

Consumer Behaviour towards Social Enterprises: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

A social enterprise is an organization that uses entrepreneurial activities to pursue a social purpose. It generates income through trading and aims to remain financially sustainable while addressing social problems (Haugh, 2005). This study maps the research landscape on consumer behaviour toward social enterprises using bibliometric analysis to examine annual publication trends, influential sources and authors, citation patterns, country contributions, and keyword co-occurrence on the research field. Relevant studies were identified and selected following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and used articles published between 2016-2026 for analysis. The findings show that research on social enterprises has expanded over the study period, although annual output fluctuated and declined after its 2023 peak. This study reflects the developing and still-consolidating nature of the field and provides an overview of the development and structure of studies on consumer behaviour towards social enterprises. The research remains concentrated in a limited number of countries and publications and point out the opportunities for broader geographical coverage and further study of consumer responses beyond purchase behaviour, trust, word-of-mouth, loyalty, and perceived social impact of research on consumer behaviour toward social enterprises.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour; Social enterprises; Bibliometric analysis; Co-occurrence network; PRISMA 2020

Introduction

Social enterprises is a form of organization that executes business activities including the production and sales of goods and services while pursuing social purposes. In other words, social enterprises focus on the traditional goal of a general enterprise which is to make profits and increase market share, but also address social problems and deliver public services for seek both financial and social value (Quilloy et al.2024. Their success depends partly on how consumers view their products, mission, and social impact. Understanding these views are important for explaining how social enterprises attract support and sustain their activities. Consumer behaviour toward social enterprises often reflects ethical and socially responsible values as consumers can contribute to society through their purchases (Cachero-Martínez et al., 2024). When consumers choose and promote these enterprise's products, they support both the enterprises social missions and their financial sustainability (Pal & Altay, 2019). However, fulfilling a social mission alone may not be enough to sustain and grow the business product, service quality also matters because it helps attract and retain customers (Oliński & Mioduszewski, 2022).

Consumer choices may be influenced by several factors, including awareness of an enterprise's social mission, perceptions of product quality and value, trust in the organization, and the extent to which its purpose aligns with consumers own values. Although research on consumer behaviour towards social enterprises is growing its findings are spread across different themes and disciplines making it difficult to see how the field has developed as a whole. A systematic synthesis can help clarify which aspects of consumer behaviour have received the most attention and where evidence remains limited. To address this need, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis of research on consumer behaviour towards social enterprises. It examines publication and citation patterns, identifies influential sources, documents, authors, and countries, and maps the main themes and their development over time. By synthesising the structure and evolution of this literature the study offers an overview of established research areas and highlights opportunities for future research.

Research questions

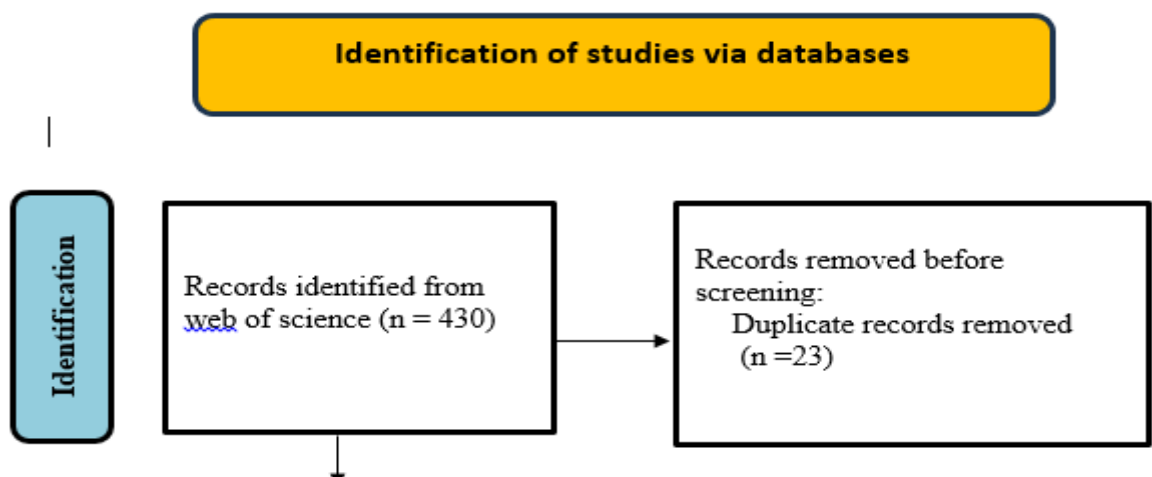
1. Which are the most cited sources, documents, authors, countries, and themes in research on consumer behaviour toward social enterprises?
2. How the distribution is done on the selected literature across different publication sources?
3. What is the Conceptual Structure of Research on Consumer Behaviour Towards Social Enterprises

Methodology

This study employs a bibliometric approach to systematically examine the literature on consumer behaviour towards social enterprises. The systematic analysis of the reviews and articles follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Bibliometric analysis is employed to examine the conceptual structure, sources, authors, countries, and themes in the research field with the help of bibliometrix from R. Inclusion exclusion criterions were used in PRISMA to select appropriate studies for analysis. The search covered publications from 2016 to 2026 to capture the development of scholarly research on consumer behaviour in the social enterprise context.

Search procedure and filters applied

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases only



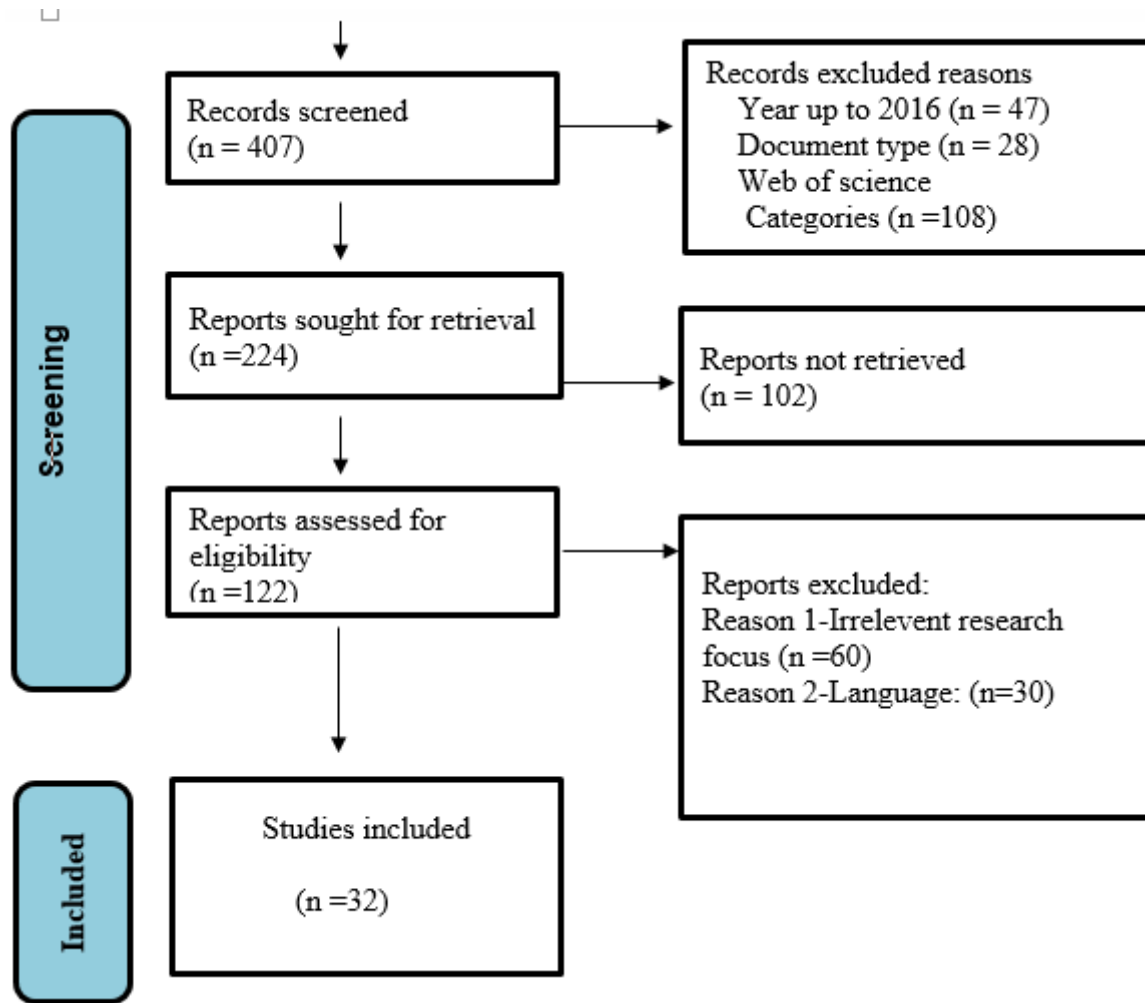


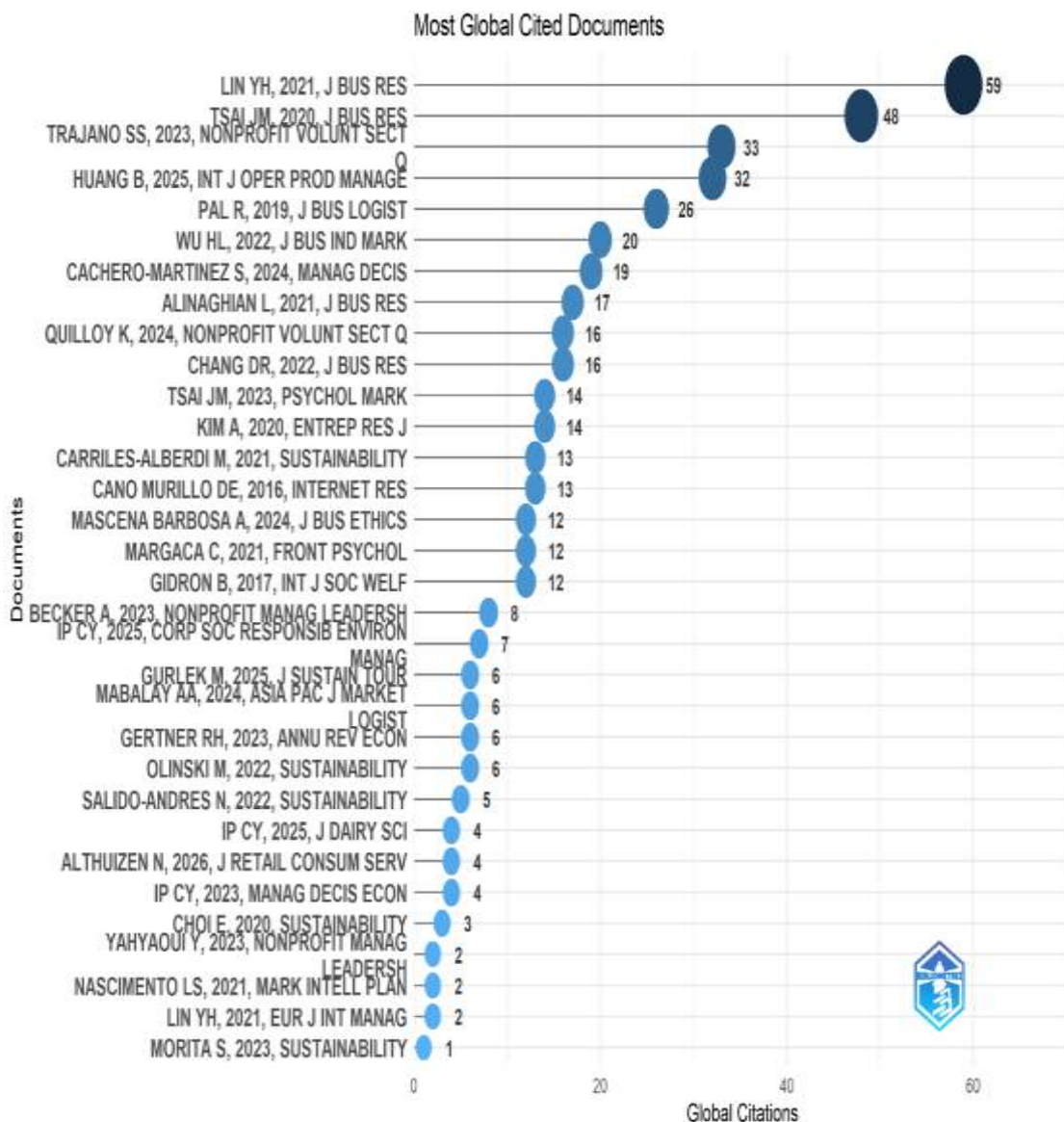
Table 1: MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA

Description	Results
Timespan	2016- 2026
Sources	23
Documents	32
Document Average Age	3.84
Average citations per doc	13.81
Document contents	
Keywords plus (ID)	172
Authors keywords (DE)	152
Authors	
Authors	86
Authors of single authored Doc	3
Co-Authors per Doc	2.97
International co-authorships %	18.75

The table 1 shows main information about the data selected. The bibliometric dataset comprises 32 articles published between 2016 and 2026 across 23 sources, including journals and books. The documents have an average age of 3.84 years and receive an average of 13.81 citations each, indicating a relatively recent body of research with a measurable citation record. The dataset contains 172 Keywords Plus terms and 152 author keywords, reflecting the range of topics represented. In terms of authorship 86 authors contributed to the articles with an average of 2.97 co-authors per document. Three articles were single-authored, while 18.75% of the documents involved international co-authorship suggesting some cross-country collaboration.

Results and discussion

Figure 1

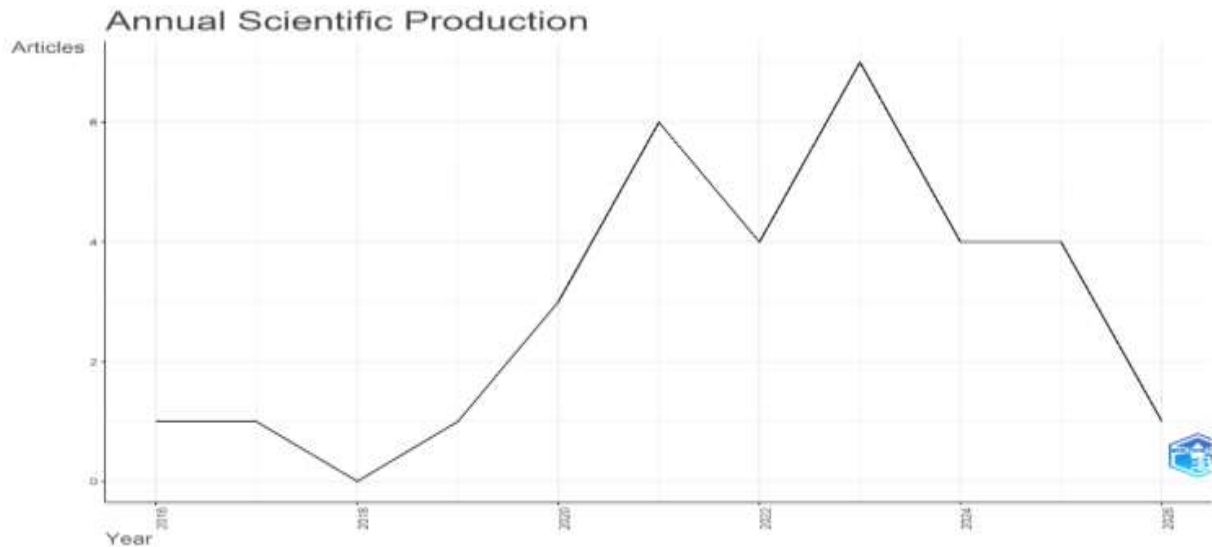


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 1. Most global cited documents

The figure highlights the influential contributions within the dataset. Lin (2021) received the highest number of global citations (59) followed by Tsai and Lin (2020) with 48 citations. Several other documents also show notable citation counts, reflecting the range of research that has contributed to scholarly discussion in this field. Overall, the figure identifies key publications that have shaped and informed work on the topic.

Figure 2

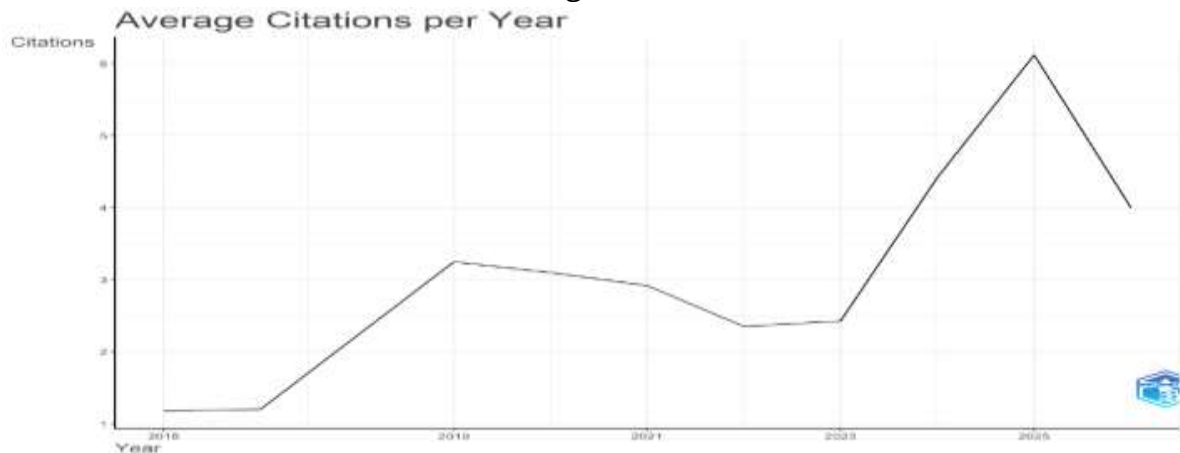


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 2. Annual scientific production

The figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the articles across the study period. Publication output remained relatively low during the initial years with a temporary decline to no publications in 2018. It began to rise from 2019, reaching six articles in 2021 and a peak of seven in 2023. Following this peak output decreased to four articles in both 2024 and 2025. Overall the trend indicates a general increase in research activity up to 2023, followed by a decline in the most recent years.

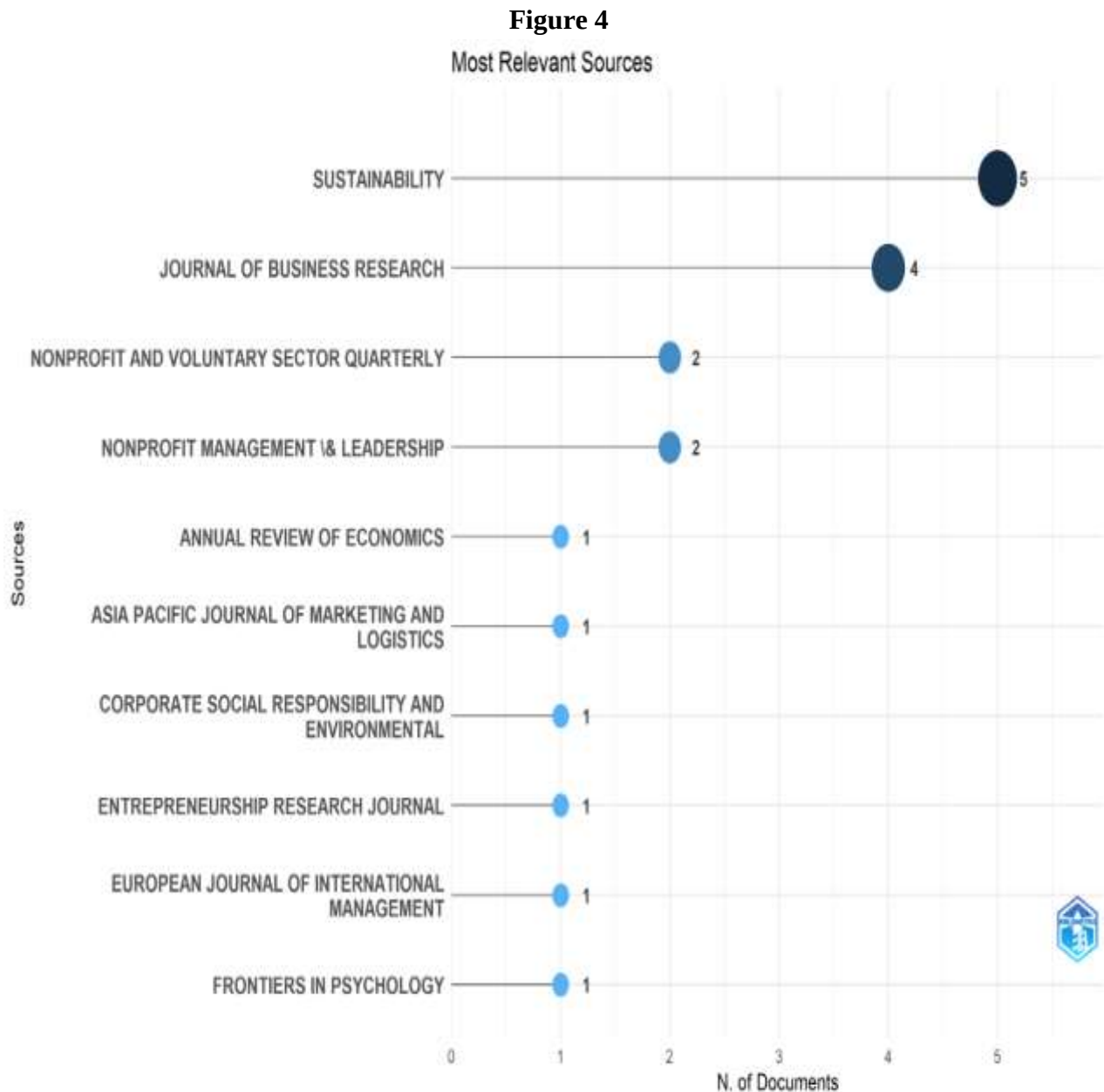
Figure 3



Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 3. Average citations per year

The figure 3 presents the annual average citations received by the articles in the dataset. Average citations rose from approximately 1.2 in 2016–2017 to 3.3 in 2019, then declined gradually to around 2.4 in 2023. They increased sharply thereafter, reaching a peak of approximately 6.1 in 2025 before falling to about 4.0 in 2026. This indicates variation in the yearly citation impact of the publications with the highest average observed in 2025.



Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 4. Most relevant sources

Figure 4 showing most relevant sources. The distribution of publications across sources is uneven. Journal of Sustainability contributes the most documents (5), followed by the Journal of Business Research (4). This indicates that the literature is concentrated in a few leading journals with the rest distributed across several sources.

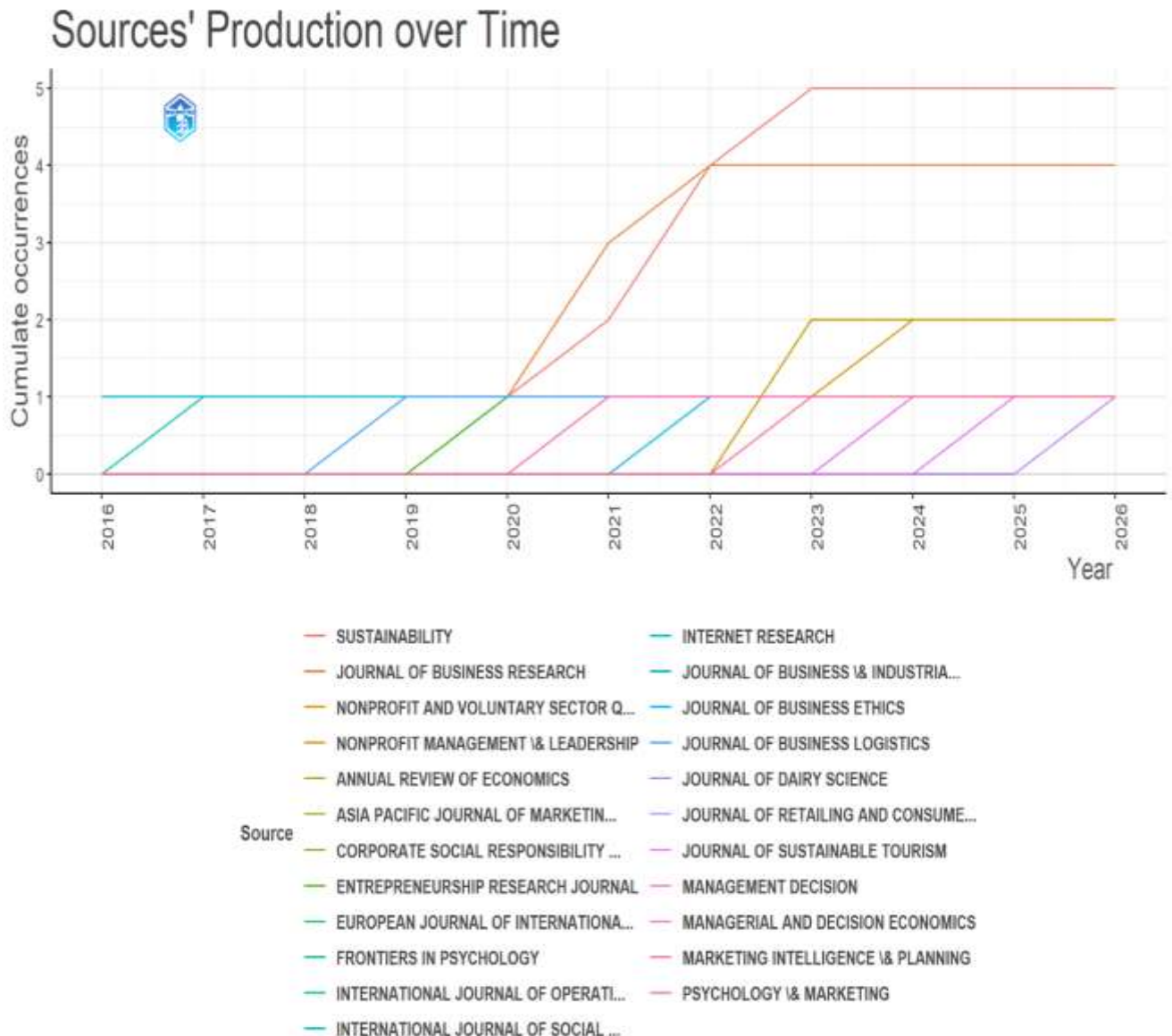


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 5. Sources local impact

The figure 5 shows sources local impact by H index. The Journal of Business Research has the highest local impact with an H-index of 4, followed by Sustainability with 3. This suggests that the leading journals in the dataset have the strongest citation impact within the analysed publication set.

Figure 6

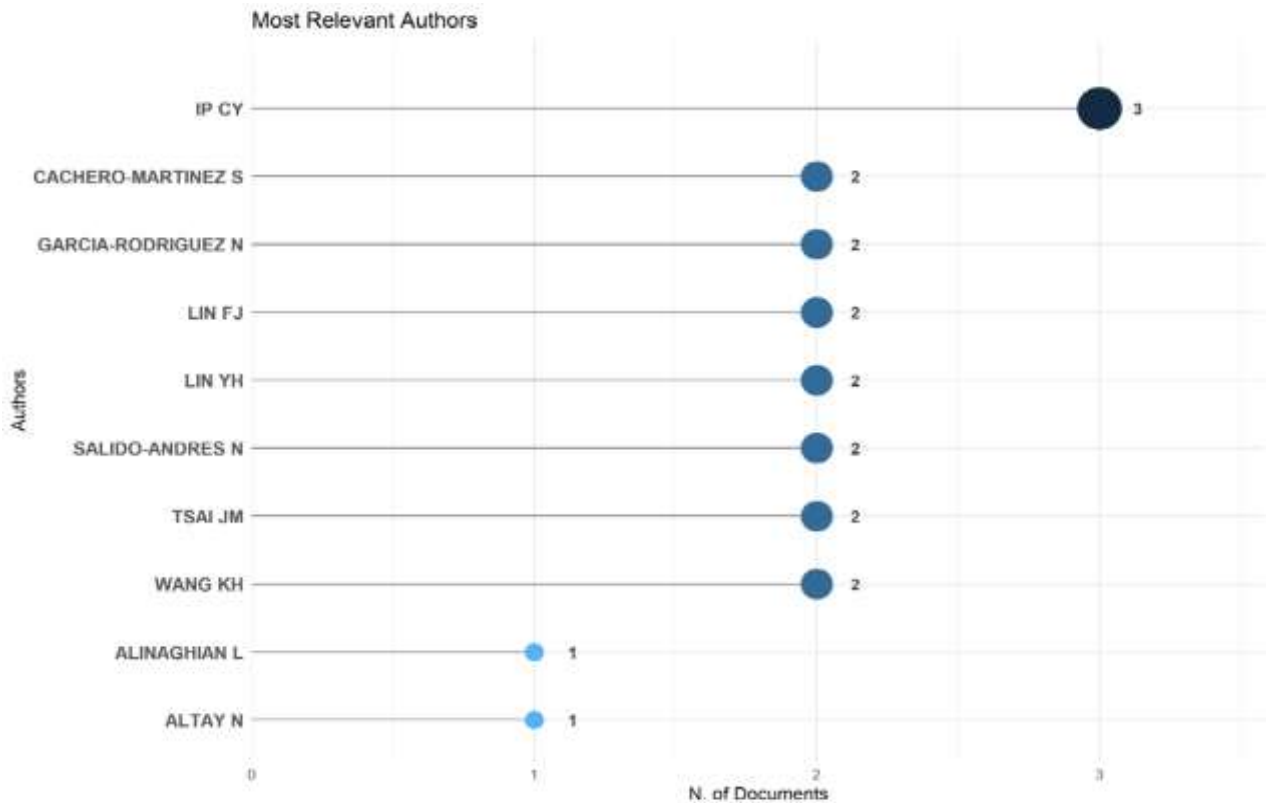


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 6. Sources production overtime

The figure 6 shows the cumulative number of publications by source from 2016 to 2026. Sustainability records the highest output reaching five publications by 2023. The Journal of Business Research reaches four by 2022, while Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly reaches four by 2022. Most other sources contribute fewer publications, generally one or two.

Figure 7

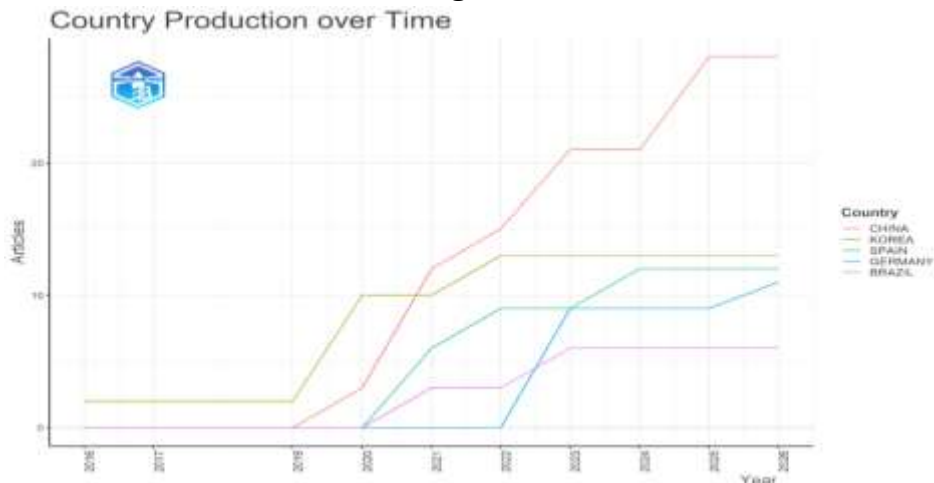


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 7. Most relevant authors

The figure shows the number of documents associated with the most frequently represented authors. IP CY has the highest count with three documents. Seven authors have two documents each, while Alinaghian L and Altay N have one each. Overall, the author contributions are distributed across several researchers, with no single author accounting for a large share of the documents.

Figure 8

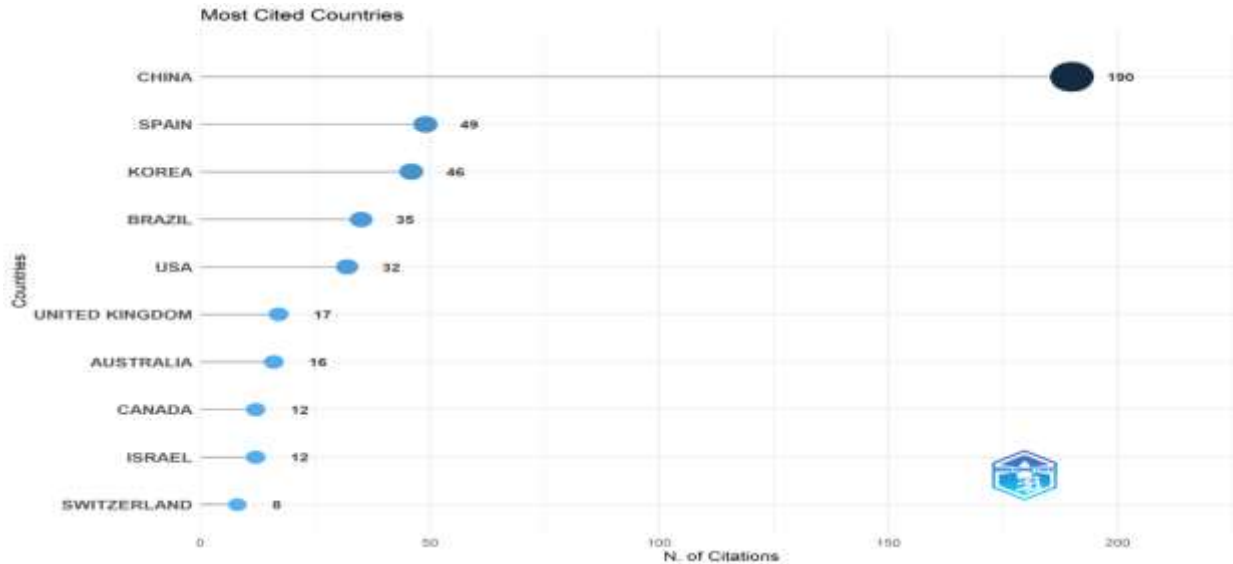


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 8. Country production overtime

The figure 8 shows country-level article production from 2016 to 2026. China records the highest output, rising sharply after 2020 and reaching 28 articles by 2025, where it remains through 2026. Korea's output increases earlier, reaching 13 articles by 2022 and then stabilizing. Spain and Germany also show growth.

Figure 9

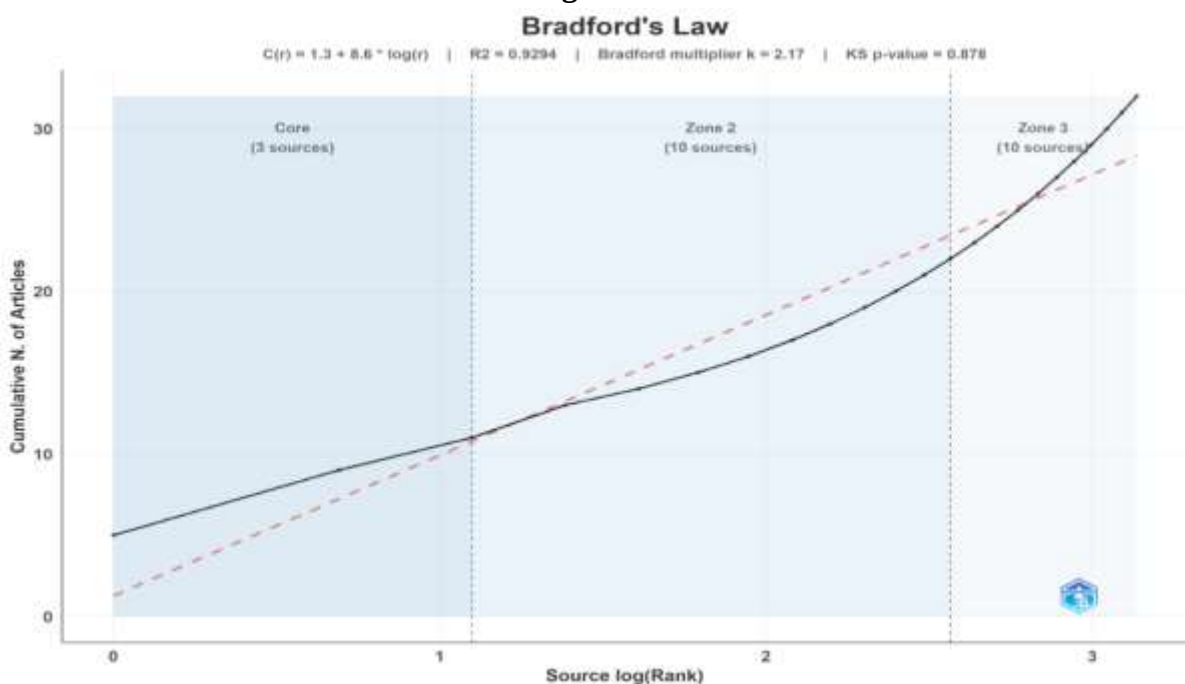


Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 9. Most cited countries

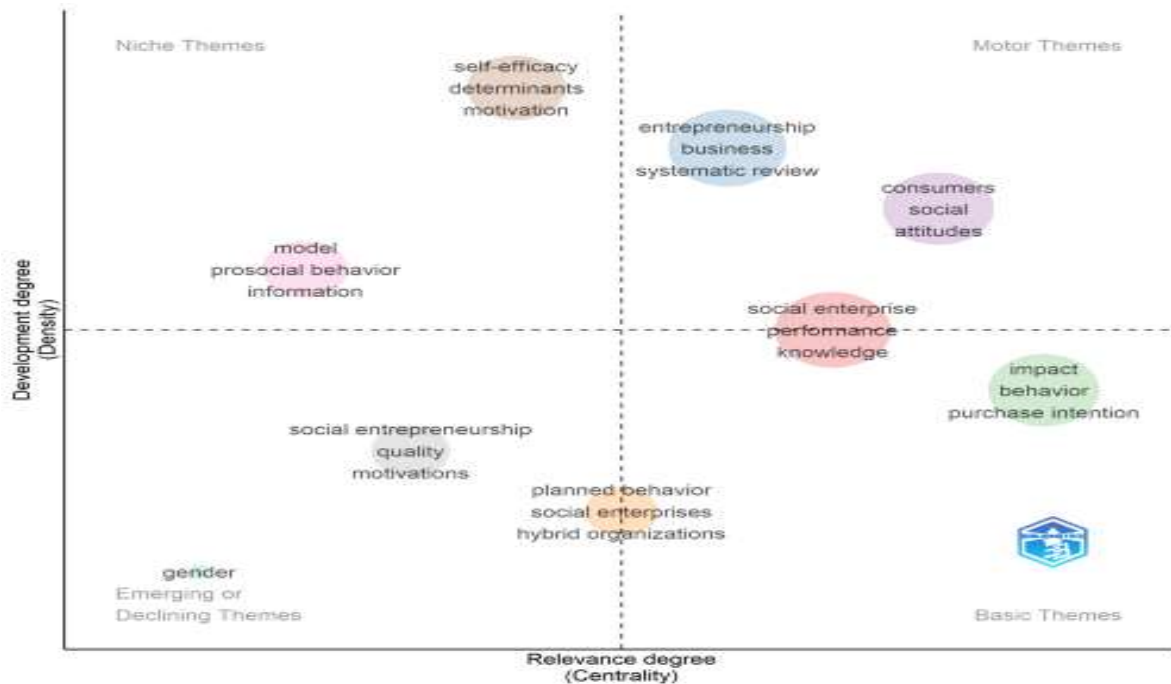
Figure 9 shows most cited countries. China is the most cited country, with 190 citations. substantially more than Spain (49) and Korea (46). Brazil and the USA follow with 35 and 32 citations respectively while the remaining countries each have fewer than 20. This indicates that citations in the dataset are concentrated largely in publications associated with China.

Figure 10



This co-occurrence network shows groups of keywords that frequently appear together. The coloured clusters represent related themes, while links between them indicate that keywords co-occur across the same documents. social enterprise, impact, entrepreneurship are the most frequent keywords of the studies.

Figure 12



Source: Bibliometrix

Figure 12. Thematic map

Figure 12 presents the thematic map illustrating the conceptual structure of research on consumer behaviour towards social enterprises based on the centrality and density of keyword clusters. The map indicates that the literature is distributed across motor, niche, basic, and emerging/declining themes. Among the motor themes, the cluster comprising consumers and social attitudes indicates a well-developed and highly relevant research stream, highlighting the importance of consumer attitudes within the social-enterprise literature. The entrepreneurship, business and systematic review cluster also occupies the motor quadrant, reflecting a comparatively developed research direction associated with the broader entrepreneurial and business dimensions of social enterprises.

The niche quadrant includes themes such as self-efficacy, determinants and motivation, as well as model, prosocial behaviour and information. These themes appear relatively well developed internally but have weaker connections with the broader research structure, suggesting specialized research streams. In contrast the basic quadrant contains the clusters impact, behaviour, purchase intention and social enterprise performance and knowledge. Particularly the positioning of purchase intention and behaviour as a basic theme indicates that consumer behavioural responses are highly relevant to the field but remain comparatively less developed as a coherent research stream.

The emerging/declining quadrant includes social entrepreneurship, quality and motivations; planned behaviour, social enterprises and hybrid organizations and gender. These themes currently exhibit relatively low centrality and density. However, their placement should not be interpreted directly as evidence of decline, since themes in this quadrant may represent either emerging areas or topics receiving

Figure 13



Figure 13. Tree map

13

Conclusion

The thorough examination of bibliometric data about consumer behaviour towards social enterprises shows the overall performance analysis, conceptual structure and distribution of articles across sources with the articles published between 2016 and 2026. The findings show Research activity increased through 2023 before declining in the most recent years. Within this body of work, Sustainability published the most articles while the Journal of Business Research had the highest local H-index. Publication output across sources and authors was dispersed, although a few sources and authors contributed more than others. Lin (2021) and Tsai and Lin (2020) were the most globally cited papers and the annual average citations peaked in 2025. China led both article production and total citations, followed by Spain and Korea in citations. Research on consumers and social attitudes represents a well-developed and highly relevant stream, underscoring the significance of consumer attitudes in the social-enterprise literature. Taken together, the findings point to a growing but unevenly distributed body of research with influence concentrated in a limited number of publications, journals, and countries. Social enterprise, impact, entrepreneurship, planned behaviour are the most frequent keywords used in the studies. Consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions constitute important components of the research landscape while purchase intention represents a relevant area with scope for further theoretical and empirical development. Study suggests Future research could include a wider range of countries and regions and examine consumer responses beyond purchase behaviour, trust, word-of-mouth, loyalty, and perceived social impact.

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