Exploring the multidimensionality of wellbeing in the marketing literature through a bibliometric approach

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Abstract:

Well-being remains one of the most extensively researched topics across various disciplines and application domains. The rapid growth in the number of studies on sustainability underscores the significance of investigating the relationship between these two constructs. Through a bibliometric analysis focused on marketing literature, we have explored the multidimensionality of these two main topics and the thematic areas in which they are examined. Ultimately, two key findings have emerged: (a) the identification of five key clusters within the managerial literature, revealing the domains in which literature is evolving and expanding, increasingly becoming interdisciplinary; (b) the identification of three micro-clusters in the area of research of marketing. The implications of this study are manifold and primarily pertain to three key audiences: (a) managers, who can enhance their understanding of value creation for their customers; (b) policymakers, who can gain valuable insights to formulate policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of their societies and citizens; (c) marketing researchers, who can gain valuable insights into previously unexplored publishing strategies for the future. The existing literature on well-being and sustainability is both extensive and fragmented, and this study aims to provide a clearer perspective on this field.

Keywords: sustainability, wellbeing, bibliometric analysis, marketing

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1. Introduction

Wellbeing represents a complex yet intrinsic human objective (Huppert and Cooper, 2014). Extensively investigated by psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers, it has recently drawn the attention of scholars in the marketing domain. Diener's seminal work (1984) offers an extensive exploration of this multidimensional construct, encompassing both objective and subjective dimensions. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened environmental concerns have stimulated a surge in research interest, elevating its importance within the scientific community. The "Millennial Survey" conducted by Deloitte in 2021 revealed a notable trend where younger generations increasingly prioritize future wellbeing alongside environmental concerns. Marcuse (1998) argues that sustainability should not be viewed as an isolated objective but rather as a constraint shaping the pursuit of other objectives (p. 105). Similarly, O'Brien (2008) introduces the concept of sustainable happiness, defined as the pursuit of happiness through environmentally conscious behaviors and choices. Consequently, research in these domains is experiencing rapid expansion. However, despite the substantial relevance and attention garnered, the trajectory of this research stream remains largely uncharted. This paper endeavors to bridge this gap by conducting an analysis of the historical, current, and anticipated relationship between wellbeing and sustainability within the field of marketing studies, scrutinizing the existing intrinsic interconnections in this realm.

2. Literature review

Wellbeing, a topic of extensive discussion in both ancient and modern studies, became pivotal in multiple fields by the mid-seventeenth century. Despite its long history, the exploration of wellbeing in economics and management is relatively recent and innovative. During the 1970s, research on wellbeing particularly focused on three interconnected themes: (a) its connection to happiness, (b) the creation of novel measurement scales for assessment, and (c) the interplay between its subjective and objective dimensions. However, achieving a precise and comprehensive definition of this construct remains challenging, as noted by Myers and Diener (1995). Furthermore, Diener's 1984 model defines subjective well-being with six personalized dimensions: personal satisfaction, income, demographic variables, behaviors, personality, and biological influences, necessitating a composite evaluation of interacting variables. The foundational definition of well-being encompasses three primary facets: life satisfaction, affective experiences, and eudaimonic well-being (Dolan & White, 2007; Sen, Stiglitz, & Fitoussi, 2009; OECD, 2013). Understanding well-being involves considering various factors, including environmental aspects. Dodds (1997) highlighted sustainability as a collective need with substantial direct and indirect impacts on individuals' lives, proposing four theoretical approaches to well-being: as a mental state, a state of the world, a human capacity, and a prerequisite condition. Recent contributions include the PERMA model by Seligman (2011), consisting of five well-being dimensions: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments (Butler & Kern, 2016), expected to have wide application in marketing (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021). Qasim (2017) proposed a systematic examination of the extensive well-being and sustainability literature, identifying two approaches for studying well-being indicators: Max-Neef's Matrix of human needs and Maslow's hierarchical needs theory. Recognizing that human actions are geared towards the attainment of an elevated state of well-being, it is imperative to align consumption choices with this overarching objective. Over the last few years, wellbeing has seen almost exponential growth in terms of relevance and attention. Since 2010, the most discussed research topics have converged towards cognitive, decision-making, and managerial issues (Cucino et al., 2021). Given the pivotal role played by

customer well-being in the domain of marketing studies, our objective is to enhance comprehension of this construct through a meticulous bibliometric analysis.

3. Methodology

The increasing significance of sustainability and individual well-being is evident in the academic literature, which has witnessed a notable surge in publications dedicated to these specific subjects in recent times. To gain deeper insights into this trend, we conducted an initial exploratory analysis aimed at observing the growing volume of publications related to these themes over recent years. Our sample selection criteria consisted of the following: (a) the inclusion of "well-being" and "sustainability" as keywords, (b) the focus on the "business" and "management" categories for publication search, (c) the exclusion of specific publication years, and (d) the utilization of the Web of Science database as the primary source for our investigation. WoS is a database that includes publications from all the known sciences. This service uses six online databases that offer access to 18,200 scientific journals in various subjects, 60.000 books, and 160.000 conference titles. Furthermore, the Web of Science collects literature starting from the year 1900, thus guaranteeing the analysis of the evolution of scientific production over time. In addition, it provides data from scholarly publications complete with citations. Any query runs on Web of Science (WoS) allows the selection of serval options. In this research the following search terms have been selected to set the scope of our study (Donthu et al, 2021): FIGURE 1

The preliminary analysis results (Figure 1) reveal a rapid growth in the number of publications, particularly since 2019. As Ding et al. (2014) point out, the quantity of publications within a field serves as a reliable indicator of research activity, while the number of citations often reflects publication quality. Given the extensive and diverse literature encompassing various approaches, perspectives, and methodologies, a bibliometric analysis is essential for comprehensive examination. To investigate the expansion of the management literature into well-being and sustainability research, we conducted a bibliometric analysis using the aforementioned selection criteria, resulting in a sample of 500 publications. VOSviewer was employed to analyze our dataset, allowing for the visualization of intricate networks of information in a clear and immediate manner.

4. Finding

4.1 Co-citation analysis

To detect analogies between the various papers and the thematic areas we used the program VOSviewer following methodology and procedure highlighted by Broadus (1987) and Pritchard (1996). We conducted a Co-Citation analysis using the cited sources as the unit of analysis, employing the dataset extracted from WoS. This analysis was predicated on the assumption that articles frequently cited together share thematic similarities, as elucidated by Hjorland (2013). Our analysis of the 500 articles revealed a total of 29,017 cited references. In order to comprehensively grasp the multidisciplinary nature of publications related to well-being and sustainability, we deemed it necessary to assess the breadth of the literature by examining the diversity of journals publishing works in this field. FIGURE 2

Being the number of citations too high, we decided to analyze the most significant ones; we chose to investigate only the ones that were cited more than 25 times. In Figure 5 we show only 161 nodes, corresponding to 161 journals, cited at least 25 times. We detected 8984 links between journals and 5 principal clusters described as below.

The Red Cluster, denoted as "Consumers' Behavior," comprises 45 journals and stands as the most distinct cluster among all. This cluster predominantly includes journals that emphasize research from the perspective of customers. Notably, the largest node within this cluster is represented by the "Journal of Business Research," boasting 159 links and 336 citations in total. Upon closer examination, this cluster primarily delves into topics related to marketing, specifically focusing on customer behavior, the psychological factors influencing consumer

decisions, and the fulfillment of their needs. The cluster with a marketing focus exhibits strong connections with nodes belonging to other clusters. This strength in the relationship among the journals indicates a robust association, meaning that, despite the cluster's distinctiveness, it also holds a central position within studies in other fields, especially those related to ethical and psychological approaches. The Green Cluster, denoted as the "Organizational/managerial approach," comprises a total of 42 items. Among these, the most prominent node is the "Academy of Management Review," boasting a substantial network of 156 links and 404 citations. This cluster is primarily oriented towards the examination of organizational perspectives and the strategic imperatives that businesses must employ to effectively address the ever-evolving demands and desires of their customer base. The Blue Cluster, designated as "Sustainable Production," mirrors the Green Cluster in terms of its size, encompassing 42 items. This cluster scrutinizes the methodologies by which businesses can execute their production processes in the most ecologically sustainable manner conceivable. Notably, it places a specific emphasis on the realms of clean production and efficient waste management. The cluster's most influential source is the "Journal of Cleaner Production," characterized by an extensive web of 158 connections to other academic journals and an impressive 483 citations. The Yellow Cluster, known as the "Ethical approach," constitutes a total of 18 items and occupies the central nexus within the graph. Its central positioning underscores its significance within the dataset, housing journals that exhibit a notably high level of co-citations. Significantly, the "Journal of Business Ethics" stands as the paramount node within this cluster, overshadowing all others in the entire map and boasting the highest citation count. With a remarkable 159 nodes and an impressive tally of 884 citations, it stands as the most cited entity within the analyzed dataset. The central thrust of the Yellow Cluster revolves around journals that probe the ethical frameworks and approaches that management must adopt to foster comprehensive and effective corporate social responsibility. The Purple Cluster, signified as the "Psychological Approach," stands as the smallest cluster in terms of the number of items, encompassing only 14 journals. Its principal focus pertains to the exploration of psychological facets concerning well-being and sustainability in the context of human beings. The "Journal of Management" emerges as the most interlinked item within this cluster, amassing 156 connections and 168 citations, thereby underscoring its prominence in this field of inquiry. The study of these 5 clusters shows, even more, how, even if only in the "business" and "management" categories, the concepts of wellbeing and sustainability are studied with multidisciplinary approaches and how they expand to numerous fields.

4.2 Bibliographic coupling analysis

To broaden the results highlighted in the previous analysis, a bibliographic coupling analysis was conducted, aimed at investigating the relationship between the examined journals, determined by the number of references they share (Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman, 2018). By setting a minimum number of shared references at 3, a total of 41 nodes is obtained, corresponding to 41 journals that are related to each other based on the number of references they share. FIGURE 3

The graph analysis enhances our understanding of the relationships among constructs and variables that constitute well-being and sustainability. Figure 3 identifies four key clusters, partially confirming prior co-citation findings (Figure 2). These clusters highlight dominant literature dimensions: (1) Orange Cluster (Cluster 1): Comprising 8 items, it focuses on environmental concerns and corporate social responsibility; (2)Green Cluster (Cluster 2): With 7 items, it emphasizes organizational strategies for addressing customer needs, particularly sustainability, and their influence on consumer behavior; (3)Pink Cluster (Cluster 3): Encompassing 6 journals, it centers on marketing; (4) Yellow Cluster (Cluster 4): With 4 items, it consistently explores diverse themes united by an ethical dimension.

An in-depth analysis of Cluster 3 (depicted in pink) reveals several notable observations,

contributing to a focused understanding of marketing studies. The objective of this examination is to discern the trajectory of research endeavors pertaining to well-being and sustainability within the context of marketing research and to contemplate the contextual ramifications for managerial practices. Within the pink cluster, three prominent micro-clusters come to the forefront. The first micro-cluster directs its attention towards international policies and actions that can be implemented to enhance individuals' well-being without exacerbating environmental concerns; instead, it explores strategies for leveraging environmental conditions to augment consumers' well-being. The second micro-cluster places a substantial emphasis on the domain of tourism, particularly in light of the post-COVID-19 era, necessitating a reevaluation of key aspects within this sphere. Sustainable tourism has emerged as a focal point of numerous studies, attracting increasing interest from both scholars and practitioners alike. The final micro-cluster delves into the intricate realm of consumer behavior and its intricate interplay with these thematic domains. It scrutinizes the choices made by consumers throughout the entire customer decision journey, along with the psychological implications for consumers and the managerial implications for marketers. This research trend underscores the pivotal role of well-being and sustainability in shaping consumers' perspectives. Notably, this cluster also unveils a specialized research strand dedicated to the topic of eco-labeling and its potential to deter consumers when used deceitfully. The prevalence of greenwashing has eroded consumer trust in product labels, prompting them to seek reassurance from experts or third-party sources to verify the accuracy of the information presented on labels. The findings from the Bibliographic Coupling Analysis corroborate the earlier co-citation results, with one exception observed in the case of the violet cluster that represents the psychological approach. Unlike the delineation as a distinct cluster in co-citation analysis, the Bibliographic Coupling Analysis indicates its integration within the broader thematic context of the other clusters. This integration is attributed to its prior peripheral position in the co-citation analysis.

4.3 Co-Occurrence network

The final analysis conducted focuses on the examination of the keywords employed within the papers under investigation. Figure 4 displays 50 nodes, corresponding to the 50 most frequently used keywords. All the keywords shown have met the threshold of appearing at least 10 times in the number of occurrences. FIGURE 4

In Figure 4, a discernible dense circular structure is observed, prominently centralized and associated with the keyword "Sustainability." This keyword emerges as the most frequently utilized term within the sample of scrutinized articles, featuring 48 links to other keywords, encompassing nearly all of the present nodes. The total number of occurrences for "Sustainability" amounts to 204. Notably, the other pivotal keywords represent the central nodes of the 5 clusters. The first cluster (red) stands as the largest and encompasses both "wellbeing" and "sustainability," intricately linking them to consumer behavior and facets concerning happiness and values. The green cluster, once again, holds a specific focus on corporate social responsibility and maintains profound interconnections with all other clusters. Indeed, "sustainable development" exhibits a total of 39 links. The third cluster (blue) accentuates the significance of management and the models adopted for sustainable development. The yellow cluster concentrates on prospective technologies to enhance business performance, showcasing a substantial innovative influence. Despite being the least densely populated, the last cluster (purple), constituted solely by the keyword "perspective," reveals a noteworthy integration, boasting a total of 29 links to other keywords. This suggests a robust integration and high relevance. The analysis of this cluster uncovers an aspect tied to the psychological approach, thus affirming the findings elucidated by the co-citation analysis. The aforementioned 5 clusters mirror the outcomes derived from previous analyses, affirming the interdisciplinary nature of studies examining wellbeing and sustainability within the domain of marketing.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

The growing emphasis on well-being and sustainability topics is also reflected in the number of scientific publications produced in recent years. The literature is extensive and encompasses various perspectives. The bibliometric analysis provides an opportunity to explore the directions and research domains that the literature on well-being and sustainability is expanding into and influencing. Both the Bibliographic Coupling Analysis and the Co-occurrence Network confirm the results shown by the Co-citation Analysis, highlighting five main clusters, with one being more peripheral than the others. Each cluster reflects the diverse disciplines in which the concepts of well-being and sustainability are manifested. Our analysis identify five cluster over the literature explored highlighting how emphasis has been posed in: (1) consumers' behavior, delving into the psychological aspects related to consumer attitudes and the motivations behind their purchasing decisions; (2) managerial/organizational approach, exploring how managers can effectively navigate the changes required and devise management strategies to enhance consumer well-being; (3) sustainable production, with an emphasis on clean production and waste management, addressing practical and implementable policies to address current environmental challenges; (4) ethical issues, both in business and beyond. A sub-dimension pertains to corporate social responsibility from ethical, social, and sustainable perspectives; (5) psychological approach, in some aspects closely intertwined with the field of study and application of marketing, highlights the significance of investigating well-being and sustainability to enhance the mental and emotional health of consumers. In a subsequent qualitative analysis of the three micro-clusters that have formed within the marketing cluster (cluster 1), three main topics can be observed around which recent research trends are focusing.

1. Public Policy Approach: The primary goal of this approach is to address sustainability by mitigating disparities and placing sustainability at the heart of public policies (Shultz et al., 2022). The objective is to leverage prevailing challenges and transform them into genuine opportunities for collective growth through steadfast policies, effective marketing, and a shift in consumption policies related to health crises, pollution, global warming, and various forms of societal inequities.

2. The second cluster predominantly focuses on the tourism sector, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating a critical reevaluation of specific key domains within this sector. This cluster examines how sustainability practices are perceived and subsequently implemented in the realm of tourism. Numerous barriers to the adoption of environmentally protective strategies are underscored, with a significant impediment being the lack of trust that tourism operators place in government policies. Notably, the intersection of this micro-cluster with the preceding one seemingly signifies a continuum. In the first cluster, effective marketing strategies were identified as an objective of public policies to communicate the value of intended actions to citizens. In this second cluster, barriers within the tourism sector obstructing the implementation of sustainable policies are elucidated. The primary obstacles encompass low trust in long-term government strategies, the paucity of clear and comprehensive guidelines, and a skeptical outlook toward government policy, particularly at the regional level.

3. Customer Decision Journey (CDJ) and the Psychological Approach: The final identified research trend pertains to the psychological aspect influencing consumer purchasing decisions. By embracing a dynamic perspective, scholars utilizing the customer decision journey framework delve into diverse facets of consumer well-being at different stages of the consumption process. Consequently, they propose various moderating variables contingent upon the specific stage of the customer decision journey.

The results of this clusters represent a new highway for marketing scholars. Examining the effects of measures and policy instruments designed to enhance individuals' well-being has the

potential to stimulate the development of new entrepreneurial initiatives, foster innovative pathways for the creation of new products, while simultaneously encouraging established market players to reevaluate their value proposition in a similar direction.

A second, yet not fully explored, domain pertains to the investigation of barriers to the adoption of policies aimed at enhancing well-being through a more sustainable approach. Lastly, embracing a dynamic analytical dimension, as advocated by the Customer Decision Journey (CDJ), could lead to the identification of comprehensive solutions and action proposals for well-being, as well as the identification of variables capable of amplifying the effects of specific measures and, thereby, individual well-being.

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Appendix:

Figure 1. Number of articles published from 1993 to 2022 on Wellbeing and Sustainability topics in the "Business" and "Management" categories
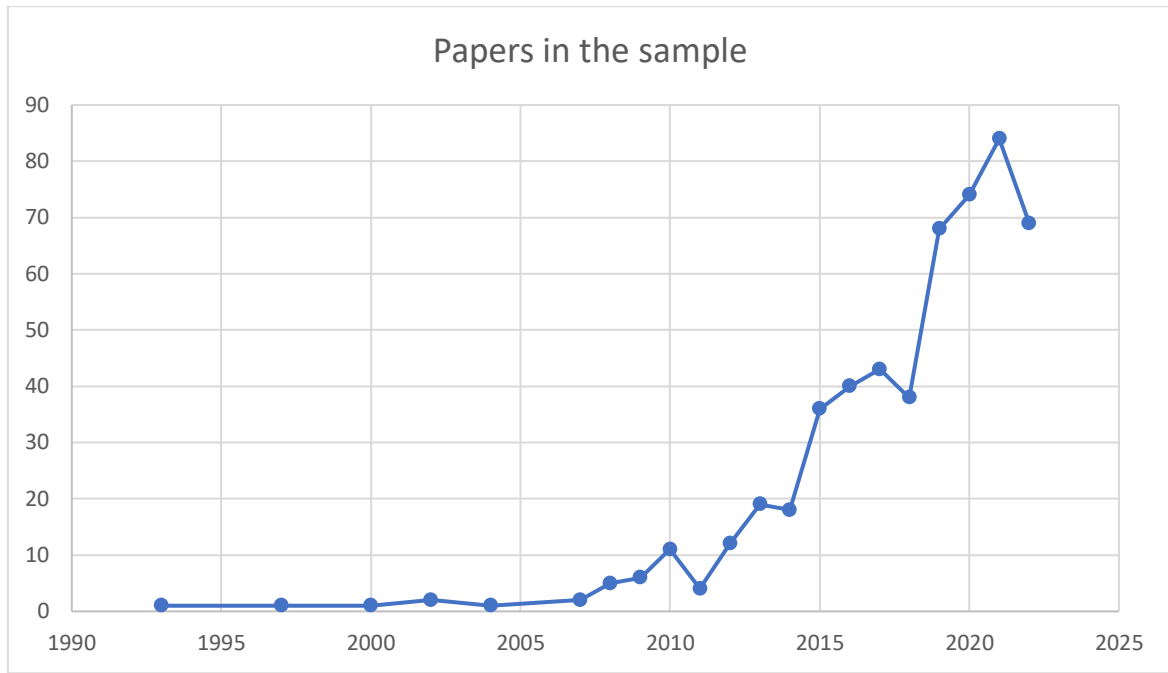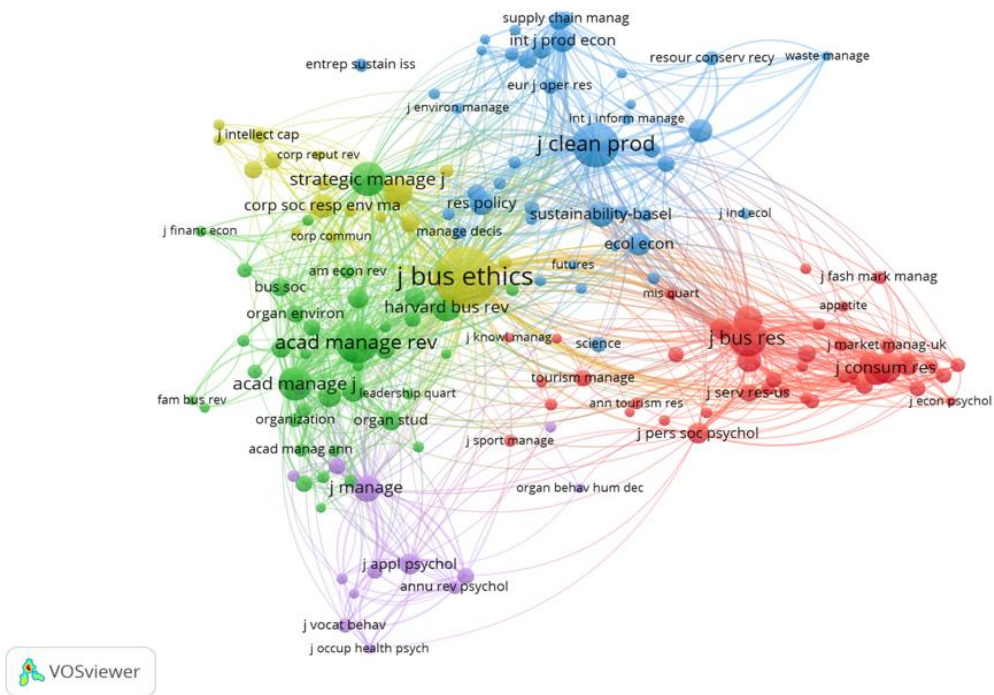
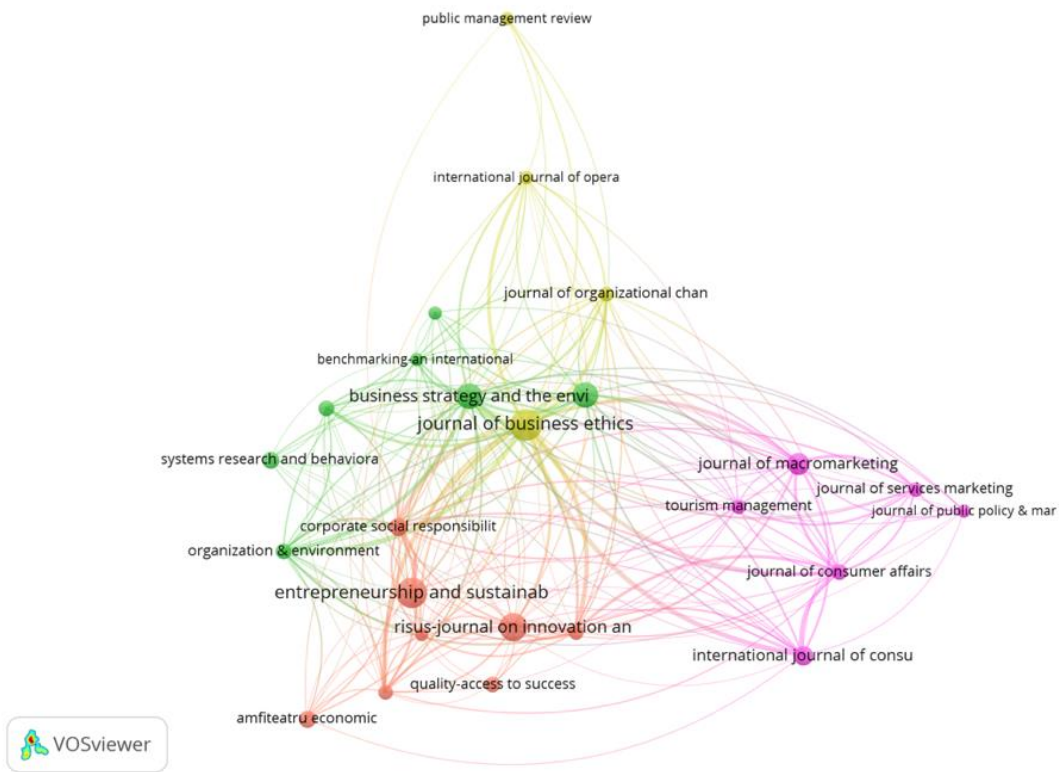Figure 2. Main Clusters

Figure 3: Bibliographic coupling analysis

Figure 4: Co-Occurrence network delle keywords