

Transforming Grocery Retail for Sustainable Futures: A Hybrid Review of Industry-SDG Linkages

Discipline: Commerce

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Abstract

The retail grocery industry is essential to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because it shapes sustainable patterns of production and consumption. The present study conducts a thorough analysis to investigate the changing relationship between the grocery sector and sustainability through a systematic literature review process. By tracking the historical development and significant turning points, the study illustrates how sustainable practices have been incorporated into grocery operations. A bibliometric study reveals significant research gaps and indicates dominant research trends, providing information about the little-known aspects of sustainability in the retail grocery trade. Hence, the study adopts a hybrid perspective incorporating bibliometric analysis and a framework (4W) approach to assess the linkage between grocery retail practices and the SDGs, bridging theoretical frameworks with practical implications. The 4W framework analysis explores the grocery industry's role in SDG 13 "Climate Action" and reveal lack of attention regarding to industry's contributions to mitigate climate change. The bibliometric findings indicate that corporate social responsibility, digital transformation, stakeholder engagement, and responsible management are the significant drivers of sustainability in the grocery sector. However, some research gaps exist, such as policy alignment, the role of AI and IoT in sustainability, and the stakeholder engagement models. This review underscores the need for interdisciplinary research and collaborative strategies to enhance the sector's contributions toward sustainable futures. By coordinating grocery retail practices with the SDGs, this study provides a ground plan for policymakers, academicians and practitioners with a path for promoting a sustainable retail grocery ecosystem.

Keywords: Grocery Retail, Sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Climate Action.

Introduction

A significant obstacle in the business ecosystem in executing the sustainable development agenda is transforming the business mindset and perception towards novel sustainability practices, technology, and business models (Rosati & Faria, 2019; Sachs, 2012; Welford, 1998). Increased knowledge and comprehension of the connections between society, business, environment, social reality, technology and sustainable development are necessary in order to advance a sustainable future (Welford, 1998). Competitive opportunities and challenges, regulatory compliance and pressure from internal and external stakeholders may drive the adoption of more sustainable practices, technologies and business models (Belal, 2002; Elliot, 2013). Organisations must work with their external and internal stakeholders to perform ethically and sustainably in order to be acceptable in the society in which they operate (Freeman, 1994).

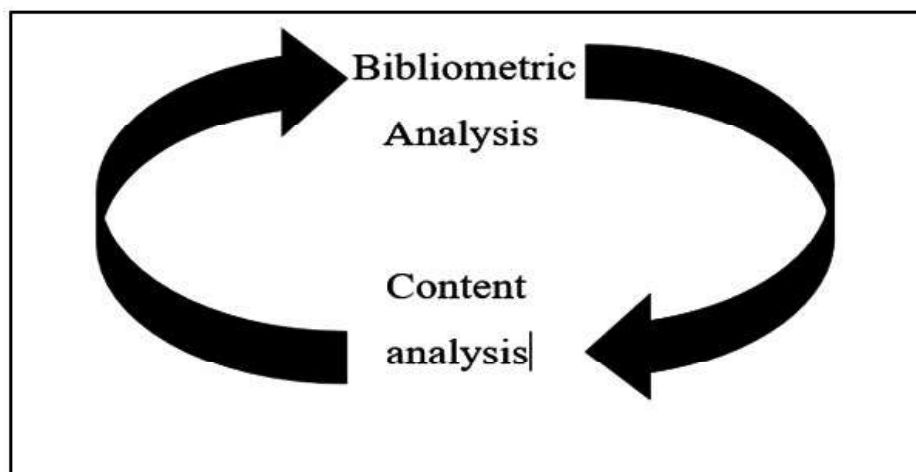
In retail, sustainability is becoming a norm rather than a trend. Retailers are novel in ways that incorporate their operations with environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals in 2025, driven by shifting customer expectations and the urgency of climate action on a global scale. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN mention that every industry must act to combat climate change, minimise waste, and guarantee moral work standards. The retail industry is no exception. Adopting sustainability by retailers is about more than simply complying with regulations; it is also about satisfying the demands of today's conscientious customer, lessening their influence on the environment, and developing a robust business plan (Richard Hartshorne, 2025). From environmental preservation and social justice to economic development, the 17 SDGs offer a thorough framework for companies to match their operations with global goals (UN, 2015).



Source: <https://expleo.com/global/en/insights/blog/sdg-retail-green-innovation/>

Climate action (SDG-13) is the most significant goal as it pushes the retail grocery industry to implement sustainable business practices to minimise the environmental impact. Climate change is a great threat to the industry. It alters the supply chain networks, agricultural production and consumer behaviour, underscoring the need for preventive actions. To tackle these obstacles, grocery stores are already implementing low-carbon logistical systems, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and incorporating sustainable energy solutions (Jones et al., 2016).

Despite the abundance of grocery reviews, none attempted to examine the linkage between the grocery sector and sustainability through a systematic literature review. Therefore, this study aims to use a hybrid review incorporating the framework review technique along with a bibliometric analysis (Lim et al., 2021) to explore the transition of the retail grocery industry by analysing the nexus between the industry and sustainable Development Goals. This review paper is structured as follows;



Source: Researcher's work

Research methods and procedure

There are various kinds of systematic reviews in the literature (Paul & Criado, 2020): structured review that examines the most widely used theories, notions and methodologies (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019; Paul & Singh, 2017); reviews on framework or model development (Lim et al., 2021; Paul & Mas, 2020); meta-analysis reviews (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Rana & Paul; Justin, 2019); theory-based reviews (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019); framework-based reviews (Paul & Benito, 2018); hybrid reviews (Azeez & Aboobaker, 2024; Lim et al., 2021); and bibliometric reviews (Corrall et al., 2013; De Bakker et al., 2005; Donthu et al.,

2020; D Tunger et al., 2018; Massimo & Corodo, 2022; Subramanyam, 1982). The present study adopts a hybrid review incorporating both the bibliometric and framework-based (4Ws) review (Mamun et al., 2021; Paul & Criado, 2020) to offer the most thorough analysis of the nexus between the grocery retail industry and sustainable development goals. The bibliometric review technique is used because of its scientific ability to analyse and visualise the relationship between the research actors or constituents (authors, keywords and sources). The 4Ws framework strategy was also used since it enriches and broadens our current knowledge and draws comparisons between the existing literature based on the content and theories used, methodologies employed, and sectors and nations covered.

Numerous applied bibliometrics for content analysis and library science for scientometric analysis (Corrall et al., 2013). The bibliometric analysis allows for the visualisation of data and tracking of knowledge gained from the available literature. The only factor that affects the quality of analysis is data quality (De Rezende; Leandro Bolzan et al., 2018). The SALSA process was utilised in the study, which refers to a four-stage objective data analysis procedure that includes search, appraisal, synthesis and analysis (Papaioannou et al., 2010).

Table 1: SALSA procedure of the review

Stage	Process
Search	Database: 'Scopus' and 'Web of Science' Parameters used: 'Grocery' and 'Sustainability' or 'Sustainable Development Goals'
Appraisal	Selected input data: 985 documents (Scopus-171 Web of Science- 830)
Synthesis	R-Studio version 4.3.2 and 4W framework
Analysis	Bibliometric Analysis and Content Analysis

Stage1 (Search): During the search stage, the articles were sourced using Scopus and Web of Science as those are the two most renowned databases (Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013). The primary goal of the study is to analyse the linkage between the retail grocery industry and Sustainable Development Goals to guide the industry into a sustainable future, so the parameters used were 'Grocery' and 'Sustainability' or 'Sustainable Development Goals'. The table presents the search query and string used in the search process.

Table 2: Document search query and search string

Database	Query and string
Scopus	(Title-Abs-Key ("Grocery") And Title-Abs-Key ("Sustainability") Or ("Sustainable Development Goals")) And (Limit-To (Subjarea , "Busi") Or Limit-To (Subjarea , "Soci") Or Limit-To (Subjarea , "Econ")) And (Limit-To (Doctype , "Ar") Or(Limit -To (Doctype , " Review")) And (Limit-To (Language , "English"))
Web of Science	(Title-Abs-Key ("Grocery") And (Title-Abs-Key ("Sustainability") Or ("Sustainable Development Goals")) And (Limit-To (Doctype , "Ar") Or(Limit -To (Doctype , " ReviewAr")) And (Limit-To (WoSCat , "Busi") Or Limit-To (WoSCat , "Soci") Or Limit-To (WoSCat , "Econ") Or Limit-To (WoSCat , "Mgt") Or Limit -To (WoSCat , "Interdisciplinary")) And (Limit-To (Language , "English")) And (Citatopmeso, "Mgt") Or Limit-To (Citatopmeso, "Eco") Or Limit-To (Citatopmeso, "climatechange") Or Limit-To (Citatopmeso, "sply chain &Log") Or Limit-To (Citatopmeso, "AI&MchnLearn") Or Limit-To (Citatopmeso, "Commu")) And (Limit-To (Language , "English"))

Stage 2 (Appraisal): Out of the 21593 documents from the Web of Science, our search was limited to journal articles and review articles (20532) in the domains of economics, management, business, social sciences, interdisciplinary or business finance (1936) considering only from the topics of management, economics, climate change, supply chain & logistics, AI and machine learning, and communication (831) and excluded the articles written in languages other than English (830).

Out of the 388 documents from Scopus, the search was restricted to journal and review articles in the fields of business, management & accounting, social sciences, and, economics, econometrics & finance (172) and considered only articles in English (171).

Following the application of the above filter, 830 articles from the Web of Science were extracted in plaintext format, and 171 articles from Scopus were extracted in

BibTeX format. R-Studio version 4.3.2 was used to merge the gathered files and eliminate 16 duplicates, and ultimately 985 articles were gathered for analysis.

Stage 3 (Synthesis): The selected input data of 985 documents was obtained for the bibliometric study. During the screening process, 12 documents were found to be about climate change, which is closely tied to the 13th sustainable development goal of “Climate Action.” As a result, we chose to use content analysis to examine those 12 documents.

Stage 4 (Analysis): For bibliometric analysis, the current study employed the R-studio of version 4.3.2 for data visualisation and network visualisation. For content analysis, we adopted the 4Ws structure to provide more insights into the linkage between the retail grocery industry and the 13th sustainable development goal of climate action.

Results and findings

Bibliometric characteristics of the study

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research technique used to assess the influence, organisation and development of academic literature in a particular research area (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Vallaster et al., 2019). This approach is recognised as a superior tool for literature reviews. It offers insights into how the research topic has evolved, identifies the most influential publications and spots the new trends in the selected research area (Corrall et al., 2013; Subramanyam, 1982). Researchers can map the intellectual structure of a domain systematically by using a variety of bibliometric techniques like citation analysis, co-citation analysis and keyword analysis to provide a comprehensive perspective that complements the traditional narrative review (Donthu et al., 2021).

Data Information

With an annual growth rate of 5.51%, 2758 authors published 985 papers in 333 journals between 1995 and 2025. A document's average age is 3.6 years, and its average citation count is 25.69. 106 publications are single-authored, according to the information figure, and the number of co-authors per document determines the level of author collaboration (3.25). There are 51575 references and 3152 author keywords in the collected data, demonstrating a broad range of domains in the research area.

Figure 1: Main information

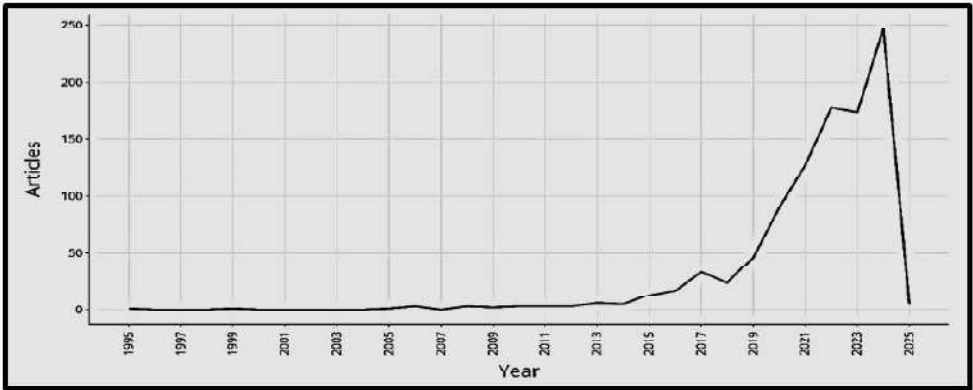


(Source: Biblioshiny of R-studio)

Annual Scientific Production:

There were very few scattered publications, and the research was minimal between 1995 and 2009, indicating that the research domain received little attention during those periods. The number of studies gradually increased between 2010 and 2015, depicting the significant understanding of sustainability that was probably driven by international initiatives such as the 2015 transition from millennium development goals to sustainable development goals. From 2016 onwards, research output climbed rapidly, reaching a peak of 247 publications in 2024. This highlights the sector’s increased emphasis on sustainability, mainly for the issues of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. A decline in 2025 with only 5 publications may be due to insufficient data or a possible slowdown in new research areas. The overall trend shows the critical role of the grocery industry in achieving SDGs is becoming more widely recognised.

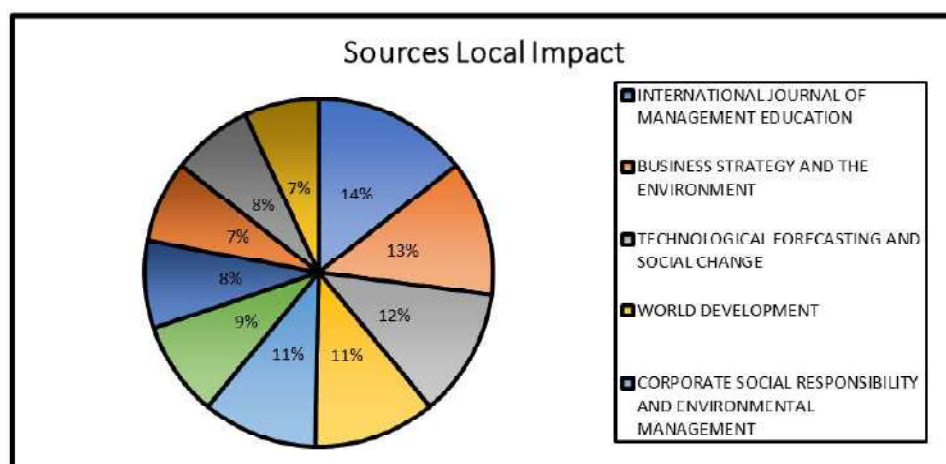
Figure 2: Annual production of publications



Most influential sources

The chart depicts the most influential journals in the research field based on their h-index. The findings revealed that the International Journal of Management Education, with an h-index of 23, is the most productive source in the research area of grocery and sustainability. The h-index highlights the articles' productivity and citation impact, and h-index 23 indicates at least 23 of the publications have cited the article at least 23 times (Anderson & Air, 2022). The core sources can be examined through Bradford's law as it distinct the journals into different zones based on how frequently and highly the articles are ranked (Loane & Bell, 2006). According to the rule, the most pertinent sources of research in grocery and sustainability are business strategy and the environment, which has 55 documents and corporate social responsibility and environmental management, which has 43 articles.

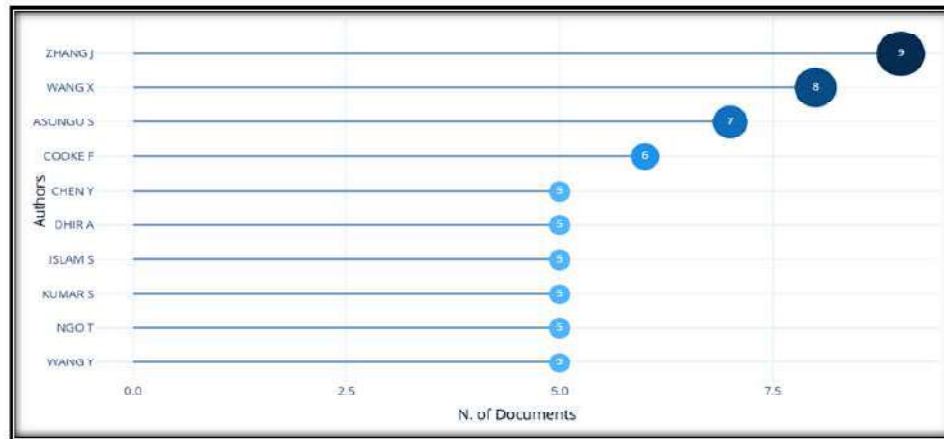
Figure 3: Most productive journals in the research



(Source: compiled by the researcher using Microsoft Excel)

Most relevant authors

With 9 publications, Jindong Zhang is the most productive author in the research field. Of them, "Changes in Human Wellbeing and Rural Livelihoods under Natural Disasters." is the most referenced paper (48 citations). This study empirically investigated the livelihood changes due to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and examined how those changes can recover human well-being (Yang et al., 2018a). Simplicio. A. Asongu (h-index-6) is the most pertinent author based on the local impact, and Francesco Rosati on the basis of citation count (92 citations).

Figure 4: Most productive authors

(Source: Biblioshiny of R-studio)

Most cited documents

Highly referenced publications are always revolutionary in the field, lay the foundation for further research, and offer more insights into the existing knowledge (Azeez & Aboobaker, 2024). Table 3 examines the seminal papers and contributions in the fields of grocery and sustainability. The results show that the paper titled “Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An Enabling Role for Accounting Research,” with 478 citations, is the most referenced article in the research area. The top cited documents recognise the world’s best authors, which ranks their Scopus citation records in the top 1% in their respective fields (Holmqvist, 2004). The most influential work specifies the role of academic accounting in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by using improved comprehension, analysis, and advancement of accounting theory, practice and policy (Bebbington & Unerman, 2018). The other seminal papers are “Modelling and measuring sustainable well-being in connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals,” with 416 citations (Costanza et al., 2016) followed by “Sustainable Development Goals and Inclusive Development,” with 381 citations (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016).

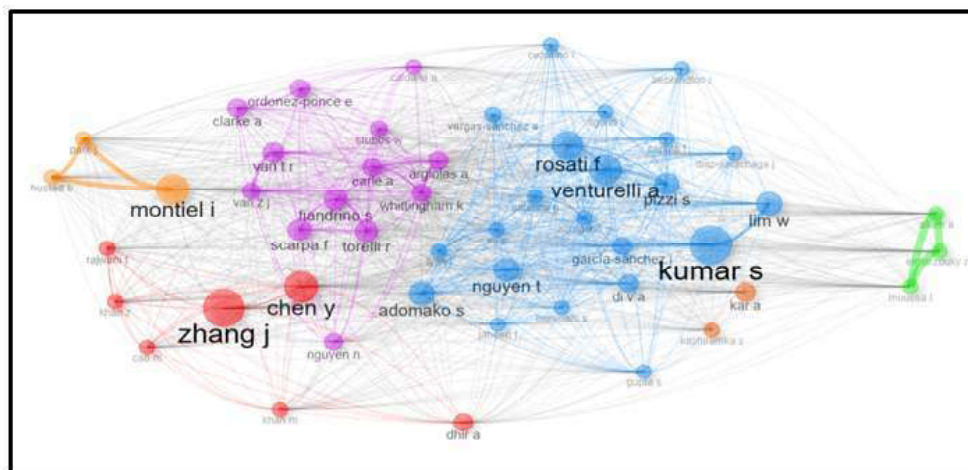
Table 3: Top referenced articles

SL.No	Title	Author(s)	Total Citations	TC per Year	Reference
1	Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research	Jan Bebbington, Jeffrey Unerman	478	59.75	(Bebbington & Unerman, 2018)
2	Modelling and measuring sustainable well-being in connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals	Robert Costanza, Lew Dalyh, Lorenzo Fioramonti, Enrico Giovannini, Ida Kubiszewski, Lars Fogh Mortensen, Kate E. Pickett, Kristin Vala Ragnarsdotti, Roberto De Vogli, Richard Wilkinson	416	41.60	(Costanza et al., 2016)
3	Sustainable development goals and inclusive development	Joyeeta Gupta, Courtney Vegelin	381	38.10	(Gupta & Vegelin, 2016)
4	Inequality, ICT and financial access in Africa	Vanessa S. Tchamyoua, Guido Erreygers, Danny Cassimon	373	53.29	(Tchamyou et al., 2019)
5	New challenges for corporate sustainability reporting: United Nations' 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the sustainable development goals	Thomas A. Tsalis, Kyveli E. Dimitrios Malamatienou, Koulouriotis, Ioannis E. Nikolaou	293	48.83	(Tsalis et al., 2020)
6	Green Human Resource Management and Employee Green Behavior: An Empirical Analysis	Richa Chaudhary	269	44.83	(Chaudhary, 2019)
7	Business contribution to the Sustainable Development Agenda: Organizational factors related to early adoption of SDG reporting	Francesco Rosati, Lourenço Galvão Diniz Faria	261	37.29	(Rosati & Faria, 2019)
8	Interdisciplinarity: Practical approach to advancing education for sustainability and for the Sustainable Development Goals	Fátima Annan-Diab, Carolina Molinari	251	27.89	(Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017)
9	A new fuzzy multi-criteria framework for measuring sustainability performance of a supply chain	Ismail Erol, Safiye Sencer, Ramazan Sari	240	16.00	(Erol et al., 2011)
10	Sustainability and development after COVID-19	Edward B. Barbier, Joanne C. Burgess	222	37.00	(Barbier & Burgess, 2020)

Bibliographic coupling of authors

The bibliographic coupling analysis identifies significant contributions to the study of SDGs. The result demonstrates three major clusters in the research field. Cluster 2, related to the theme of corporate social responsibility and sustainability, is the most prominent with writers such as Francesco Rosati (9.77) and Pizzi S (11.34). Cluster 3 includes authors like Van Z J (3.12) and Van T R (3.37), who concentrate on specialised content like the 2030 Agenda, and Cluster 1 includes Cao M (0.83) and Rajwani T (1.06).

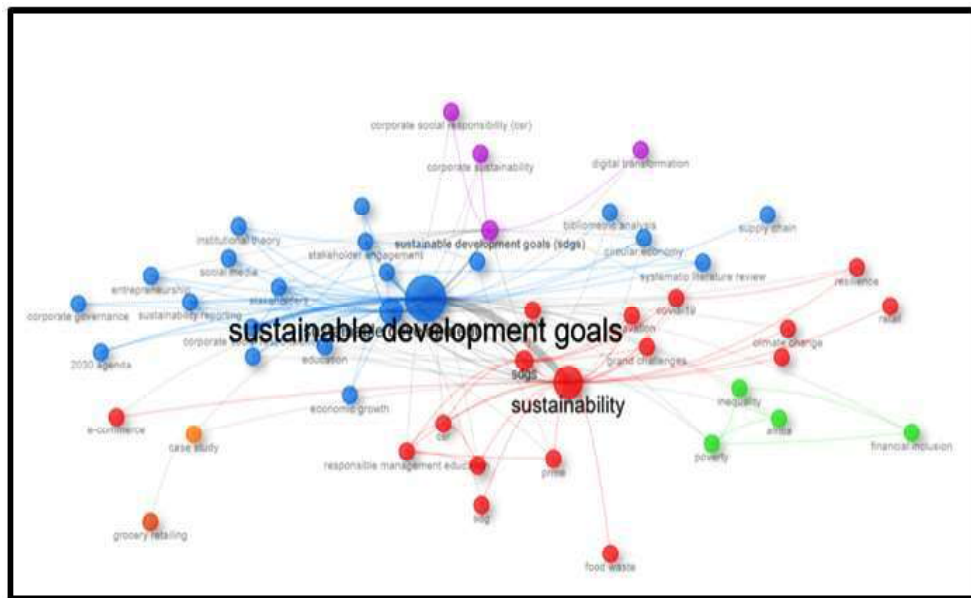
Figure 5: Author clustering



(Source: Biblioshiny of R-studio)

Keyword analysis

Research on grocery retailing is scarce, according to the keyword analysis, mainly when it comes to how it relates to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Climate Action (SDG 13). The analysis table shows the proximity of grocery retailing as 0.007, indicating that little attention is given to the industry's involvement in Sustainable Development Goals, especially in achieving climate objectives. Overall, sustainability and sustainable development goals are the central themes in the field as they have the highest betweenness and closeness. Six clusters were obtained from the keyword occurrence network. Cluster 1 focuses on SDGS, Corporate Social Responsibility and Responsible Management Education. Cluster 2 includes the broader socio-economic and environmental dimensions. Clusters 3, 4, 5, and 6 concentrate on emerging and niche themes such as equity. Inclusion, corporate sustainability and grocery retailing.

Figure 6: Keyword occurrence

(Source: Biblioshiny of R-studio)

Content Analysis

On the basis of SDG 13 ‘Climate Action’, this section offers a comprehensive review of 12 documents that are filtered out from the collected data by considering only the keyword “climate change” by adopting 4Ws (what, why, where, and how) framework review of systematic literature review method. The current stage of the paper analyses the following questions;

- “What” focuses on the basic content of the research?
- “Why” highlights the need to explore the study?
- “Where” demonstrates the context of the study?
- “How” represents the future research avenue?

Table 4: 4W framework of the review

Document Title	What	Why	Where	How
Linking disaster reduction, climate change and Sustainable Development Goals (Kelman, 2017)	An editorial explores how the Paris Agreement is related to disaster risk reduction and sustainable development goals.	To find out the parallels and differences in the structure, legal contexts and implementation mechanisms of the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals and Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction.	Not specified	An in-depth study of the three agreements is needed to improve the activities for further growth,
Framing vulnerability and coffee farmers' behaviour in the context of climate change adaptation in Nicaragua (Quiroga et al., 2020)	Analyze the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of coffee producers to climate change by examining the farmers perception.	For mitigation precautions, farmers perceived capacity should be assessed to know whether they are capable of adapting the vulnerabilities due to climate change.	Nicaragua	Further study can explore the role of pests and diseases in the adaptive capacity perceptions.
Resilience and the role of equids in humanitarian crises (Clancy et al., 2022)	Exploring the involvements of working equids in humanitarian crises like war, conflict, drought, climate change and natural hazards.	Working equids are vital at the time of crisis to support vulnerable people in low to middle-income countries.	UK	Future studies may explore on resilience building and disaster mitigation for vulnerable communities
Local Authorities Acting Globally for Sustainable Development (Gkaute, 2016)	Review the article on the role of local authorities, local actors and drivers in global interventions.	To implement the SDGs properly the role of local bodies and authorities needs to be considered.	Not specified	Practical study on how the voice of local authorities can strengthen the international deliberations and decision making
Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future: Impacts of Education and Experience on Disaster Preparedness in the Philippines and Thailand (Hoffmann & Mutsaers, 2017)	Analyse the role of education in disaster preparedness	Preparing for a disaster can minimize possible losses and damages from natural hazards.	UK	Further study in the assessment of the quality of schooling and curriculum for promoting desirable behaviour on natural hazards
Impact and adaptation of south-east Asian farmers to climate change: conclusions and policy recommendations (Kurukulasuriya & Mendelsohn, 2017)	Quantitative analysis of climate sensitivity on crop net revenue and predicting the future climate change scenarios based on those values.	Need for the prediction of climate scenarios, which is very fruitful to southeast Asian farmers for their crop production.	Asia	Studies on the effect of climate change on farmers from the rest of the world.
Data interoperability for disaster risk reduction in Europe (Migliorini et al., 2019)	Case study on data interoperability in disaster risk reduction	Need for reducing barriers to disaster risk reduction due to the wide array of data availability	Europe	More research on evidence-based policy-making
Preferences of vulnerable social groups for ecosystem-based adaptation to flood risk in Central Vietnam	Quantitative analysis on differences in vulnerability to flooding and preferences in	Need to support communities in flood by considering ecosystem-based adaptation.	Vietnam	Studies on accounting of different EBA projects in order to reduce the flood risk

(Hagadoom et al., 2021)	Ecosystem-based adaptation			
What is the post-2015 development agenda? A look from the underlying disaster risk drivers (Sarmiento, 2018)	By applying the theory of change, this study explores the three post-2015 Agendas on the underlying risk drivers.	Need to understand the changes when the three 2015 agendas integrate.	Paris	Consider more changing indicators for deeper insights into the SDG Agenda 2015
Risk Perception in a Multi-Hazard Environment (Sullivan-Wiley & Short Gianotti, 2017)	Analysing the environmental hazard risk perception in multi-hazard context in Eastern Uganda	To provide risk understanding and risk perception for preventive actions in communities.	Uganda	How the farmers balance and prioritise protective action against risk.
The effectiveness of soft law in international environmental regimes: participation and compliance in the Hyogo Framework for Action (Wanner, 2021)	An empirical investigation of Hyogo framework of action on disaster risk reduction related to the effectiveness of a specific soft law regime.	Necessary to review and modify the concepts of participation and compliance that come from the evaluation of hard law regimes	Paris	Application of Sendai framework as it is essential for the effectiveness of any of the regimes
Changes in Human Well-being and Rural Livelihoods Under Natural Disasters (Yang et al., 2018)	An empirical analysis of livelihood changes in post 2008 Wenchuan earthquake	In order to guide management intervention for sustainable development after natural disasters	China	More interdisciplinary studies by using vast data on how disasters alter livelihood activities, which in turn impact human well-being

(Source: Compiled by the researcher)

Conclusion and Discussion

The grocery industry is undergoing a major shift due to the growing importance of sustainability considerations and are compelling to match their business operations with the worldwide Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper explores the linkage between grocery retailing and the Sustainable Development Goals as the industry transforms to achieve a sustainable future. It also identifies the developments in the research area by utilising a hybrid review of systematic literature review methods incorporating bibliometric analysis and content analysis with a strong emphasis on SDG 13(Climate Action). Articles with the term's 'grocery' and 'sustainability' or 'Sustainable Development Goals' were obtained from Scopus and Web of Science, and merged using R-studio.

The findings revealed that the research field is significantly increasing over time. and 2024 is considered the peak year for publications with a great focus on the themes of COVID-19 and Corporate Social Responsibility. However, the integration of the grocery industry within sustainability research is low and points to a critical research gap. The most influential authors, sources and documents are mapped, revealing the significance of sustainable practices in the recent retail ecosystem. Content analysis using the 4Ws structure was also carried out in the study for deeper insights into the sector's linkage with Climate action. For this, 12 documents were obtained from the

gathered data by including the keyword 'Climate change' and excluding other related terms. From the analysis, it is evident that India lacks papers on grocery retailing and climate action, and most of the papers are related to the 2015 SDG Agenda.

Limitations

- We only looked at sources that were accessible through Scopus and Web of Science, excluding the other significant databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO, Science Direct, and others, which would have been used for a far more thorough examination.
- In this study, articles were only analysed. Other materials that were less likely to undergo peer review, such as book chapters, reports, and conference proceedings, were removed (Volkman et al., 2012).
- Non-English articles are not included in the present study, which would be difficult for readers who do not speak English.
- The analysis only considers the bibliometric and content analysis, excluding other systematic literature review methods. Future researchers can focus on other approaches to the systematic literature review method.

Future research avenues

- Exploring the role of grocery retailing in advancing sustainability in developing regions most affected by climate change
- More investigations are essential to promote innovative solutions for reducing carbon footprints, like adopting low-carbon logistics, renewable sources of energy and sustainable packaging.
- Investigating the role of digital technologies like Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things in enhancing sustainability in the retail grocery trade.
- Future researchers can develop holistic frameworks that integrate social, economic and environmental dimensions within the grocery retail sector.

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