

Bibliometric Review of Consumer Ethics: Synthesis and Future Directions

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Consumer ethics has gained the attention of researchers, academia, and industry. During the last 25 years, several researchers have made theoretical and empirical contributions to the body of knowledge yet only a fragmented understanding is known about consumer ethics. This paper aims to present a comprehensive examination of consumer ethics research across different time periods by integrating bibliometric insights with a systematic literature review. Indeed, it attempts to present a synthesized review of studies conducted by numerous authors in different countries during the last three decades. This study employs natural language processing (NLP) techniques along with Aduna clustering to offer an in-depth analysis of consumer ethics research conducted over the past 25 years (1997–2022). It traces the developmental trajectory of the field by examining various parameters such as core research themes, keywords, influential authors and journals, citation patterns, and the geographical distribution of studies. The results highlight existing gaps in the literature, providing a foundation for future exploration in the domain of consumer ethics.

Keywords: Literature review, Consumer ethics, Bibliometric analysis, VOS viewer

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01. Introduction

Business ethics has been the center of attraction for researchers and scholars from several decades as there is ample amount of conceptual and empirical work available (Crane et al., 2019). Indeed, marketing has various ethical issues since it is the main exchange platform where dealings between buyers and sellers occur (Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 2013). Despite its importance, limited research has focused on how consumers perceive their own ethical behaviour (Muncy & Vitell, 1992). As central figures in the marketing process, understanding consumers' ethical perspectives is crucial without this, gaining a comprehensive view of ethical dynamics remains incomplete (Lui, Tong, & Wong, 2012). Instead of condemning business ethics solely or fleeing the onus on the market itself, it is also prolific to emphasize the concerns pertaining to consumers unethical behaviour. If researchers continue to give attention to ethics of suppliers, it would lead to dearth and partial comprehension of business ethics (Vitell & Muncy, 1992). The widespread economic losses caused by counterfeiting and piracy, along with the rise of globalization and the rapid expansion of the Internet, have highlighted various consumer ethics concerns. These developments have sparked growing academic interest in the field over the past three decades (Chatzidakis & Mitussis, 2007). It is a fact that consumer ethics has gained the worldwide attention of researchers, managers, practitioners and regulators due to recent frauds, scams, scandals and unfair practices in the corporate sector (Charzidakis & Maclaran, 2020). Since consumer behaviour encompasses the processes of purchasing, using, and discarding products and services, each phase inherently involves significant ethical considerations (Vitell, 2003). There are billions of consumers in the world aspiring for different products and services and consumer ethics involve the degree to which specific behaviour is regarded as right or wrong, fair or unfair (Vitell et al., 2016). Vitell and Muncy (1992) conceptualized consumer ethics as the deliberate act of purchasing, utilizing, and disposing of products and services in alignment with personal values, moral standards, and established norms. Essentially, consumer ethics pertains to the ethical choices and behaviours exhibited by individuals within the marketplace. Further contributions by Vitell (2003), Chiu et al. (2009), and Rad and Hidalgo (2018) emphasize that consumer ethics involves how individuals recognize

And respond to ethically questionable consumption scenarios such as misusing expired discount coupons, engaging in shoplifting, or altering price tags to gain unfair advantage. According to Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010) consumer ethics are also symbolized as ethically minded consumers who are responsible in consuming and purchasing environmental friendly goods, keeping a concern about fair trade, workers' rights, sustainability and animal welfare. Nevertheless, consumer ethics includes the practices and behaviour permitted by the social norms and justified on moral grounds (Lo et al., 2020). Consumer ethics has also been seen as the 'correctness as contrasting to the wrongness of specific conducts on the part of the buyer or potential buyer in consumer situations.' Ethical consumer choices are also seen as a reply to business ethics including purchases from firms whose dealing and products are supposed to be ethical while avoiding those deemed to engage in unethical practices (Chen et al., 2019). In the whole supply chain, retailers are in direct interaction with consumers and more susceptible to ethical violations such as deception, shoplifting, misleading information and false claims (Chatzidakis & Maclaran, 2020; Chowdhury, 2019). Retailers have become conscious and sensitive to the unethical conduct of consumers and consumer ethics is imperative for retailers as the ethical conduct of consumers has an impact on the whole organization and society (Ozgen & Esiyok, 2020; Vitell, 2015). The ethical behaviour of consumers supports the growth of retailers in terms of high market share, sales volume, margins and strong retail image leading to ethical consumption and better quality of life. However, the unethical behaviour of consumers has severe consequences in the form of poor performance, low market share and negative word-of-mouth. Ethical consumers build strong trust and long-term relationships with the retailers who in return offer better shopping experience and customer value (Chang & Lu, 2019). One of the primary challenges in examining consumer ethics lies in identifying the factors associated with ethical issues and understanding consumers' perspectives on particular ethical behaviours (Muncy & Vitell, 1992). According to their findings, consumers' ethical awareness in specific situations is influenced by three key elements: the attribution of responsibility, the presence of deceptive intent by the consumer, and the extent of harm

Caused. Later, Vitell and Muncy (2005) suggested that individuals are more likely to act ethically when they maintain a positive attitude toward businesses. Moreover, a deeper insight into consumer ethics can assist both governmental bodies and organizations in developing educational and regulatory frameworks aimed at reducing the adverse impacts of unethical consumer practices (Arli, 2017). The literature on consumer ethics is vast but yet fragmented (Culiberg, 2015; Le & Kieu, 2019). During the last three decades, several researchers have enriched the literature by exploring and validating many scales. The pioneer and most exemplary contribution have been done by Muncy and Vitell (1992). The Consumer Ethics Scale (CES), developed by the authors, has been widely utilized by researchers across different countries. Over the years, a substantial body of literature has emerged, comprising diverse concepts, theoretical models, and empirical insights aimed at exploring the associations between consumer ethics and related constructs. Due to the inherent complexity of this domain, the findings across studies have often been inconsistent and lack a unified perspective. Although multiple research streams have attempted to capture the multidimensional nature of consumer ethics, a consolidated understanding of its evolution over the past thirty years remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge that gap by providing a comprehensive synthesis of historical and contemporary research, while also outlining a future research agenda, through the integration of bibliometric analysis and literature review. The primary objective of this study is to examine the current landscape of research in the field of consumer ethics with the following questions decoding the extent of the study: To explore the current publication trends in consumer ethics in terms of time, journals, discipline, authors, associated countries and institutions. To perform bibliometric review of all the studies that have been conducted on consumer ethics till now. To examine the influential studies and themes of research in this field. To investigate how consumer ethics have evolved over the years.

02. Literature Review

This study investigates the body of consumer ethics research spanning a period of 25 years, from 1997 to 2021. Relevant literature was identified through a keyword-based search conducted in the SCOPUS database, which yielded approximately 300 articles

Encompassing various dimensions of consumer ethics. Additional scholarly works were sourced from databases such as EBSCO, ABI/Inform, Emerald, Elsevier, Web of Science (WOS), and ScienceDirect. Prior to inclusion, all selected articles were evaluated for their relevance by reviewing their abstracts, key findings, thematic focus, and alignment with the objectives of the present study.

Different key terms such as "religiosity", "materialism", "long term orientation", "love of money", "gender", "consumer behavior", "idealism", "relativism", "spirituality", "moral identity", "ethical beliefs", "ethical ideology", "customer satisfaction" and "ethical consumption" were used to extract papers related to consumer ethics.

Various researchers have given due attention to consumer ethics for the past few years. A foundational contribution to the field of consumer ethics was made by Muncy and Vitell (1992), who developed and empirically validated the Consumer Ethics Scale (CES), setting the stage for subsequent research in this area. Consumer ethics has been categorized into distinct dimensions: "actively benefiting from illegal activities" followed by "passively benefiting from illegal activities" then "actively benefiting from questionable/deceptive but legal practices" and finally "no harm/no foul activities". Vitell and Muncy (2005) further revised the scale by including three more dimensions downloading, recycling, and doing good. Vitell and Muncy (2005) argued that people with optimistic attitude towards business abstain questionable consumer behavior. In another model called Hofstede's (1980) model, four dimensions were proposed namely, individualism/collectivism, femininity/ masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance. Furthermore, Hunt and Vitell in 1986 introduced a model that includes two evaluations that is deontological and teleological (Vitell, Singhapakdi & Thomas, 2001). During the last three decades, most of the researchers have used these scales to assess consumer ethics in different countries (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2013; Culiberg, 2015; Lu & Lu, 2010; Lui, Tong & Wong, 2012; Polonsky et al., 2001; Rad & Hidalgo, 2018; Rawwas, Vitell & Khatib, 1994). Vitell (2003) conducted a review encompassing 20 studies on consumer ethics post-1990, wherein the Consumer Ethics Scale was predominantly employed. Additionally, Chong, Wong, and Leung (1998) investigated the ethical perspectives of

Chinese consumers and highlighted that diverse cultural factors significantly influence consumer ethical standards. According to Fullerton, Kerch and Dodge (1996), young, more educated and high-income group people are prone to accept unethical behavior as compared to older and less income group people. According to Rawwas, Vitell, and Al-Khatib (1994), Lebanese consumers exhibited comparatively lower concern toward ethical consumption, characterized by a tendency toward relativism and Machiavellianism, and demonstrated less idealism than their Egyptian counterparts. Rallapalli et al. (1994) undertook an exploratory investigation into how various personality traits influence consumers' ethical beliefs. In a cross-cultural comparison, Rawwas, Patzer, and Klassen (1995) observed that Irish consumers displayed greater apathy toward ethical consumption issues relative to consumers in Hong Kong. Furthermore, Babin and Griffin (1995) examined the influence of age on ethical consumer behavior and found that adolescents were more inclined toward unethical practices such as shoplifting. Additionally, Rawwas (1996), in his empirical analysis of Austrian consumers, revealed that their ethical decision-making largely depends on situational factors and perceived outcomes.

Religiosity

Religious orientation is one of the personal factors acting as an antecedent of consumer ethics (Vitell, 2009). The general theory of marketing implies that ethical beliefs rely upon personal traits and religion is one of the drivers of consumer ethics (Patwardhan, Keith, & Vitell, 2012; Singhapakdi et al., 2013; Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, 2006; Vitell & Paolillo, 2003). Religiosity refers to the extent to which individuals adhere to and internalize the doctrines, values, and teachings associated with their religious faith (Allport & Ross, 1967). Religiosity comprises of two types, viz., intrinsic and extrinsic. A person with intrinsic religiosity leads his life as per his religion whereas a person with extrinsic religiosity uses his religion for personal benefits like making friends, achieving goals, etc (Arli, 2017). The study by Agarwala, Mishra and Singh (2019); Arli (2017) showed that intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity significantly impact consumer ethical behavior. Furthermore, Patwardhan, Keith and Vitell (2012) opined that there exists an affirmative association amid intrinsic religiousness and ideas that questionable consumer

Actions are wrong. On the other hand, consumer perception regarding the morality of conduct is not impacted by extrinsic religiousness while Arli, Septianto and Chowdhury (2020); Aydemir and Egilmez (2010); Singh (2018); Vitell, Hidalgo and Rad (2018) opined that intrinsic religiosity is optimistically connected with right or moral actions whereas extrinsic religiosity is moderately and unfavorably linked to the moral conducts. In addition, consumers with high religiousness show a rejecting attitude towards digital piracy and counterfeit products in comparison to non-religious consumers (Tjiptono, Arli & Winit, 2017). It is worthwhile to mention that consumers with high religious beliefs are inclined towards ethicality in comparison to those having no religious values (Arli & Pekerti 2017; Chowdhury, 2018). Prior studies indicate that an intrinsic orientation toward religion is positively linked to ethical consumer behaviour. Consumers with such orientation tend to reject unethical practices, including overtly illegal actions like shoplifting, benefiting from seller errors such as keeping extra change, and ethically questionable yet legally permissible behaviours like redeeming expired coupons (Arli, 2017; Arli & Pekerti, 2016, 2017; Chowdhury, 2018; Vitell et al., 2005, 2007). Research conducted by Lau, Choe, and Tan (2011) and Flurry and Swimberghe (2016) further revealed that intrinsic religiosity is negatively related to unethical actions such as passive benefiting and questionable practices, though it showed no significant influence on active benefiting or altruistic behaviours. Conversely, extrinsic religiosity demonstrated no notable impact on the Consumer Ethics Scale. Furthermore, Bakar, Lee and Hashim (2013) opined that religiosity does not impact ethical judgment where intrinsic religiosity pushes a person to be more ethical than a person having extrinsic religiosity. In addition, Schneider, Krieger and Bayraktar (2011) argued that with the increase in intrinsic religiosity consumers become more sensitive to ethical issues and abstain unethical conduct. Studies have shown that individuals with an intrinsic religious orientation are more likely to engage in helping behaviours and demonstrate pro-social tendencies. In contrast, extrinsic religiosity tends to be either negatively associated with or unrelated to such altruistic and supportive actions. Therefore, in the context of helping behaviours, intrinsic religiosity encourages ethical actions by enhancing pro-social tendencies, whereas extrinsic religiosity tends to hinder such ethical

Conduct by lowering pro-social inclinations. This contrast in outcomes also explains why extrinsic religious orientation has often been criticized for casting a negative impression of religion (Donahue, 1985). Furthermore, while some studies have found no significant relationship between extrinsic religiosity and consumer ethics (Vitell et al., 2005, 2007), recent research suggests that individuals with extrinsic religious orientation may be more inclined to engage in unethical consumer behaviours (Arli, 2017; Arli & Pekerti, 2016, 2017). Arli and Pekerti (2016) observed that for Australian consumers, extrinsic religiosity is associated with unethical behaviours such as actively and passively benefitting, engaging in questionable practices, and participating in "no harm, no foul" activities—those perceived by some as acceptable since they do not directly harm others, like duplicating software. Arli (2017) reaffirmed these findings using a different sample of Australian consumers. Arli and Pekerti (2017) found that for religious consumers in Indonesia, extrinsic religiosity is linked with greater acceptance of overtly illegal actions, passive unethical behaviour, legally permissible yet misleading practices, and "no harm, no foul" activities. In contrast, among religious Australian consumers, extrinsic religiosity was associated mainly with tolerance of illegal and legally deceptive actions. In a study conducted by Arli, Septianto, and Chowdhury (2021), it was found that extrinsic religiosity can lead consumers toward unethical consumption, primarily driven by feelings of ethnocentrism and moral superiority. Additionally, Arli (2017) emphasized the role of religiosity as a key antecedent in shaping consumer ethical behaviour. Indeed, the results depicted that consumers with intrinsic religiosity tend to adhere more towards ethics than those with extrinsic religiosity. Chang, Vitell, and Lu (2019) found that consumers who exhibit strong relationship orientation and religious commitment are more likely to reject ethically questionable behaviors. In contrast, factors such as favorable attitudes toward business practices and an increased affection for money tend to have a moderate impact on shaping consumers' unethical beliefs. Similarly, Agarwala, Mishra and Singh (2019); Arli and Tjiptono (2018); Arli (2017); Schneider, Krieger and Bayraktar (2011); Vitell, Paolillo and Singh (2006) opined that consumers with high intrinsic religiosity are more inclined to support consumer social responsibility, as their behaviour is guided by strong moral

Values and ethical considerations. Furthermore, people with extrinsic religiosity become religious for their sake and adopt unethical and unacceptable practices. Moreover, these individuals are reluctant to go for recycling or doing good. In another study by Arli (2022), religion did not need a disapproving attitude towards the purchase of luxury goods. Studies have shown that religion positively influences individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. However, within the context of luxury consumption, only subjective norms were found to significantly affect consumers' purchase intentions.

Spirituality

While spirituality may conceptually overlap with religion, the two remain fundamentally distinct. Religion typically denotes adherence to a specific faith tradition or institutional belief system, whereas spirituality is more concerned with personal values, ideals, and moral virtues. In this sense, spirituality aligns closely with intrinsic religiosity, as both reflect a deep, internalized commitment to ethical principles and higher ideals. The influence of materialism, financial orientation, religiosity, and spirituality on consumer behavior has been extensively explored. Spirituality and moral identity are particularly influential in guiding consumers' ethical orientations, especially in retail and shopping mall environments (Rad & Hidalgo, 2018; Vitell et al., 2016). According to Deng (2013), individuals with weaker religious commitment and lower behavioral intentions tend to exhibit less favorable attitudes toward making ethically conscious purchases. The individual having a strong spiritual orientation, likely to be more ethical in decision-making (Vitell et al., 2016). In another study by Vitell, Hidalgo and Rad (2018) a new outlook was proposed for evaluating consumer ethics and a model was created to examine the influence of religiosity and spirituality on consumer ethical/unethical attitudes and concluded that individuals who had pure faith in God and were not inclined to religious beliefs for their motives would abstain unethical practices even if some practices are considered as harmless. On contrary, doing good and recycling practices were not influenced by intrinsic religiosity as most of the consumers shared that they should perform good deeds irrespective of their religion (Patwardhan, Keith & Vitell, 2012). Spirituality is negatively associated with attitudes toward unethical consumer behavior, as individuals

Who possess a strong internal locus of control or adhere to personal belief systems are more likely to reject unethical practices in the marketplace. Besides, spiritual people perform recycling and purchase goods and services most of the time from companies who claim to be ethical in their operations. Furthermore, Chowdhury and Fernando (2013) conducted a study in which spiritual well-being was examined in relation to consumer ethical beliefs and it was found that lived communal well-being demonstrated a negative association with both the active/illegal and passive dimensions, while showing a positive relationship with the 'no harm, no foul' and 'doing good/recycling' dimensions. In contrast, lived personal well-being was negatively linked to active/illegal behaviors but positively aligned with the 'no harm, no foul' and 'doing good/recycling' aspects. Furthermore, lived transcendental well-being was inversely related to the passive, active/legal, and 'no harm, no foul' dimensions. Finally, lived environmental well-being exhibited a negative correlation with the active/legal and 'no harm, no foul' dimensions.

Idealism and Relativism

Idealism, relativism, individualism, collectivism, moral emotions and relationship of buyer-seller have also been explored in order to determine consumer ethics. Consumer ethics has been investigated through two perspectives, that is, idealism and relativism along with the deontological and teleological approach to ethics (Al-Khatib, Stanton & Rawwas, 2005; Shanahan & Hyman, 2003; Vitell & Hunt, 2015). Furthermore, the consumer ethics scale was considered suitable in studies relating to personality traits, idealism/relativism, religious beliefs and ethical judgments (Tjiptono, Arli & Winit, 2017). Culiberg (2015) found individualism and collectivism positively impact consumer ethics. Consumers who are having high guilt and shame traits rejected unethical situations and conduct (Arli, Leo & Tjiptono, 2016). Also, Shaw and Shiu (2002) opined that ethical obligations and self-identity influence consumer ethics due to the reason that behavioral intentions are pertinent in determining the consumer's actions. Besides, Chowdhury (2018) considered intrinsic and quest religiosity as antecedents and regarded four dimensions of consumer ethics scale as negative and unethical whereas personal moral philosophies particularly **idealism** and **relativism** have been identified as

Significant positive predictors of ethical judgment and consumer ethical decision-making. Indeed, individuals with high idealism positively contributed to self-control and guilt-proneness while individuals with high relativism likely to have reduced levels of guilt and control. Ethical ideology alone may not fully determine consumer choices, as Arli and Leo (2017) argue that factors like guilt awareness and personal restraint play a crucial mediating role in this relationship.

Many researchers have studied consumer ethics in cultural settings (Polonsky et al., 2001; Rawwas, 1996; Rawwas, Patzir & Klassen, 1995; Vitell et al., 2016; Swaidan (2012) applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance to examine their influence on consumer ethical beliefs. It was found that consumers with high collectivism, uncertainty avoidance would abstain from unethical actions while consumers with high masculinity and power distance would engage in unethical conduct. The study by Tjiptono and Elfitasari (2018) concluded that females were more ethical in dimensions of consumer ethics scale as compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, Rawwas and Singhapakdi (1998) explored consumer ethics of different age groups and observed that children were exhibiting more acceptable behavior towards actively benefitting from illegal actions and benefitting from questionable action whereas teenagers tend to reject these practices. According to the findings of the study by Flurry and Swimberghe (2016), young American consumers were more responsible for shoplifting and retail frauds and it was viewed that adolescent's ethics ameliorates as they grow up. Tjiptono, Arli and Winit (2017) explored the ethical viewpoints between consumers of Thailand and Indonesia. It was opined that Indonesian youth considered dimensions of consumer ethics scale such as passively benefitting, questionable action and downloading as more unethical practices as compared to Thai's youth. While in Indonesia, females proved to be more ethical as compared to male counterparts whereas no male or female dissimilarities were observed in Thailand. More recently, Singh (2018) conducted an empirical study to find out the moral beliefs of young buyers through outlook towards money, religiosity and spiritual well-being with the moderation of gender and found that ethical beliefs of male

And female respondents were influenced by religiosity and spiritual well-being respectively whereas attitude towards money did not impact ethical beliefs of Indian consumers.

The study concluded that individuals exhibiting strong religious beliefs are more likely to perceive questionable actions as unethical. According to Chowdhury (2017), emotional intelligence is one of the causes of consumers' ethical actions and concluded that individuals who judge/evaluate their own emotions would reject unethical acts whereas accept ethical actions like doing good. Similarly, Haung and Lu (2017); Vitell, Singh and Paolillo (2007) opined that an individual's attitude towards business made his/her loyalty to a particular shop or retailer which stimulate a consumer to maintain a good relationship with the seller and never let a consumer to behave unethically. Furthermore, Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis (2011) concluded that ethically-minded consumers behave morally in their actions while Rallapalli, Vitell, Wiebe and Barnes (1994) opined that people with autonomy not considered illegal and questionable behavior as unethical whereas the need for social desirability never let people to behave unethically since they are conscious about their social image. Similarly, Lu, Chang and Chang (2015) examined the impact of consumer personality traits on green purchase intention through the mediation of consumer ethical beliefs and found that consumers holding high ethical beliefs purchased environmentally friendly products. However, Vitell, Singhapakdi and Thomas (2001) examined how consumers make up their decisions regarding situations involving ethical issues and revealed that most of the consumers' ethical judgments were based on ethical norms rather than thinking about its perceived consequences while making behavioral intention towards ethical issues. Moreover, Vitell (2015) found that consumers had not paid more prices for socially responsible products even if the product was considered to be very important. However, they were willing to purchase a socially responsible product if the price and quality were reasonable as compared to other substitutes. Similarly, Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004) explored ethical consumerism in Finland and found that ethics did not influence consumer choice behavior as they were not sure which firms followed ethical practices. Furthermore, ethical obligation and self-identity were significant factors informing consumers'

Behavioral intention while making ethical decisions (Shaw & Shiu, 2002) while Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney (2010) opined that unethical consumption behavior on the part of the consumer is reactive and based on emotions rather rational thinking. According to Singh et al. (2018) consumers in a state of incidental fear show more ethical concern than persons in the condition of accidental anger. Consumers accepted doing good practices as ethical while considered active and questionable practices as unethical and developed a positive attitude towards social responsibility. Similarly, Lu et al. (2015) argued that dimensions like passive, no harm and recycling did not influence the social responsibility of consumers. Furthermore, Chang and Lu (2019) opined that a deep and proper clarity of the relationships between consumer unethical behavior and relational benefits, relationship quality and CSR associates can ameliorate the customer relationship management practices. All the social advantages acquired from retail stores have robust, positive and negative direct/indirect impact on customers' unethical practices. It has been observed that an acquainted consumer will be recognized and treated in the best possible manner. Budding relationships with consumers by friendships, fraternisation and special acknowledgment becomes a strategy in refraining the unethical behavior of consumers. Special treatment benefits also influenced unethical behavior of consumers in questionable and no harm practices. Businessmen can also decrease the unwanted losses done by consumers by giving customized benefits to the consumers. As far as CSR associates is concerned, retailers should devote some endeavors for social obligation and onus such as productive obligation, business operations of legal provisions, moral norms and other efforts to win customers trust and ethical reactions. Better service quality also assists the retailers in attaining customer satisfaction, commitment and loyalty, which in turn persuade consumers' ethical conduct while purchasing. Arli and Tjiptono (2022) found that relativism positively influenced two dimensions of the Consumer Ethics Scale (CES), whereas idealism had a negative impact on three dimensions namely, actively benefiting, passively benefiting, and problematic behavior.

Materialism

Materialism has long intrigued researchers and scholars, gaining prominence as

A key construct within consumer behavior studies (Muncy & Eastman, 1998). Given that both materialism and consumer ethics concern the consumption process, their interrelationship presents an avenue for deeper investigation. Unlike consumer ethics, materialism has been defined through varying scholarly lenses. For instance, Ward and Wackman (1971, p. 422) described materialism as a perspective that considers material possessions and financial assets essential to personal well-being and societal advancement. Building on this, Richins and Dawson (1992) viewed materialism as a value system where possessions are crucial for status expression and shaping one's desired self-image. Common across definitions is the centrality of possessions in achieving happiness and social standing, emphasizing acquisition as a vital life pursuit. However, contrasting views exist. Belk (1985) argued that individuals scoring high on materialism tend to report lower life satisfaction, identifying materialism as a potential root of discontent. These conflicting perspectives have heightened scholarly curiosity regarding materialism's detrimental effects. Muncy and Eastman (1998), in their empirical work, established a negative association between materialism and consumer ethics, indicating that materialistic individuals may adopt less ethical consumption patterns. Further evidence from Lu and Lu (2010) indicated that highly materialistic Indonesian consumers were more inclined to engage both actively and passively in ethically questionable behaviors. This suggests that materialistic tendencies may undermine moral standards, as ethical restraint could hinder the pursuit of material desires. Additionally, their study highlighted that idealism significantly predicted ethical restraint, while relativism showed no such association. This implies that Indonesian consumers rely more on idealistic values than relativistic perspectives when making ethical judgments. Similarly, research by Lui, Tong, and Wong (2012) in Hong Kong revealed only a weak and statistically insignificant link between materialistic values and unethical consumer behavior, suggesting cultural variations in how materialism influences ethical decision-making. However, adolescents with a high level of materialism and love of money would adopt unethical practices whereas adolescents with a low level of materialism and love of money would adopt ethical practices (Flurry & Swimberghe, 2016). Moreover, self-esteem, materialism and power

Are seen as mediating factors in an integrated model of parental and peer support on consumer ethical beliefs and found that adolescents with a materialistic approach developed unethical behavior while adolescents with high positive self-esteem rejected unethical practices. Therefore, peer and parental conditioning also influence individuals in shaping their ethical principles (Gentina, Tang & Gu, 2018). According to Ozen and Esiyok (2020), the materialistic attitude and material satisfaction of consumers rely upon socio-economic level as ethics differs between low and middle socio-economic status. Since family's socio-economic status and values shape one's ethical values, it was considered that males are more materialistic than females, however in this study, it was concluded that materialistic attitude does not depend upon gender. In another study by Chowdhury and Fernando (2013) materialism was found to be negatively associated with consumer ethical beliefs. In a recent study by Webster et al. (2021), it was concluded that those who have faith in pure good are prone to behave ethically and restraint themselves from illegal/unethical behaviors. On the other hand, people who have faith in pure evil are bound to act unethical.

3.METHODOLOGY

To examine prior studies on consumer ethics, researchers have employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, among which bibliometric analysis has gained prominence for offering a systematic and structured overview of literature (Liu et al., 2015; Sun & Grimes, 2016). This method enables the identification of research trends, dominant themes, influential authors, institutions, and countries within a field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Software such as VOSviewer (Van & Waltman, 2010) facilitates the visualization of networks, enhancing the interpretation of bibliographic data. Unlike traditional literature reviews, bibliometric analysis provides a broader, macro-level perspective by mapping the evolution of concepts, publication patterns, and thematic developments. It incorporates various analytical components including publication volume, citation impact, and keyword co-occurrences. Common techniques like co-citation analysis (measuring how often two documents are cited together), bibliographic coupling (linking documents that share common references), and keyword co-occurrence (highlighting frequently used terms) are used to

Reveal structural relationships within the literature (Dzikowski, 2018). Indicators such as the number of publications and total citations offer insights into the productivity and impact of research contributions. Overall, bibliometric methods help in synthesizing large volumes of academic output and offer clarity through visual mapping of relationships between key elements in the literature (Bindra et al., 2020; Singh & Dhir, 2019; Singh et al., 2021; Shaik & Dhir, 2020).

In the above figure, each color represents a node in a network which further symbolize the occurrence of the keyword. As per the figure, the frequently occurring keyword is consumer ethics followed by other key words like ethics, religiosity, materialism and so on.

A set of top 10 journals was identified using two primary criteria: the volume of publications related to consumer ethics and their citation rankings as per the Thomson Reuters citation index. Table 1 presents these leading 20 journals in alphabetical order. From this selection, a total of 234 articles were chosen for in-depth analysis, as illustrated in (Figure 1).

04. DISCUSSION

These findings indicate that consumer ethics is a developing, advancing, and diversifying research field. It is a budding subject matter with a remarkable history of 30 years. Evidently, research in this sphere has developed considerably since the year 2000. Although the United States was the foremost explorer and a primary country in this arena. Indeed, recent trend indicates steady global dissemination of consumer ethics research. The current study provides a comprehensive literature review by showing up various determinants of consumer ethics and recommended the implication to encourage consumer ethical behaviour and restrain the unethical behavior of consumers. This review is an endeavour to assimilate the scattered research studies in one frame. The vast review done between 1997 to 2022 explored the various determinants, mediators, moderators and consequences of consumer ethical behaviour. The paper has tried to include all the relevant studies prevailing in the arena of consumer ethics. Furthermore, it presents a comprehensive knowledge of the keywords, most relevant journals, leading journals in consumer ethics, country wise citation, influential authors and

Year wise citation. In order to be a prominent, reliable and valid study one has to give emphasis on the research methodology it uses. The above bibliometric review has preferred the papers published in reputed journals. It emphasizes vital antecedents of consumer ethics especially in developed countries.

05. IMPLICATIONS

On the basis of above review findings, this study provides both theoretical and managerial implications.

01. The above findings will succour various consumers, marketers, researchers, academicians, retailers, consumers and government to better understand different antecedents, mediator, moderator and consequences of consumer ethics.
02. In retail stores, shops and malls retailers can provide guidelines, rules and regulations for disseminating the information about the norms and code of conduct along with the after negative consequences of violating them.
03. Government can frame strict rules, guidelines, strategies and a law for protecting the rights and interests of the retailers against consumers which will further lessen the unethical practices of consumers.
04. The above review insights proved that when customer retailer relationship is robust and positive then customer never go for unethical practices. Marketers can plan movements to encourage CSR and thus, restraining consumers to perform ethical practices only. Therefore, these movements and campaigns could be a unique strategy to curb unethical behaviour of consumers.
05. Practitioners can also use these findings to indulge consumers in ethical and prosocial conduct. Indeed, such determinants can be the component of marketing campaigns that optimistically influence ethical act.
06. It enables marketers to frame some initiative and put forth fruitful insights that can reduce the intention-behavior gap.
07. The study can provide more comprehensive knowledge to policymakers in framing different policies regarding consumer ethical behaviour.
08. Another very important

01. implication is that unethical behaviour of consumers, viz., shoplifting, deceptive returns, piracy will cause financial loss to the companies while consumer ethics like purchasing, consuming and disposing off ethically will increase profits of retailers and over all well-being of society.

02. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

At last, this paper has thrown the spotlight on an exhaustive and detailed account of the work in the field of consumer ethics. Most of the studies on consumer ethics are carried in developed countries as very few studies seem to be conducted in developing countries. More research is required in Asian context and developing nations. No doubt, during the last 10 years consumer ethics have evolved and enriched by various researchers, however gaps are still existing. There are ample number of future opportunities which can further be explored. Different new theories, traits and methodologies can be examined. Furthermore, more new models can be framed in order to enhance the knowledge about consumer ethics. In addition, future studies can focus on budding markets where there is dearth of research. Advance statistical tools, observations, qualitative methods appear more relevant and productive in construing ethical behavior of consumers. In the future, researchers may consider more databases such as Web of Science and Google Scholar among others. Also, investigating the importance of social media in persuading consumers to be ethical seems very prominent to study in near future. On the other hand, antecedents like materialism, individualism, demographic variables, moral attentiveness, compassion, generosity, self-conception, self-answerability, self – esteem, culture, religion and ethical blindness can be explored in upcoming research. Moreover, social comparison, peer pressure, trust in advertising and demographic factors such as age, gender, education, income and so on can also be investigated as moderators in relation to consumer ethics. Nevertheless, the outcomes of consumer ethics have almost been absent. Therefore, more work needs to be done on the consequences of consumer ethical behavior. To wrap up, consumer ethics plays a paramount role in today's scenario as more and more people are becoming self-centred and materialistic without taking into consideration environment, humans, animals and sustainability in

Their minds. As a result, their decision making while buying, consuming, and disposing off is also not wise (environmental friendly). The research on this arena will succour marketers and government to frame policies and laws to restrain unethical behavior of consumers so that ultimate aim of envisaging a societal wellbeing, robust customer seller bond and a morally aware world can be achieved.

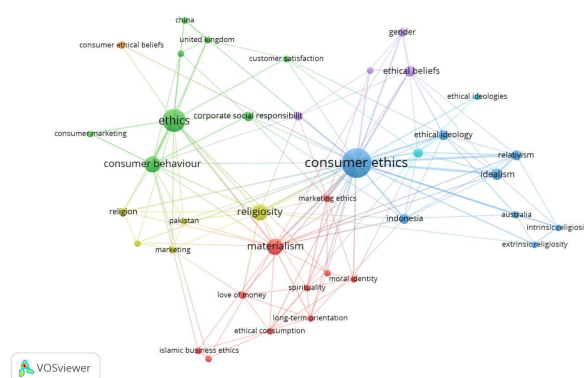


Figure 1: Cluster mapping of keywords

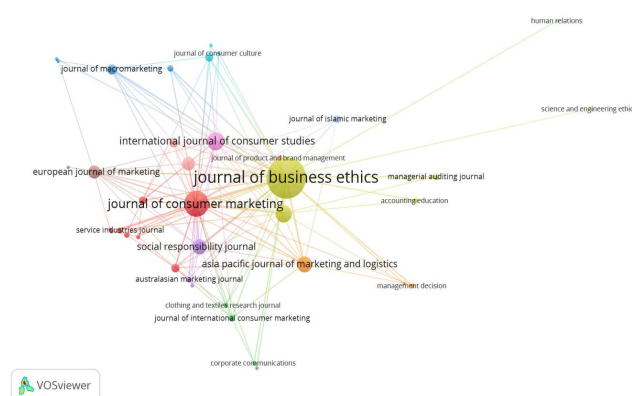


Figure 2: Leading journals in consumer ethics

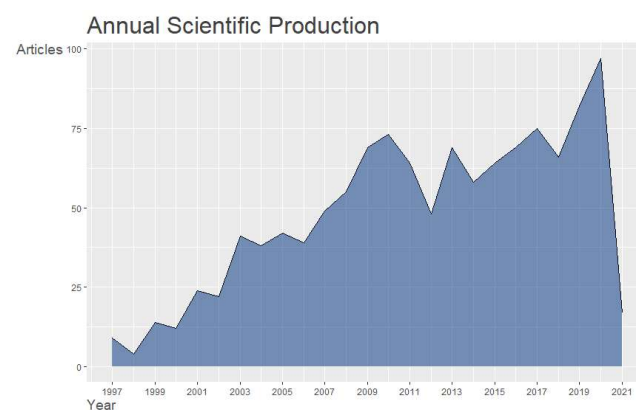


Figure 3: Evolution of research in consumer ethics

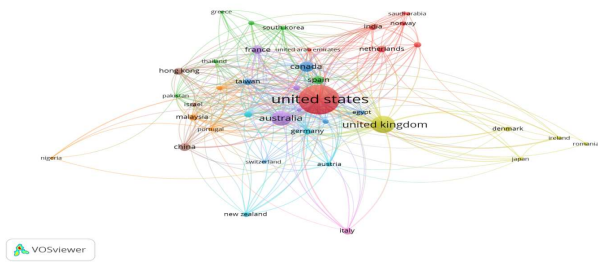


Figure 4: Citation of Countries

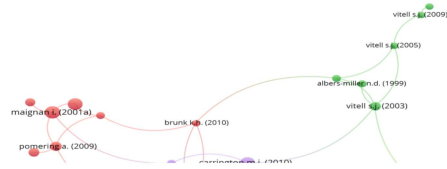


Figure 5: Citation of documents

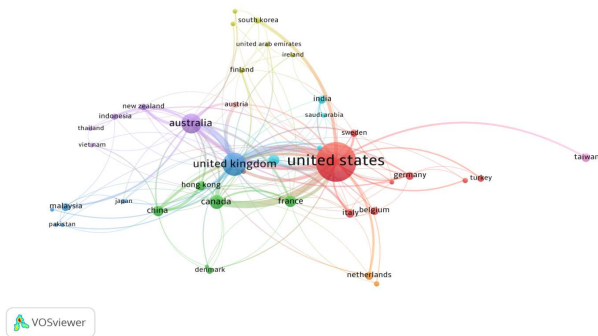


Figure 6: Co-authorship of Countries



Figure 7: Co-citation of cited authors

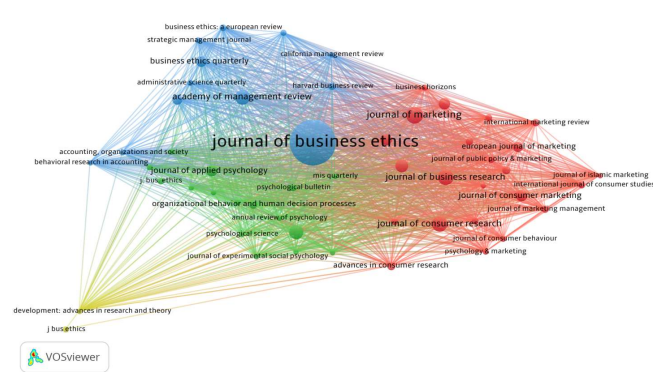


Figure 8: Co-citation of cited sources

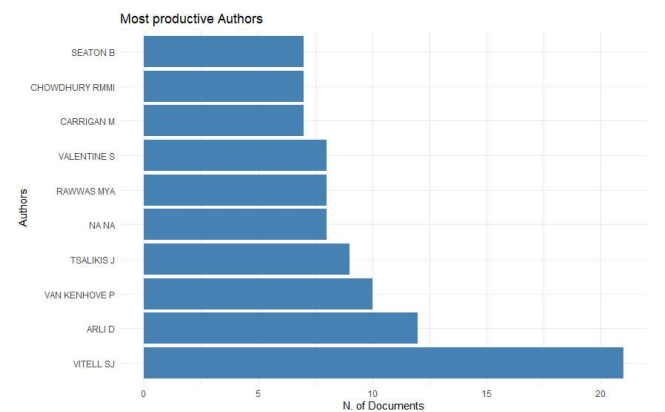


Figure 9: Most productive authors

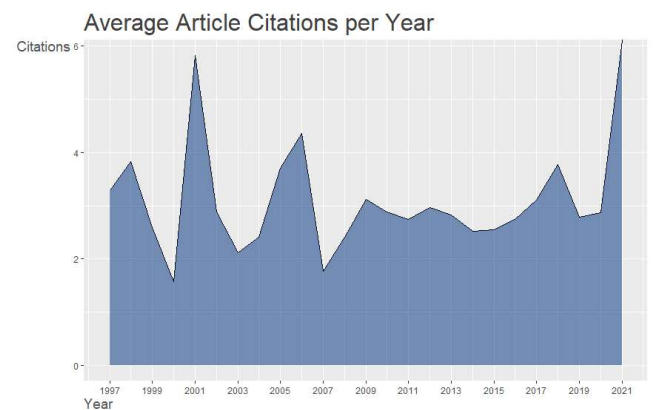


Figure 10: Year wise average article citation

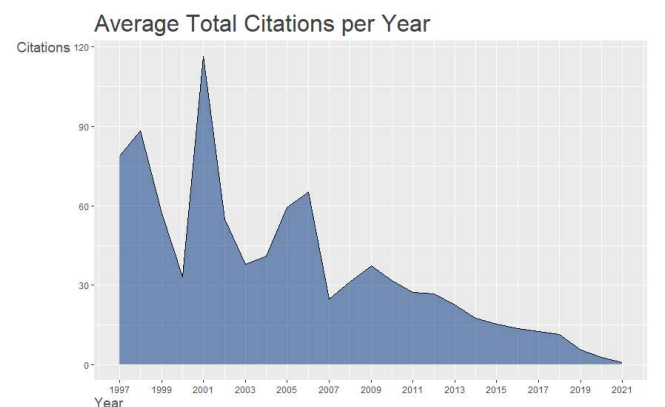


Figure 11: Year wise average total article citation**Table 1: Most Relevant Sources**

Sources	Articles
Journal of Business Ethics	291
Science and Engineering Ethics	63
Journal of Consumer Marketing	27
Journal of Business Research	23
European Journal of Marketing	22
International Journal of Consumer Studies	21
Social Responsibility Journal	21
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	13
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	13
British Food Journal	11

Table 2: Annual Scientific Publication

Year	Articles	Year	Articles
1997	9	2010	73
1998	4	2011	64
1999	14	2012	48
2000	12	2013	69
2001	24	2014	58
2002	22	2015	64
2003	41	2016	69
2004	38	2017	75
2005	42	2018	66
2006	39	2019	82
2007	49	2020	97
2008	55	2021	17
2009	69	Total	1200
Annual Percentage Growth Rate: 2.685			

Table 2 shows the annual research paper publications over the last 26 years and the maximum number (97) articles were published in 2022. The recent years have seen an upward trend in the number of articles published.

Table 3: Main Information About Data

Timespan	1997: 2022
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	363
Documents	1200
Average years from publication	9.13
Average citations per documents	26.86
Average citations per year per doc	2.439
References	1

Table 4: Document Types

Article	1051
Book	3
Book Chapter	18

Conference Paper	44
Review	84

Table 5: Document Contents

Keywords Plus (ID)	0
Author's Keywords (DE)	3011

Table 6: Authors

Authors	2294
Author Appearances	2755
Authors of single-authored documents	297
Authors of multi-authored documents	1997

Table 7: Authors Collaboration

Single-authored documents	323
Documents per Author	0.523
Authors per Document	1.91
Co-Authors per Documents	2.3
Collaboration Index	2.28

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