

The Evolution of Sustainable Retailing: A Bibliometric Review

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of sustainable retailing through a bibliometric approach to map its intellectual structure, thematic development, and emerging research directions. Using data retrieved from Scopus and analyzed with VOSviewer, the study identifies key publication trends, influential contributors, and dominant research clusters. The findings reveal that sustainable retailing is anchored by core themes such as retailing, sustainable development, and consumption behavior, reflecting a strong integration of sustainability into retail practices and consumer dynamics. Over time, the field has shifted from a primary focus on corporate social responsibility and resource management toward more strategic and performance-oriented perspectives. Additionally, emerging themes such as electronic commerce, carbon emissions, and innovation highlight the growing importance of digital transformation and environmental impact measurement in retail contexts. Despite this progression, several areas—particularly sector-specific applications and operational practices—remain fragmented, indicating opportunities for further research. This study contributes by providing a comprehensive overview of the knowledge structure of sustainable retailing and offers insights for future theoretical and empirical development in this evolving field.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability has become one of the most critical global agendas in response to escalating environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality. Industries across the world are increasingly expected to align their operations with sustainable development principles that balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social welfare. Retailing, as one of the most resource-intensive sectors and a direct interface between producers and

consumers, plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainability initiatives. Retailers influence both upstream supply chains and downstream consumption patterns, making them key actors in promoting environmentally responsible products and ethical consumption practices. Consequently, the transformation toward sustainable retailing is not only a strategic necessity but also a societal imperative [1].

Over the past decade, sustainable retailing has gained significant traction due to

the combined influence of regulatory pressures, stakeholder expectations, and changing consumer behavior. The introduction of global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has accelerated corporate commitments toward sustainability. Retailers have increasingly adopted environmentally friendly practices, including sustainable sourcing, eco-labeling, waste reduction, and energy-efficient store operations. Moreover, consumer awareness has risen substantially, with a large proportion of consumers demanding that companies take active steps to reduce their environmental footprint [2].

In parallel, the growing body of academic research on sustainable retailing reflects the increasing importance of this field. Studies have explored diverse aspects such as green marketing, sustainable supply chain management, circular economy practices, and consumer behavior toward eco-friendly products. Sustainable retailing encompasses a wide range of practices, including minimizing emissions, reducing waste, implementing green logistics, and promoting responsible consumption. Additionally, recent research indicates a rapid growth in scholarly output, with an annual increase in publications and expanding thematic diversity across sectors such as food, fashion, and e-commerce retailing. This expansion highlights the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of sustainable retailing research [3], [4].

Furthermore, the integration of sustainability into retailing has been closely linked to the evolution of green marketing and consumer-centric strategies. Green marketing emphasizes the promotion of environmentally friendly products and practices, aiming to reduce negative environmental impacts while enhancing customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. As consumers become more environmentally conscious, their purchasing decisions increasingly reflect sustainability considerations. This trend has encouraged retailers to innovate in product design, packaging, and communication strategies to appeal to eco-conscious consumers. As a

result, sustainable retailing has evolved from a niche concept into a mainstream business paradigm that shapes modern retail strategies [5].

Despite the rapid development of sustainable retailing practices and research, the field remains fragmented due to its multidisciplinary nature and the diversity of research themes. Existing studies are often limited to specific industries, geographic contexts, or conceptual perspectives, making it challenging to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the overall research landscape. While some systematic literature reviews and bibliometric studies have attempted to map the domain, there is still a need for a more integrated and updated analysis that captures the evolution, key themes, influential contributors, and emerging trends in sustainable retailing research. Bibliometric analysis, as a quantitative approach to analyzing scientific publications, offers a robust method to visualize knowledge structures, identify research gaps, and track the development of a field over time.

Although sustainable retailing has attracted increasing scholarly attention, the existing literature is highly fragmented, with limited integration of findings across different research streams, methodologies, and contexts. Prior studies often focus on specific aspects such as green marketing, supply chain sustainability, or consumer behavior, without providing a holistic view of the field's intellectual structure and evolution. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive bibliometric analyses that systematically map the development of sustainable retailing research, identify key themes and trends, and highlight influential authors, journals, and countries. This gap limits the ability of researchers and practitioners to understand the progression of knowledge, recognize emerging research directions, and develop evidence-based strategies for sustainable retail practices. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric review of sustainable retailing literature to analyze its

evolution, intellectual structure, and research trends.

2. METHDOE

This study employs a bibliometric analysis approach to systematically examine the evolution and intellectual structure of sustainable retailing research. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to evaluate scientific publications by analyzing patterns in academic literature, including citation structures, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrences. The data for this study were collected from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and high-quality indexing standards.

The search query was constructed using relevant keywords such as “sustainable retailing,” “green retail,” “retail sustainability,” and related terms, applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. The inclusion criteria were limited to journal articles published in English, ensuring consistency and quality of the dataset, while conference papers, book chapters, and non-English publications were excluded. The time span was not restricted to capture the full evolution of the field. The final dataset was then exported in compatible formats (e.g., CSV and RIS) for further analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Network Visualization

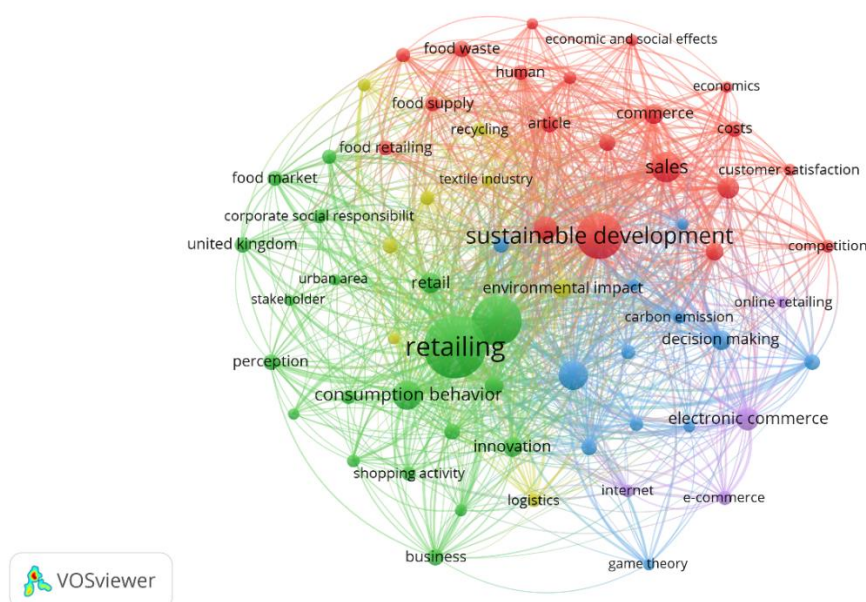


Figure 1. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2026

Figure 1 reveals a structured and interconnected knowledge domain within sustainable retailing research. The map is organized into several clusters, each represented by different colors, indicating thematic groupings based on keyword co-occurrence. The central position of terms such as sustainable development and retailing suggests that the field is anchored in a strong interdisciplinary intersection between

sustainability discourse and retail practices. The density of links between nodes also reflects a relatively mature and well-integrated research area.

The green cluster, dominated by keywords like retailing, consumption behavior, food market, and corporate social responsibility, highlights the consumer-oriented and managerial perspective of sustainable retailing. This cluster emphasizes

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal evolution of research themes in sustainable retailing, where colors represent the average publication year of keywords. Earlier topics (shown in blue and purple, around 2016–2018) include foundational discussions such as food supply, food waste, corporate social responsibility, and business. These themes indicate that initial research in sustainable retailing was closely tied to ethical considerations, resource management, and sector-specific issues, particularly in food and traditional retail contexts. The focus during this stage was largely on establishing the relevance of sustainability within retail systems.

As the field progresses into the mid-phase (green tones, around 2019–2020), there is a noticeable consolidation of core concepts such as retailing, sustainable development, consumption behavior, and environmental impact. This suggests that the literature began to integrate sustainability more deeply into

mainstream retail discourse, moving beyond isolated topics toward a more cohesive understanding of how retail activities influence and are influenced by sustainability concerns. The strong centrality of these terms reflects their role as intellectual anchors, connecting various subthemes such as customer perception, stakeholder engagement, and operational practices.

More recent developments (yellow tones, around 2021–2022) highlight emerging and forward-looking topics such as electronic commerce, online retailing, decision making, carbon emission, and innovation. This shift indicates a growing emphasis on the intersection between digital transformation and sustainability, as well as increasing attention to measurable environmental outcomes. The appearance of these newer themes suggests that current research is moving toward data-driven, technology-enabled, and impact-oriented approaches.

Table 1. The Most Impactful Literatures

Citations	Authors and year	Title
484	[6]	Purchasing behaviour for environmentally sustainable products: A conceptual framework and empirical study
461	[7]	The Potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence Across Disciplines: Perspectives and Future Directions
417	[8]	Covid-19's impact on supply chain decisions: Strategic insights from NASDAQ 100 firms using Twitter data
416	[9]	Innovations in retail business models
354	[10]	Does environmentally responsible purchase intention matter for consumers? A predictive sustainable model developed through an empirical study
270	[11]	Reverse and closed loop supply chain coordination by considering government role
252	[12]	Big brand sustainability: Governance prospects and environmental limits
251	[13]	A new fuzzy multi-criteria framework for measuring sustainability performance of a supply chain
250	[14]	Sustainable fashion supply chain: Lessons from H&M
249	[15]	The use and usefulness of carbon labelling food: A policy perspective from a survey of UK supermarket shoppers

Source: Scopus, 2026

sustainable consumption patterns. This aligns with the broader shift in marketing and retail research toward understanding value co-creation, where consumers actively participate in sustainability outcomes through their purchasing decisions. At the same time, the clustering of these themes indicates that behavioral insights remain a dominant lens, potentially overshadowing deeper structural or institutional analyses.

Another important insight emerges from the integration of economic and performance-related themes, such as sales, costs, and competition, within the sustainability discourse. This reflects a growing recognition that sustainability in retailing must be aligned with business viability and competitive positioning. Rather than being framed as a trade-off, sustainability is increasingly conceptualized as a driver of long-term value creation. This shift is particularly important for practitioners, as it reinforces the idea that sustainable retail strategies can enhance both market performance and societal impact, thereby bridging the gap between ethical responsibility and economic rationale.

The emergence of technology-oriented themes, including electronic commerce, online retailing, and decision making, points to a significant transformation in how sustainability is operationalized in retail contexts. Digitalization introduces both opportunities and challenges, enabling more efficient resource use and data-driven decision-making while also raising concerns about environmental footprints associated with logistics and energy consumption. The positioning of these themes in the network suggests that the intersection between digital transformation and sustainability is becoming a critical frontier in the literature, yet still requires deeper theoretical and empirical exploration.

The presence of operational and sector-specific themes, such as food waste,

logistics, recycling, and textile industry, highlights the applied nature of sustainable retailing research. These topics indicate that scholars are increasingly engaging with concrete sustainability challenges across different retail sectors. However, their relatively lower density suggests that these areas remain fragmented and underdeveloped compared to the core themes. This opens up opportunities for future research to adopt more integrative approaches, linking micro-level operational practices with macro-level sustainability outcomes, and to explore cross-sector comparisons that can enrich the theoretical development of sustainable retailing.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that sustainable retailing has evolved into a cohesive and expanding research domain, anchored by the integration of sustainability principles within retail practices and consumer dynamics. The bibliometric findings reveal a clear progression from early concerns with responsibility and resource management toward more strategic, performance-oriented, and technology-driven perspectives. Core themes such as retailing, sustainable development, and consumption behavior dominate the field, while emerging topics—including digital retailing, carbon emissions, and innovation—signal new directions for research. At the same time, the presence of sector-specific and operational issues highlights the applied nature of the field, although these areas remain relatively fragmented. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive mapping of the intellectual structure of sustainable retailing and offers a foundation for future research that bridges behavioral, technological, and operational dimensions in a more integrated manner.

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