

Thirty Years of Sustainable Marketing Research: Bibliometric Analysis and Mapping the Research Trends in Sustainability Context

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(Received 26 May 2025; Revised 10 July 2025, Accepted 28 July 2025; Available online 30 September 2025)

Abstract - For over five decades, sustainability concepts have been implemented and investigated in marketing, yet the issues we face today remain serious. The objective of the research is to analyze the evolving landscape of "sustainable marketing" by utilizing bibliometrics, such as top keywords, most cited articles, most cited authors, and leading journals, in order to study current trends and outline future research directions within the sustainable marketing domain. The appropriate articles from suitable sources were shortlisted from the Scopus database using the search term "sustainable marketing," where 384 articles (as of June 2025) from the years 1996 to 2025 were identified, and bibliometric analysis was performed with the help of VOSviewer software. The findings of the study will be of significant use for researchers, academicians, and other stakeholders in the sustainable marketing research domain. The future research directions mentioned in this study will motivate the researchers for further studies in the sustainability movement. This is an original article contributing to the domain of sustainable marketing by providing research insights and offering future research directions. The present paper is an up-to-date bibliometric analysis study in the domain of sustainable marketing post-COVID-19. This study is very useful for researchers in sustainability in general and sustainable marketing in particular.

Keywords: Sustainable Marketing, Green Marketing, Sustainability, Marketing 5.0, Eco-friendly Marketing, Bibliometrics

I. INTRODUCTION

Most firms today are transitioning from effective marketing organizations to sustainable marketing organizations. The marketing objectives of firms are moving from aiming for the highest sales figures to aiming for the longest sustainable marketing practices. Sustainable marketing aims at offering an optimum marketing mix to the present consumers while also taking care of future consumers by being concerned about the environment, utilizing optimum and local resources, and environmentally responsible production, consumption, and (Ziwei & Han, 2023).

'Sustainable marketing' is defined as "...sustainable marketing is the process of generating, conveying, and delivering value to customers while preserving or enhancing

both natural and human resources....." (Martin & Schouten, 2014). Whereas (Belz & Peattie, 2009) defined 'sustainability marketing' as "... Strategically planning, organizing, executing, and regulating marketing resources and initiatives to fulfill customer demands and preferences, while adhering to social and environmental standards and achieving company goals.....". (Aswathy, 2024).

Organizations use sustainable marketing techniques to deliver value for their products and services to stakeholders (Anwar & El-Bassiouny, 2020; Sharma & Iyer, 2023). A major challenge faced by managers in implementing sustainable marketing strategies is that their primary motivation is centered on the financial success of the company. They give lesser priority to environmental concerns and the integration of environmental factors into their corporate operations (Trojanowski & Kazibudski, 2021). There is a vital necessity to devise new concepts, methodologies, and techniques for sustainable development, including business-relevant instruments (Duica et al., 2015). Conventional marketing mix tools are not at all adequate in this environmentally concerned era; hence, the literature accentuates the necessity to redetermine them, accumulating to each of them the facet of sustainability (Tollin, Christensen, & Wilke, 2014; Prabhudeva & Hariharan, 2024).

There are a substantial number of literature review studies available in the allied areas of sustainable marketing, like sustainability, green marketing, environmental marketing, sustainability marketing, etc. A conventional review on "marketing and environment" has been conducted (Kilbourne & Beckmann, 1998), a bibliographical analysis on "green marketing" was executed (Chamorro, Rubio, & Miranda, 2009), an SLR on "sustainability marketing strategy" was organized (Kumar, Rahman, & Kazmi, 2013), a co-citation analysis using multi-dimensional scaling on "sustainability marketing" was performed (Chabowski, Mena, & Gonzalez-Padron, 2011), an electronic and manual bibliographic search method analysis on "environmental marketing" has been executed (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011), a conventional

review on “sustainability marketing” has been conducted (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014), a systematic literature review on “green marketing” has been conducted (Kumar et al., 2024), and a bibliometric review on “sustainability marketing” was performed (Bhattacharyya, 2023). Along with this are some of the latest research studies in the area of structuring, bibliometrics, and reviewing the sustainable marketing research, like “green marketing innovation” by (Kar & Harichandan, 2022), “green marketing research” by (Saleem, Khattak, Ur Rehman, & Ashiq, 2021), “the state of research in green marketing” by (Bhardwaj et al., 2023), and “green marketing and marketing-related fields” by (Wang, Liu, & Pérez, 2023).

Among all of these studies, some of the studies conducted systematic literature reviews and bibliometric analyses on allied areas of sustainable marketing like green marketing, environmental marketing, etc. Some of the studies are on close keywords like sustainability, sustainability marketing, sustainability marketing strategy, etc., but not exactly on sustainable marketing. All these review studies were conducted between 1998 and 2016; hence, these are not the latest studies. But one review study by (Bhattacharyya, 2023) is the very latest, but the Scopus source data considered for the study was from 2019. Moreover, the way the keywords were used is like TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainability marketing), where it will extract all the research documents related to the keywords sustainability as well as marketing but not sustainable marketing. This research used the keyword like TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainable-marketing), where it will extract the documents related to sustainable marketing as a single keyword. So more accurate, appropriate, and relevant documents can only be extracted for this bibliometric analysis study. This is the foremost bibliometric analysis study conducted on the keyword “sustainable marketing.” Theoretically also the keywords “sustainability marketing” and “sustainable marketing” cannot be used as synonyms, as both are not the same (Rao & Chatterjee, 2025)

The post-COVID-19 situation forces us to relook into a once-in-a-generation prospect to advance more sustainable alleyways and to rebalance the domains of sustainability (Morrissey & Heidkamp, 2022). This research is the foremost review of bibliometrics of sustainable marketing research post-COVID-19. As the need for research in the domain of sustainability is growing day-by-day and enhancing efforts towards the attainment of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), it is very important to know the changing landscapes and future research directions of sustainable-marketing research. It is very vital to know this new information about the changing landscape of sustainable marketing using bibliometric analysis (Bhattacharyya et al., 2023).

This research aims to assess and identify the trends and patterns in sustainable marketing research papers from 1996

to 2025 by analyzing the highest productive journals, countries, authors, institutions, keyword usage, citation metrics, and global collaborative networks. This research will academically contribute to the domain of sustainable marketing research by exploring the present research status and changing dimensions in this emerging domain. With this paper, the prospective researchers in this domain can develop an understanding about the emerging keywords, top authors, top countries, and top journals publishing sustainable marketing research, along with top-cited articles, author networks, and collaborations and networking of institutions in sustainable marketing research. This study seeks to address the subsequent research questions.

RQ1: What are the current publication trends in sustainable marketing research?

RQ2: Which are the most productive countries, institutions, and journals in sustainable marketing research?

RQ3: Which are the top-cited articles, and who are the most contributing authors to sustainable marketing research?

RQ4: What are the most powerful authors' keywords and co-occurrence of top keywords in sustainable marketing research?

RQ5: Which are the emerging research avenues that contribute to sustainable marketing research in the future?

II. SCOPE AND DATA SOURCE

The Scopus database served as the source of secondary data for this bibliometric investigation. Scopus is a widely recognized and reputable database frequently used by a multitude of scholars (Singh, Singh, Karmakar, Leta, & Mayr, 2021). The search query "TITLE-ABS-KEY('sustainable-marketing')" was applied in the TOPIC section of the Scopus database. The bibliographic information for 384 articles was exported from the Scopus database related to the search keyword “sustainable marketing.” The foundational characteristics of this bibliometric study are presented in Table I.

The bibliographic information for 384 articles was exported and evaluated using the VOSviewer tool. We executed the PRISMA model to qualify and disqualify the documents in the study, as illustrated in Fig 1 (Moher et al., 2009). The bibliometric dataset was downloaded from the Scopus database in June 2025, with the earliest and latest papers from 1990 to 2025. The data file has been exported in a text document, specifically as a .csv file, containing various bibliographic details such as titles, authors, abstracts, keywords, affiliations, bibliography, and citations.

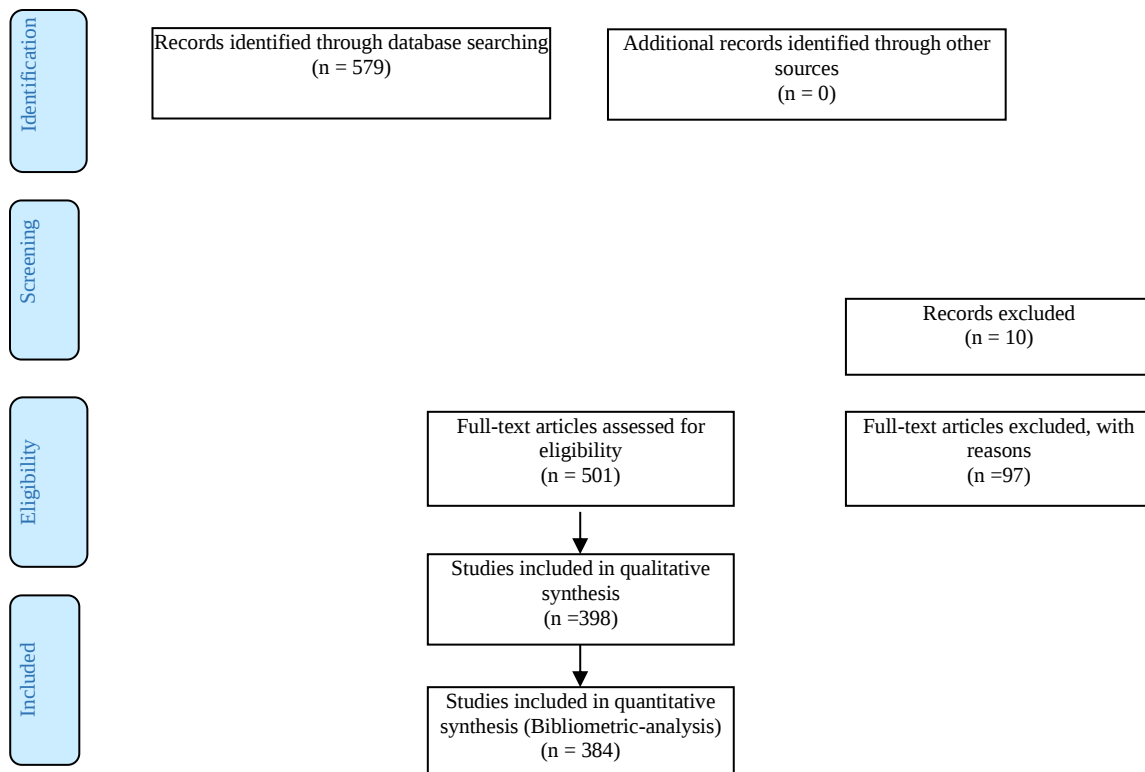


Fig. 1 PRISMA Model – “Sustainable Marketing” Bibliometrics Analysis

TABLE I FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Description	Results
Total Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	511
Timespan	1996-2025
Total Documents (considered for this study)	384
Document Average Age	5.55
Total Citation	8692
Average citations per doc	22.63
References	21212
Author's Keywords (DE)	1150
Total Authors Contributed to “Sustainable-Marketing”	363
Authors of single-authored docs	51
Total Organisations Contributed to “Sustainable-Marketing”	718
Total Countries Contributed to “Sustainable-Marketing”	71
Single-authored docs	346
Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer	

III. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS ON SUSTAINABLE MARKETING RESEARCH

1. Types of Documents

Fig 2 depicts the types of research documents (articles) in the database (Scopus) on the topic of "Sustainable Marketing." The most common article type is 'journal articles' (published as articles), which has n=257 counts (66.9% of the total 384 entries). Book chapters are the most common form of publication (n=52 (13.5%)), followed by conference papers (n=36 (9.4%)), reviews (n=15 (3.90%)), books (n=10 (2.60%)), editorials (n=7 (1.80%)), brief notes (n=3 (0.80%)), conference reviews (n=2 (0.50%)), retracted (n=1 (0.26%)), and erratum (n=1 (0.26%)).

and conference reviews (n=2 (0.50%)). The other article kinds, 'Erratum' and 'Retracted,' only occurred once.

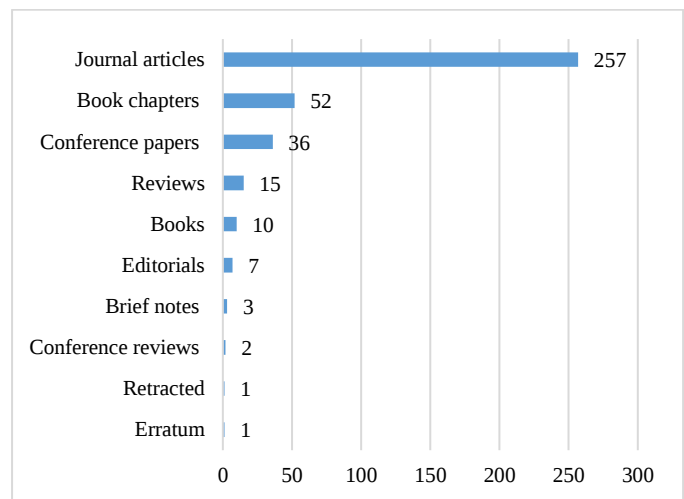


Fig. 2 Types of publication

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

2. Annual Publications

Fig 3 illustrates the trends of the quantity of articles on the subject of "sustainable marketing" in the database (Scopus) as a whole. The term sustainable marketing foremost appears in the compilation of articles in the current sample in 1996, and its frequency progressively grows year after year. The exhibited trend line for the papers (number) produced each

year shows seven distinct peaks. These high points occurred in 1999 (n=2), 2006 (n=4), 2012 (n=11), 2015 (n=22), 2020 (n=35), and 2023 (n=53). In 2025, as of June 2025, there are 25 documents indexed in the Scopus database as per the PRISMA model followed for this study. The results of the data show that in five separate years, no articles about

sustainable marketing were published. Those years are 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2005. One probable explanation for the lack of publications in the discipline is the rise of other significant fields in marketing other than sustainable marketing. The data also show that the rate of publishing on sustainable marketing has grown since 2015.

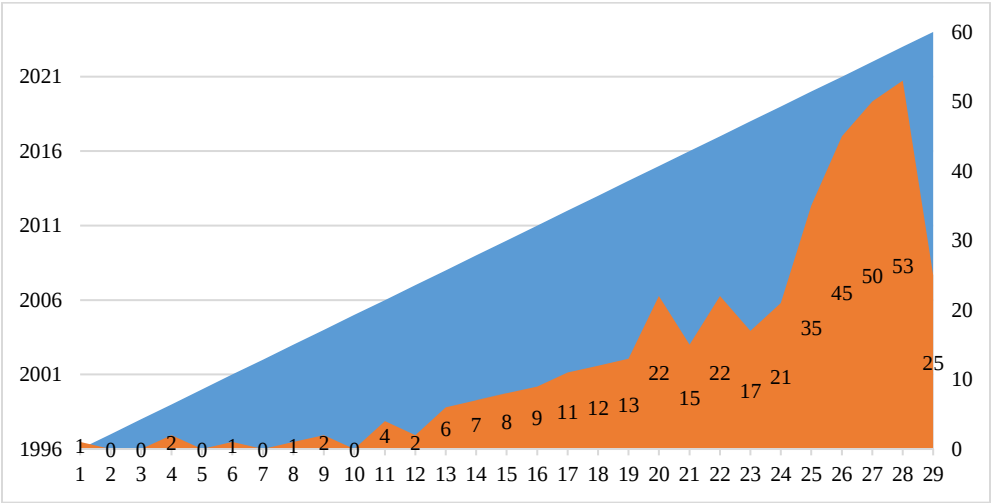


Fig. 3 Number of publication year wise

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

3. Research Directions

Fig 4 depicts the top 16 research directions that were found to be most popular (as determined by the "Scopus" database). Different domains, viz., business, management, and accounting (n=111 (28.9%)), social sciences (n=57 (14.9%)), environmental science (n=41 (10.8%)), economics, econometrics, and finance (n=40 (10.5%)), engineering (n=31 (8.1%)), energy (n=29 (7.5%)), computer science (n=28 (7.3%)), agricultural and biological sciences (n=10 (2.6%)), decision sciences (n=10 (2.5%)), arts and humanities (n=7 (1.8%)), and others (n=19 (5.1%)), are among the top areas. The survey also found that "Business Management and Accounting," "Social Sciences," "Environmental Sciences," and "Economics, Econometrics, and Finance" had a greater impact on sustainable marketing research than the other categories.

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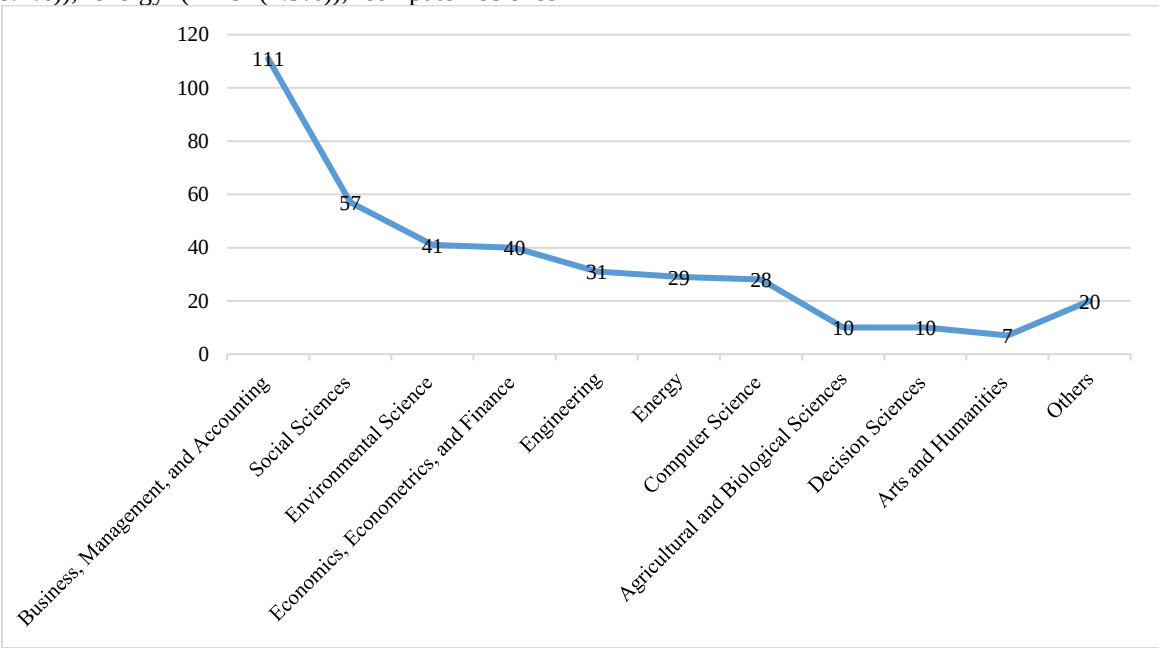


Fig. 4 Popular research direction

Source: Compiled from scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

4. Most Productive Countries

TABLE II MOST PRODUCTIVE COUNTRIES

S.No.	Country	Total Documents (TD)	Total Citations (TC)	Average Citations(AC)	Total Link Strength (TLS)
1	United States	58	2049	35.33	7
2	India	40	422	10.55	4
3	United Kingdom	39	1442	36.97	5
4	China	26	227	8.73	6
5	South Korea	22	530	24.09	7
6	Australia	16	231	14.44	2
7	Poland	14	90	6.43	0
8	Italy	11	332	30.18	1
9	Germany	10	208	20.80	0
10	Malaysia	10	57	5.70	0

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

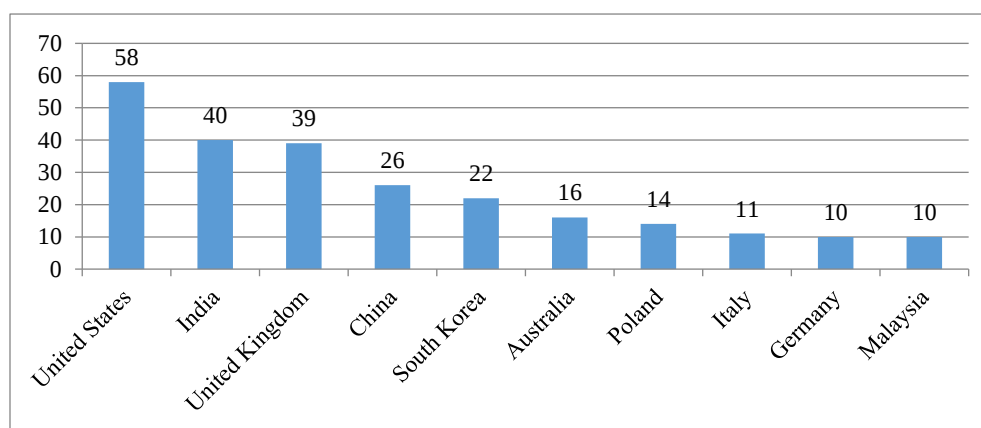


Fig. 5 Top countries producing Research on sustainable marketing

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

Table II displays the world's most prolific countries in terms of research article production in sustainable marketing. It delineates the eight most productive countries according to their output of total documents (TD) published, total citations (TC), and average citations (AC) per article for each country. The top ten most productive countries (in terms of total number of documents (research produced)) are the USA (TD=58), India (TD=40), the UK (TD=39), China (TD=26), South Korea (TD=22), Australia (TD=16), Poland (TD=14), Italy (TD=11), Germany (TD=10), and Malaysia (TD=10), respectively. The top five countries each possess a minimum of 22 papers in Sustainable-Marketing Research, as illustrated in Fig 5.

The top ten countries by total citations are the USA (TC=2049), the UK (TC=1442), South Korea (TC=530), India (TC=422), Italy (TC=332), Australia (TC=231), China (TC=227), Germany (TC=208), Poland (TC=90), and Malaysia (TC=57), respectively. Regarding total citations, the USA is performing exceptionally well, as the research of the USA in sustainable marketing is getting cited worldwide, followed by the UK. Regarding the mean citation count per article, the top ten countries are found to be the UK

(AC=36.37), the USA (AC=35.33), Italy (AC=30.18), South Korea (AC=24.09), Germany (AC=20.80), Australia (AC=14.44), India (AC=10.55), China (8.73), Poland (6.43), and Malaysia (AC=5.70), respectively.

The United States stands out as the most productive country when it comes to generating articles on the subject of sustainable marketing, having published 58 articles. It is the sole nation in the sample with the highest number of publications. These 58 articles, originating from the United States, have garnered a total of 2049 citations, resulting in an average of 35.33 citations per article. India follows as the second most prolific country in the sample, with 40 publications, although it has fewer citations (TC=422; AC=10.55). The United Kingdom takes the third spot in terms of the number of articles published (TD=39; TC=1442; AC=36.97). China is found to be the fourth most productive country, with 26 articles, 227 citations, and 8.73 average citations per article. South Korea is in fifth position with 22 articles, 530 citations, and 24.09 average citations per article.

5. Most Productive Institutions

Institutions have an important impact on both the quality of research and the productivity of researchers. Figure 6 depicts the 10 most productive institutions in terms of total documents (TD). Jeonju University (TD=6), Korea University (TD=5), Changwon National University (TD=5), Yonsei University (TD=5), Texas Tech University (TD=5), Universidade de Aveiro (TD=5), St. Petersburg University of Economics (TD=5), Bucharest Univ. of Economic Studies (TD=5), Prince Sultan University (TD=4), and University of Canterbury (TD=4).

Economics (TD=5), Bucharest University of Economic Studies (TD=5), Prince Sultan University (TD=4), and University of Canterbury (TD=4). Notably, the majority of these institutions are located in developed countries. The bulk of influential literature on sustainable marketing probably originates from institutions in affluent nations. Wealthy countries have made significant investments in sustainability marketing research, which may account for this trend.

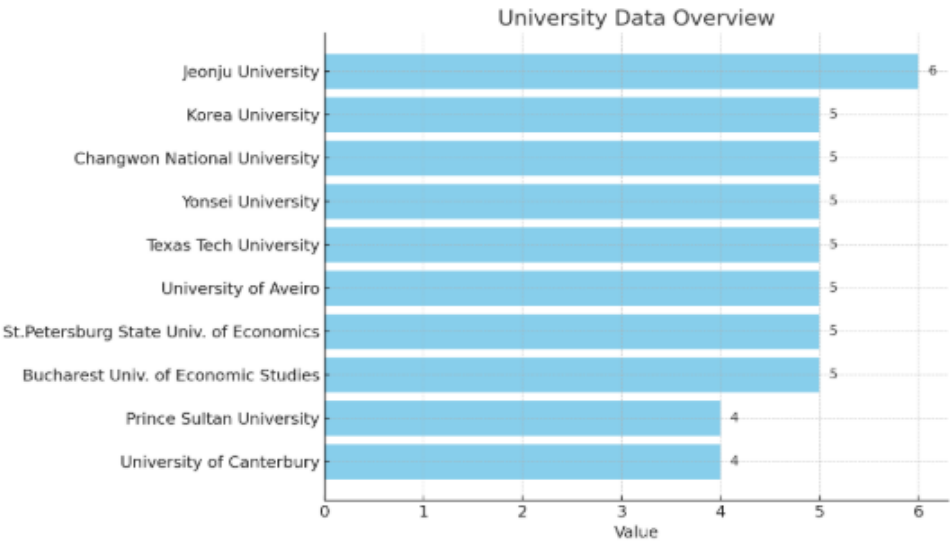


Fig. 6 Most Productive Institutions

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

6. Most Productive Journals (cite score) publishing sustainable marketing research



Fig.7 Most Productive Sources based on cite score

Source: Compiled from Scopus downloaded .csv file using Vosviewer

Journals and sources also have a crucial impact on the quality of research and researchers' productivity. Fig 7 displays the five most productive journals based on their Cite Score (CS) at the end of 2021. The top journal publishing sustainable marketing research is found to be the Journal of Business Research (CS=11.2), followed by the Journal of Marketing

Management (CS=5.2), Sustainability (CS=5), the Journal of Macromarketing (CS=3.8), and Developments in Marketing Science (CS=1). It can be recommended that any researcher initiating sustainable marketing research can consider these journals first.

TABLE III MOST CITED REFERENCES

Work on green consumerism attracted the highest number of citations (TC=487; as of 04th April, 2023), in which green consumerism was advocated and future research directions recommended in the domain of consumer society (Peattie, 2010). Second highest number of citations (TC=268), and they worked on SLR of green marketing” along with an analysis of definitions, tools, steps, and strategy (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Third highest number of citations (TC=235), and the work is on sustainability research in marketing, in which the authors provided various dimensions of sustainability research in the area of marketing (Connelly et al., 2011). Fourth highest number of citations (TC=232), and the work is on “the marketing paradigm in the third millennium,” where the authors advocated about sub-phenomena (“sensory systems and consumer experiences”), phenomena (“marketing networks”), and super-phenomena (“sustainability and development”) (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). Fifth highest number of citations (TC=231), and the work is on the role of consumers, guilt, and pride in sustainable consumption choices (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). Sixth highest number of citations (TC=181), and the work is on sustainable marketing of bio-fuel, wherein a policy review and the barriers of biofuel sustainable marketing were

8. Word Cloud of Keywords of Sustainable Marketing

Fig.8 Word Cloud Author's Keywords

Fig 8 shows a word cloud analysis of keywords associated to sustainable marketing. It is a graphical portrayal of the occurrence of phrases identified in diverse research papers. The size of the words in the word cloud reflects the maximum frequency of the term. Among the top five keywords based on the appearance (number of times) are found to be the keyword “marketing,” which appeared 393 times; the keyword “sustainable,” which appeared 282 times; the keyword “sustainability,” which appeared 110 times; the keyword “social,” which appeared 66 times; and the keyword “green,” which appeared 66 times. Apart from these keywords, other sustainable marketing keywords like consumer, consumption, development, etc. are found to be more dominant as the research is progressing on these keywords.

IV. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study provided an extensive bibliometric analysis of sustainable marketing research from 1996 to 2023. The study effectively tackles all the posed research questions. Journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers primarily publish sustainable marketing research. The majority of research in sustainable marketing has been conducted in the “business, management, and accounting” domain, followed by the “social sciences” domain, the “environmental science” domain, and the “economics, econometrics, and finance” domain. During the years 1996 to 2023, the least productive period for sustainable marketing research is found to be 1999-2006, and the most productive period is found to be 2020-2023. The most productive journals based on cite score that are publishing sustainable marketing research are found to be Journal of Business Research (JBR), Journal of Marketing Management (JMM), Sustainability journal, Journal of Macromarketing, and Developments in Marketing Science. The most productive institutions contributing to sustainable marketing research are found to be Jeonju University, Korea University, Changwon National University, Yonsei University, Texas Tech University, Universidade de Aveiro, St. Petersburg University of Economics (SPUE), and Bucharest University of Economic Studies (BUES). The topmost countries producing sustainable marketing research are found to be the USA, India, the UK, China, and South Korea. The research work of (Peattie, 2010; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Connelly et al., 2011; Achrol & Kotler, 2012; Antonetti & Maklan, 2014) is found to be top articles in sustainable marketing research that got the highest number of citations. Chhabra D, Hunt S D, Papasolomou I, Peattie K, and Varey R J are found to be top authors contributing to the sustainable marketing research domain determined by the quantity of documents generated and referenced.

The most powerful keywords in sustainable marketing research are found to be “sustainable marketing,” “sustainability,” “green marketing,” “sustainable development,” and “sustainable consumption.” These are the most common keywords that are used in most of the documents published on sustainable marketing research. The top keywords based on co-occurrence that are closely

associated with the sustainable marketing research are found to be “Sustainable Marketing,” “Sustainability,” “Green Marketing,” “Sustainable Development,” “Marketing,” “Sustainable Consumption,” “Marketing Strategy,” and “Sustainability Marketing.”

The top-cited journals in sustainable marketing research under bibliographic coupling were found to be Journal of Marketing Management (JMM), Journal of Macromarketing, AMS Review, Journal of Business Research (JBR), Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, and Sustainability Journal. The top citing authors in sustainable marketing research under bibliographic coupling were found to be Kemper J.A. & Ballantine P.W., Thomas N.J.R., Kumar V., Rahman Z. & Kazmi A.A., Trang P.N.T., Hanh Le A.N., Tan L.P. & Sung Cheng J.M., Sheth J.N. & Parvatiyar A., Kennedy A.M., McGouran C., and Kemper J.A. The top citing institutions in sustainable marketing research under bibliographic coupling were found to be Nottingham Business School (UK), Nottingham Trent University (UK), Oslo School of Management (Norway), Jeonju University (South Korea), Changwon University (South Korea), Bucharest University of Economic Studies (BUES-Romania), and University of Szczecin (Poland). The top citing countries in sustainable marketing research under bibliographic coupling were found to be the UK, USA, New Zealand, India, China, and South Korea. The trending themes (cluster themes) in sustainable marketing are identified to be “Strategic Planning in Sustainable Marketing,” “Ecological Challenges in Sustainable Marketing,” “Sustainable Marketing Theory and Framework,” and “Sustainable Marketing and Societal Consumption.” It was observed that there are three themes formed in the bibliographic coupling of documents: the initial cluster was identified as “Sustainable marketing—review and research agenda,” the second cluster was detected as “Sustainable marketing—market study,” and the third cluster was detected as “Sustainable marketing—meaning and business views.” So it is suggested to the current researchers and prospective researchers to work on these trending themes (cluster themes); also, it is suggested to work on the most powerful keywords discussed to include in their research and to publish in the journals publishing sustainability marketing research.

V. LIMITATIONS

Several factors constrain the ability to draw general conclusions from this study. The study was initially confined to the Scopus database. This choice presents several advantages, as outlined in the methodology section, such as extensive coverage and high data quality. However, it's important to note that some journals and specific journal publications may not be encompassed in the Scopus database, even if journal itself is included. It's worth mentioning that we did not incorporate these sources into the analysis in any alternative manner to ensure the study's replicability. The study's particular search criteria represent a second limitation. We aimed to assemble a set of articles related to sustainable marketing research published in reputable journals. We achieved this goal by including the search term “sustainable marketing” in the titles, abstracts, or keywords of the publications. We swiftly eliminated a limited number of conference papers, book chapters, non-English articles,

and other publications from the Scopus search. The filter will additionally conceal several publications published prior to the term "sustainable marketing" being established as the accepted designation for these studies. While we opt for specificity in comprehending existing knowledge on sustainable marketing, scholars exploring comparable topics may desire to expand our research.

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