

A Bibliometric Analysis of Anti-Consumption, Voluntary Simplicity, and Sustainable Consumption Trends in the Literature (2020 – 2025)

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Abstract

This paper examines the research on anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and sustainable consumption using a bibliometric approach. With increasing concern in society over climate change, consumer fatigue, and values-based living mirrored in online trends like No-Buy 2025, this study aims to identify key trends, research domains, and thematic development in research conducted between 2020 and 2025.

A total of 3,365 records were obtained via the Web of Science Core Collection using a specific search strategy. Co-occurrence mapping and visualizing relations between keywords was done by VOSviewer software, and performance metrics such as publication quantity, citation frequency, document type, and fields of research were examined to assess the development of the field.

The results demonstrate a consistent rate of publications over the period between 2020 and 2024, declining in 2025 – brought on likely by indexing lag. "Sustainable consumption" was the single most dominant idea core, with environmental science, psychology, and business studies converged. Keyword map analysis revealed four general thematic clusters: systemic measures towards sustainability, psychological, and motivational influences, change through identity-oriented consumption, and decision-making practices. Terms such as "digital minimalism," "TikTok," and "no-buy challenge" reflect increasing academic interest in online culture and consumption shifts led by Gen Z.

This study contributes to a methodologically accurate overview of the tendency in the literature, summarizing existing as well as emerging paradigms for research. The results are of key value to sustainability proponents, teachers and policymakers by establishing areas of research with significant impacts and uncovering where consumer trends intersect with environmental and social objectives.

Keywords

Sustainable consumption, anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, bibliometric analysis, consumer behavior, VOSviewer.

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Introduction

There has been a clear tendency among consumer culture in recent times marked by increased rejection of mainstream consumption patterns. This shift can be observed not only in written academic works but also in conventional public debate and social consumer movements such as No-Buy 2025. Driven and shared via social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, this movement encourages individuals to forego purchasing non-essential goods and services for quite a significant time frame – typically an entire year. Though the trend on the surface appears to respond to digital consumer fatigue, economic instability, and

environmental devastation, it is a symptom of broader societal and psychological rethinking of materialism and meaning-seeking beyond consumption.

These changing behaviors overlap with principles long discussed in academic literature – most notably anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and sustainable consumption. Anti-consumption is a conscious avoidance or diminishment of consumption habits; voluntary simplicity highlights a mindful way of life based on minimalism and individual values; and sustainable consumption highlights long-term environmental and social responsibility in buying choices. Research on these phenomena has grown significantly over the past two decades. Most recently, between 2020 and 2025, a definitive increase in scope and interdisciplinarity in the research has been seen, as global crises and digital culture fuel changes in consumer behavior.

This paper employs a bibliometric analysis to examine the academic evolution of these topics. Drawing on evidence extracted from the Web of Science Core Collection and mapped using VOSviewer, the study reveals leading publication patterns, influential topics, and emerging domains of research. The objectives are twofold: (1) to map the scholarly intellectual landscape and related topics of anti-consumption, and (2) to ascertain the degree to which new research reflects the nature of emerging consumption patterns, e.g., digital and youth – driven movements.

The organization of the paper is as follows: The first section presents a review of the scientific literature, the second section explains the methodological approach and data collection methodology used for the bibliometric analysis, and the third section presents the findings, namely performance metrics, subject field distribution, and keyword co-occurrence map. Section 4 comprises a combined discussion and conclusion paragraph, explaining the findings in both academic innovation and broader societal terms, and making recommendations for future research and practice.

1. Review of the scientific literature

Anti-consumption and sustainable consumption are themes that are always developing in consumer research. Anti-consumption encompasses a variety of practices including rejection, reduction, and reuse of goods (Black and Cherrier, 2010). It can be motivated by a variety of factors including environmental concerns, ethical concerns, and economic reasons (Rodrigues and Carvalho, 2023). The concept of anti-consumption has expanded from being solely environment-based to accepting broader socio-environmental concerns (Haider et al., 2022). It's most commonly linked with the search for authenticity, as research has shown that some consumers turn to anti-consumption when they cannot achieve authenticity through mainstream consumption behaviors (Zavestoski, 2002).

Sustainable consumption, however, has expanded from product-oriented to more comprehensive sustainable behaviors (Araújo et al., 2021). It is being remarketed increasingly as a means of quality-of-life improvement rather than environmental defense (Haider et al., 2022). This framework includes both personal well-being and environmental sustainability components.

Such concepts are likely to overlap and supplement each other. For instance, sustainability-oriented anti-consumption (SRAC) has directly linked anti-consumption activity with sustainable economic development (Seegebarth et al., 2016). Recent research is pointing towards the fact that sustainable consumption can result from anti-consumption views, as exemplified by increased adoption of secondhand consumption by consumers who adopt sustainability (Gilal et al., 2024).

Both ideas are linked with positive results to personal well-being. Research has identified that anti-consumption behaviors don't decrease quality of life and can, in fact, enhance it (Hüttel et al., 2021). This defies conventional thinking that less consumption automatically means less satisfaction. Voluntary simplicity is a life choice by which one voluntarily abridges material acquisition with preference to intrinsic values and life quality (Hook et al., 2021).

Moreover, voluntary simplicity is specially distinguished from other anti-consumption and sustainable consumption because of its ethical foundation, particularly its focus on the consequence of action and not only universal rules (Peifer et al., 2019). Voluntary simplicity has been shown to be connected with well-being positively, meaning that simplifying consumption does not always decrease life satisfaction (Hook et al., 2021). Voluntary simplicity adoption can be influenced by income, age, and whether it is self-initiated or imposed (Hook et al., 2021). It is not just less consumption, but rather a quality of life choice with regard to concern for society and the environment.

2. Methodology

This article aims to provide a comprehensive bibliographic analysis of studies on anti-consumption, sustainable consumption, and voluntary simplicity. First, relevant research is collected from a science Web database using a standard retrieval methodology (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). Subsequently, analysis of the main features of these publications, including annual distribution, type of publication, research and the number of references, was conducted.

In addition to data collection and preliminary analysis, the study will use VOSviewer for further bibliographic analysis. VOSviewer is a special software tool that builds and visualizes bibliometric networks. These networks enable the visualization of various relationships between the collected documents (van Eck et al., 2010).

Finally, the current problems, future trends, challenges and limitations will be discussed. The methodology framework of the paper shall be seen in Figure no. 1.

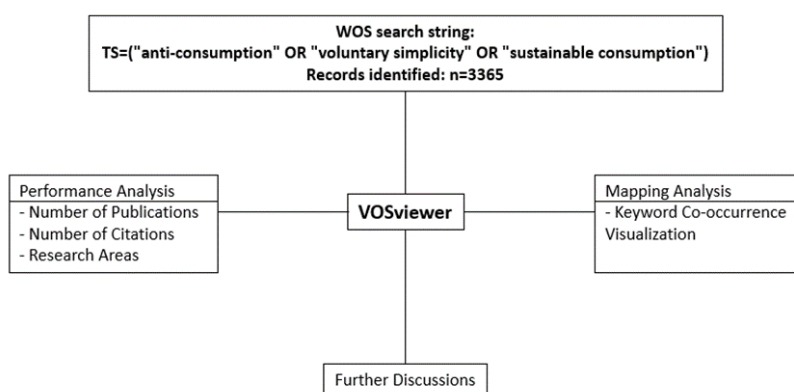


Figure no. 1. The Framework of the study

Source: authors' own creation based on the PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2009) and Nicolescu and Barbu (2024)

2.1. Data collection process

To retrieve and collect reliable literature, the WoS core collection is used as the data source in this paper. The retrieval settings are: TS=(\"anti-consumption\" OR \"voluntary simplicity\" OR \"sustainable consumption\"); and Publication years: between 2020 and 2025. On 1st of May 2025, 3365 publications were retrieved. Data including titles, abstracts, and keywords was exported in a .csv format for further analysis.

Drawing on the retrieved data and the analytical approach outlined earlier, several findings emerge from the bibliometric analysis of scholarly work related to anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and sustainable consumption. These findings are presented in accordance with three analytical dimensions adapted from Zhang et al. (2022): 1 - performance analysis - distribution by document types and research areas, and 2 - identification of the journals that published the most articles on these topics.

3. Results

3.1 Performance analysis

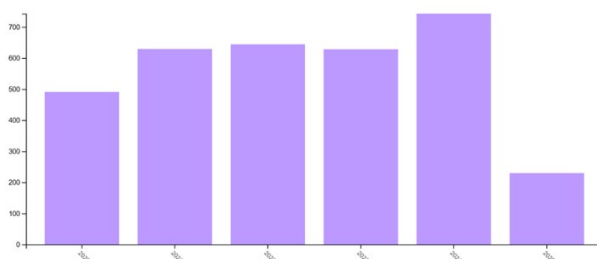


Figure no. 2. Number of publications by year

Source: WoS based on author's input

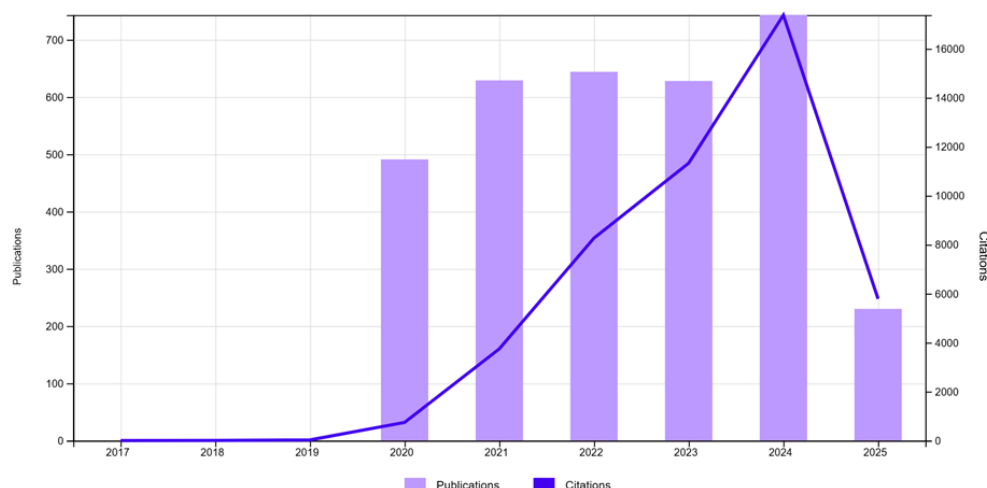


Figure no. 3. Number of publications by year

Source: WoS based on author's input

The bibliometric data marks a steady and dramatic increase in academic interest in anti-consumption, simple living, and sustainable consumption between 2020 and 2024. As it is observable in Figures no. 2 and no. 3, the number of publications rose from some 490 articles in 2020 to over 700 publications in 2024, marking an increasing academic focus on such topics. This growing trend shows heightened awareness of sustainability issues and mounting pressure to achieve shifting consumer behavior in this era, particularly as influenced by global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inflationary pressures, and environmental catastrophes.

Most strikingly, in 2025 there is a dramatic drop in publications with production dropping to about 230 articles. This decline could be accounted for by lags in database indexing or by a natural peak in the current wave of investigation, rather than declining significance.

Patterns of citations, as shown by Figure no. 1, show a corresponding trend as the number of publications but with an even sharper peak. Overall citations grew significantly between 2020 and 2024 and reached a high point of over 17,000 citations in 2024, which corresponds to the year with the highest number of publications. This establishes that literature from these years not only was bountiful in terms of numbers but also effective and extensive enough to be used regularly in academia.

Nevertheless, a sharp drop in citations in 2025 - to a value of around 6,000 – represents both the lag time in the accumulation of citation and perhaps shifting attention to near or emerging subjects. That the amount of citation in 2024 is so great is indicative of the truth that impactful writings published during and after the pandemic had a tremendous impact on research discourse in consumer studies and sustainability.

3.2 Types and Research Areas of Publications

Table no. 1. Document types distribution

Document Type	Record Count	% of 3,365
Article	2,960	87.964%
Review Article	242	7.192%
Early Access	153	4.547%
Proceeding Paper	96	2.853%
Editorial Material	51	1.516%
Book Chapters	44	1.308%
Book Review	7	0.208%
Meeting Abstract	6	0.178%
Book	4	0.119%
Data Paper	4	0.119%
Correction	3	0.089%
Retracted Publication	2	0.059%

Source: authors' own creation based on data from WOS

The distribution of document types in the dataset reflects the prevalence of peer-reviewed scholarly literature in the field of anti-consumption, sustainable consumption, and voluntary simplicity. As can be seen from Table no. 1, articles constitute the majority with 2960 records or 87.96% of the total. This confirms

that most of the research work in this field appears in the form of standard full-length academic articles, indicating a mature and well-established research field.

Review articles comprise 7.19% of the dataset (242 records), marking a high level of synthesis effort intended to map existing knowledge and identify theoretical and methodological gaps. This suggests the field is not simply producing new empirical findings but is also actively engaged in consolidation and critique.

Early access articles (4.55%) suggest active publishing and contemporaneous scholarly activity with the topic in 2025, indicating that it is still lively. Proceedings articles (2.85%) suggest that conference-based dissemination is also a small but worthwhile contribution, likely to be responsible for the initial dissemination of new ideas.

Other formats such as editorial articles (1.52%), book sections (1.31%), and books (0.12%) are small but reflective of the interdisciplinarity and multiplicity of formats of interest in the subject matter. Occasional formats like book reviews, conference abstracts, data papers, corrections, and retracted articles each constitute less than 0.25% of the total, which is to be expected and typical in bibliometric distributions.

In general, the data set is predominantly dominated by peer-reviewed journal articles, underlining the scientific intensity and academic depth in researching post-consumption behaviors and sustainability topics. The relatively high rate of reviews also indicates a discipline in theoretical development and conceptual elaboration.



Figure no 4. Research areas of publication

Source: authors' own creation based on data from WOS

The interdisciplinary nature of anti-consumption, sustainable consumption, and voluntary simplicity research is revealed in Figure no. 4, which is formatted as a treemap visualization. The most common topic category is Environmental Sciences & Ecology with 1,459 articles, and this is employed to validate environmental sustainability as the overall context in which these phenomena are under research. This is a long-standing problem with ecological deterioration, global warming, and natural resource depletion.

Science & Technology – Other Topics (1,107 publications) is second, with high levels of cross-disciplinary research, frequently involving innovation, circular economy thinking, and systems thinking. Business & Economics is third at 969 publications, with specific interest in consumption trends and where they intersect with marketing, sustainable business models, and economic change. The other disciplines involved are Engineering (345), in the sense of eco-design and technological effectiveness, and Psychology (140), which suggests higher levels of research in attitudes, motivation, and identity on the part of consumers. Social Sciences (174) and Sociology (83) introduce the wider cultural and structural concern, highlighting the involvement of social norms and institutions in framing consumption.

Further debate from Food Science & Technology (147) and Agriculture (120) puts further emphasis on rural consumption and sustainable food systems. In the background is Energy & Fuels (73) that highlights how anti-consumption aids in solving the problem of energy consumption as well as environmental problems. Generally, the subject category distribution illustrates a wide and extensive research setting in which environmental, technological, economic, and psychosocial factors meet to counteract overconsumption and shifts in sustainability.

Table no 2. Top 10 journals with the most published articles

Journal	Publications
Sustainability	456
Journal of Cleaner Production	175
Sustainable Production and Consumption	84
British Food Journal	49
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	47
Cleaner and Responsible Consumption	45
Business Strategy and the Environment	43
Environment Development and Sustainability	41
Frontiers in Sustainability	41
International Journal of Consumer Studies	41

Source: authors' own creation based on data from WOS

The data in Table no. 2 indicates to leading journals publishing research work in sustainability and allied areas. The journal Sustainability stands highly with 456 articles, reflecting its leading position and broad range of coverage in the research community in sustainability. The Journal of Cleaner Production ranks well below at 175 publications, covering clean production and sustainable industrial development. Sustainable Consumption and Production (84 articles) and Responsible and Cleaner Consumption (45 articles) are some of the journals that indicate how high academic interest is in sustainable consumption practices and consumption behavior. Moreover, the British Food Journal (49 articles) and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (47 articles) indicate journals with articles on combining consumer behavior, retailing, and sustainability. Together, these journals reflect the interdisciplinary, consumerist, and varied character of current sustainability research.

3.3. Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometric tools are often used by researchers to analyse trends such as publication counts and keyword co-occurrences so as to gain insights into the developing trends across academic fields (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). In the parts that follow, VOSviewer will be used to visually represent the co-occurrence of keywords. The aim is to identify the relationships between keywords and the fundamental concepts in the literature by representing their co-occurrence visually.

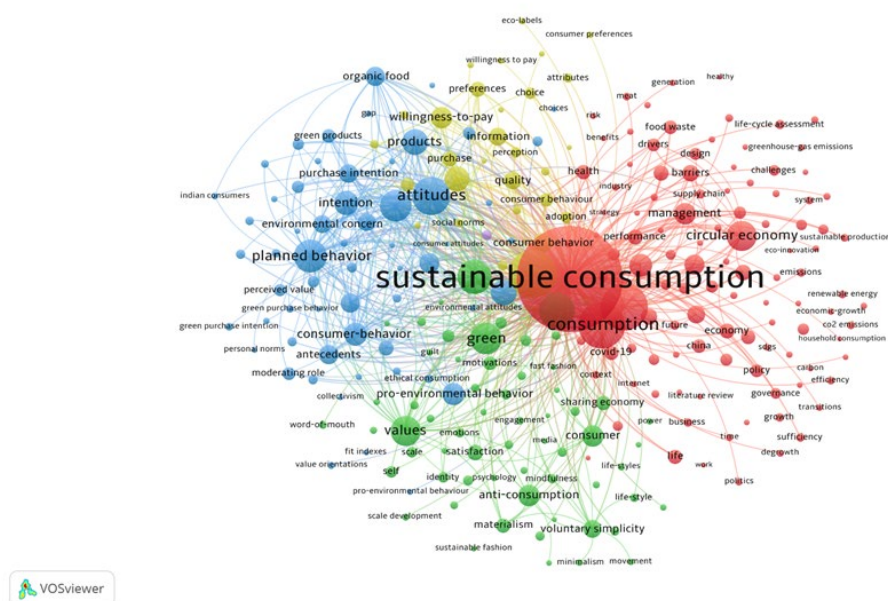


Figure no. 5. Keyword co-occurrence visualisation

Source: VOSviewer based on authors' input

As it can be seen in Figure no. 5, the keyword co-occurrence analysis identified four main thematic clusters in the 2020-2025 literature on sustainable consumption. The dominant themes are systemic circular economy strategies, behavior-oriented sustainability frameworks, identity-oriented anti-consumption, and consumer decision-making processes. The central role of 'sustainable consumption' reflects its interdisciplinary relevance, representing a meeting point for environmental, psychological, and economic perspectives.

In addition to the four dominant thematic clusters in the keyword co-occurrence map, several emerging or niche areas are captured as smaller, peripheral nodes. Keywords such as "Covid-19," "social media," "digital minimalism," "zero waste," "TikTok," and "no-buy challenge" – while less frequent – suggest the growing influence of real-time societal transformation and digital media on sustainable consumption discourse. Their relatively peripheral positions on the map indicate that these topics are not yet strongly integrated into the central scholarly discussion, but their presence is an indication of increasing academic interest.

Discussion and Conclusion

This bibliometric review shows the academic trajectory of anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and sustainable consumption between 2020 and 2025. The results capture a growing and more interdisciplinary topic area, as contributions are received from environmental science, psychology, business, engineering, and social sciences. Keyword co-occurrence analysis resulted in four dominant thematic clusters: systemic sustainability initiatives (e.g., circular economy), behavioral forces (e.g., attitudes, intentions), values of lifestyle (e.g., anti-consumption, identity), and consumer choice-making (e.g., preferences, perceptions).

"Sustainable consumption" holds the intellectual center of the field as an overarching term, which traverses diverse research streams. In contrast, "anti-consumption" and "voluntary simplicity" sound more disciplinary subfields that are most often bound with ethical living, identity, or personal wellbeing. Their location suggests that although there has been growing academic endorsement of these concepts, they hold a somewhat exterior role to mainstream core sustainability debate.

Subject analysis throughout these findings is in line with a robust environmental science presence, but also strong representation in business and psychology – tell-tale indicator of shifts toward applied, consumer-oriented research. The diversity of document types, led by peer-reviewed articles and literature reviews, reflects both empirical density and theoretical syntheses throughout the field.

Interestingly, the emergence of buzzwords such as "digital minimalism," "TikTok," and "no-buy challenge" signals a recognition of growing new, digitally networked consumer social movements. They symbolize the responsiveness of the academic frame to emerging real-time social movement trends, particularly those driven by Gen Z as well as web-based communities.

Finally, this review demonstrates that research on sustainable consumption is growing in scale and complexity. Future studies would be helped by more research into digital consumer culture, inter-generational relationships, and longitudinal examinations of value-based living and systemic change. While academic thinking can certainly offer critical analysis alongside practical counsel, social media trends like No-Buy 2025 for its part can make consumerism react against ingrained consumption behaviors.

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