

Global Research Trends in Sustainable or Green Consumer Behavior – A Bibliometric Analysis

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In recent years, and especially after the pandemic, consumers around the world have expressed their intention to prioritize more sustainable choices. To explore the evolution and trend of research oriented in this area of environmentally sustainable or green consumer behavior, a bibliometric analysis was applied. This study presents an examination focusing on the literature related to sustainability or green consumer behavior between 1991 and 2023. By investigating 745 Scopus indexed documents, which includes keyword network analysis, co-author analysis and reference co-citation analysis using VOSviewer, the study highlights which are the known authors concerned with the research field, impactful and highly cited articles, countries contributing significantly to the analysis, the relevant journals in the field of interest. Furthermore, it identifies emerging themes such as green marketing, sustainable consumption, and green product development, while also outlining potential avenues for future research. The article provides perspectives in this field of development and interest, helping to define visions and strategies to attract, promote and develop sustainable or green consumers behavior.

Keywords: sustainable, green, consumer behavior, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer

JEL Classification: M31, M14, M10

1. Introduction

Much of the research into environmental responsibility was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when few consumers seriously assessed the environmental impact of products (Finisterra do Paço et. al, 2009). In the last decade, the environment has become an increasingly prominent concern for socially responsible behavior. Environmental issues have been gaining significant attention from researchers in the field of management marketing (Samarasinghe, 2012).

As awareness of environmental issues such as climate change, resource deficiency, pollution, covid-19 pandemic, consumers increasingly look for products and services that reduce negative impacts on the life and planet (Zeynalova & Namazova, 2022; Ali et.al., 2023). This shift is not a trend but a critical component of a broader movement toward sustainability, where the choices of individuals and communities play an essential role in shaping a more sustainable future. As consumers become more informed and conscientious,

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their purchasing decisions reflect a deeper commitment to sustainability, influencing market trends and encouraging businesses to adopt greener practices. Consequently, sustainable consumer behavior is a key driver in the transition to a greener economy, promoting a symbiotic relationship between economic growth and environmental conservation.

This study examines recent trends in green consumer research. Through bibliometric analysis, we aim to gain insights into current research approaches that address gaps in current literature. The decision to delve into consumer green behavior research is motivated by several key factors. First, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in consumer interest and demand for green products and eco-friendly services. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for change across different industries. It revealed vulnerabilities within global supply chains and highlighted the importance of adaptability in business management. As a result, many companies are reevaluating their strategies and exploring ways to respond to green consumer preferences and sustainability. In addition, governments and regulatory bodies around the world are increasingly adopting policies and regulations aimed at promoting sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, including the European Union. This evolving regulatory landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for businesses, requiring them to stay informed of these developments and proactively adjust their strategies to meet the demands of green consumers.

This research aims to address several key aspects within the research field, including:

1. How bibliometric research on "sustainable or green consumer behavior" has evolved over time?
2. What are the predominant themes and trends observed among authors and countries contributing to the literature on "sustainable or green consumer behavior"?
3. What are the most cited publications in the field of "sustainable or green consumer behavior"?
4. Who are the most influential researchers in this field, and what contributions have they made to advancing our understanding of sustainable consumer behavior?
5. What future research directions can be identified through the analysis conducted in this study on "sustainable or green consumer behavior"?

2. Literature Review

The global discourse surrounding consumer interest in green products has experienced rapid expansion in recent years (Chen et al., 2018). Global Sustainability Report (2021) highlights significant global shifts in consumers perspectives to invest in green products and sustainable services. The increasing importance of green production and consumption can be attributed to the United Nations (2018). Sustainability is designed as a high-priority issue in development goals, which has brought green consumer research to the forefront. Sustainability has become a crucial topic of modern times, with extensive discussions on how sustainable consumption can impact negative environmental and what drives consumers towards green consumption, resulting in green consumer behavior (Ern et al., 2022).

According to the European Commission's strategy (2024) "the European Union has implemented various policies aimed at fostering a more sustainable, resource-efficient, and circular economy. One of the policies focuses on aiming to promote responsible consumption habits and reduce waste generation".

Green consumers actively protect the environment in various ways, such as recycling, verifying that packaging is made from recycled materials, purchasing green products, and conserving energy. Although they continue to seek satisfaction of their wants and desires, they increasingly feel a responsibility to have a more active role in environmental protection, preservation, and conservation (Do Paço, 2013).

Green behavior refers to a set of planned activities that address social and individual needs related to environmental conservation. Various terms are used in studies on environmental behavior, including pro-environmental behavior, environmentally friendly behavior, green behavior, sustainable behavior, and ecological behavior (Khan et al., 2020). Khan et al. (2020) describes green behavior as "a set of deliberate actions in response to both social and individual needs following from environmental conservation efforts". Furthermore, green consumer behavior can be classified into two main categories: first, actions aimed at reducing energy resource consumption, often referred to as curtailing behaviors, and second, eco-friendly purchasing decisions, known as green purchase behavior (Khan et al., 2020).

Kazdin (2009) relates that "green consumption encompasses behaviors aimed at reducing environmental impact, such as opting for vehicles with lower energy, utilizing public transportation, practicing

water conservation, and endorsing the recycling of product packaging, among other actions”. Green consumption can be defined as a consumer behavior that prioritizes actions aimed at protecting both human health and the environment while conserving natural resources (Li, 2020). At its essence, green consumption promotes sustainable practices that contribute to the long-term well-being of individuals and the planet.

Additionally, Si L.S. cited in Li (2020) proposes that the particularities of green consumption encompass at least four dimensions:

- Economic consumption: Involves minimizing the consumption of resources and energy, thus promoting efficiency in resource utilization.
- Clean consumption: Focuses on minimizing waste and pollutants generated during the consumption process, thereby reducing environmental impact.
- Safe consumption: Ensures that the outcomes of consumption do not pose risks to the health of consumers or others.
- Sustainable consumption: Ensures that the outcomes of consumption meet the demands of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Few studies have aimed to unravel the determinants of sustainable consumption practices (Kumar et al., 2022). Scholars argue that consumers' motivation to purchase eco-friendly products can significantly shape their buying decisions, yet empirical evidence remains scarce (Kumar & Sadarangani, 2018). Despite recent increases in consumer spending on green products, it has yet to break through what is often termed the "green glass ceiling" (Godelnik, 2012), with the global market share of green products remaining below 4% (Gleim et al., 2013).

The adoption of green behavior is fundamental to achieving sustainability goals. Green behavior is commonly linked with green consumption, which entails utilizing goods that minimize pollution and environmental damage while also acting with social consciousness and responsibility (Do Paco, 2019). Sustainable behavior is frequently linked with pro-environmental consumption behavior, which pertains to actions individuals take to diminish their adverse effects on the environment (Dhendra, 2019). Pro-environmental behavior can be characterized as actions that either result in minimal harm to or benefit the environment (Steg and Vlek, 2009). Sustainable or green consumer behavior represents a life-changing approach to consumption, emphasizing the importance of environmental responsibility and ethical considerations in buying decisions.

3. Research Methodology

The selection of relevant studies involved several methodical steps (Figure 1). Initially, we outlined the topic of research -"sustainable or green consumer behavior" and identified relevant databases. Subsequently, research strategies and data processing methods were determined. Finally, the data were analyzed, and the results were organized systematically.



Figure 1. The flow of research
Source: adapted by authors

The literature search involves utilizing data on "sustainable or green consumer behavior" published between 1991 and November 20, 2023, sourced from the Scopus - Elsevier Science (2023) database. Scopus is distinguished as one of the comprehensive databases for multidisciplinary scientific literature (Chadegani et al., 2013; Pranckutė, 2021). Notable for its extensive collection, Scopus encompasses over 23,000 scientific journals, more than 206,000 books from over 5,000 international publishers, and over 120,000 conference proceedings, among other resources (Singh et al., 2021). According to Boyle and Sherman (2006), researchers prefer Scopus due to its high-quality results, user-friendly, time efficiency platform enabling easy access to data through search and analysis options, and its potential impact on research outcomes.

The Scopus database serves as an important source of bibliometric data for broad research science policy, evaluations, assessments, research landscape studies, and university rankings (Baas et al., 2020).

For data analysis, we have chosen VOSviewer, version 1.6.19 (vosviewer.com). The selection of this software was motivated by its integration with the Scopus database and its ability illustrating connections between publications, authors, research organizations, countries, to visually represent bibliometric networks, or keywords based on bibliometric information. Additionally, VOSviewer provides detailed insights into various links, such as co-occurrence of keywords, co-authorship, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation, facilitating accessible visualization (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010).

The search parameters were set to analyze the group of terms - within the title, abstract, and keywords - "sustainable or green consumer behavior," reflecting the research theme. The decision to focus on keywords in the title and abstract stemmed from the objective of identifying trends, connections, and gaps in the research field to foster new ideas in this domain.

The data was collected from the SCOPUS database (Elsevier Science). The results identified using the title-abstract-keywords "consumer" "green" and "behavior" "sustainab*" represented a total of **1570 papers**. For a relevant bibliometric analysis, three filters were added:

- Scientific field - the fields in which the identified works fall are diverse and not limited to the research field. Therefore, preliminary results were refined by excluding articles published in journals outside the domains of economics or business and management. From this perspective, the following domains of interest were selected for an impactful investigation: Business, Management, and Accounting (639 results) and Economics, Econometrics, and Finance (263 results).
- Document type - represents a set of documents that could reflect studies in the field, namely: article, book, book chapter, conference paper, and conference review (901 results).
- Time period - the selected reference period is 1991 - 2023, highlighting researchers' approaches and interest in the subject over time.

In the end, **745 publications** were considered eligible for the research.

The aim of this paper is to identify, present, and analyze the most relevant issues related to "sustainable or green consumer behavior". The research objectives are as follows:

- To explore emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the field of sustainable or green consumer behavior research.
- To develop a structured categorization of the outcomes derived from studies on "sustainable or green consumer behavior".
- To identify and critically evaluate the limitations and gaps presented in the current body of knowledge surrounding "sustainable or green consumer behavior".

4. Analysis and Results

The analysis of the 745 articles was conducted based on various criteria, including the year of publication, Scopus category, language of publication, and countries of origin of the authors. Notably, the fields related to sustainable or green consumer behavior have witnessed a substantial surge in the number of publications.

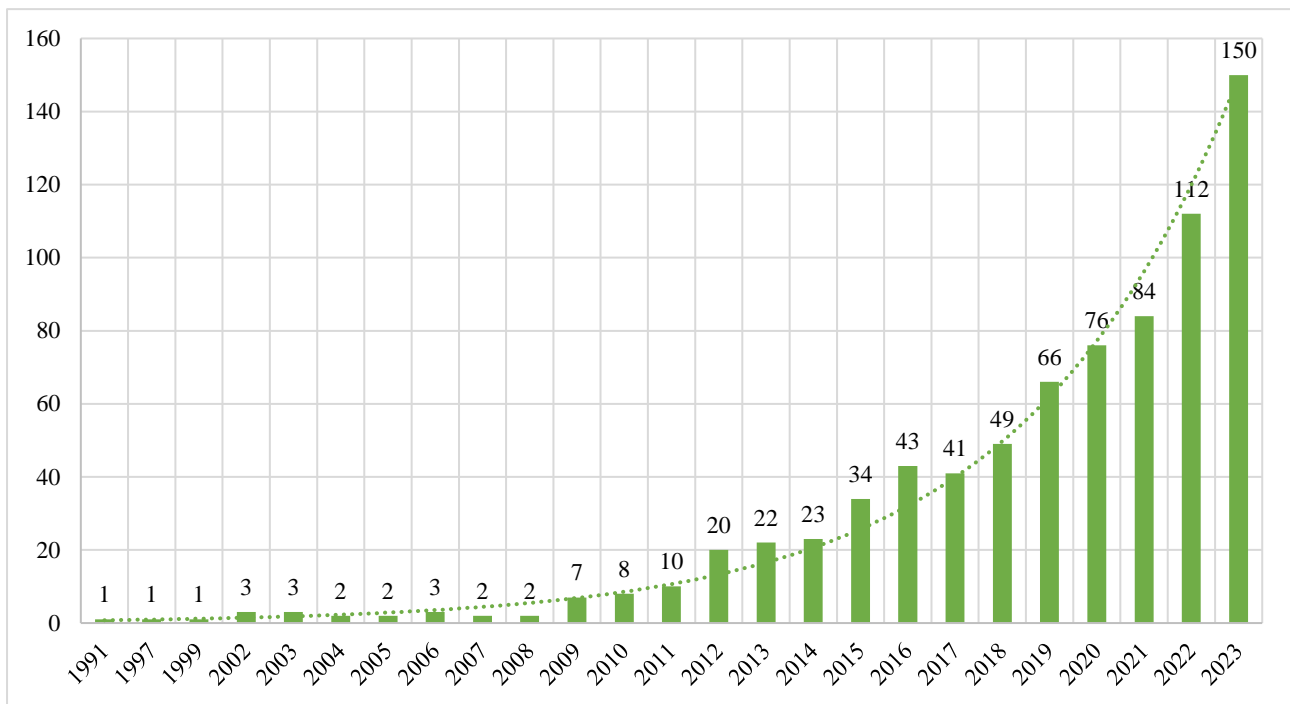


Figure 2. Documents by year
 Source: SCOPUS

The findings show that the number of studies in the field "sustainable or green consumer behavior" has increased, especially after 2019.

Most of the documents are articles (617), commonly scholarly papers found in academic journals. Additionally, there are 77 documents labeled as book chapters, representing sections of books published as standalone pieces within larger volumes or compilations. In addition, there are 31 review documents, encompassing literature reviews, systematic reviews, or critical analyses of existing research in specific fields. Moreover, 21 documents are categorized as conference papers, scholarly works presented at conferences or academic meetings. Furthermore, there are 16 documents classified as books, likely monographs or textbooks authored by researchers. Finally, there are 3 documents designated as conference reviews, potentially comprising critical evaluations or summaries of academic conferences or events.

Table 1. The most cited papers

Author(s)	Paper Title	Source	Year	Total citations
Paul J.; Modi A.; Patel J.	Predicting green product consumption using theory of planned behavior and reasoned action	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	2016	1097
Tanner C.; Kast S.W.	Promoting Sustainable Consumption: Determinants of Green Purchases by Swiss Consumers	Psychology and Marketing	2003	717
Manaktola K.; Jauhari V.	Exploring consumer attitude and behavior towards green practices in the lodging industry in India	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2007	640
Gilg A.; Barr S.; Ford N.	Green consumption or sustainable lifestyles? Identifying the sustainable consumer	Futures	2005	531
Gleim M.R.; Smith J.S.; Andrews D.; Cronin J.J.	Against the Green: A Multi-method Examination of the Barriers to Green Consumption	Journal of Retailing	2013	494
Haws K.L.; Winterich	Seeing the world through GREEN-tinted glasses: Green consumption values and	Journal of Consumer Psychology	2014	488

Author(s)	Paper Title	Source	Year	Total citations
K.P.; Naylor R.W.	responses to environmentally friendly products			
Peattie K.; Crane A.	Green marketing: Legend, myth, farce or prophesy?	Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal	2005	434
Moser A.K.	Thinking green, buying green? Drivers of pro - Environmental purchasing behavior	Journal of Consumer Marketing	2015	376
Esmailian B.; Sarkis J.; Lewis K.; Behdad S.	Blockchain for the future of sustainable supply chain management in Industry 4.0	Resources, Conservation and Recycling	2020	358
Brough A.R.; Wilkie J.E.B.; Ma J.; Isaac M.S.; Gal D.	The green-feminine stereotype and its effect on sustainable consumption	Journal of Consumer Research	2016	344

Source: Scopus

Based on our analysis, we can assert that the three most influential articles in the research field of "sustainable or green consumer behavior" between 1991 and November 2023 are: (1) Paul J.; Modi A.; Patel J. (2016) Predicting green product consumption using theory of planned behavior and reasoned action; (2) Tanner, C., & Wölfing Kast, S. (2003). Promoting sustainable consumption: Determinants of green purchases by Swiss consumers; and (3) Manaktola, K., & Jauhari, V. (2007). Exploring consumer attitude and behaviour towards green practices in the lodging industry in India.

The highly cited article by Jyoti Paul, Anil Modi, and Jayesh Patel offers valuable insights into the determinants of consumers' decisions to purchase green products, thereby enriching the existing literature on sustainable consumer behavior. The study's objective was to forecast green product consumption behavior by leveraging the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Reasoned Action (TRA). These established theoretical frameworks are widely employed in consumer behavior research to explicate and anticipate individuals' intentions and actions. The results of this study are expected to offer significant insights into the effectiveness of TPB and TRA in forecasting consumer behavior towards green product consumption. These insights illustrated the intricate relationship between individual beliefs, societal norms, and perceived control, all of which play pivotal roles in shaping consumers' choices in sustainability.

Among the 81 countries included in the analysis, only 40 countries have contributed to co-authorship in at least five documents. This suggests that a substantial portion of the countries have not met the minimum threshold for co-authorship in the studied documents.

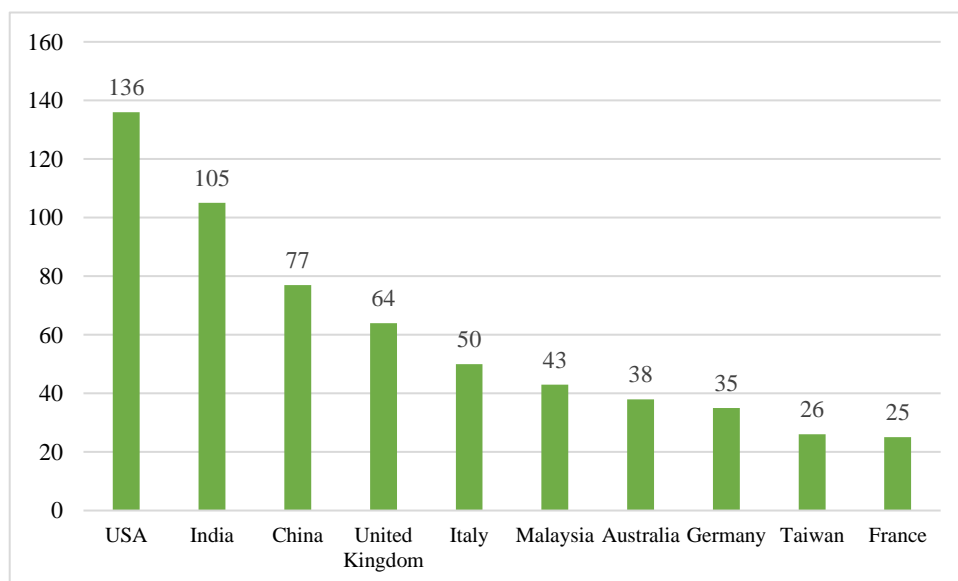


Figure 3. Documents by country or territory
Source: SCOPUS

According to figure 3, it was concluded that most studies originated from the United States (136 documents), India (105) and China (77).

For the visualization of the analyzed data, specifically the 745 results, VOSviewer software was utilized to construct various graphical maps of the article network: the circle's size depends on the article's importance; network connections illustrate the proximity of relationships between articles; circle locations and colors are used to group elements. A thesaurus was utilized to enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research conducted within VOSviewer.

To identify connections between authors and their reference countries, the "co-authorship by countries" option was selected in VOSviewer (Figure 4).

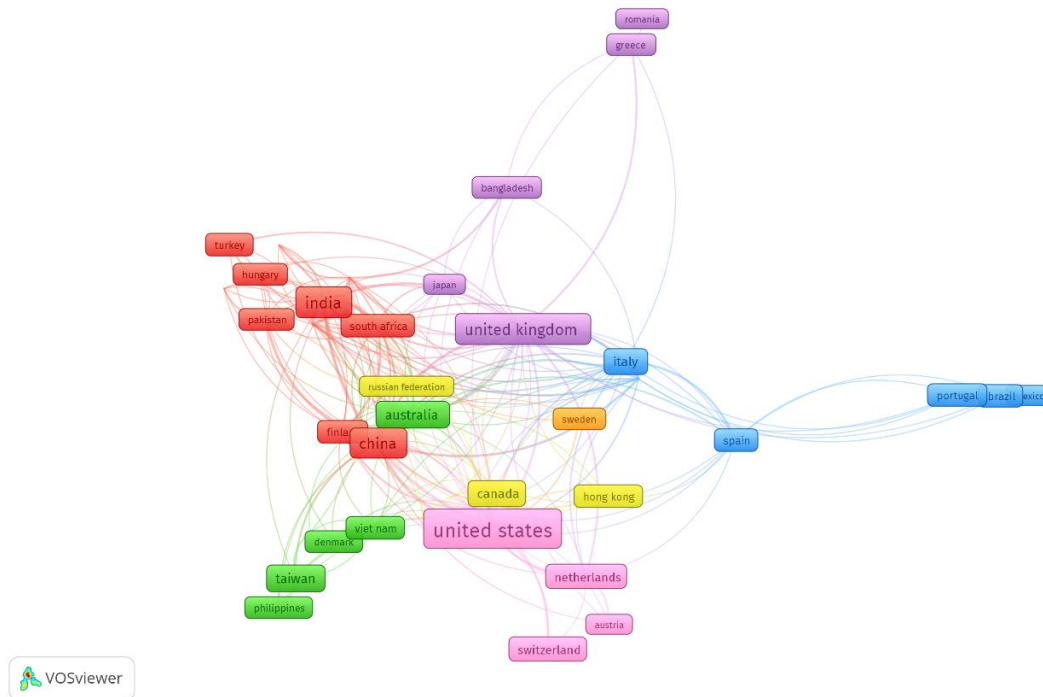


Figure 4. Co-authorship by countries
Source: Vosviewer

The analysis resulted in the identification of 7 clusters. These clusters are interconnected by a total of 354 links, indicating the strength of relationships among the items. This comprehensive clustering process involved the collaboration of 40 entities.

- Cluster 1 – Red (12 items) China, Finland, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Arab Emirates.
- Cluster 2 – Green – (7 items) Australia, Denmark, Indonesia, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.
- Cluster 3 – blue (6 items) Brazil, France, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, and Spain.
- Cluster 4 – yellow – (5 items) Canada, Hong Kong, Poland, Russian Federation and South Korea.
- Cluster 5 – purple – (5 items) Bangladesh, Greece, Japan, Romania, and United Kingdom.
- Cluster 6 – pink – (5 items) Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and United States.
- Cluster 7 – orange – (1 item) Sweden.

In the analysis, it was found that the United States had the highest number of citations, totaling 9323, with a link strength of 64. India followed with 4248 citations and a link strength of 44, while the United Kingdom had 4176 citations and a link strength of 59. These metrics highlight the significant contribution of these countries to the research on sustainable or green consumer behavior, underscoring their prominence in the academic landscape within this field.

In the dataset of author keywords, there were 2075 unique keywords identified. Among these, 86 keywords met the criterion of occurring at least 5 times. This suggests a subset of keywords that are more frequent in the dataset. The total strength of these 86 keywords reflects the combined occurrence and interconnections, highlighting their importance within the context of the analyzed documents.

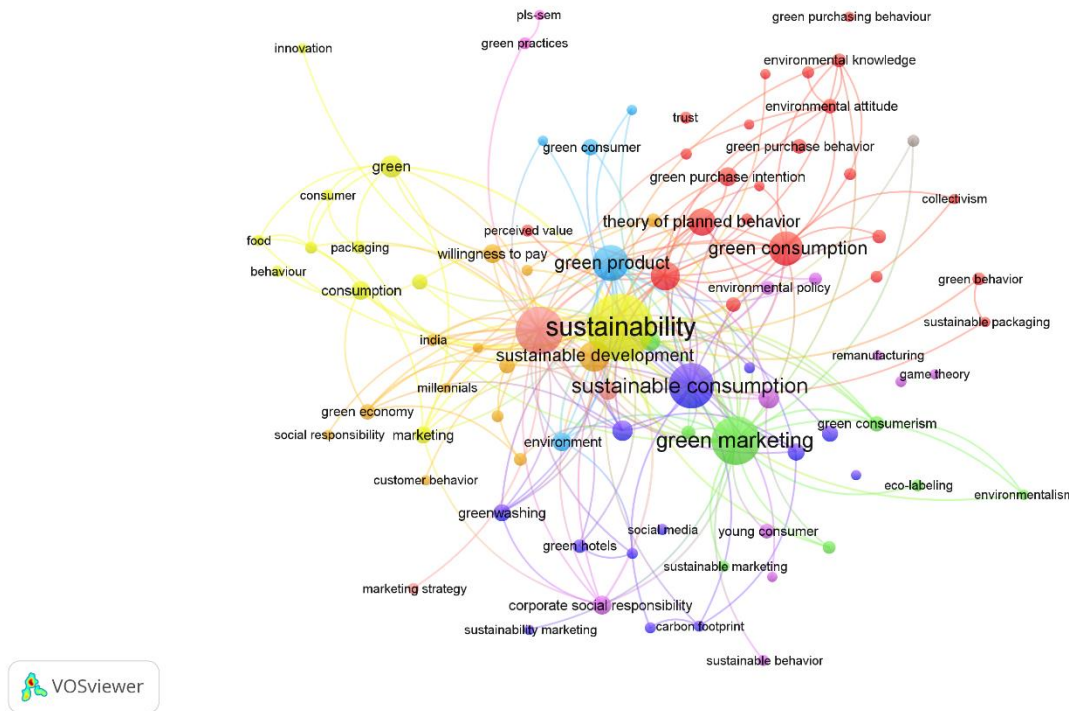


Figure 7. Co-occurrence of keywords (by author)
Source: Vosviewer

The co-occurrence of keywords by authors represents ten clusters:

- Cluster 1 – red (23 items) – bibliometric analysis, collectivism, environmental attitude, environmental awareness, environmental concern, environmental consciousness, environmental knowledge, green apparel, green behavior, green consumption, green perceived value, green purchase behavior, perceived consumer effectiveness, perceived value, pro-environmental behavior, sustainable consumer behavior, sustainable fashion, sustainable packaging, theory of planned behavior, theory of reasoned action and trust.
- Cluster 2 – orange (13 items) – attitude – behavior gap, China, customer behavior, green economy, India, millennials, organic food, renewable energy, social responsibility, structural equation modelling, sustainable development, values, willingness to pay.
- Cluster 3 – blue (12 items) – carbon footprint, circular economy, climate change, green hotels, green washing, recycling, social media, sustainability marketing, sustainable consumption, sustainable tourism systematic literature review, tourism
- Cluster 4 – yellow (11 items) – attitude, behavior, consumer, consumption, food, green, innovation, marketing, packaging, sustainability, sustainable.
- Cluster 5 – purple (9 items) – corporate social responsibility, environmental policy, food waste, game theory, green supply chain management, purchase intention, remanufacturing, sustainable behavior, young consumer.
- Cluster 6 – green (8 items) – eco-labeling, environmentalism, green advertising, green consumer behavior, green consumerism, green consumers, green marketing, and sustainable marketing.
- Cluster 7 – light blue (3 items) – environment, green product, purchase behavior.
- Cluster 8 – coral (3 items) - consumer behavior, environmental sustainability, marketing strategy.
- Cluster 9 – pink (2 items) – green practices, pls-sem.
- Cluster 10 – grey (1 item) environment marketing.

Co-citation has been effectively applied to reveal the relationships and structures among authors, academic publications within each field of research (Haba et al., 2023). There were 318 distinct citation sources identified in the dataset. Among these, 26 sources met the criterion of being cited in at least 5 documents. This indicates the subset of sources that have a relatively higher frequency of citation within the analyzed documents, meeting the specified thresholds for inclusion.

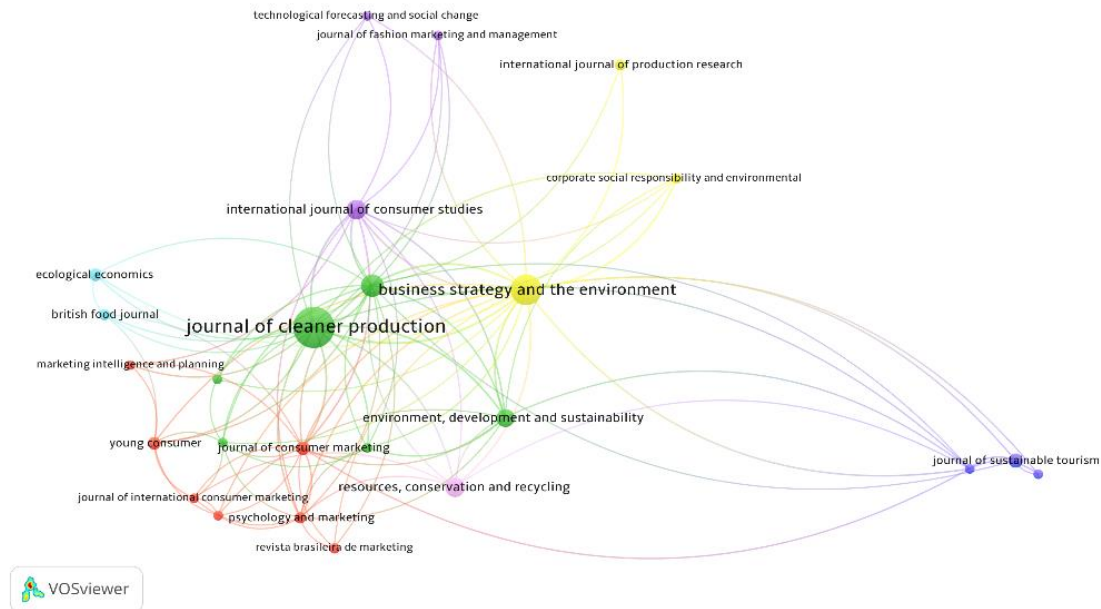


Figure 8. Co-citation source
Source: Vosviewer

The citation sources are classified into seven clusters:

- Cluster 1 – Red (7 items) – Journal of consumer marketing, Journal of international consumer marketing, Journal of micromarketing, Marketing intelligence and planning, psychology, and marketing, Revista brasileira de marketing, Young consumer
- Cluster 2 – green (6 items) – Environment, development and sustainability, Journal of cleaner production, Journal of marketing management, Journal of retailing and consumer services, Social responsibility journal, vision
- Cluster 3 – blue (3 items) – International journal of contemporary hospitality management, International journal of hospitality management, Journal of sustainable tourism
- Cluster 4 – yellow (3 items) – Business strategy and the environment, Corporate social responsibility, International journal of pro
- Cluster 5 – purple (3 items) – International journal of consumers studies
- Cluster 6 – light blue (2 items) – British food journal, Ecological economics
- Cluster 7 – pink (2 items) - Resources, conservation, and recycling.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis and integrates the existing knowledge in the field of sustainable or green consumer behavior. For managers, it provides clear guidance on how to develop and implement a Green Marketing Strategy, making it particularly valuable for innovation and marketing managers aiming to integrate environmental sustainability into their strategies. For scholars, it integrates existing research to provide theoretical framework. By identifying gaps in the current literature, it also suggests directions for future research. We hope this study will encourage further research and become a reference point for managers, scholars, and students interested in sustainable or green consumer behavior.

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study highlights some various aspects of green consumer behavior within the context of sustainability. By identifying and analyzing key concepts – green consumer behavior and sustainability, the research provides valuable insights into the underlying particularities driving consumer choices towards environmentally friendly products and eco-friendly services. Additionally, the synthesis and analysis of connections with other relevant concepts contribute to the advancement of theoretical frameworks in understanding sustainable or green consumer behavior.

5.2. Managerial Implications or Policy Implications

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both managerial practices and policy development. For managers, understanding the factors influencing green consumer behavior can inform strategic marketing decisions aimed at serving environmentally conscious consumers. This may involve product development, branding, and communication strategies that emphasize sustainability. Policymakers can use the insights from this research to develop and implement guidelines and initiatives that encourage businesses to adopt sustainable practices and promote green consumption patterns.

5.3. Limitations of Study / Future Directions of Research

One limitation is the reliance on secondary data sources, which may limit the depth of analysis or introduce biases. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating primary data collection methods and exploring green consumer behavior across diverse contexts.

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