

From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics: A Bibliometric Review of the Evolution of Marketing Communication and Consumer Trust

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to trace the conceptual and thematic evolution in marketing communication and trust through a bibliometric analysis of 103 Scopus-indexed articles from 1992 to 2025. Through visual mapping using VOSviewer software, the study identifies six main clusters that illustrate research directions: consumer attitudes and behavioral trust formation; digital marketing communication and engagement; brand relationship and loyalty building; academic foundations in marketing communication; ethical and corporate communication strategies; and advertising effectiveness and message credibility. In addition to mapping the conceptual evolution, this study analyzes research trends over the past three decades to reveal a shift in scientific focus from consumer perception to integrating ethical values and social responsibility into marketing communication strategies. The analysis results indicate that research development has shifted from focusing on consumer perception to integrating ethical values and social responsibility into marketing communication strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the landscape of global marketing communication, forcing companies to adapt to various new communication tools and channels that are reshaping marketing strategies (Ziółkowska, 2021). This phenomenon shows that digital marketing strategies are no longer just promotional tools but rather a means to build trust and a company's ethical reputation in the public's eyes. The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the global business landscape, affecting how companies interact with consumers and market their products and services (Farah et al., 2024).

One of the main impacts of the digital revolution is the emergence of social media as a strategic platform for building relationships, trust, and consumer loyalty, while also strengthening brand image in the digital era (Pamungkas et al., 2024). This phenomenon underscores that consumer trust has now become a central element in modern marketing communication, grounded in ethical values and transparent information. By incorporating ethical principles into their communication strategies, businesses can enhance their brand reputation, build customer trust, and contribute to society's overall improvement (Chong & Patwa, 2023).

In a competitive market filled with digital information, consumers now evaluate not only the quality of products but also the integrity and ethics of a company's communication. Brand trust has become a key factor influencing purchasing decisions amidst rapidly changing consumer behavior (Yusuf et al., 2024). In a highly competitive business environment, every company must be able to anticipate increasingly intense competition by developing effective marketing communication strategies to attract consumers' attention (Muhammad Reza Pahlevi & Aminah Swarnawati, 2024).

Although previous research has explained the relationship between marketing communication and consumer trust, most studies remain limited to practical contexts and have not integrated the dimensions of consumer perception, marketing communication, and corporate ethics into a single, comprehensive conceptual framework (Lee & Jin, 2019; Yusuf et al., 2024). Another limitation lies in the dominance of a descriptive quantitative approach, without longitudinal or bibliometric analysis capable of tracing conceptual evolution comprehensively (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Therefore, this study offers novelty by using a bibliometric approach to map the relationship between marketing communication and consumer trust from an ethical and social responsibility perspective (Chong & Patwa, 2023; van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This approach makes a theoretical contribution by showing how marketing communication and trust have evolved from marketing instruments into ethical mechanisms that shape public perceptions of corporate integrity, while also laying the foundation for a new, globally developed paradigm of ethical, trust-based marketing communication.

To address this gap, this study conducts a bibliometric analysis of articles indexed in Scopus and published between 1992 and 2025 to explore trends, dominant themes, and theoretical contributions in producing a conceptual map

that explains how marketing communication has evolved into an ethical instrument in building corporate trust and legitimacy in the eyes of consumers. Using tools such as VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), this study maps relationships among keywords, identifies emerging clusters, and highlights under-researched areas, especially in developing countries.

This study aims to map, analyze, and understand the scientific development of customer review research in the digital era, focusing on the shift from mere evaluation to understanding consumer preferences. The study also seeks to identify dominant themes and theoretical contributions that have emerged globally. By examining the structure and development of existing literature, it is hoped to foster the emergence of a new paradigm in the field of marketing communication, namely 'ethical trust-based marketing communication,' which places honesty and moral values as the primary foundation of the relationship between companies and consumers in the digital era.

To achieve this goal and address the identified research gaps, this study is guided by three main Research Questions (RQs) that bridge the gap between descriptive bibliometric findings and their theoretical and practical implications.

RQs1: How has the conceptual evolution of research on Marketing Communication and Consumer Trust progressed over the past three decades (1992–2025), and what new paradigms have emerged from this shift?

RQs2: What are the fundamental thematic clusters that form the intellectual structure of Marketing Communication and Consumer Trust research, and how do these clusters indicate a shift towards ethical dimensions?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Digital marketing communication refers to a company's efforts to convey promotional messages through digital channels to influence consumer behavior. Marketing communication is a means by which companies inform, persuade, and remind consumers, both directly and indirectly, about the products and brands they sell (Kotler & Keller, n.d.). Digital marketing communication is the activity of delivering messages to potential consumers through various digital media to influence their knowledge, attitudes, and actions towards a product (Sutrisno et al., 2023). In a modern context, ethical issues in the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) play an important role in building the brand's relationship with consumers (Lee & Jin, 2019).

Consumer trust in digital marketing is the customer's confidence in a company's integrity, competence, and reliability when interacting online. Consumer trust involves the "willingness of the company to rely on business partners" based on competence, integrity, honesty, and company policies (Pahlevi & Swarnawati, 2024). Trust in digital transactions involves believing that a company is honest, technically competent, and committed to consumer needs. For example, integrity is demonstrated through honesty and keeping promises, competence relates to the ability to meet needs, and benevolence involves caring about the customer's interests. High consumer trust affects loyalty and long-term repurchase intentions (Jauhari & Nuzil, 2025).

Research shows a positive relationship between effective digital marketing communication strategies and consumer trust levels. Transparent, consistent, and interactive communication strengthens perceptions of a company's integrity and competence. Digital marketing communication strategies that focus on enhancing vendor reputation and website quality, ease of online store access, value-added content, and maximizing word-of-mouth (WOM) promotions successfully build customer trust (Ilyas et al., 2023).

The study mentioned that 'digital marketing communication strategies begin by strengthening vendor reputation, website quality, accessibility, added value, and leveraging word-of-mouth' to build trust. Other empirical research confirms the positive effect of digital marketing on trust. (Yunus et al., 2022) found that the Digital Marketing variable has a significant positive relationship with Online Trust, meaning that consumers become more trusting when digital strategies are implemented effectively. In other words, the more effective communication through digital media (such as informative content, positive eWOM, and responsive service), the higher the consumers' trust in the brand. This trust then fosters loyalty, recommendations, and long-term improvements in marketing performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive bibliometric approach to map trends, developments, and key themes in the scientific literature on marketing communication and trust, which has evolved from a mere marketing instrument into an ethical mechanism that shapes public perceptions of social responsibility and corporate integrity. The bibliometric method is chosen for its strength in providing a systematic and comprehensive overview of the production of scientific knowledge over time, as well as in revealing the intellectual structure and evolving discourse within a research domain (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015)

To ensure a rigorous data collection process, this study adopts the four-step procedure proposed by Page et al. (2021), which includes identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, relevant keywords were entered into the Scopus database using the search string: "Marketing communication" and "trust". This search initially yielded 283 publications. The screening stage involved selecting only the keywords Marketing Communications, Trust, and Marketing, resulting in 104 documents that met the criteria.

The eligibility stage focused on language refinement, retaining only articles published in English to maintain analysis consistency. One document was removed, keeping the total number of publications at 103. These publications were then included in the final analysis. Bibliometric data were analyzed using VOSviewer software, which allows for visual mapping of co-authorship networks, co-occurring keywords, and thematic clusters. The resulting maps provide insights into the field's intellectual structure, highlighting dominant research themes and potential gaps for further study.

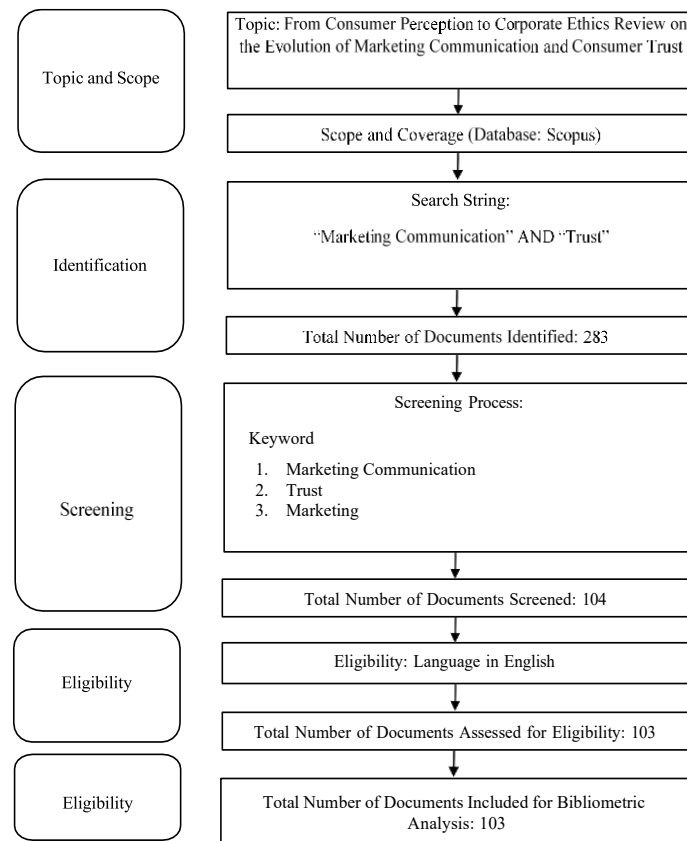


Figure 1. Data Collection Process

The stages of data analysis and selection are arranged based on analysis guidelines to ensure the validity and replicability of research results. Each stage reflects a rigorous selection of publications on marketing communication and consumer trust, ensuring that the data produced provides a comprehensive picture of the scientific evolution in this field. Thus, the conceptual map formed from this process serves as a foundation for understanding the direction of research development and the integration of ethical values in global marketing communication (Donthu et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance Analysis

Based on data retrieved from the Scopus database using the keyword combination "Marketing Communication" AND "Trust," a total of 103 relevant articles published between 1992 and 2025 were identified after the eligibility screening process.

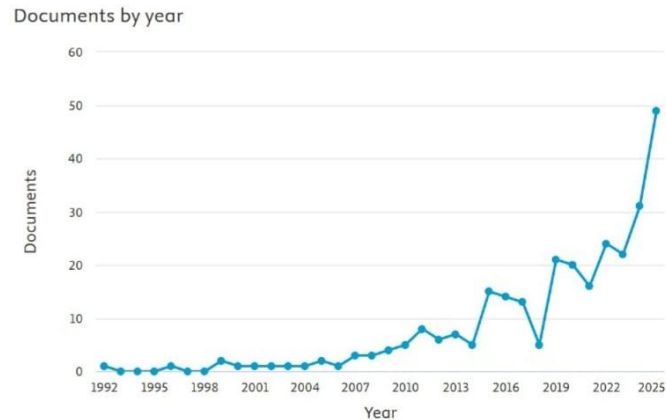


Figure 2. Publications Trends

Analysis shows an increasing trend in publications on Marketing Communication and Trust from 1992 to 2025. In the early period (1992–2010), research was still relatively limited and primarily conceptual, reflecting the initial stage of exploring the relationship between marketing communication and consumer trust. However, since 2016, there has been a significant surge, especially after 2020, indicating growing academic attention to issues of digital trust, corporate ethics, and transparency in marketing communication. This trend demonstrates a paradigm shift from a traditional focus on consumer perception to a broader, more strategic approach: ethical, trust-based marketing communication, where trust and ethical values serve as the foundation for building a company's reputation and legitimacy in the digital transformation era.

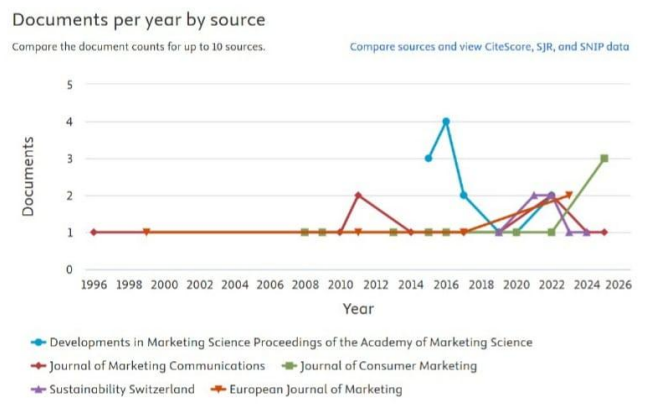


Figure 3. Journal Source Trends

The analysis illustrates the distribution of publications on Marketing Communication and Trust across journal sources from 1996 to 2025. Early research was still sparse and limited to journals such as the Journal of Marketing Communications and the Journal of Consumer Marketing, which focused on brand communication and consumer behavior aspects. However, since 2015 onwards, there has been a significant increase in publications in journals with an ethical and sustainability orientation, such as Sustainability (Switzerland) and the European Journal of Marketing. This pattern indicates a shift in research direction from traditional promotional approaches toward integrating ethical values,

sustainability, and social responsibility into marketing communication. Thus, these results reinforce the findings in the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics* that the relationship between marketing communication and consumer trust is now evolving towards an ethical trust-based marketing communication paradigm that emphasizes corporate transparency and credibility in the digital era.

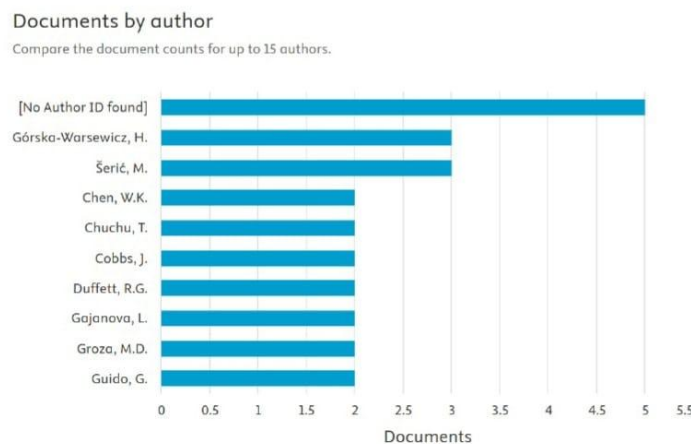


Figure 4. Documents by Author

This analysis shows the distribution of publications by author on Marketing Communication and Trust during the research period. It is observed that research contributions are dispersed, with the number of publications per author being relatively balanced, where authors such as Górska-Warsewicz, Šerić, and Chen are the main contributors with around two to three publications. This pattern reflects that studies on marketing communication and consumer trust constitute a collaborative, multidisciplinary field, involving many researchers from diverse backgrounds and countries. The dominance of several names focused on ethics, loyalty, and brand relationships indicates that research is no longer solely promotion-oriented, but also emphasizes transparency and corporate social responsibility. Thus, this graph supports the findings of the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics*, which states that global research on marketing communication and trust is evolving toward integrating ethics and trust as core pillars of modern marketing communication.

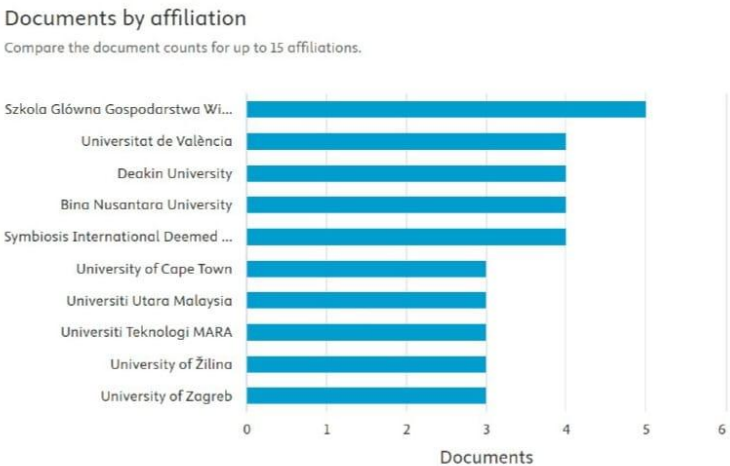


Figure 5. Top Contributing Institutions in Publications

The graph shows the distribution of publications by institutional affiliation in research on Marketing Communication and Trust. The most significant contribution appears to come from Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Warszawie (SGGW) in Poland, with five publications, followed by Universitat de València, Deakin University, and Bina Nusantara University, each with four publications. The involvement of universities from Europe, Asia, and Australia indicates that issues of marketing communication and consumer trust are a global concern. The dominance of institutions such as Deakin and Binus underscores the growing relevance of this topic in digital marketing and corporate ethics across both developing and developed countries. This pattern of collaboration reinforces the idea presented in the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics* that research on marketing communication and trust is evolving toward integrating ethical perspectives, social responsibility, and sustainability as the foundation for building consumer trust globally.

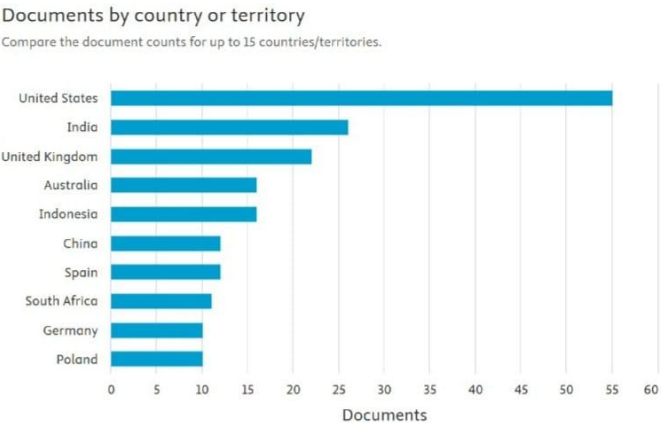


Figure 6. Publication Distribution by Country

The chart shows the distribution of publications by country on the topic of Marketing Communication and Trust. The data indicate that the United States leads in publications, followed by India, the United Kingdom, and Australia, while countries such as Indonesia, China, and Spain are also making increasing contributions. The dominance of developed countries reflects the high attention to

issues of consumer trust, corporate ethics, and transparency in digital marketing communication. However, the emergence of significant contributions from developing countries such as Indonesia and India indicates the expanding relevance of this research in the context of more dynamic and digital markets. Overall, this graph confirms the direction of the findings in the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics: global research on marketing communication and trust* has evolved from consumer behavior studies to strengthen ethical values and social responsibility as the foundation of trust across various cultural and economic contexts.

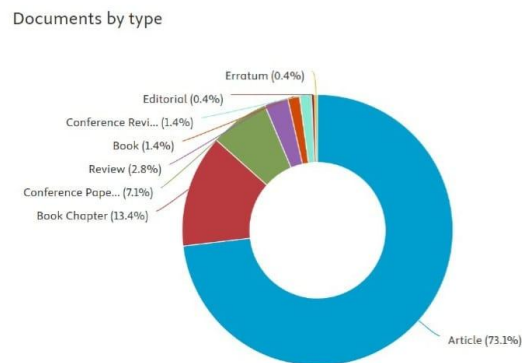


Figure 7. Document Type Distribution in Publications

The chart shows the distribution of research document types related to Marketing Communication and Trust. The majority of publications are scientific articles (73.1%), indicating that this field has strongly developed in the academic realm and is widely published in reputable journals. Meanwhile, contributions from book chapters (13.4%) and conference papers (7.1%) indicate that this topic is also an important theme in scientific discussions and cross-disciplinary theory development. The small number of reviews, books, and editorials suggests that synthesis research and conceptual reviews remain limited, thereby opening opportunities for more in-depth bibliometric studies and systematic analyses. Overall, this graph reinforces the findings in the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics* that research on marketing communication and consumer trust has reached academic maturity and continues to evolve toward an ethical and strategic understanding of how to build corporate reputation in the digital era.

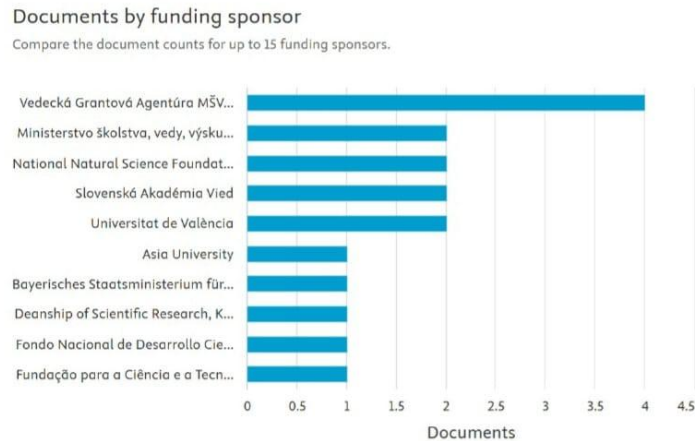


Figure 8. Funding Institutions in Research

This graph shows the distribution of research funding for Marketing Communication and Trust by sponsoring institution. It can be seen that Vedecká Grantová Agentúra MŠV is the institution with the highest funding contribution, followed by Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej republiky, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, and Universitat de València. The diversity of supporting institutions across Europe and Asia indicates that this topic has high global relevance, especially in strengthening trust and ethics in digital marketing communication. Relatively even funding support also reflects the growing academic awareness of the importance of research based on moral values, social responsibility, and corporate transparency. Thus, this graph reinforces the conclusion of the journal *From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics* that research on marketing communication and trust is now developing into a strategic field attracting broad attention in advancing the paradigm of ethical trust-based marketing communication in the global era.

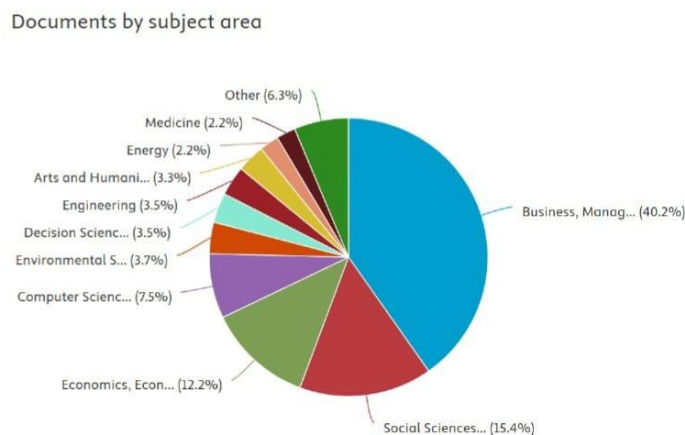


Figure 9. Distribution of Publications by Field of Study

Based on the graph of relevant fields of study related to the topic of Marketing Communication and Consumer Trust in the journal titled "From Consumer Perception to Corporate Ethics: A Bibliometric Review on the Evolution of Marketing Communication and Consumer Trust." According to the diagram, the field of Business, Management, and Accounting dominates with 40.2%,

followed by Social Sciences (15.4%) and Economics and Econometrics (12.2%). This suggests that issues of marketing communication and consumer trust are most frequently discussed in managerial and economic contexts, particularly in relation to corporate strategies for building reputation and corporate ethics. This dominance also indicates that trust is not only a psychological construct but also a strategic factor in creating long-term relationships between brands and consumers. Meanwhile, contributions from other fields, such as Computer Science, Decision Science, and Environmental Science, expand interdisciplinary perspectives that link consumer trust with digital innovation and corporate social responsibility.

Science Mapping

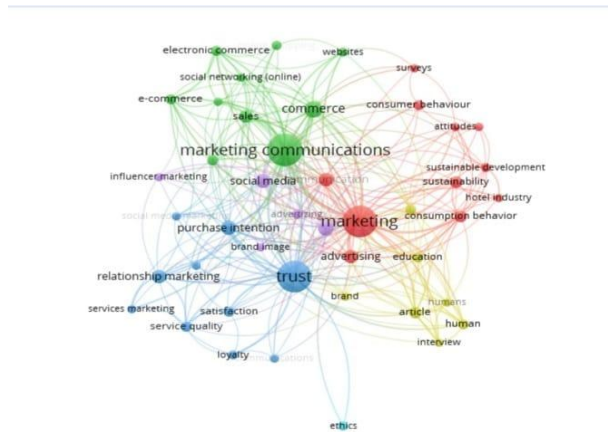


Figure 10. Bibliometric Network Visualization

Co-occurrence analysis of keywords using VOSviewer reveals a complex yet well-organized thematic structure in the literature on customer experience. The visualization identifies six main clusters, each representing a different but complementary research direction.

Cluster 1 – Consumer Attitudes and Behavioral Trust Formation

This cluster focuses on how consumer perceptions and attitudes are formed through marketing messages and how this process creates initial trust in a brand or product.

Cluster 2 – Digital Marketing Communication and Engagement

Describing the shift in marketing communication towards the digital space that emphasizes consumer engagement and the building of trust based on online interactions.

Cluster 3 – Brand Relationship and Loyalty Building

Focus on the role of brand communication in building emotional connections, loyalty, and long-term trust between the brand and consumers.

Cluster 4 – Academic and Theoretical Foundations in Marketing Communication

This cluster represents the scientific and methodological foundation of marketing communication research as well as the direction of scientific development in the study of consumer trust.

Cluster 5 – Ethical and Corporate Communication Strategies

Focusing on how ethical values and corporate social responsibility become strategic dimensions in building brand trust in the eyes of the public.

Cluster 6 – Advertising Effectiveness and Message Credibility

Explaining the relationship between the effectiveness of advertising messages and the level of consumer trust in the media, content, and message sources.

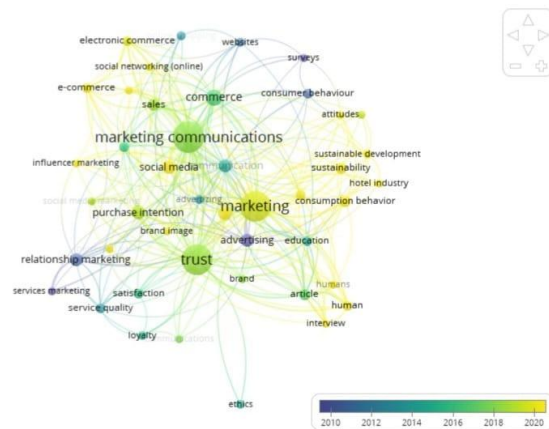


Figure 11. Visualisasi Overlay Bibliometrik

The image above shows a bibliometric map with a time dimension that illustrates the evolution of research on marketing communication and trust from 2010 to 2020. The early period (2010–2014) corresponds to initial-stage research, while the subsequent period (2015–2020) represents more recent studies. It is evident that marketing communications play a central role in research, closely linked to topics such as commerce, social media, and consumer behavior, and that this field is rapidly developing alongside digital transformation. On the other hand, trust forms an important cluster connected to relationship marketing, loyalty, and service quality, indicating a strong focus on building trust as a key factor in maintaining customer relationships. The development pattern from the early period to the most recent shows that research has moved from fundamental issues to topics such as sustainability and ethics, indicating a shift in research direction towards corporate ethics and sustainability. Overall, this map reflects that the evolution of marketing communication and trust research has shifted from focusing on consumer perception to integrating ethical values and corporate social responsibility.

approach that emphasizes honesty, transparency, and message consistency in all digital marketing activities. Strengthening communication strategies based on ethical values and trust is expected to enhance consumer loyalty while reinforcing brand reputation amid increasingly transparent global competition. Furthermore, academics need to develop new conceptual models that integrate consumer trust, digital communication, and corporate ethics to address marketing challenges in the era of technological transformation and a sustainable economy.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research can empirically explore the application of ethical, trust-based marketing communication across various industrial and cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to understand the dynamics of consumer trust over the long term and its impact on brand loyalty and reputation. Additionally, future research can expand the scope by integrating big data and machine learning-based analytical approaches to map consumer sentiment and perceptions of corporate ethical communication in digital media. Thus, further studies will enrich the academic literature and provide strategic guidance for companies in building ethical, sustainable, and trust-oriented marketing communication.

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