a high of 6 publications in 2020 and remaining stable until 2023 and 2024.

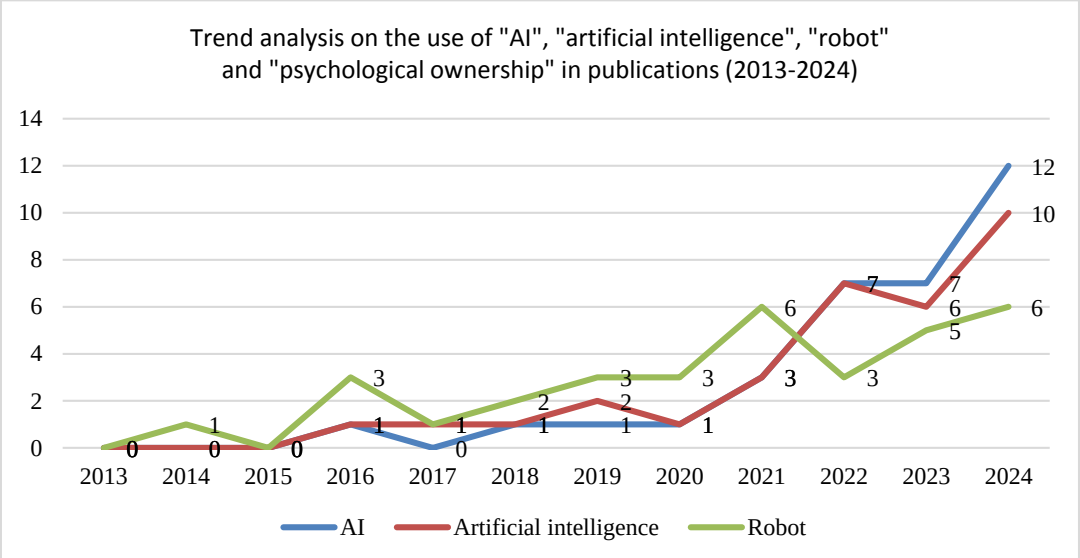

Figure 2. Trend analysis on the use of key words "artificial intelligence" and "robot" with "psychological ownership" in Web of Science publications (2013-2024)

Source: Authors' own research.

The keyword “artificial intelligence” (red line) shows a more constant rising trend, overtaking the keyword “robot” in 2021 and reaching a peak in 10 publications in 2024. The keyword “AI” (blue line) shows the most significant increase, especially in 2023 and 2024, when it rises rapidly to the top of 12 publications in 2024, becoming the dominant topic in recent years. This analysis highlights the increasing attention paid by researchers to the links between artificial intelligence, robots and psychological ownership, particularly in the last five years, reflecting a growing research focus on these emerging technologies.

Considering the fact that the number of articles resulted from the search combination “artificial intelligence”, “robot” and “psychological ownership” had a limited number of published articles, we have created a mind map in VOS Viewer based on the combination of the key words “artificial intelligence”, “robot” and “ownership”.

The results highlight six clusters of correlated key words based on the search terms “artificial intelligence” and “ownership” as it can be seen in figure 3 and table 1. The first cluster marked with red color, gravitates around the words: “implication”, “understanding” and is focused on the legal aspects resulting from AI or robot ownership. Cluster 2 marked with green color, gravitates around the words: “privacy”, “patient”, “data ownership”, “practice” and “participant”. This cluster highlights the application of AI and ownership in the field of medicine and points out the data protection aspects related to patient data used by AI. Cluster 3 marked with blue color points a rather digital perspective on AI and ownership, including key words such as “performance”, “algorithm”, “network” and “protection”. Cluster 4 marked with red color indicates the implications of AI ownership. The main key words for this cluster are “implication”, “integration” and “understanding”. Cluster 5 marked with purple color indicates issues like “blockchain” or “security”, indicating several applications of the topic.

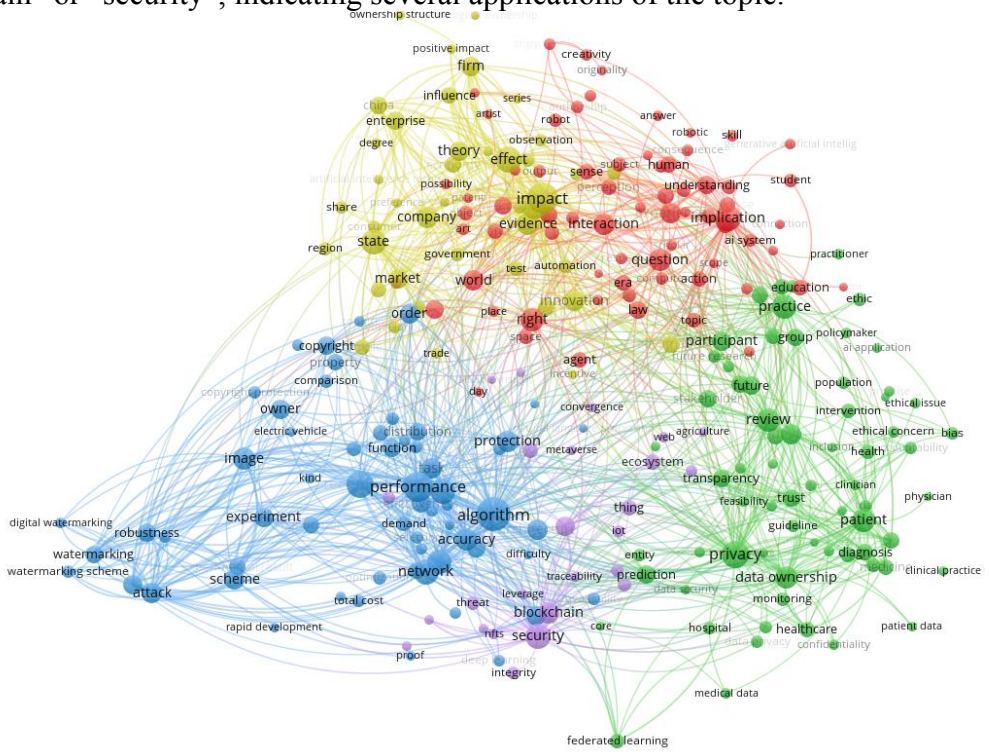

Figure 3. VOS Viewer results for key words “artificial intelligence” and “ownership”

Source: Authors’ own research.

Table 1. Word clusters based on VOS Viewer results for the key words "artificial intelligence" and "ownership"

	"artificial intelligence" and "ownership"
Cluster 1	(70 items) action, agency, agent, AI system, answer, art, artist, authorship, awareness, body, chat GPT, collaboration, computer, connection, consequence, content, copyright law, creation, creativity, day, digital technology, education, emergence, era, experience, foundation, generative artificial intelligence, hand, human, idea, implication, interaction, law, necessity, new technology, notion, object, originality, output, patent, perception, place, position, possibility, presence, production, question, reality, relation, respect, response, right, robot, robotic, scholar, scope, self, sense, skill, society, space, student, subject, suggestion, text, topic, understanding, virtual reality, world
Cluster 2	(69 items) accountability, age, AI application, bias, care, clinical practice, clinician, compliance, confidentiality, core, data collection, data ownership, data privacy, data security, data sharing, date, diagnosis, disease, efficacy, entity, ethic, ethical concern, ethical issue, fairness, feasibility, federated learning, future, future research, group, guideline, health, healthcare, home, hospital, inclusion, institution, intervention, interview, medical data, medicine, monitoring, outcome, participant, patient, patient data, physician, policymaker, population, practice, practitioner, prediction, privacy, privacy concern, promise, recommendation, regulation, reliability, review, smartphone, stakeholder, sustainability, systematic review, total, transparency, treatment, trial, trust
Cluster 3	(61 items) accuracy, algorithm, architecture, attack, autonomous vehicle, availability, basis, city, combination, comparison, conflict, copyright, copyright protection, dataset, deep learning, deep neural network, demand, detection, difficulty, digital watermarking, distribution, effectiveness, electric vehicle, experiment, experiment result, feature, function, image, increase, intellectual property, kind, natural language processing, network, neural network, node, optimization, order, owner, parameter, performance, proof, property, protection, rapid development, reason, recent year, robustness, scheme, selection, set, simulation, task, technique, today, total cost, vehicle, video, watermark, watermarking
Cluster 4	(42 items) AI technology, artificial intelligence technology, automation, business, company, consumer, correlation, degree, difference, digital economy, economy, effect, enterprise, evidence, extent, firm, governance, government, impact, incentive, influence, innovation, investment, market, observation, ownership structure, positive impact, preference, productivity, psychological ownership, region, relationship, sample, series, share, significance, situation, state, test, theory, trade
Cluster 5	(25 items) agriculture, authenticity, blockchain, blockchain technology, convergence, ecosystem, integrity, internet, IOT, leverage, metaverse, NFT, overview, party, protocol, security, smart contract, thing, threat, traceability, transaction, valuable insight, web.

Source: Authors' own research.

The mind map analysis based on "robot" and "ownership" resulted in 3 clusters, which can be observed in figure 4 and table 2. The first cluster marked with red color refers to the different physical characteristics a robot has. Without having some main words to characterize the cluster, the words that stay in the middle of it are "embodiment", "hand" or "agency". It is also interesting to observe that this cluster does not have an equivalent in the previous search related to "artificial intelligence" and "ownership", compared to the next two clusters, which can be found also in the first analysis. The second cluster, marked with green color is somehow equivalent to cluster 2 from the previous analysis, referring to the medical field. Without having some main key words to characterize them, the key words "analysis", "approach", "outcome" or "patient" have a stronger presence in the graphical illustration. Cluster 3, marked with red color refers to some technological aspects, having "data" as main key word.

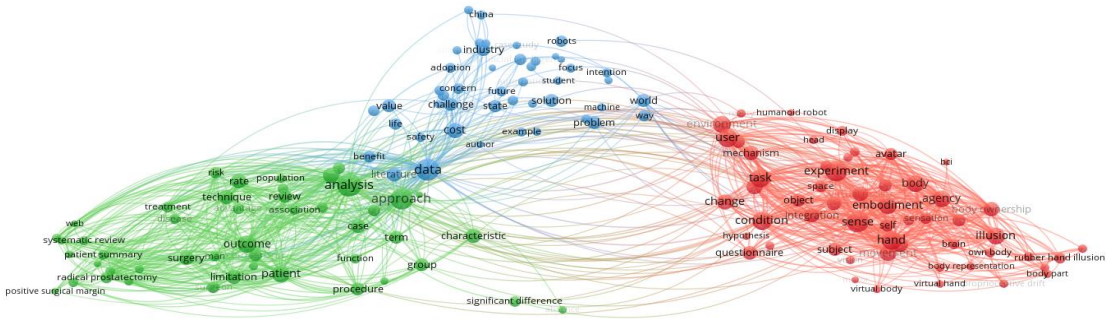

Figure 4. VOS Viewer results for key words "artificial intelligence" and "ownership"

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 2: Word clusters based on VOS Viewer results for key words "artificial intelligence" and "ownership"

	"robot" and "ownership"
Cluster 1	(55 items) action, agency, arm, avatar, body, body ownership, body part, body representation, brain, change, condition, display, embodiment, environment, experiment, feedback, feeling, hand, humanoid robot, hypothesis, illusion, integration, mechanism, motor, movement, object, one, operator, own body, paradigm, part, perception, phenomenon, proprioceptive drift, questionnaire, reality, robotic hand, rubber hand, rubber hand illusion, self, sensation, sense, space, subject, tactile stimulation, task, user, virtual body, virtual environment, virtual hand, virtual reality, vision
Cluster 2	(47 items) absence, advantage, age, analysis, approach, association, case, characteristics, comparison, context, disease, evidence acquisition, evidence synthesis, function, group intervention, lack, length, limitation, man, odds ratio, outcome, outcome measurement, patient, patient summary, population, positive surgical margin, procedure, quality, rate, review, risk, series, significant difference, statistical analysis, surgeon, surgery, systematic review, technique, total, treatment, web.
Cluster 3	(46 items) access, adoption, anthropomorphism, artificial intelligence, author, automation, benefit, case study, challenge, company, concern, consumer, cost, data, education, example, focus, future, human robot interaction, idea, industrial robot, industry, innovation, intention, internet, life, literature, machine, opportunity, problem, project, robots, safety, service, social robot, society, solution, state, student, survey, total cost, value, vehicle, way, world.

Source: Authors' own research.

Conclusion

The bibliometric analysis highlights the increasing importance of the association between the key terms "artificial intelligence", "robots", "ownership" and "psychological ownership". The word clusters resulted from the VOS Viewer output highlight different interpretations of ownership in relation to artificial intelligence and robots. On one hand ownership is associated with the provided output or used data by the AI in relation to the human consumer. It is frequently researched in the field of medicine, where AI has the ability to interpret medical results, but also in other fields such as legal or information technology context. On the other hand, the association between artificial intelligence and ownership refers to ones' right to control and decide for the other part. Few researches have been published in this field, but with the increasing autonomy of AI this field will probably grow in the future. Trend results show that this topic has begun to gain importance in recent years.

The association between the key words "robot" and "ownership" has shown similar results for two of the identified clusters. One cluster of key words differed from the one about "artificial intelligence" by emphasizing the embodiment and physical characteristics of the robot. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of psychological ownership, how AI adoption affects long-term trust, and ethical considerations in human-AI interactions. These findings provide a foundation for the sustainable integration of AI in business and society.

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