A Bibliometric Analysis of Meaningful Marketing: A Systematic Review of Global Trends, Leading Contributors, and Thematic Evolution

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Abstract

In an era of socio-cultural change, ecological complexity, and evolving consumer expectations, traditional transactional marketing models are increasingly viewed as ethically and emotionally limited. Meaningful marketing has emerged in response, emphasizing value co-creation through ethical engagement, emotional resonance, and social responsibility. Despite growing interest over the past two decades, the field remains fragmented, lacking a consolidated intellectual structure, shared vocabulary, and comprehensive bibliometric mapping. This study presents a systematic bibliometric analysis of 104 Scopus-indexed publications on meaningful marketing from 2005 to 2025, using Bibliometrix, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace to examine citation patterns, conceptual clusters, international collaborations, and thematic evolution. The findings reveal a marked rise in publications after 2015, reflecting increasing scholarly and practical recognition. Research spans ethical branding, purpose-driven innovation, sustainability, and brand authenticity, yet lacks theoretical cohesion. The United States, Australia, India, and the United Kingdom lead in contributions, while international collaboration remains limited. The field's development follows three phases: emergence (2005–2010), consolidation (2011–2018), and rapid growth (2019–2024). This study maps the intellectual structure of meaningful marketing, highlights key knowledge gaps, and offers strategic directions for future research. It underscores the need for stronger international collaboration, interdisciplinary integration, and cohesive theoretical development to establish meaningful marketing as a mature research domain.

Keywords: Meaningful Marketing, Systematic Review, Bibliometric Analysis, Marketing

1. Introduction

Amid social change, environmental uncertainty, and rising consumer awareness, traditional marketing focused on short-term transactions is seen as ethically and emotionally limited. As consumers seek purpose and brands aim for lasting trust, meaningful marketing has emerged as an alternative, emphasizing value co-creation through socially grounded, emotionally engaging, and ethically informed interactions [1, 2]. Meaningful marketing is more than adding social values to existing models. It represents a deeper shift, integrating insights from philosophy, sociology, psychology, and economics [3, 4]. Rather than focusing solely on profit, it adopts a human-centered approach where thought, emotion, intention, and ethical behavior support individual and societal well-being [4]. This aligns with value-based marketing linking customer experience, social responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and authentic branding [5, 6]. Despite growing interest, research remains fragmented. Studies explore brand–cause fit [2], meaning in luxury consumption [7], and purpose-driven innovation in hospitality [8], but there is no comprehensive overview of patterns, key themes, influential works, or collaboration networks. This limits theory development and practical application in sectors like tourism [5], agriculture [9, 10], and luxury branding [7].

Bibliometric evidence from 2005 to 2025 shows steady growth and broad geographic participation, led by the United States, Australia, India, and the United Kingdom. Yet literature remains uneven, and cross-institutional and international collaboration is limited [11]. While journals such as Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Product and Brand Management, and Journal of Macromarketing support the field, a full comparison of authors, institutions, journals, and themes is lacking.

This study addresses these gaps through a systematic bibliometric analysis of research published between 2005 and 2025, examining the field's development, geographic distribution, and key scholarly contributions. It explores how research output in meaningful marketing has evolved, identifies emerging and shifting research trends over time, determines which countries have contributed most significantly to the field, and analyzes how publications are distributed globally across the two decades. By answering these questions, the study maps the intellectual structure of meaningful marketing and provides direction for future research and practice aimed at fostering ethical, human-centered, and sustainable marketing within an increasingly values-driven global marketplace.

2. Literature Review

Meaningful marketing has emerged as a human-centered alternative to traditional approaches focused on short-term economic gain. It emphasizes co-creating value through social, emotional, and cognitive interactions, grounded in personal and collective meaning, contrasting with transactional models that overlook deeper consumer engagement [1, 2]. Kheiri [4] frames meaningful marketing as value creation through socially legitimate power expressed in thought, emotion, intention, and action, aimed at improving individual and societal well-being. This aligns with purpose-driven branding, ethical consumption, and value-based innovation [2, 12]. Unlike spiritual or strictly ethical marketing, meaningful marketing integrates insights from psychology, sociology, philosophy, and strategy into a practical framework [3, 4]. Rising consumer demand for meaning reflects awareness beyond economic needs. Across contexts, consumers seek products and services that support identity, self-expression, and emotional connection [6, 11]. Even functional features can add emotional and ethical value within a meaning-making framework [4]. Social responsibility is central, guiding practical action in market relationships. Aligning organizational purpose with consumer values strengthens loyalty, advocacy, and long-term performance [5, 8, 13, 14]. Meaningful marketing encourages empathy, transparency, and shared purpose, reflecting cooperative systems where mutual benefit supports sustainability [10, 15], making marketing a tool for social impact as well as business performance [16]. Empirical studies support this approach, showing that aligning brand purpose with consumer identity enhances authenticity and engagement [2, 7, 17, 18]. Tools like the Balanced Scorecard help translate meaningful marketing into practice by linking purpose to financial, customer, internal, and learning goals [18]. Overall, meaningful marketing balances profit with ethical action, social responsibility, and consumer meaning, bridging philosophy and sociology with applied marketing and organizational ethics [3]. As consumers grow more aware and markets more complex, it offers a practical, ethical, human-focused approach for researchers and practitioners.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses bibliometric analysis, a quantitative method to examine academic output, track trends, and map collaborations [19]. A broad literature review identified keyword variants related to meaningful marketing and consumer behavior. A structured search using Boolean operators was conducted in Scopus on November 6, 2025 (15 Aban 1404), chosen for its coverage of high-quality journals and structured metadata [20]. The search returned 154 records; after filtering for subject area (Management and Business), language (English), and period (2000–2025), 104 documents remained (Table 1). Analysis used R Studio with Bibliometrix (v4.2), VOSviewer, CiteSpace, Gephi, BibExcel, and HistCite [21]. Bibliometrix handled statistics and visual outputs like citation trends and thematic evolution [22]. VOSviewer mapped co-word networks, co-citation clusters, and conceptual structures [23]. This approach supported co-word analysis, network analysis, and trend analysis to identify core concepts, relationships, and research shifts. Overall, this integrated methodology clarifies the field's structure and evolution, highlights gaps, and guides future theoretical and practical development in meaningful marketing.

Table 1
Search Procedures and Inclusion Criteria of the Bibliometric Dataset.

Items	Description
Data Source	Scopus (Elsevier Database)
Keywords	"Meaningful Marketing", "Purpose-Driven Marketing", "Marketing with Meaning", "Brand Purpose", "Consumer Purpose", "Purposeful Consumption", "Value-Based Marketing", "Socially Responsible Marketing", "Ethical Marketing"
Search Fields	Title, Abstract, Keywords
Search Strategy	("Meaningful Marketing" OR "Purpose-Driven Marketing" OR "Marketing with Meaning" OR "Brand Purpose" OR "Consumer Purpose" OR "Purposeful Consumption" OR "Value-Based Marketing" OR "Socially Responsible Marketing" OR "Ethical Marketing" AND "Consumer Behavior" OR "Brand Loyalty" OR "Customer Engagement" OR "Sustainability" OR "Corporate Social Responsibility" OR "Brand Trust") AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (EXCLUDE(SUBJAREA, "COMP") OR EXCLUDE(SUBJAREA, "ENVI")) AND (EXCLUDE(EXACTKEYWORD, "Marketing")) AND (EXCLUDE(LANGUAGE, "Romanian") OR EXCLUDE(LANGUAGE, "Russian") OR EXCLUDE(LANGUAGE, "Spanish") OR EXCLUDE(LANGUAGE, "Ukrainian"))
Document Types	Journal articles and review papers
Time Span	2000 – 2025
Language	English
Exclusion Filters	Documents in subject areas of Computer Science (COMP) and Environmental Science (ENVI); Non-English documents in Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian
Documents Retrieved	154
Selected for Final Analysis	104 (English-language papers in Management and Business fields)

4. Results

Bibliometric analysis shows that meaningful marketing research has steadily grown over the past two decades, particularly after 2015, highlighting its emergence as a recognized area (see Table 2). The field has expanded in output, citations, and collaboration, though international co-authorship remains limited. Most studies are recent and moderately cited. Keyword analysis reveals a wide range of topics, including ethical branding, consumer behavior, brand authenticity, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement, reflecting both richness and fragmentation. Document types are diverse, indicating exploratory and interdisciplinary approaches.

Table 2

Overview of Core Bibliometric Indicators in the Field of Meaningful Marketing (2005–2024).

Category	Indicator	Result
Data Overview	Timeframe	2005–2024
	Number of Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	50
	Number of Documents	84
	Annual Growth Rate (%)	17.67%
	Average Document Age (Years)	5.36
	Average Citations per Document	13.27
	Total References Used	649
Content Analysis	Keywords Plus (ID)	57
	Author Keywords (DE)	277
Author Metrics	Total Unique Authors	232
Collaboration Indicators	Average Authors per Document	4.36
	Percentage of International Collaboration	17.86%
Document Types	Journal Articles	47
	Books	11
	Book Chapters	19
	Conference Papers	2
	Notes	1
	Review Articles	4

Research development follows three temporal stages. During 2005–2010, publications were sparse and mostly exploratory, defining meaningful marketing and distinguishing it from related concepts. From 2011–2018, the field consolidated, with steady growth, framework building, and connections to ethics, consumer behavior, and branding. After 2019, growth accelerated sharply, reaching its peak in 2024, paralleling global interest in ethics, sustainability, social impact, and corporate responsibility. This trajectory suggests the field is maturing, though total output remains limited. Expanded international and cross-field collaboration and stronger methodological approaches could deepen insights and practical impact.

Geographically, the United States leads with 40 publications, followed by Australia (18), India (14), and the United Kingdom (13). Other active contributors include Turkey, Spain, South Africa, Greece, Nigeria, and Portugal (see Table 3). This distribution reflects shared interest in ethical branding, social responsibility, and consumer well-being, though local economic and cultural factors shape research focus. Collaboration across countries remains low, suggesting room to strengthen global and comparative perspectives.

Table 3

Top 10 Countries by Number of Publications in Meaningful Marketing (2005–2024).

Country	Number of Publications
United States (USA)	40
Australia	18
India	14
United Kingdom (UK)	13
Turkey	10
Spain	9
South Africa	7
Greece	6
Nigeria	5
Portugal	5

5 .Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides a bibliometric review of meaningful marketing research from 2005 to 2025, examining its growth, key contributors, regional distribution, and dominant ideas. Using performance analysis and science mapping, it outlines the field's structure and trends. Publications have risen sharply, especially after 2015, reflecting interest in ethics, social responsibility, and value-based branding. Although output is still small at 84 studies, the field is expanding and linking with marketing and

management. Core concepts like ethical engagement, purpose-driven brands, and human-centered value creation are gaining attention. Research is uneven geographically, led by the United States, followed by Australia, India, and the United Kingdom, with international collaboration low at 17.86%, suggesting most work reflects national perspectives. Greater cross-country cooperation could strengthen theory and adaptability. Thematic analysis shows diversity and fragmentation. Topics such as brand purpose, ethical branding, and stakeholder engagement are common, but shared theory and standard methods are lacking. This highlights opportunities for clearer concepts, stronger theory, and comparative studies across industries and cultures. Methodologically, combining citation analysis with network tools like Bibliometrix, VOSviewer, and CiteSpace effectively reveals trends and gaps. Limitations include reliance on English-language Scopus articles and researcher-coded keywords. Future work could address this with qualitative reviews, expert input, or machine learning approaches. Overall, meaningful marketing is moving from a niche area toward a more established field. Its growth depends on broader data, stronger interdisciplinary theory, and clearer links to practice. With more global collaboration and theory-driven research, it can better advance ethical branding, responsible innovation, and consumer well-being.

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