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MAPPING CONSUMER SKEPTICISM RESEARCH: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF TRENDS AND THEMES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the consumer skepticism literature and to identify future research gaps that can enhance the existing body of knowledge. Using the Scopus and Web of Science databases, a total of 244 articles were extracted for analysis. Performance analysis was employed to identify the most influential authors, countries and documents in the field. In addition, network analysis was used to examine the conceptual structure of the domain. The findings reveal four major thematic clusters representing different dimensions of consumer skepticism research. These themes indicate that the majority of studies have focused on areas such as cause-related marketing and advertising, while the dimension of green skepticism remains relatively underexplored. Although this study adopts a systematic literature review approach through bibliometric techniques, future research may employ alternative frameworks such as TCCM, ADO, or mixed-method approaches for a more comprehensive synthesis. The study offers valuable insights and practical recommendations, contributing to a deeper understanding of the conceptual and social foundations of consumer skepticism research.

Keywords: Consumer skepticism, consumer doubt, bibliometric analysis, citation analysis, RStudio.

INTRODUCTION

Initially, consumer skepticism was examined within the broader context of consumer sentiment toward advertising and marketing. It was assessed as a component of customers' attitudes toward marketing and companies (Aggarwal et al., 2025; Abid et al., 2024; Gaski & Etzel, 1986), as well as their views and beliefs about advertisements. The term skepticism toward advertising was initially used by Boush et al. (1994) and Mangleburg and Bristol (1998) to describe individuals who do not believe advertising claims and who distrust advertisers' intentions. To be skeptical is to possess an inherent tendency toward doubt, disbelief, and inquiry. More broadly, skepticism refers to a person's inclination to question and disbelieve (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Concepts such as cynicism, suspicion, (low) trust, dissonance, and ambivalence are closely related to skepticism, although each is qualitatively distinct. Cynicism, defined as an enduring personality trait, reflects the persistent belief that others act primarily out of self-interest (Mohr et al., 1998). Suspicion arises when an individual believes that an actor may be concealing information or attempting manipulation (Fein et al., 1990). The distinction between trust and distrust lies in the extent to which one anticipates that another party may act in ways that could threaten one's well-being, rather than merely expecting supportive behavior (Cho, 2006). Dissonance refers to the post-purchase discomfort experienced by individuals, which motivates them to take actions to reduce this discomfort (Sweeney et al., 2000). Ambivalence denotes the simultaneous presence of both positive and negative evaluations (Chang, 2011).

According to Foreh and Grier (2003), skepticism can be classified into two types: situational and dispositional. Situational skepticism is characterised by a lack of trust triggered by external factors or specific events (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). In contrast, individuals with dispositional skepticism possess a general tendency to view others with suspicion (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Mohr et al. (1998) and Tan (2002) suggest that consumers exhibit dispositional skepticism when evaluating advertising claims in general, and situational skepticism when responding to specific advertising messages or promises (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham & Kim, 2020; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) further explains that general skepticism arises from persuasion knowledge—referred to as dispositional doubt—whereas topic and agent-specific knowledge structures give rise to skepticism in particular contexts, known as situational skepticism (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Research on skepticism spans multiple academic disciplines, including philosophy (McGrath, 2011), politics (Taber & Lodge, 2006), sociology (Owen-Smith, 2001), and psychology (Forgas & East, 2008). In the commercial context, skepticism has been widely examined as a potential customer response to advertising, marketing, and public relations activities (Boush et al., 1994; Obermiller et al., 2005). Several scholars have also explored skepticism in relation to corporate social marketing (Foreh & Grier, 2003), environmental claims (Mohr et al., 1998), cause-related marketing (Singh et al., 2009), corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication during crises (Khan et al., 2024; Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009), and CSR initiatives (Saida & Hasboui, 2024; Pirsch et al., 2007). While some studies conceptualise skepticism as a personality trait characterised by a continuous state of doubt (dispositional skepticism), most of the research focuses on situational skepticism. Situational skepticism refers to a temporary state of doubt influenced by specific contexts and conditions, rather than by an individual's enduring traits. Skeptical individuals are also characterised by their willingness to revise their beliefs when presented with sufficient evidence (Sivapalan et al., 2024; Mohr et al., 1998). Although consumers' levels of doubt may vary, skepticism can be understood as a cognitive response that arises from situational factors (Foreh & Grier, 2003).

In the contemporary marketing landscape, consumer skepticism has emerged as a critical challenge due to the increasing complexity of information environments and the proliferation of persuasive communication across digital platforms (Sinha & Annamdevula, 2025; Campbell et al., 2022). Consumers today are continuously exposed to sponsored content, influencer marketing, artificial intelligence-generated advertisements, and green or ethical claims, many of which blur the boundaries between genuine and manipulative messaging. This persistent exposure to exaggerated, misleading, or algorithmically targeted communication has heightened skepticism toward brands and their claims (LeBrun, 2025; Kim et al., 2025; AlFarraj et al., 2021). Moreover, incidents of greenwashing, data misuse, and fake reviews have further intensified public doubt regarding corporate credibility and advertising transparency (Kim & Rim, 2024; Reck et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding consumer skepticism is not only important for consumer protection but also essential for marketers seeking to build trust, enhance message credibility, and foster ethical engagement in a competitive digital ecosystem. Therefore, reassessing the evolution and structure of consumer skepticism research is both timely and significant for contemporary marketing theory and practice.

This underscores the growing importance of understanding consumer skepticism in shaping marketing strategies and highlights the need to examine its characteristics and research trends. Notably, a gap exists in the current literature regarding the integration of the concept with prior research. Accordingly, this study aims to address this gap by systematically reviewing the consumer skepticism literature. It contributes to existing knowledge in several ways: First, it provides a comprehensive overview of consumer skepticism through a bibliometric analysis of 244 studies. Second, it conducts a performance analysis by mapping various research networks. Third, it identifies prominent research themes using keyword co-occurrence analysis. Finally, it outlines directions for future research. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for both emerging and established researchers in the field of consumer skepticism. In addition, policymakers and marketing practitioners can benefit from the perspectives generated by this research.

METHODOLOGY

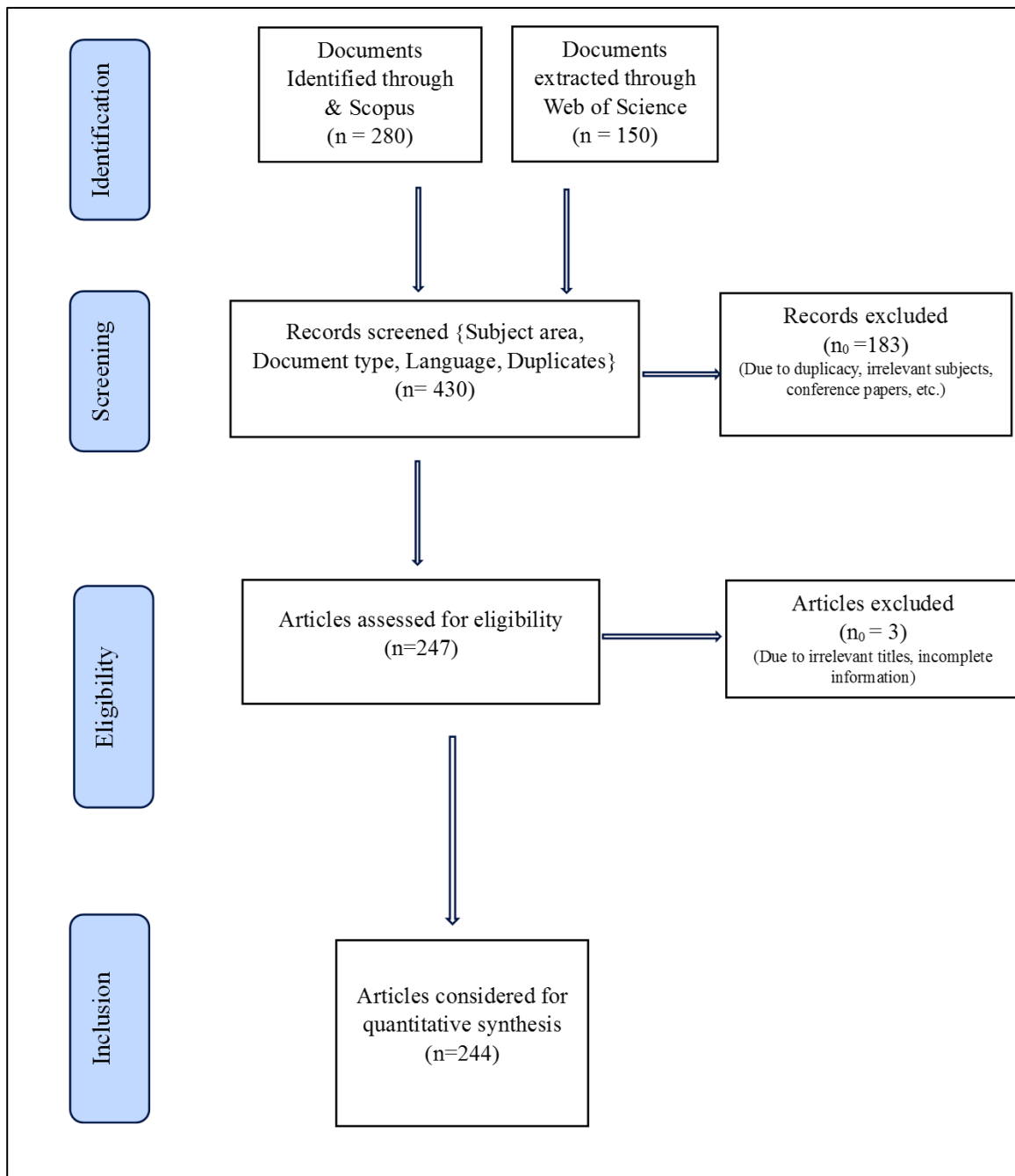
Various quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been employed by researchers to synthesise the literature on consumer skepticism. One widely used tool for analysing prior studies is bibliometric analysis (Jing et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2015; Sun & Grimes, 2016), which provides a transparent and systematic overview of research developments (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Bibliometric analysis offers a structural approach that helps to identify research trends over time, key themes, and the most prolific authors, countries, institutes and sources within a particular domain. It can be conducted using various software tools, including BibExcel (Persson et al., 2009), VOSviewer (Omar & Rosli, 2024; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010), and Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Li et al., 2017). In the present study, the bibliometric package in RStudio and VOSviewer are used for the analysis.

Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases were used to collect bibliographic data on published articles related to consumer skepticism for the period 1973 to 2024. The search query applied to extract the relevant literature was: ("Consumer Skepticism" OR "Customer Skepticism" OR "Green Skepticism") within the title, abstract, and keyword fields. A total of 280 documents from Scopus and 150 from WoS were initially retrieved. After applying database-specific filters and inclusion criteria, 352 articles were retained and exported in BibTex and TXT formats. These files were merged using RStudio commands and subsequently

converted into CSV format for analysis. For the bibliometric approach, the documents were further screened in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). To ensure a transparent and systematic selection process, the PRISMA framework follows a four-phase model: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. This approach enhances the comprehensiveness and reliability of the findings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

PRISMA Framework



ANALYSIS

Main Descriptors

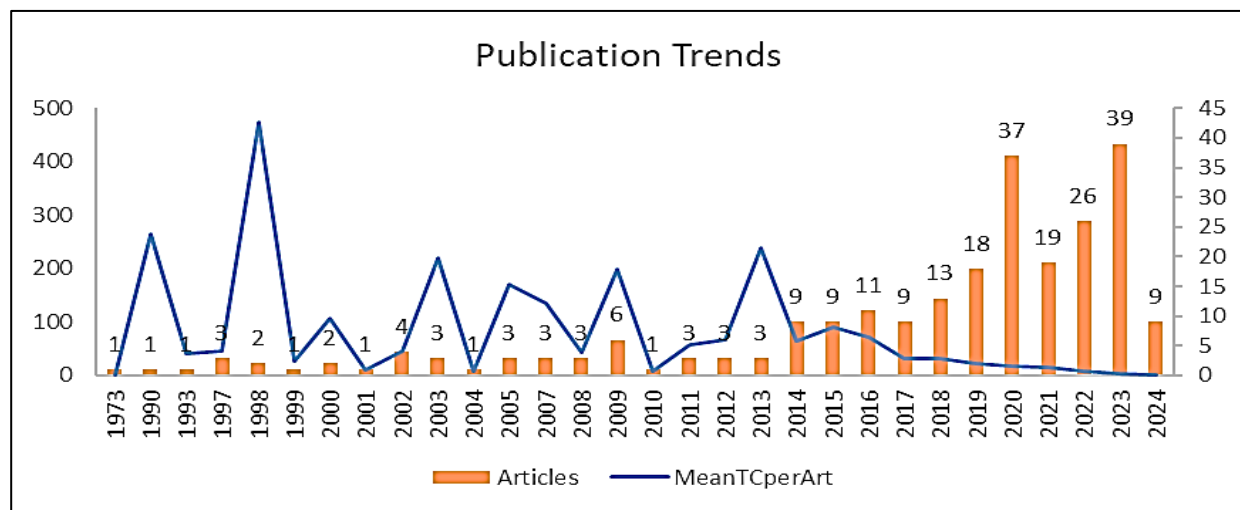
The dataset spans the period from 1973 to 2024 and is sourced from 127 journals and related publications, comprising a total of 244 documents. It reflects an annual growth rate of 4.4% with an average document age of 6.84 years and an average of 42.44 citations per document. The dataset includes 2,194 references, with 371 Keywords Plus and 728 authors' keywords identified. A total of 572 authors contributed to the publications, including 29 single-authored documents, with an average of more than three co-authors per document. International co-authorships account for 4.098% of total collaborations. The document types represented in the dataset include articles, early access articles, and conference proceedings, among others.

Evolution of the Research

The earliest study in the domain of consumer skepticism was published in 1973 (Wilson, 1973), in which the author discussed different phases of consumerism and how consumers began to question misleading advertising. However, the domain remained relatively underexplored until the late 1990s. Since then, there has been a general increase in both the number of published articles and the average citations per article. The period from 2000 to 2010 appears to mark a significant growth phase in both research output and impact. In subsequent years, the mean citations per article show a decline, which may indicate a saturation of research themes or increased competition within the field. The year 2020 stands out, with the highest number of publications (37 articles). Overall, Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of research output and impact over time, highlighting phases of growth, saturation, and fluctuations in citation rates. These trends underscore the emerging need to examine consumer skepticism across diverse dimensions.

Figure 2

Publication Trend of Research



Prominent Journals

Understanding the current state and potential future directions of a research field requires identifying its most productive and influential publication sources. The domain of consumer skepticism is represented by 244 research articles published across 127 outlets. Figure 3 provides insight into the top five sources. The *Journal of Business Research* ranks first, with 11 articles, and is also among the earliest journals to publish in this domain. It is followed by the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, each with nine articles (see Table 1). Notably, most of these journals are rated A* or A in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) journal quality list, indicating that high-ranking journals are receptive to research in this area.

Table 1

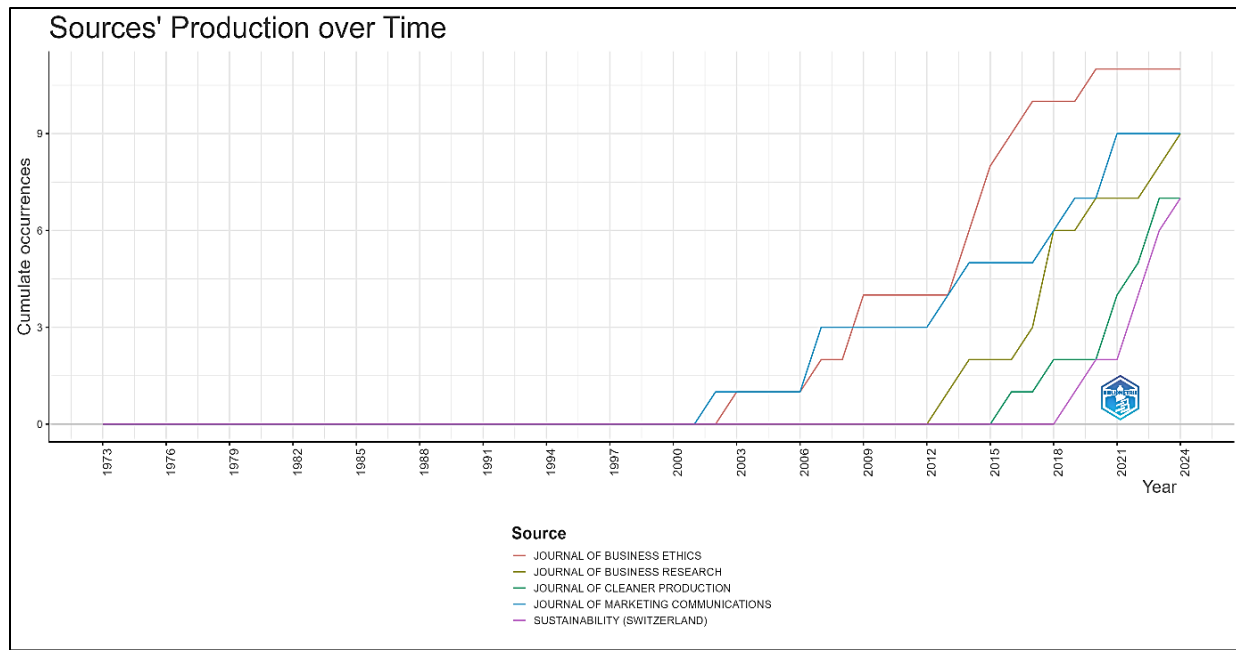
Prominent Journals

Sources	TP*	IF*	Publisher	ABDC Rank	First Decision
Journal of Business Ethics	11	6.1	Springer	"A"	14
Journal of Business Research	9	11.3	Elsevier	"A"	339
Journal of Marketing Communications	9	6.9	TandF	"B"	85
Journal of Cleaner Production	9	11.1	Elsevier	"A"	152
Sustainability	7	3.9	MDPI	-	18.8

(*TP- Total publications, *IF- Impact factor)

Figure 3

Most Prominent Sources and Publication Trend



Bradford's Law

According to Bradford's Law (Brookes, 1985), a relatively small number of sources tend to account for a large proportion of publications within a given field. Based on this principle, "core sources" are identified as those that contribute the first one-third of the total articles (Zone I). The second one-third of the articles is produced by a larger group of sources (Zone II), while the final third is distributed across the largest collection of sources (Zone III). Sources in Zone I are typically highly specialised and closely aligned with the subject area. Applying Bradford's Law to the present study helps identify the core sources within the field of consumer skepticism. As presented in Table 2, 82 research articles were published by 13 sources in Zone I, 83 articles by 35 sources in Zone II, and the remaining articles by 79 sources in Zone III. These results indicate that the research publications are relatively evenly distributed across the three zones. This analysis highlights that most relevant and influential studies are concentrated within a limited number of core sources, enabling researchers to prioritise these outlets when conducting literature reviews. In the domain of consumer skepticism, the core sources include the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Business Research*, and the *Journal of Marketing Communications*, along with 10 other journals that contribute a substantial share of key publications (see Figure 4). These findings are consistent with the results of the top contributing sources presented in Figure 3.

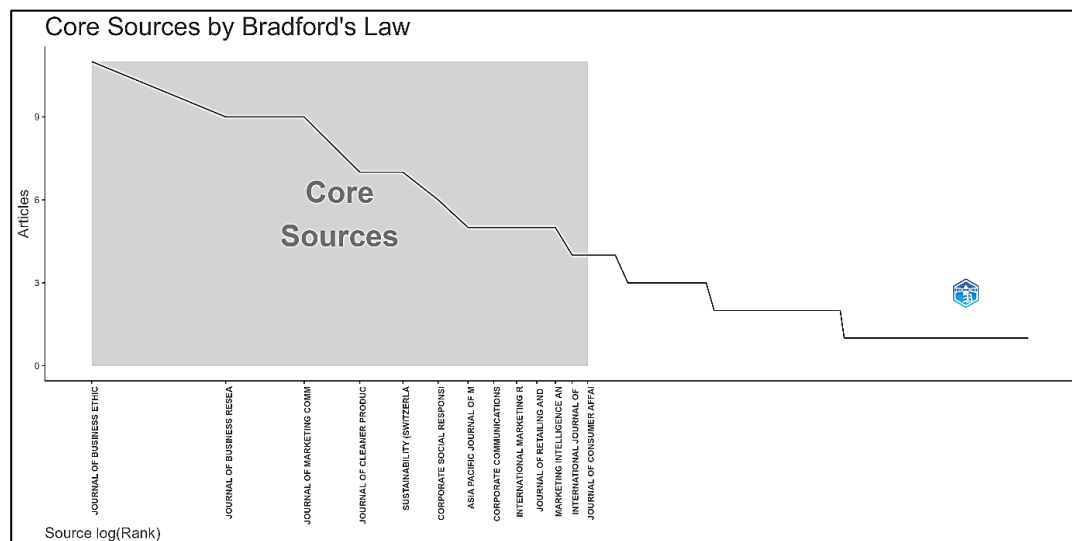
Table 2

Sources and Articles Distribution in Different Zones

Zones	Sources Count	Publication Count	%
Zone I (Core zone)	13	82	33.60
Zone II	35	83	34.02
Zone III	79	79	32.38
Total	127	244	100

Figure 4

Bradford's Law



Prolific Authors in the Research of Consumer Skepticism

This section summarises the most influential authors in the domain (see Table 3), along with their total citations (TC), average citations per article (TC/Articles), h-index, and year of first publication (PY_start). An author's influence in the field can be assessed through citation counts, while the h-index, as proposed by Hirsch (2005), serves as a measure of both productivity and impact. The most prolific author in terms of publication count is Septianto, who began publishing in this domain in 2020 and has contributed six articles. This is followed by Kim, Lee, Leonidou, and Obermiller, with Obermiller being the earliest contributors, with a first publication in 1998. Despite having fewer publications, Obermiller emerges as one of the most influential authors, with the highest average citations per article (358.66) and a total of 1,076 citations, while Leonidou records the highest total citations (1,144). This suggests that contributions, which focus on foundational themes in consumer skepticism, have received substantial scholarly attention. Overall, Table 3 highlights the top 10 most productive authors in the field, who collectively account for 15.98% (39) of the total publications and have accumulated 3,157 citations.

Table 3

Prolific Authors

Element	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC*	NP*	AC*(TC/NP)	PY_start*
Septianto F	3	5	0.6	27	6	4.5	2020
Kim S	4	5	0.444	131	5	26.2	2016
Lee S	4	4	0.25	174	4	43.5	2009
Leonidou C	4	4	0.286	1144	4	286	2011
Lee J	3	4	0.5	32	4	8	2019
Zhang X	3	4	0.333	59	4	14.75	2016
Deb M	3	3	0.75	55	3	18.33	2021
Johnson L	3	3	0.188	375	3	125	2009
Northey G	3	3	0.429	84	3	28	2018
Obermiller C	3	3	0.111	1076	3	358.66	1998

(*TC- Total Citations, *NP-Number of publications, *AC-Average citations per article, *PY_start- First publication year of author)

Lotka's Law

In bibliometric analysis, Lotka's Law, proposed by Lotka (1926), is used to assess the scholarly productivity of authors within a specific field. According to this law, approximately 60% of authors in a domain publish only one article, 15% publish two articles, 6.6% publish three articles, and so on. Figure 5 presents a comparison between the observed author distribution and the theoretical distribution proposed by Lotka's Law. The results indicate that 87.5% of authors have contributed only one article, 9.37% have published two articles, and 1.56% have published three articles, with smaller proportions contributing more. Although consumer skepticism has garnered increasing attention from scholars in recent years (see Figure 2), the proportion of authors with a single publication (87.5%) is considerably higher than the 60% predicted by Lotka's law. Similarly, the proportion of authors with two or three publications are lower than the expected values. This noticeable disparity between the observed and expected distributions suggests that author productivity in the field of consumer skepticism does not conform to Lotka's law. The findings further indicate that only a limited number of established authors contribute extensively to the domain.

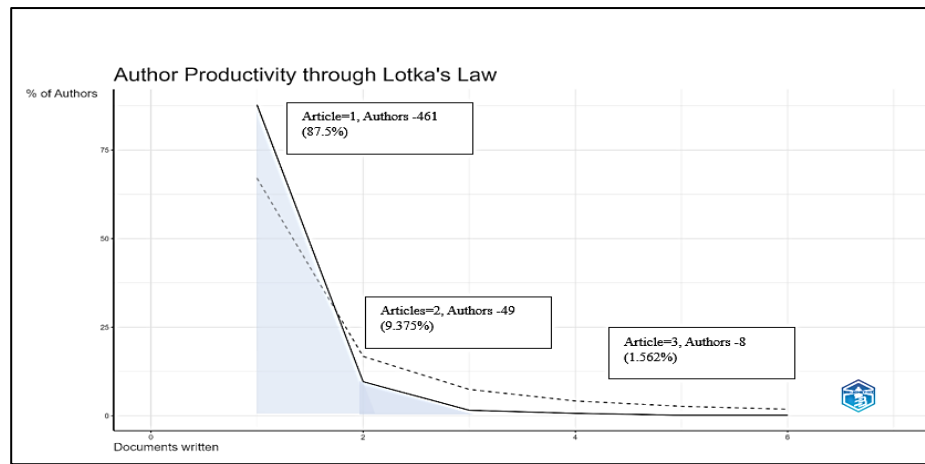
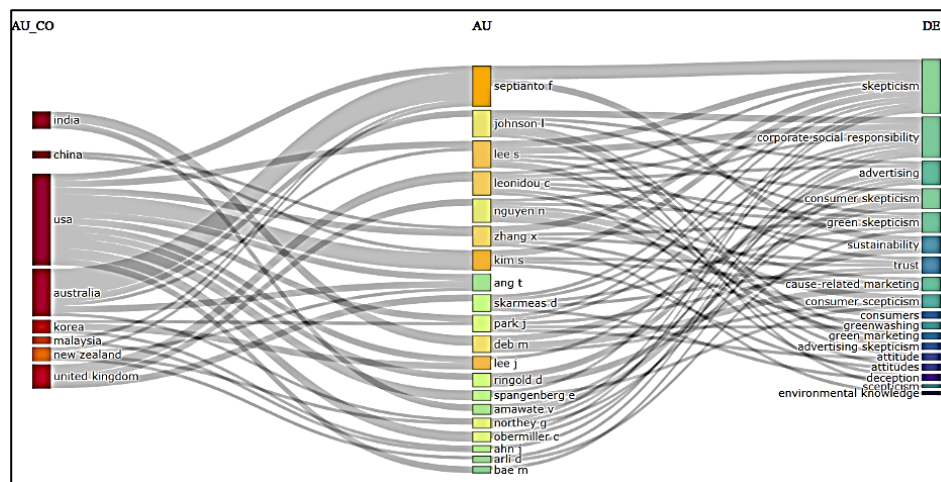
Figure 5*Lotka's Law***Three-Field Plot**

Figure 6 presents an integrated framework illustrating the relationships among countries (left), authors (centre), and keywords (right), based on a Sankey diagram. In the three-field plot, the elements are represented by coloured boxes, with the height of each box indicating the frequency of its connections with other elements (Abhishek & Srivastava, 2021). The analysis shows that many leading authors in the field of consumer skepticism, such as Septianto F., Lee S., Obermiller C., and Zhang H., are affiliated with institutions in the United States. Their research primarily focuses on themes such as consumer skepticism, advertising, sustainability, and green skepticism. Correspondingly, the United States contributes the highest number of publications in this domain, as indicated in Figure 7. In contrast, contributions from Indian authors—such as Deb et al. (2021), Deb (2021), and Amawate and Deb (2021)—tend to emphasise more specific contextual aspects, focusing on keywords such as consumer skepticism, skepticism, and cause-related marketing.

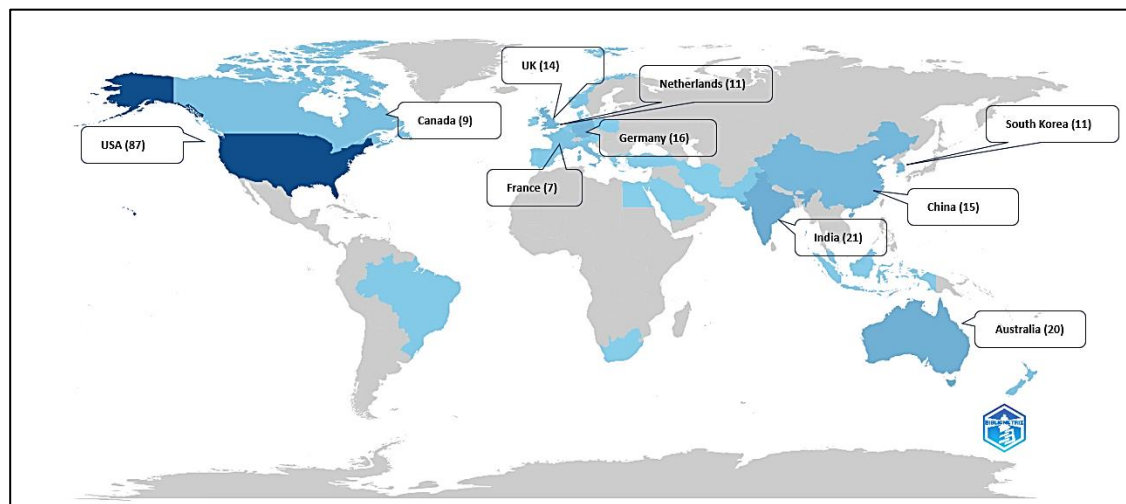
Figure 6*Three-Field Plot*

Productive Countries for Consumer Skepticism Research

Figure 7 presents an overview of the most prominent countries contributing to research on consumer skepticism. The United States of America emerges as the most influential country, with a total of 3,267 citations. The Netherlands and China follow, with 977 and 509 citations, respectively. These figures highlight the significant role of these countries in advancing the field. In terms of average citations per article, the Netherlands ranks the highest, with 88.8 citations, followed by United States (37.55) and China (33.93). This indicates that, while the United States leads in overall influence, research from the Netherlands demonstrate a higher average impact per publication. Overall, the findings suggest that the United States, the Netherlands, and China are the most impactful contributors to consumer skepticism research.

Figure 7

Ten Prominent Countries



Influential Documents

Table 4 presents the most influential articles in the domain of consumer skepticism, based on both global and local citation counts. According to Goel et al. (2022), global citations (GCs) measure the total number of citations a document receives, whereas local citations (LCs) refer to citations within a specific bibliometric dataset. The most influential study in this field of consumer skepticism is by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, which has received 16 LCs and 621 GCs. This is followed by another study by Obermiller et al. (2005), with 11 LCs and 326 GCs. These findings indicate that Obermiller C. is not only a prolific author (as shown in Table 3) but also a highly impactful contributor to the consumer skepticism domain. Similarly, Mohr et al. (1998) ranks third, with 10 LCs and 325 GCs, with both studies contributing to the conceptualisation and scale development of consumer skepticism. Notably, the study by Foreh and Grier (2003), also published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, stands out with 598 GCs among the top 23 locally cited articles. Further analysis revealed that despite having high GCs, articles such as Elving (2013), Fan (2005), and Schmeltz (2012) have not been locally cited within the dataset of 244 articles.

Table 4
Most Influential Documents

Paper	DOI	GC*	LC*
Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998)	10.1207/s15327663jcp0702_03	621	16
Foreh and Grier (2003)	10.1207/s15327663jcp1303_15	598	7
Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013)	10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.004	531	6
Vanhamme and Grobбен (2009)	10.1007/s10551-008-9731-2	379	4
Obermiller et al. (2005)	10.1080/00913367.2005.10639199	326	11
Mohr et al. (1998)	10.1111/j.1745-6606.1998.tb00399.x	325	10
Pirsch et al. (2007)	10.1007/s10551-006-9100-y	324	2
Ford et al. (1990)	10.1086/209228	264	9
Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017)	10.1007/s10551-015-2829-4	246	8
Goh and Balaji (2016)	10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.04.122	228	7
Skarmeas et al. (2014a)	10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.12.010	212	6
Rahman et al. (2015)	10.1108/ijchm-04-2014-0202	189	1
Elving (2013)	10.1080/13527266.2011.631569	181	0
Pomeroy and Johnson (2009)	10.1108/13563280910998763	175	1
Fan (2005)	10.1108/13563280510630133	170	0
Leonidou et al. (2011)	10.1108/02651331111107080	155	1
De Vries et al. (2015)	10.1002/csr.1327	140	2
Sher and Lee (2009)	10.2224/sbp.2009.37.1.137	139	5
Schmeltz (2012)	10.1108/13563281211196344	137	0
Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000)	10.1023/a:1008181028040	129	2
Nguyen et al. (2019)	10.3390/su11092653	119	1
Romani et al. (2016)	10.5465/ame.1998.650513	114	2

(*GC- Global citations, *LC-Local Citations)

Conceptual Structure

The conceptual foundation of consumer skepticism research is derived from the results of keywords' co-occurrence network. According to Kumar et al. (2022) and Zupic and Čater (2015), the underlying premise is that terms grouped within the same cluster share thematic relationships. Figure 8 shows the network map generated using VOSviewer, identifying key clusters based on 92 keywords.

Cluster 1: Influence of Consumer Skepticism on Advertising and Product Choice

Cluster 1, represented by green nodes, reflects how consumers navigate marketplace decisions through informed and critical evaluation. Keywords in this cluster include *curiosity*, *advertising skepticism*, *persuasion knowledge model*, *product*, *impact*, *strategies*, *mediating role*, and *consumer choice*. The concept of skepticism was initially examined in relation to advertising, as discussed by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), and Obermiller et al. (2005). A study by Garaus and Halkias (2020), also within this cluster, found that customers tend to become more skeptical—and, unexpectedly, less interested—when they encounter unconventional product packaging colours. Research suggests that consumers process

advertising more critically, which may reduce their receptiveness to persuasive messages (Khan et al., 2024; Garaus & Halkias, 2020; Waldenström et al., 2022). Thus, it is not advertising in general that drive skepticism, but rather certain features—such as curiosity-evoking or unconventional elements—that may trigger negative responses. Many studies within this cluster employ the *Persuasion Knowledge Model* (Cheah et al., 2021; Kassie & Rhee, 2023; Kim et al., 2019), which explains how individuals' understanding of persuasion tactics influences their responses to marketing efforts. Overall, the findings indicate that skeptical consumers are less likely to trust, prefer, or rely on advertising, and may respond more favourably to emotional appeals than to purely informative messages (Obermiller et al., 2005).

Cluster2: Enlightened Purchases by Bridging Trust and Skepticism

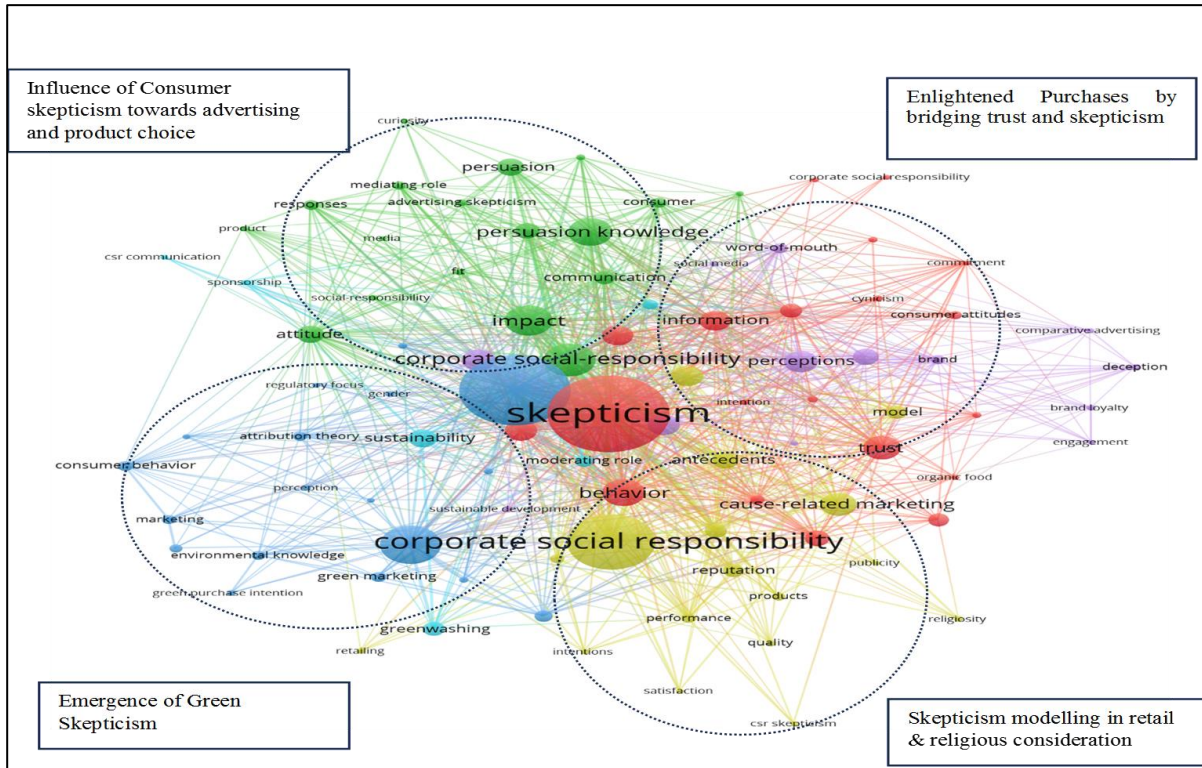
This cluster represented by red nodes, includes keywords such as *information, knowledge, skepticism, purchase intention, trust, CSR, commitment, consumer attitudes, cynicism, willingness to pay, and behaviour*. The theme reflects the heightened awareness and discernment of contemporary consumers, who actively seek information and critically evaluate marketing messages before making purchase decisions. It highlights the delicate balance consumers maintain between trusting brands and remaining skeptical of their claims, which can negatively influence purchase intentions (Fenko et al., 2016; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Orazi & Chan, 2020; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Studies focusing on *trust, attitudes, and knowledge* suggest that advertising skepticism and brand awareness play significant moderating roles in the relationship between promotional strategies and consumer attitudes toward brands (Jameel, 2025; Fong Yee Chan, 2019). By bridging trust and skepticism, this cluster indicates that consumers actively reconcile these seemingly contradictory forces to make informed decisions. In doing so, they seek to align their purchases with personal values while carefully evaluating the credibility and authenticity of brands, as supported by prior research (Garg & Madan, 2024; Hyun et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2022).

Cluster 3: Emergence of Green Skepticism

Depicted by blue nodes in Figure 8, this cluster highlights keywords such as *sustainability, consumer behaviour, environmental knowledge, green marketing, green purchase intention, greenwashing, environmental concern, green skepticism, moderating role, and regulatory focus*. This theme reflects a newer dimension of consumer skepticism, with a strong emphasis on sustainability-related concerns. Several studies contribute to this area, including Khan et al. (2022), Lavuri (2022), Wang et al. (2023), Silva et al. (2020), Shao et al. (2023), Lin et al. (2023), Chang (2023), and Javed et al. (2024). Although interest in environmental conservation has grown, misleading or exaggerated corporate claims have increased consumers' skepticism toward green initiatives. For instance, Uddin et al. (2023) found that green skepticism negatively moderates the attitude-behaviour relationship, thereby reducing consumers' intentions to purchase green products. Supporting this, Singh et al. (2022) also reported a negative relationship between green skepticism and purchase intention, with green word-of-mouth acting as a moderating variable. Similar findings have been reported by Alotaibi and Abbas (2023).

Figure 8

Co-occurrence of Keywords



Cluster 4: Skepticism Modelling in Retail and Religious Considerations

This cluster, represented by yellow nodes in Figure 8, includes keywords such as *intentions*, *reputation*, *quality*, *CSR skepticism*, *religiosity*, *publicity*, *cause-related marketing*, *antecedents*, *models*, and *retailing*. It reflects research focused on modelling consumer skepticism in relation to firm motives, CSR initiatives, and contextual factors such as religiosity. Several studies (Bae, 2020; Christofi et al., 2020; Deb, 2021; Mimouni Chaabane & Parguel, 2016; Thomas et al., 2024) suggest that skepticism toward firm motives is negatively associated with participation intentions. At the same time, message credibility remains a critical factor for highly skeptical consumers (Manuel et al., 2014). Consumers tend to exhibit skepticism toward CSR initiatives when they attributed such efforts to egoistic or stakeholder-driven motives. However, this skepticism is reduced when the initiatives are perceived as value-driven (Ham & Kim, 2020; Koch et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Rim & Kim, 2016; Schade et al., 2022; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). This relationship may also be indirectly influenced by skepticism toward cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns. Le et al. (2019) further identify four factors contributing to attitudinal ambivalence: greenwashing, consumer skepticism, green misunderstanding, and perceived green risk. In addition, prior research (Hede et al., 2014; Helm et al., 2015; Tan & Tan, 2007) has explored the antecedents of consumer skepticism across various sectors. Finally, religiosity is found to play a significant role in shaping responses to CRM campaigns, either as an independent variable or as a moderator in the relationship between skepticism and behavioural intention (Amawate & Deb, 2021; Deb, 2021; Deb et al., 2021; Sarairoh, 2023; Thomas et al., 2024).

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study makes important contributions to both theory and practice in the field of consumer skepticism research. From a theoretical perspective, it offers a renewed understanding of consumer skepticism, demonstrating that it extends beyond simple doubt toward advertising and instead represents a complex interplay of cognitive and affective responses shaped by today's dynamic marketing environment. By linking skepticism to trust formation and information processing, the study provides insights into why consumers question and resist marketing messages, particularly in the context of digital advertising, influencer endorsements, and brand activism. The findings contribute to the theory by highlighting the multidimensional nature of skepticism and its evolution across different contexts over time.

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the growing challenge that consumer skepticism poses for brands seeking to build and maintain trust. The study helps marketers understand how skepticism influences consumers' purchase intentions, particularly in contexts characterised by pervasive and potentially questionable promotional activities. By examining the antecedents, as well as the moderating and mediating variables identified in the co-occurrence network, both academics and practitioners can gain deeper insights into the factors shaping skepticism and their varying effects. This understanding enables marketers to identify the underlying drivers of skepticism and refine their communication strategies to mitigate doubt and positively influence behavioural intentions. To remain effective, companies must prioritise transparency, authenticity, and evidence-based claims. Building credibility through third-party validation, social proof, and ethical practices can help reduce skepticism and foster long-term customer relationships. Addressing consumer skepticism is no longer limited to communication strategies; it has become a key component of maintaining trust and achieving sustained success in today's marketing environment.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Research on consumer skepticism has gained increasing attention over the past few decades. It represents a crucial behavioural construct that helps explain how consumers develop doubt toward products and services, advertising, and various forms of marketing communication. The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by analysing consumer skepticism literature sourced from the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases using bibliometric techniques. This study is distinctive in that it integrates insights from two of the most widely used databases to provide a comprehensive overview of the field. Through bibliometric mapping, the study highlights key aspects of the domain including annual publication trends, prominent journals, leading authors, productive countries, influential articles, and the conceptual structure of consumer skepticism research.

By analysing the publication trend of 527 articles, this study highlights the growing interest among researchers in the domain of consumer skepticism. The performance analysis identifies the leading contributors in the field, including Felix Septianto (author), the *Journal of Business Ethics* (journal), and the United States (country). The findings also indicate that developed countries exert a dominant influence in this area. Therefore, greater collaboration between researchers from developing and developed countries is encouraged to enhance knowledge exchange and benefit from broader intellectual diversity. The results of Bradford's and Lotka's laws further confirm that a relatively small number of sources and authors

contribute disproportionately to the advancement of consumer skepticism research. In terms of conceptual structure, the co-occurrence analysis provides a comprehensive network that facilitates the identification of key research themes, including the influence of consumer skepticism on advertising and product choice, enlightened purchasing through the interplay of trust and skepticism, the emergence of green skepticism, and skepticism modelling in retail and religious contexts. Existing studies have not comprehensively mapped the consumer skepticism literature using such an integrated bibliometric approach. Accordingly, the primary contribution of this study lies in offering a novel and systematic understanding of consumer skepticism and its evolving intellectual structure.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its reliance solely on bibliometric analysis to capture the development of the domain. Future researchers could complement these findings by employing alternative systematic review frameworks, such as TCCM or ADO, to provide deeper theoretical synthesis and richer interpretive insights. Such methodological diversification may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the field and uncover additional research opportunities.

The growing scholarly attention to consumer skepticism also opens up several promising avenues for future research, particularly in relation to advertising, technological advancements, sustainability, and socio-cultural context of consumption. The clusters in this review not only reflect the thematic evolution of previous research but also highlight important theoretical gaps that warrant further systematic exploration.

Under Cluster 1, which examines the effect of consumer skepticism on advertising and product choice, future research can explore the impact of various forms of advertising communication on skeptical responses. As marketing communication increasingly shifts toward personalised and hybrid formats—including influencer marketing, algorithmic advertising, and integrated promotional strategies—the role of message attributes in shaping skepticism becomes increasingly significant. From a theoretical perspective, future research can build on the Persuasion Knowledge Theory and Attribution Theory by investigating how consumers perceive persuasive intent across different communication formats and credibility cues. Researchers may also employ structural equation modelling (SEM) to identify the underlying antecedents of advertising skepticism and to examine the interrelationships among cognitive, emotional, and situational determinants of consumer evaluations. Another promising research direction involves examining whether the degree of skepticism varies across product categories. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and consumer involvement theory, future research could investigate whether high-involvement or credence goods prompt deeper cognitive processing and, consequently, higher levels of skepticism compared to low-involvement products.

Within Cluster 2, which focuses on enlightened purchasing arising from the interplay between trust and skepticism, future research can examine the role of transparency in corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication in shaping corporate trust across different national contexts. Cross-national studies may deepen theoretical understanding by integrating Institutional Theory and Signalling Theory, particularly in explaining transparency as a signal of credibility within environments characterised by varying levels of institutional trust and regulatory strength. Additionally, skepticism may be conceptualised as an intervening psychological construct between CSR communication and trust outcomes. This relationship warrants empirical investigation using mediation or moderated mediation models. Another important research direction involves the use of emerging technologies in marketing communication, such as augmented reality (AR). Future research could explore whether consumer skepticism mediates the effects of AR-based

experiences on trust and engagement outcomes. Such inquiries could extend the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Trust Transfer Theory by incorporating skepticism as a boundary condition that shapes technology-mediated persuasion.

Cluster 3 reflects the rise of green skepticism, a domain characterised by challenges in conceptual integration and limited theoretical consolidation. Future studies should focus on identifying and developing the antecedents of green skepticism by integrating constructs such as environmental concern, perceived greenwashing, risk perception, and information ambiguity into unified frameworks. Given the absence of a single overarching theory to explain green skepticism, scholars may benefit from drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives, including Signalling Theory, Legitimacy Theory, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. These frameworks can help explain how inconsistencies between environmental claims and perceived corporate motives give rise to skepticism. From a methodological standpoint, system-oriented approaches—such as Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) or graph theory—can be employed to capture the hierarchical and interdependent relationships among influencing factors. The adoption of such approaches may contribute theoretically by shifting the focus from linear causal models toward a more holistic, systems-based understanding of skepticism formation in sustainability marketing.

Finally, Cluster 4, which focuses on skepticism modelling in retail and religious contexts, highlights opportunities to examine the socio-psychological factors underlying skeptical behaviour. Future research may explore whether personality traits account for variations in skepticism, drawing on the Big Five Personality Framework to analyse differences in information processing and trust formation among individuals. Religiosity may also serve as an important cultural and moral factor influencing consumer skepticism, particularly through ethical evaluation criteria and value-driven consumption patterns. Examining religiosity within the skepticism literature could extend the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory and cultural consumption models, especially in markets where religion plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour.

More broadly, future studies should adopt interdisciplinary perspectives and multi-method approaches to advance theoretical integration in skepticism research. By linking skepticism with established behavioural, technological and sustainability theories, scholars can develop more comprehensive explanatory frameworks that capture the complexity of modern consumer decision-making and offer practical insights for transparent and trust-based marketing practices.

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