Broadening marketing's goal. Exploring how wellbeing and sustainability are framing the marketing studies using a bibliometric approach

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Abstract

This study analyzes the relationship between the concept of wellbeing and sustainability as it emerges from marketing studies. Wellbeing is a multidimensional concept, and its relevance increases its possible applications thus making it one of the most interesting topics for scholars and practitioners. The purpose is to understand the evolution of marketing studies on the theme of wellbeing and sustainability and its multidisciplinarity. The analysis of the international scientific literature, published in the last 25 years, allows us to identify possible future research trends. This work uses a bibliometric analysis to provide an overview of this concept in marketing research.

1. Introduction

The study of consumer motivation has always been a primary goal in marketing research. It is no surprise, then, that the most comprehensive and profound motivation for human behavior—wellbeing—has also entered the study of marketing, having been investigated in fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, medicine, and philosophy. Wellbeing is a multidimensional construct embracing multiple disciplines, encompassing both an objective – i.e., functional facet of value – as well as a subjective dimension (Diener, 1984). It is often regarded as the most important KPI for economic and social development, driving current and next generations, and requiring a radical overhaul of traditional performance measurement methods (OECD, 2013). Wellbeing has attracted even more attention in the recent past, thanks to climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to globalization and competition that ask for innovative strategies to survive, anticipate customer needs, and fully satisfy them. Particularly Millennials and Generation Z pay special attention to wellbeing in terms of health, unemployment, and climate change (Deloitte, 2021). For them, sustainability is a top priority that fundamentally affects their lifestyles, consumption choices, and wellbeing. Further, the relationship between sustainability and wellbeing has gained growing importance with the Brundtland Commission's report in 1987 (Simmonds & Gazley, 2021). Marcuse (1998) states that "sustainability is not a goal; it is a constraint on the achievement of other goals" (p. 105), while O'Brien (2008) theorizes sustainable happiness, i.e. the "pursuit of happiness" as a goal to achieve, through environmentally friendly behaviors, choices, and actions. The concept of sustainability, in its social, environmental, and economic dimensions, represents a central topic for many, including policymakers, organizations, and individuals. It has generated significant attention from numerous disciplines, especially naturalistic and social ones (Bhaskar et al., 2010). In essence, they aim to influence behaviors already widely adopted and harmful to the environment and to prevent them in the future. In this context, wellbeing is understood in a broad sense and considers both objective aspects and subjective aspects. Since it is largely multidisciplinary, its study has to be broad and comprehensive, especially in an effort to predict future directions. Despite a high level of relevance and attention, the next evolution of this stream of research is still largely unknown. This paper aims at filling this gap, by analyzing past, current, and future relationships of wellbeing with sustainability in marketing studies. Specifically, we investigate the main scientific dimensions of sustainable wellbeing, with a focus on business and management disciplines, to predict future research directions. The rest of the paper is structured into five sections. Section 2 presents the analysis of the existing marketing literature related to sustainable wellbeing. Section 3 describes the details of the bibliometric analysis performed. In section 4 we discuss the results and the key findings. Section 5 presents the main implications and the emerging future trends expected in this field.

2. Wellbeing in marketing studies

Wellbeing is one of the most discussed topics in ancient and modern studies, but its study in economics and management is quite innovative. In the '70s its study has been especially devoted to three interconnected themes: (a) its relationships with happiness; (b) the development of innovative measurement scales for its assessment; and (c) the relationships between its subjective and objective dimensions. Clarifying the construct and defining it precisely is not easy. Wellbeing is a broader concept than happiness; the latter, in fact, is only a small part of it (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 1993). Indeed, wellbeing can be defined as the "good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences" (OECD, 2013: 10). Happiness instead is currently regarded as an experience of fulfillment, i.e., a state of contentment, related to the positive area of affect (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

Wellbeing is not only emotional; it is cognitive as well. Such a feature is nowadays considered the basis of the nature of wellbeing, as a composite of objective and subjective factors. Starting

from Campbell (1976), two dimensions of wellbeing emerged, one related to the more subjective assessment of one's life and the second one more related to quantitative and objective variables. In sum, everyone evaluates their life conditions differently. Wellbeing derives from subjective and objective determinants, which contribute toward creating individual quality of life, life evaluations, hedonic experiences, and priorities (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). Objective factors include income, good health, supportive marriage, good social relationships, freedom, democracy, lack of tragedy, and so forth (Diener & Lucas, 1999; Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Most psychologists note that objective factors account only for 15% of the variance of happiness and life satisfaction, thus indicating the need to look for other possible subjective factors (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The evaluation of the objective factors is typically related to a benchmark such as other members of the community (Buss, 2000; Van Praag, Frijters, & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2003), and it gradually adapts to the changing situations. Further, the relationships between objective factors such as income and happiness might not be linear. Several economists have also started to explore subjective wellbeing, investigating it as a broader feeling of self-satisfaction than what is implied by the narrow textbook definition of "utility." Over time subjective wellbeing has evolved and is strongly correlated with some quantifiable variables. Diener (1984) identifies six variables that influence individual subjective wellbeing, namely (1) personal satisfaction, (2) income, (3) demographic variables, (4) behaviors and habits, (5) personality, and (6) biological influences. Non-optimal health conditions, even mental health, negatively affect individuals' wellbeing. Such an evolution has gone hand in hand with a revision and advancement of the measurement scales. The multidimensional nature of wellbeing does not allow its assessment by way of a single indicator, but it asks for a combination of different and interacting variables. Towards that end, the starting point is the wellbeing definition. It encompasses three main aspects (Dolan & White, 2007; OECD, 2013): (a) Satisfaction with Life, i.e. the cognitive assessment of a person's life or specific more focused aspects of it through previous memories (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). (b) Affect, i.e. a person's feelings or emotional states at a given point in time (Diener, 1984). (c) Eudaimonia, i.e. the individual sense of purpose and meaning in life, gathering the extent to which individuals realize their potential (Deci & Ryan, 2006).

More recently, a key contribution is the one known as the PERMA model: Seligman (2011) proposes a model made by five dimensions, namely Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments (Butler & Kern, 2016). This model is expected to be largely employed in marketing (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021).

Moreover, wellbeing involves numerous factors, and it is impossible to fully analyze it without taking into consideration the environmental aspect and the implications it has on individuals. More than twenty-five years ago, Dodds (1997) proposed sustainability as a collective need, with strong and long-term direct and indirect impacts on individuals' life. The more immediate direct effects concern the health conditions of human beings, while the indirect refers to mood, guilt, and concern for the future. Wellbeing can be generated only by analyzing it in a broader, more complex, and three-dimensional framework. According to the author, the most encouraging approaches to the study of wellbeing are those that identify and respond to universal human needs. An attempt to study the vast existing literature on wellbeing and sustainability in a systematic way was carried out by Qasim (2017), who succeeded in identifying two different strands of approaches to the study of wellbeing's indicators. The first method used by many scholars applied Max-Neef's Matrix of human needs for the benchmark of indicators. While the second group of scholars applied Maslow's hierarchical needs theory to identify new indicators or selecting the ones to use. The theme of wellbeing is receiving increasing attention and its relevance is twofold. Firstly, considering the ever-increasing importance of the topic and the numerous research fields it involves, it is highly relevant from an academic point of view. Secondly, it can be said that it also holds importance in the

contextual dimension, considering the growing interest in satisfying consumer needs. From the point of view that the purpose of every human action is guided by the achievement of a higher level of wellbeing, there is also the need to consider consumption decisions as oriented in the same direction. In this framework, a more than satisfactory customer experience is transformed, for the customer, into real subjective wellbeing, giving a perception of serenity to the consumer who uses that specific good or service. Since the increase in customer wellbeing is mandatory for marketing, we aim to better understand its construct by way of a bibliometric approach.

3. Bibliometric Analysis

Studies on sustainability, climate change, and the impact they have on individuals are relatively recent thus boosting the attention of the scientific community. The same path can be found with the construct of wellbeing, as a widely studied subject, but not analyzed entirely in its multidisciplinarity. Indeed, wellbeing and the specific focus on the concept of sustainability represent an evergreen and constantly evolving topic. Recently there has been an increase in the interest of scholars in trying to better understand these topics and the interplay between those variables. To investigate the trend, a preliminary analysis has been conducted on a total sample of 535 articles identified by the following criteria: (a) wellbeing and sustainability as keywords, (b) 1993-2022 as the period, (c) "Business" and "Management" as the categories of investigated scientific journals, and (d) the Web of Science as the publisher-independent global citation database. Figure 1 shows an emerging increase in attention starting in 2019.

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

These results show how wellbeing and sustainability have experienced a moment of growing importance in the most varied fields and disciplines. The relationship between the two topics is largely reflected in numerous aspects of the daily life of individuals. As Ding et al. (2014) explained, the number of publications occurring in a given field is a reliable and widely used indicator of research activity in that field. While the number of citations would measure the "quality" of publications in many scientometric studies. Over the years, different approaches have been used, an evolution of these themes has emerged, and several topics, categories, points of view, and methods of analysis have been investigated. They all define a large scope of the domain, asking for a bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al, 2021).

3.1. Methodology

A bibliometric analysis (BA) has been run to investigate the fields. This methodology unfolds an objective analysis of the literature, highlighting the main authors, the themes, and the underlying relationships (Ferreira, 2018). The bibliometric approach involves a statistical analysis of scientific articles related to certain topics, it utilizes quantitative techniques on bibliometric data (Broadus, 1987; Pritchard, 1996). The output of such analysis also helps to identify future research trends in a specific research field.

3.2. Data Collection

To collect data we used Web of Science (WoS) an online indexing platform that allows access to databases of multidisciplinary scientific publications. 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, WoS 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 WoS allows the selection of several options. In this research the following search terms have been selected to set the scope of our study (Donthu et al, 2021): Keywords: "Wellbeing" and "Sustainability" have been used as keywords; Years of publication: no specific criteria have been used; Categories of documents: only articles published in English have been selected to limit the analysis to the internationally relevant unit of analysis; Research areas: "Management" and "Business" have been selected as research areas. The final sample of the investigated publications includes a total of 500 scientific articles.

3.3. Data Analysis

Our dataset has been analyzed by using Bibliometrix, a package available on R. It allows the study of the selected publications by employing graphic maps and tables (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Cucino et al., 2021). Subsequently, we used VOSviewer to finalize the research.

We will present our findings with a series of bibliometric networks, also called science maps, because they have been often used by scholars since the wide spread of bibliometric studies because of the shared idea that the visualization of large networks is very useful and reliable to analyze a broad variety of networks.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive analysis

A total sample of 500 documents has been analyzed, articulated as follows: 441 scientific articles, 17 book chapters, 35 Early Access, and 7 Proceedings papers. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the analyzed documents by way of the user-friendly R interface, which are the description of the sample, the document contents, the authors' collaboration, and the document types.

Table 1. Key features of the investigated documents

Description		Authors of single-authored documents	74
Documents	500	Authors of multi-authored documents	1331
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	235	**Authors' collaboration**	
Period	1993-2022	Single-authored documents	77
References	29017	Documents per Author	0.356
Average years from publication	5.45	Authors per Document	2.81
Average citations per documents	20.24	Co-Authors per Documents	2.93
Average citations per year per doc	3.067	Collaboration Index	3.15
Document contents		**Document types**	
Keywords Plus (ID)	1131	Article	441
Author's Keywords (DE)	1881	Book Chapter	17
AUTHORS		Early Access	35
Authors	1405	Proceedings Paper	7
Author Appearances	1467		

4.2. Thematic Analysis

We employed the keywords of each of the 500 documents included in our sample as a way to understand the topics' evolution over time. The thematic evolution map provides us with a first grasp of the evolution of this stream of research. It presents the thematic evolution of the various emerging concepts by using 2020 as the cutting year. It also provides important inputs for a better understanding of the possible future evolution of the research stream and trends.

Figure 3. Thematic evolution from 1993 to 2022 (cutting year 2020)
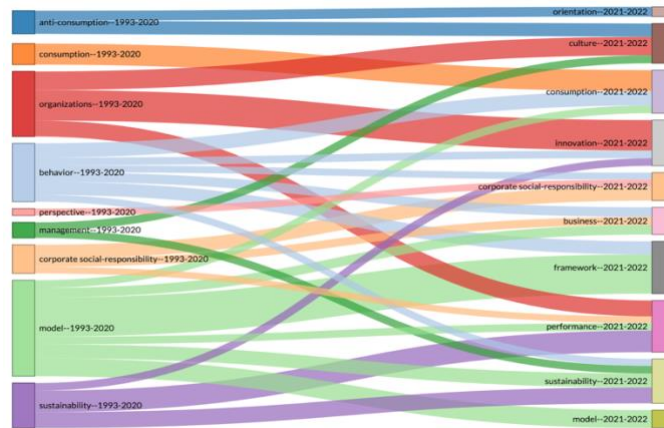
More in detail, Figure 3 shows the evolution and the contexts through which studies on sustainability and wellbeing have been developed. The idea behind this representation is to see how certain thematic areas evolve and change over time. A representation of the situation before and after the moment of cutting and division into two phases is obtained. It shows on the left the main thematic areas that have had an important impact on the scientific literature from 1993 to 2020, and on the right, there are those belonging to the years 2021 and 2022. A closer look at each of them is needed. Let's take "sustainability". The term has been studied from 1993 to 2020, but in the last two years, it has been used in more than one context, thus broadening both its meaning and domain. Indeed, since 2020 this topic has remained partly true to itself, but has also crossed its thematic boundaries and has entered and evolved into topics related to "innovation" and "performance". The thematic evolution of the topics therefore clearly shows increasing evolution and specialization of the literature on wellbeing and sustainability, showing the multidisciplinarity of the thematics.

4.3. Bibliographic coupling analysis

Wellbeing, undoubtedly, has received in the recent past growing attention both from academics and practitioners fuelling a new cultural change. The interest in wellbeing is often paired with climate change. To better analyze such a correlation, we carried out an analysis aimed at exploring the literature on this duo. Specifically, we have run a Factorial Analysis on the keywords of the documents, using the Multiple Correspondence Analysis method. Findings show three main clusters corresponding to three macro-areas of study (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Main Clusters
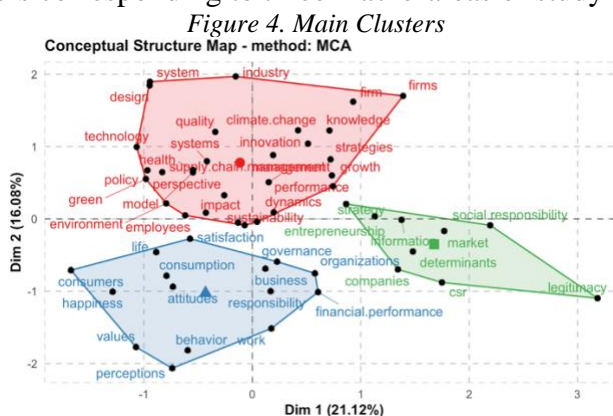
The cluster "organizational approach" (Cluster 1, in red) includes documents that focus on the analysis of issues related to wellbeing and sustainability, maintaining a corporate and managerial approach. This group of keywords highlights a line of academic research that deeply studies how to apply more sustainable strategies to the corporate world, and it also brings together concepts and problems related to the environmental issue in macroeconomic terms. Innovation and technology play a fundamental role in this cluster. Green policies are new and yet not fully explored concepts and that is why it is interesting to better learn how to measure

these policies' impact. Within the group, 29 main keywords are identified. The document that has contributed most to the composition of the cluster is a paper by Murray, Skene, and Haynes (2017) which extensively explores the concept of circular economy and its most diverse applications. The second macro-area emerging from our analysis is called "consumer approach" (cluster 2, in blue). It is more focused on issues related to consumers, such as their lifestyles, perceptions, emotions, and purchasing behaviors. The total number of identified keywords is 15. This group, therefore, links the purely managerial dimension with the personal and emotional dimension of individuals, touching on topics such as happiness, responsibility, and consumer values. The last cluster, called "ethical approach", is characterized by the green colour. It presents a total of 9 keywords that share a managerial and organizational perspective with a focus on the environmental issue, specifically on the ethical aspect. They all propose corporate social responsibility as an opportunity to do business effectively and efficiently. Responsibility toward others and the communities to which one belongs acts as a driving force for the implementation of more ethical and socially attentive strategies from businesses and politics. The most weighted article in this cluster was written by Castka and Corbett (2016) and explores the reactions that individuals present in correspondence with exposure to eco-labels. The resistance customers experience on trusting brands that claim to sell sustainable products is studied; the authors clarify the need to reassure their customers by providing greater guarantees on the correctness and truthfulness of the pieces of information they provide.

4.4 Co-citations analysis

To detect analogies between the various papers and the thematic areas they study we used the program VOSviewer[1], which is already been applied by numerous recent bibliometric studies to name a few: Certomà et. Al. (2014), Hellsten and Leydesdorff (2015), Cucino et al. (2021). We performed a Co-Citation analysis with the cited sources as unit of analysis on the dataset we extrapolated from WoS, starting from the assumption that articles that are often cited together are also thematically similar (Hjorland, 2013). The analysis of the 500 articles disclosed a total of 29017 cited references.

Figure 5. Main Clusters
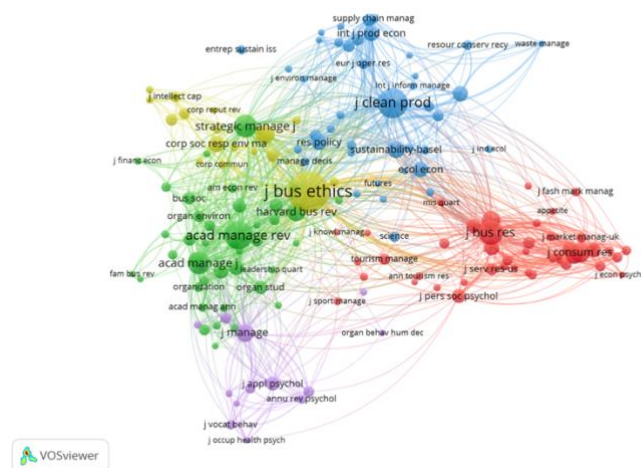
This vast amount of citations made it necessary to select and analyze the most significant ones, so we showed on Figure 5 only 161 nodes, corresponding to 161 journals, which were cited at least 25 times. Each node represents a journal, and the distance between them represents their similarity, the smaller the distance between two journals the higher the number of co-citations. 8984 links between journals and 5 principal clusters were identified.

Red Cluster ("Consumers' Behavior"): The first cluster, composed by 45 journals, is the most distant from the others. It is composed of journals with a focus on marketing research from a

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[1] See van Eck and Waltman, 2010 for technical details of the VOSviewer program and the mathematical algorithms it applies

customer's point of view. The biggest node of this cluster is represented by the "Journal of Business Research" with 159 links and 336 citations in total. The red cluster explores primarily the aspects related to marketing which are connected to the customer behavior and the psychological aspects behind consumers' decisions and the satisfaction of their needs.

Green Cluster ("Organizational/managerial approach"): The second identified cluster is composed of 42 items. The biggest node is the "Academy of Management Review" with a total of 156 links and 404 citations. The focus of this cluster is the organizational approach and the strategies businesses have to implement to meet the customers' needs and wants.

Blue Cluster ("Sustainable Production"): The third cluster has the same dimension as the green one, 42 items in total. It analyzes the ways in which a business can manage the production phase in the most sustainable way possible. In fact, it has a focus on clean production and waste management. The most important source in the blue cluster is the "Journal of Cleaner Production" with 158 links with other journals and 483 citations.

Yellow Cluster ("Etichal approach"): The yellow cluster presents 18 items in total and it is the most central one in the graph. Its central position shows that it contains journals with a very high number of co-citation. In fact, its most important node, the"Journal of Business Ethics", is the bigger of the entire map and has the higher number of citations. With its 159 nodes, it has 884 citations, the highest number in the analized dataset. The focus of the yellow cluster are journals that analyze the ethical approaches that the management should implement to achieve a full and effective corporate social responsibility.

Purple Cluster ("Psychological Approach"): The last cluster is also the smallest one in terms of number of items, it contains only 14 journals. It focuses on everything that studies the psychological aspects of wellbeing and sustainability on human beings. The most linked item is the "Journal of Management" with 156 connection and 168 citations.

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.

5. Discussions e conclusions

Our research shows how wellbeing and sustainability studies have evolved over time starting from simple constructs into multidimensional ones. The bibliometric analysis highlights three key perspectives when studying wellbeing and sustainability: (a) the circular economy, its interaction with productive processes, and its relationship with wellbeing (Murray, Skene, & Haynes, 2017); (b) the emotional dimension of consumers, by analyzing thoughts and feelings (Akhtar et al, 2017), and highlighting their impact on sustainability; (c) Sustainability, including the environmental dimension, corporate social responsibility, and ethics. The managerial studies on wellbeing and sustainability especially concern the implementation of effective and efficient business strategies. On the contrary, those more related to psychological disciplines and marketing put the consumers at the center of their attention, including their consumption experiences as a driver of consumer wellbeing. We address the future evolution of this stream of research by running a co-citation analysis and a thematic evolution analysis of marketing studies. Towards that end, the co-citation network allows for the identification of the main journals in the fields, and combined with the study of the evolution of the topics, provides a clear vision of the research trends in recent years regarding wellbeing and sustainability. It is interesting to analyze the evolution that the research fields have undergone; in particular, recently, there has been a growing interest in specific dimensions. Compared to older documents in the Web of Science sample, modern ones present more wellbeing measurement options. The need to quantify, assess, and measure wellbeing has recently emerged as crucial for individuals, companies, and policymakers. In fact, recently there has been a shift in research boundaries: what was once a part of the analysis of the model of the business has turned into a more precise study of company performance. This direction, undertaken by various disciplines

in their scientific research, was soon transformed into the desire of companies to use more precise and punctual measurement tools to better understand the relationship between consumer wellbeing and sustainability. In the next future, these research areas on measurement scales will be studied with growing focus and will be used by companies, in order to improve their competitive performance. Towards that end, a high level of brand differentiation cannot be postponed, along with a customer-centric approach. The organizational aspects of cultural centricity are crucial with wellbeing and sustainability being top priorities for competitive companies. Scholars have to study such demanding and challenging areas, whose investments are typically risky and long-term. The scientific community, especially in restless periods like the ones we are experiencing, has started to take these elements into consideration and analyze them on a continuous base to fully understand the conditions in which one has to operate. A final research direction that has emerged for the near future lies in brand communication strategies. Indeed, this is one of the major concerns highlighted by consumers is the greenwashing phenomenon. Individuals, given the tendency to falsely sponsor sustainable products, as some businesses do, have developed a reluctance to buy and trust the pieces of information they get from points of contract controlled by the specific brand. In this sense, the literature will have to evolve to try to understand how to reassure consumers and how to be able to regain their lost trust. As with any other study, also our findings are affected by limitations. Specifically, although intended, our scope is limited to managerial and business studies. Since wellbeing and sustainability are multidisciplinary, any limit in the scope might lead to partial results. Second, our findings emerge from a sample of 500 documents, while it might be possible that an extension of the analysis over time might lead to new results. Thus, future studies should extend the scope of our analysis. The path toward wellbeing and sustainability might be numerous, but the goal is set for the future of our society and our scientific community.

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