

Consumer Ethics: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Consumer ethics are the moral principles and conventions that direct people's behaviour when they purchase, use, and discard goods and services. It addresses concerns about moral behaviour in consumer markets. The purpose of this study is to provide readers with a more thorough understanding of the most recent advancements in consumer ethics research. In order to facilitate the researchers, this study provides a bibliometric analysis of consumer ethics research from 1983 to 2022.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The Scopus database was screened to identify year-wise publications, most cited papers, most prolific authors, countries and institutions. The Vosviewer software was used to analyse keyword occurrence, co-authorship network and inter-country co-authorship network.

Findings: The findings of bibliometric analysis indicate that the highest number of consumer ethics publications were published in 2021. The highly cited research paper is 'Why ethical consumers don't walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour of ethically minded consumers'. The most prolific author on consumer ethics is D.Arl, Department of Marketing, Australia. The highest number of papers on consumer ethics were published in the Journal of Business Ethics.

Originality/Value: This study provides direction to future researchers on the topic of consumer ethics by providing journals, authors, institutions, countries and keywords related information that are prominent in the domain of consumer ethics.

Paper Type: Review of Literature

KEYWORDS: Consumer ethics | Bibliometric Analysis | Biblioshiny | VOSviewer | Consumer behaviour

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Introduction

The term ethics is derived from the Greek word “ethos,” which means “way of living.” Ethics is a subfield of philosophy that deals with human conduct, particularly how people behave in social settings. In order to understand what is morally right or wrong, just or unjust, ethics explores the intellectual justifications for our moral judgements.

Paul & Elder (2006) define ethics as “a set of concepts and principles that guide us in determining what behaviour helps or harms sentient creatures”. Ethics have been studied in relation to medicine, forensic science, business, marketing, consumer, education, advertising, accounting to name a few.

Consumer ethics are the moral principles and conventions that direct people’s behaviour when they purchase, use, and discard goods and services. It addresses concerns about moral behaviour in consumer markets.

The concept of ethical consumerism holds that consumers can and should carry out a variety of ethical ideals and principles and pursue a variety of ethical goals through their purchasing decisions. Generally speaking, it means that making purchases is a way to put values into practice. Tuna without dolphins, foods without genetically modified organisms (GMOs), apparel made without sweatshop labour, fair-trade coffee, non-animal tested cosmetics, and conflict-free diamonds have all gained popularity as a result of effective campaigns run by ethical consumer movements.

Review of Literature

Consumer ethics are the moral principles and norms that guide individuals’ behaviour while they obtain, utilise, and dispose of products and services (Muncy & Vitell, 1992). Vitell emphasised that consumers have a responsibility to act ethically in their one-on-one dyadic relationships, which normally involves the acquisition and maybe use of products and services but could also involve disposal. This obligation could be described as consumer ethics (Vitell, 2015).

Consumer ethics is a research field having global application due to its impact on commercial organisations, society, and the environment, as well as its potential for good and bad (Carrington et al., 2020; Vitell, 2015) Consumer misbehaviour in the service industry has an effect on a company’s bottom line and other customers’ service experiences (Schaefers et al., 2016). Additionally, it

influences the behaviour of other customers. On the brighter side, ethical consumer behaviour like purchasing fair trade goods creates circumstances that support ethical consumption and improve the quality of life for many system players like producers, retailers, and other consumers (Carrington et al., 2020; Geiger, Oneto & Arnould, 2011).

Consumer ethics research focuses on two main areas. First one being consumer ethics standards, which are the values and norms that guide consumers’ ethical decisions (Vitell, 2015; Burke et al., 2014); and second one unethical consumer behaviours, which are the consequences of consumers’ ethical beliefs on their actions (Lu et al., 2015; Carrington et al., 2014). There are obvious indications that many consumers are shifting to more socially and ecologically responsible goods and services, which is consistent with a change in consumer values that has been seen in many different countries (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008).

Research Objectives

This study aims to give readers a more comprehensive understanding of the most recent developments in consumer ethics research. This study employs bibliometric methods to examine trends in consumer ethics research, benefit academics and professionals, and assist businesses in their decision-making.

The following objectives are the focus of this study:

1. Analyze the distribution of articles on consumer ethics, paying particular attention to the date and location of publication, keyword research, and the number of citations.
2. Investigate the connection between the citation and co-citation of consumer ethics papers.

Methodology

In order to find significant publications on consumer ethics, the current study has screened paper titles and abstracts. Given that Scopus covers a greater range of high-quality publications, is rigorously indexed, and has a substantial number of citations, our study focused on research papers on consumer ethics that were listed in those journals (Bergman, 2012). When searching the Scopus database, the keyword “Consumer Ethics” was used. The field of research used was ‘article title, abstract and keywords’.

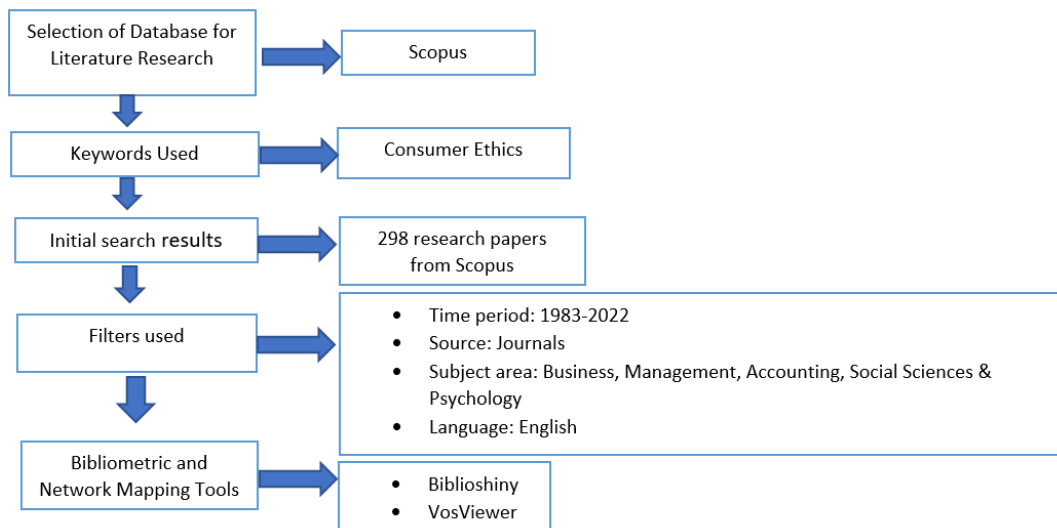


Figure 1: Research Methodology

(Prepared by authors)



The process used to generate the final data set of 212 papers is described in the figure above. Bibliometric techniques have spread throughout science and research policy over the past 20 years. A bibliometric study is a method of analysis that employs empirical and quantitative data to describe the dynamics of the distribution of research articles within a certain subject and time frame (Almind&Ingwersen, 1997; Persson et. al, 2009). Increasing their scope of study, evaluating the impact of a research group, or analysing the impact of a particular study are three reasons why many fields of research employ bibliometric approaches (Pilkington & Meredith, 2009). The result is that they are now among “the few really multidisciplinary areas of research that can be extended to practically all branches of science that can be identified” (Glänzel, 2003, p. 5). Bibliometric analysis makes it possible to gather instruments for quantitatively assessing literature. It employs citation analysis and a study of the content as tools for analysis (De Bellis, 2009) Some scholars define it as a technique used in the creation of scientific literature that allows assessment of the pace of technological and scientific advancement at a particular level. It allows the positioning of a country within the world, a business within a neighbourhood, and even specific scholars within their society (Okubo, 1997).

Additionally, this study uses the Vosviewer software to provide a network map of co-authorship analysis, country-co-author analysis, keyword occurrences, and bibliographic coupling with author analysis. It is a network analysis programme that makes it easier to see the dynamics and organisation of data; it was employed to carry out the coupling of authors, countries, and co-occurrence of keyword analysis in order to carefully examine and examine the logical networks of the targeted research topic (Vallaster et al., 2019). In order to produce a more comprehensive and visual representation of the data, the VOSviewer software was chosen (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The programme can be used to create links between the widest range of bibliometric data, presenting them on maps that make it easier to see the contents that were studied (Laengle et al., 2018).

Results and Findings

Year-Wise Publication on consumer ethics

The year-by-year publications on consumer ethics from 1983 to 2022 are shown in Figure 2. From 1983 to 2008, there were hardly any articles published, however starting in 2009, many papers have been consistently published. With 22 publications, consumer ethics research showed impressive development in 2021. This surge in articles was a result of academics’ rising interest in consumer ethics.

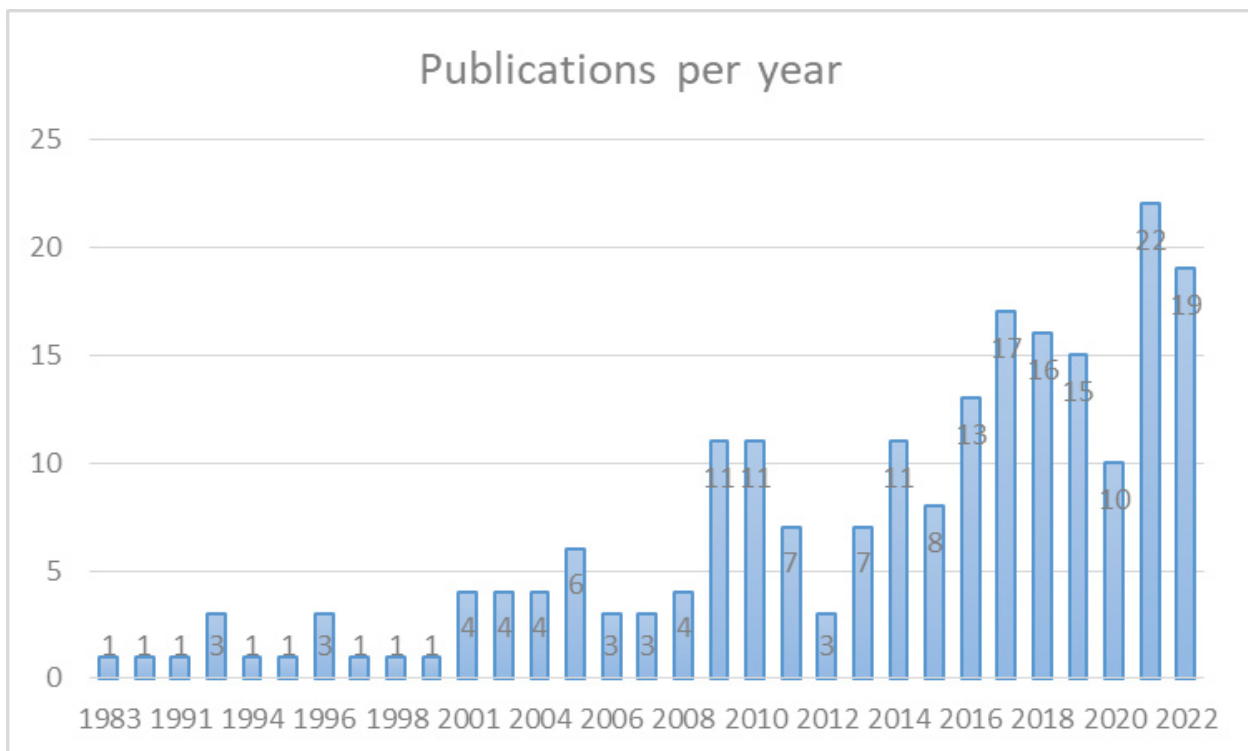


Figure 2. Number of Articles Published Over the Years

Source: (Scopus database)

Most cited papers

The citation rates indicate the effect of consumer ethics on academics and other fields. The top 10 consumer ethics articles, widely cited in other journals, are listed in Table 1. Details of the top five most-cited papers based on the Scopus search results are as follows: ‘Why ethical consumers don’t walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour of ethically minded consumers’ has been cited 657 times and is the most cited paper. This paper investigates the relationship between the intention-behaviour and the authors have given the conceptual model regarding the intention-behaviour gap of the ethically minded consumers. The second most-cited article is ‘Consumer ethics: An investigation of the ethical beliefs of the final consumer’, cited 370 times. The authors have discussed various instances where ethicality is involved like drinking the can of cola directly from the store without paying for it. The third most-cited paper is ‘Consumer ethics: An empirical investigation of factors influencing ethical judgments of the final consumer’ which has been cited 233 times. This paper has a very interesting investigation as it asks consumers about the ethical behaviour of the businesses, government and public and then compares it with their beliefs regarding consumer practices. The fourth most-cited paper is entitled ‘Consumer ethics: An investigation of the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers’ and has been cited 212 times. The fifth most-cited paper is ‘Consumer ethics: An application and empirical testing of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics’ and this has been cited 198 times. This paper has studied the ethical beliefs of the elderly people whose number are increasing in their segment. The authors have found that the elderly people are more ethical than the younger ones but they vary in their ethical beliefs.

Most Prolific Authors

The details of the authors of consumer ethics publications are shown in Figure 3. According to our research, the author who has written most frequently about consumer ethics is D.Arli, Department of Marketing, Australia. The second most prolific author on consumer ethics is S.J.Vitell, School of Business University, University of Mississippi. The third most prolific author is M.Y.A. Rawwas, Department of Management and Marketing, School of Business Administration, University of Mississippi. The fourth most prolific author is F. Tjiptono, UniversitasAtma Jaya Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The fifth most prolific author is P. Van Kenhove, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Marketing, Ghent University, Belgium.

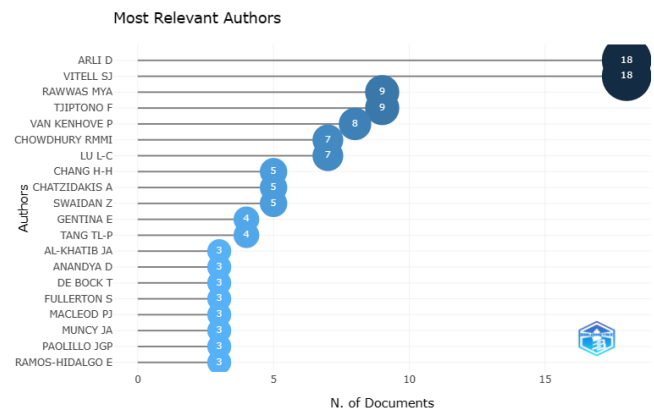


Figure 3. Top 20 Authors Who Have Published Papers on consumer ethics Source: (Scopus database).

Table 1. Most Cited Papers on Consumer Ethics

Authors	Title	Year	Cited by
Carrington M.J., Neville B.A., Whitwell G.J.	Why ethical consumers don't walk their talk: Towards a framework for understanding the gap between the ethical purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour of ethically minded consumers	2010	657
Muncy J.A., Vitell S.J.	Consumer ethics: An investigation of the ethical beliefs of the final consumer	1992	370
Vitell S.J., Muncy J.	Consumer ethics: An empirical investigation of factors influencing ethical judgments of the final consumer	1992	233
Vitell S.J., Lumpkin J.R., Rawwas M.Y.A.	Consumer ethics: An investigation of the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers	1991	212
Vitell S.J., Singhapakdi A., Thomas J.	Consumer ethics: An application and empirical testing of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics	2001	198
Vitell S.J.	The role of religiosity in business and consumer ethics: A review of the literature	2009	189
Vitell S.J., Paolillo J.G.P.	Consumer Ethics: The Role of Religiosity	2003	180
Vitell S.J., Paolillo J.G.P., Singh J.J.	Religiosity and consumer ethics	2005	179
Vitell S.J., Muncy J.	The Muncy-Vitell consumer ethics scale: A modification and application	2005	173
Vitell S.J.	A Case for Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR): Including a Selected Review of Consumer Ethics/Social Responsibility Research	2015	145

Source: (Scopus database)



Most Prolific Journals

Figure 4 lists eminent and well-known periodicals that have five or more research publications on consumer ethics. The number of publications is led by the Journal of Business Ethics. Between 1983 and 2022, nine papers were each published in two journals. The International Journal of Consumer Studies and the Journal of Consumer Marketing are the first and second, respectively. Furthermore, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics and Journal of Business Ethics have both published 8 papers each. Social Responsibility Journal has published 6 papers and Ethics and Behavior has published 5 consumer ethics papers.

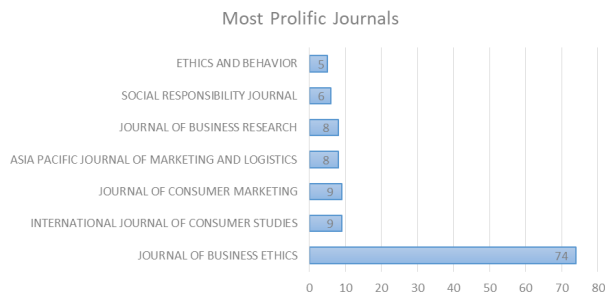


Figure 4. Top Seven Journals Source: (Scopus database)

Country-Wise Publication of consumer ethics

The distribution of the 212 publications on consumer ethics by the nations of the researchers is shown in Figure 5. In 212 papers, contributions from a total of 40 nations were identified. The United States tops this list with 158 publications, followed by Australia and the United Kingdom with 50 and 48 papers respectively. China published 40 papers. Belgium and Canada published 18 and 17 papers respectively. Turkey, Spain, France and Malaysia published 14,13,12 and 11 papers. This research makes it evident that the top four nations on the list have published more than 50% of the publications on consumer ethics.

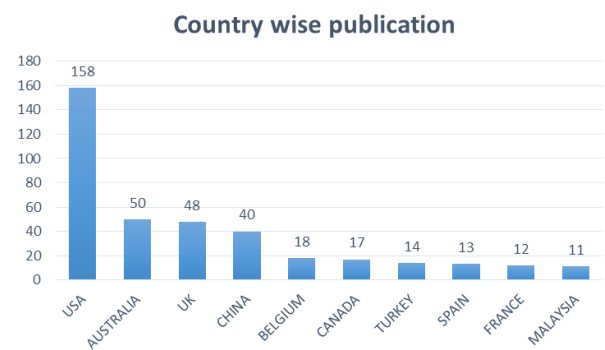


Figure 5. Most Prolific Countries Source: (Scopus database).

Institution-Wise Publication on consumer ethics

The institutions with the highest number of publications in consumer ethics research are shown in Figure 6. Only institutions with five or more articles published have been taken into account. In terms of consumer ethics publications, University of Mississippi is in the lead. Ghent University has published 15 research papers followed by Griffith University and National Chung Cheng University that have published 14 & 13 papers

respectively. Bond University & University of Northern Iowa have published 7 & 6 papers respectively. The following four institutions in this list have published five papers each: Eastern Michigan University; Royal Holloway University of London; University of Calgary; University of Melbourne

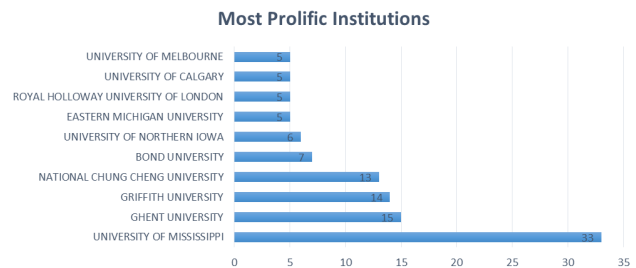


Figure 6. Most Prolific Institutions Source: (Scopus database)

Keyword Occurrence Analysis

To determine how frequently keywords have been used in published consumer ethics studies, keyword occurrence analysis is carried out. Research themes and subjects that have been often identified by researchers can be identified thanks to our study. All the terms related to consumer ethics that have appeared five or more times in the Scopus database from 1983 to 2022 are included in Table 2. The text mining map that the VOSviewer software displayed showed the association between keywords by measuring the distance between various terms. A closer proximity between two or more phrases denotes a more significant connection between them (Dolhey, 2019). The network map of keyword co-occurrences is shown in Figure 7. The 316 total occurrences of 20 keywords have been utilised in the consumer ethics study. This map shows how different lines connect certain terms to one another. These lines represent the co-occurrence of keywords in different papers within the studied data set.

Table 2. Keywords Which Occurred At Least Five Times in Consumer Ethics Research

Keywords	Occurrences
Consumer Ethics	142
Ethics	17
Ethical Consumption	13
Indonesia	13
Materialism	13
Religiosity	13
Consumer Behaviour	11
Idealism	11
Corporate Social Responsibility	10
Gender	9
Relativism	9
Business Ethics	8
Ethical Beliefs	8
Australia	6
Culture	6
Machiavellianism	6
Marketing Ethics	6
Ethical Ideology	5
Extrinsic Religiosity	5
Intrinsic Religiosity	5

Source: (Scopus database)

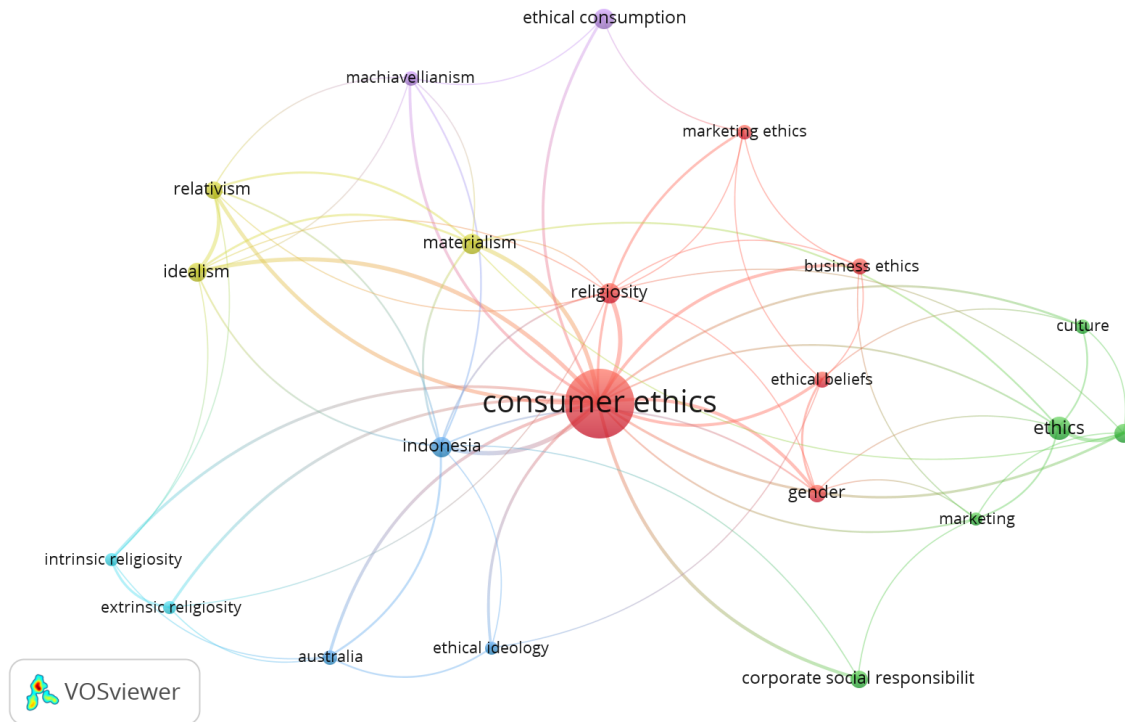


Figure 7. Keyword Occurrence Network

Source: (Scopus database)

Inter-Country Co-Authorship Network Analysis

Figure 8 displays a network analysis of international co-authorship. This analysis was carried out to determine which nation's authors have worked with the most authors from other nations. The consumer ethics publishing dataset identified a total of 40 nations. Out of 40 countries, 25 were connected to one another in terms of co-authorship, according to the

VOSviewer programme, with a total connection strength of 176. Seven clusters were formed: cluster-1 (Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam); cluster-2 (Egypt, France, Spain, Taiwan, USA); cluster-3 (Italy, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, UK); cluster-4 (China, Hong Kong, Pakistan), cluster-5 (Portugal, South Africa, South Korea), cluster-6 (Germany, India, Turkey) and cluster-7 (New Zealand).

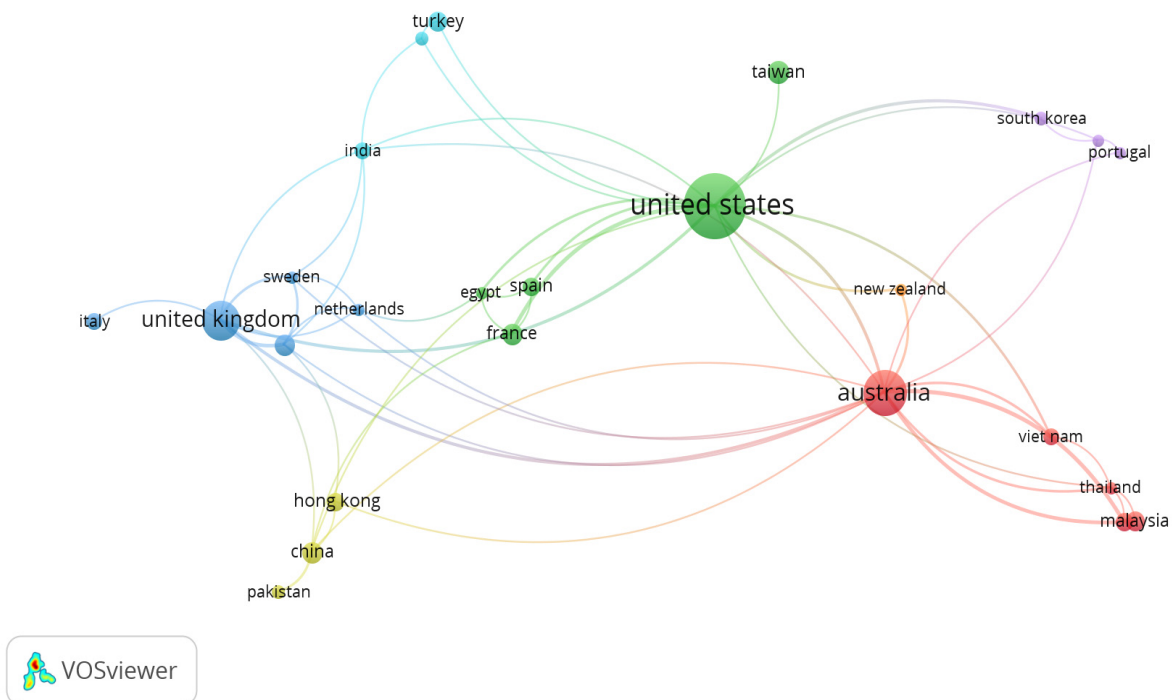


Figure 8. Co-Authorship: Country Analysis

Source: (Scopus database)



Discussion and Conclusion

This study presents the bibliometric analysis of several consumer ethics publications that were published between 1983 and 2022. The Scopus database has yielded 298 articles in total. After the application of the exclusion criterion the number of articles were reduced to 212. This study concentrated on the annual trend of consumer ethics publications. It also listed the papers and authors that have earned the most citations, as well as the countries and institutions that have contributed significantly to the study. This study also included assessments of the co-authorship, intercountry, and keyword occurrence networks. These studies provide direction to aspiring consumer ethics researchers by highlighting journals, authors, organisations, and countries that are well-known in the subject as well as terms that are frequently used in the study in the field. Consumer ethics research is growing and reached its peak in 2021. The highly cited paper on consumer ethics analysed the relationship between the intention-behaviour and the authors have given the conceptual model regarding the intention-behaviour gap of the ethically minded consumers. The most prolific author on consumer ethics is D. Arli, Department of Marketing, Australia. The Journal of Business Ethics published the most papers on consumer ethics. The majority of publications had authors from the United States, indicating the nation's prominence in the network of international co-authorship. This analysis also separates international co-authorship networks into seven clusters, with Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam emerging as the strongest cluster.

Implications

The study of consumer ethics is advanced by a number of implications. First, the year-by-year publication statistics and the papers with the most citations indicate that there is increasing interest in this subject. Second, by examining author-wise publications and journals that frequently publish articles on consumer ethics, research students may discover studies and possible directions for their future research. Similar studies on consumer ethics done by different countries demonstrate a broad interest in this field. This study supports the geographic diversity of consumer ethics research in light of authorship, journal publishing, and institutional connections. Third, the keyword of an article can be used to symbolise its main objective, and its repetition shows the development of the consumer ethics issues that academics have focused on as well as the range of contexts in which consumer ethics research has been conducted. Fourth, when a study delivers worldwide findings and spans a large geographic area, its impact is greater. As a result, co-authorship network analysis and intercountry co-authorship network analysis allow researchers to work with other scholars both inside and outside of national borders. These findings are helpful for locating studies, journals, and other relevant topics in the field of consumer ethics research spanning a range of time periods.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

Despite the many advantages of our work, there are a few drawbacks that suggest a possible scope for future research. This study considered the Scopus database for consumer ethics-related articles. This study therefore did not include any papers that were not indexed in Scopus. New databases like Web of Science and Google Scholar, among others, may be taken into consideration by researchers in the future. Second, future scholars should consider extending their research to provide a comprehensive understanding of this topic. Third drawback of this study is that bibliometric analysis emphasises statistics more so than it does author, affiliation, and concept linkages. Future research may focus on systematic reviews of the literature, meta-analysis, etc. The majority of prior research on consumer ethics was done in developed economies, according to the country-by-country analysis and the network of international co-authors. The analysis of consumer ethics research in emerging markets will now be possible for future studies.

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GJEIS Prevent Plagiarism in Publication

The Editorial Board had used the Ouriginal – a Swedish anti-plagiarism software tool which is a fully-automatic machine learning text-recognition system made for detecting, preventing and handling plagiarism and trusted by thousands of institutions across worldwide. Ouriginal by Turnitin is an award-winning software that helps detect and prevent plagiarism regardless of language. Combining text-matching with writing-style analysis to promote academic integrity and prevent plagiarism, Ouriginal is simple, reliable and easy to use. Ouriginal was acquired by Turnitin in 2021. As part of a larger global organization GJEIS and Turnitin better equipped to anticipate the foster an environment of academic integrity for educators and students around the globe. Ouriginal is GDPR compliant with privacy by design and an uptime of 99.9% and have trust to be the partner in academic integrity (<https://www.ouriginal.com/>) tool to check the originality and further affixed the similarity index which is {4%} in this case (See below Annexure-I). Thus, the reviewers and editors are of view to find it suitable to publish in this Volume-14, Issue-2, Apr-June 2022.

Annexure 14.10

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W	URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226990076_Consumer_Ethics_Research_Review_Synthesis_a... Fetched: 2020-03-21 15:40:19	1

Reviewers Memorandum



Reviewer's Comment 1: Consumer Ethics is a relatively new concept with practical implications worldwide. The research study successfully gives possible directions to future consumer ethics researchers and focuses on the annual trend of consumer ethics.

Reviewer's Comment 2: Bibliometric analysis of consumer ethics publications has been performed in a systematic and strategic manner which reveals relatively lack of studies performed in developing countries, thus highlighting geographic diversity in research in the field.

Reviewer's Comment 3: The study provides comprehensive understanding of the topic and current state of research through extensive year-wise, inter-country, citation based, co-authorship based analysis. Although the data is limited to the scopus indexed journals, the qualitative approach opens up opportunities to further improve the quality of research.

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Conflict of Interest: Author of a Paper had no conflict neither financially nor academically.

Editorial Excerpt



The article has 4% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the authors (Manpreet, Kamna and Manjot), and accordingly, all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "**Consumer Ethics: A Bibliometric Analysis**" both subject-wise and research-wise. Consumer ethics is a highly recognised field of study with global application, and impact on organisation, society and the environment. This bibliometric paper examines the trends in consumer ethics research, benefit academics and professionals, and also assist businesses in decision making. After comprehensive reviews and the editorial board's remarks, the manuscript has been categorized and decided to publish under the "**Review of Literature**" category.

Acknowledgement



The acknowledgment section is an essential part of all academic research papers. It provides appropriate recognition to all contributors for their hard work and effort taken while writing a paper. The data presented and analyzed in this paper by (Manpreet, Kamna and Manjot) were collected first handily and wherever it has been taken the proper acknowledgment and endorsement depicts. The author is highly indebted to others who had facilitated in accomplishing the research. Last but not least endorse all reviewers and editors of GJEIS in publishing in a present issue.

Disclaimer



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