# Sustainable Retail Supply Chain Management – A Bibliometric Viewpoint

Kristina Petljak[1] and Herbert Kotzab[2,3](✉)

[1] Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia
[2] University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany
kotzab@uni-bremen.de
[3] Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia

**Abstract.** In this paper, we examine the research domain of sustainable retail supply chain management (SRSCM). Sustainability is a multi-dimensional construct trying to balance social, environmental as well as economic objectives simultaneously. By using citation and co-citation analysis we are able to illustrate the intellectual foundation and roots of this field of research. Our results show that the research domain of SRSCM is embedded in a number of various research sub disciplines including sustainability, retail, logistics, operations and supply chain management as well as the consumer side of supply chain.

**Keywords:** Retail supply chain management · Sustainability · Bibliometric analysis · HistCite · VOSviewer

## 1 Introduction

One of the most mentioned topics today is the increasing concern about environmental and social issues in food production, distribution and consumption. From a corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspective, food and agribusiness companies are frequently subject to sustainability interests and there is an increasing need for them to respond to the challenges and obligations posed by environmental and social issues (Souza-Montera and Hooker 2017).

Companies are facing rapid changes due to the growing concern and rising awareness among consumers of e.g. traceability in the food chain, the origin of raw materials and safety, environmental impacts of products and processes as well as societal issues such as welfare (e.g. Morgan et al. 2018).

Customers, governments, non-governmental organizations, the media and wider society are also demanding from companies to provide an open and well-substantiated account on how they operate, what their impact on society is, and how they are minimizing negative impacts and saving scarce natural resources (Hingley et al. 2013).

Over the past couple of decades, as the growth of retailers has led to the fundamental shift in marketplace power from manufacturers to retailers (Arnold 2002) and as retailers became closer to consumers, they are now taking the leadership role in sustainability as well (Wiese et al. 2015). Some of the greatest sustainability issues lie within supply chain and its operations as sustainability questions and answers are more


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and more shifting from the single-firm level to supply chains and networks (Hartmann 2011). Nowadays retailers are demonstrating sustainability dedication not only on their web pages (Kotzab et al. 2011) or at the store level (Jones et al. 2011), but more and more on a supply chain level as well (Maloni and Brown 2006; Petljak et al. 2018).

Research has so far only partially examined sustainability within the retail domain. Research looked mainly on food consumption patterns (Carlsson-Kanyama 1998; Carrigan and de Pelsmacker 2009), environmental labels and eco or organic labels (de Snoo and van de Ven 1999; Kaiser and Edwards-Jones 2006), ethical trade (Browne et al. 2000), resource efficiency view of the consumer and retailer (Ogle et al. 2004), general sustainability in retailing (Jones et al. 2007), certification (Binnekamp and Ingenbleek 2008), retailers' corporate social responsibility (Biloslavo and Trnavcevic 2009; Erol et al. 2009; Kolk et al. 2010), sustainable development (Balan 2009), sustainable business relations (Reynolds et al. 2009), green logistics (Jarosz 2008; de Brito et al. 2008) or green retail (food) supply chain management (Petljak et al. 2018).

Taking all these issues into account, we see a need to identify the intellectual foundation of SRSCM. Contrary to the objectives of a systematic or content-based literature reviews, which identify, evaluate and integrate the main findings of individual studies based on research questions (see e.g. Seuring and Gold 2012; Durach et al. 2017), the goal of this paper is to determine the roots (= 'intellectual foundation') of SRSCM, because of its growing importance as research field *per se*.

By reviewing the intellectual foundation of SRSCM research with the means of bibliometric methods (see next section), we are able to identify the most important/influential publications and their interrelationships. The results of our analyses provide not only thematic trends in these publications but also present those papers which have impacted research in the field significantly (see e.g. White and McCain 1998).

## 2 Methodology

For performing citation and co-citation analysis, we apply the software tools HistCite 12.03.17 (Garfield 2009) and VOSviewer 1.6.11 (van Eck and Waltman 2010). Both software packages analyse and visualise bibliometric results which help to identify the most important work on a topic as well as their timely development.

We collected data from the Web of Science Core Collection and gathered all academic journal articles that were published between 1955 and 2018 with the following search string: *TS = ((green*OR environ*OR social*OR sustain*) AND retail*)* in any of the title, abstract, or author-supplied keyword fields, which resulted with altogether 1393 articles.

After a qualitative check of the sample articles (including keyword analysis and abstract check) we deducted articles which were marginally connected with the topic of interest. So, our search resulted in 708 records from 284 journals. This final sample represents more than 2,000 authors and over 38,000 citations with more than 12,000 citation links.

## 3 Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows the citation relations of the 25 most cited papers in our sample based on the local citation score (LCS) in a chronological manner.

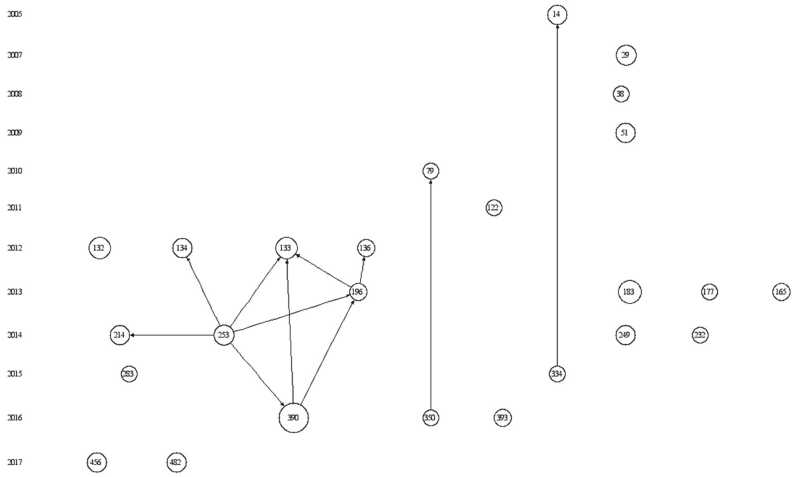


**Fig. 1.** Citation relations of the 25 most cited SRSCM papers as indicated by HistCite (for the circle number see Appendix 1)

The publication date of these papers spans from 2005 to 2017. The citation relations include 25 nodes and (only) 11 links with a citations' strength range between 5 to 16. The pattern of the citation relationships shows that 14 out of these 25 papers have no relation at all. There is one larger citation cluster including seven papers and two citation dyads. The large citation cluster evolves over the papers written by Dong et al. (2016, 390) about sustainability investments, Choi (2013, 196) on local sourcing and fashion quick response system, Choi and Chiu (2012, 134) on implication of newsvendor models for sustainable fashion retailing, Shen (2014, 253) on sustainable fashion supply chains and on the perception of fashion sustainability in online community (Shen et al. 2014, 214), Caniato et al. (2012, 136) on environmental sustainability in fashion supply chain, while the two citation dyads are connecting works done by Kolk et al. (2010) and Björklund et al. (2016, 79) which are more evolved and connected with green logistics and Chkanikova (2015, 350) and Hatanaka et al. (2005, 334), papers about food labeling and third party certification.

Figures 2 and 3 show the results for our co-citation analyses for articles as well as for journals.

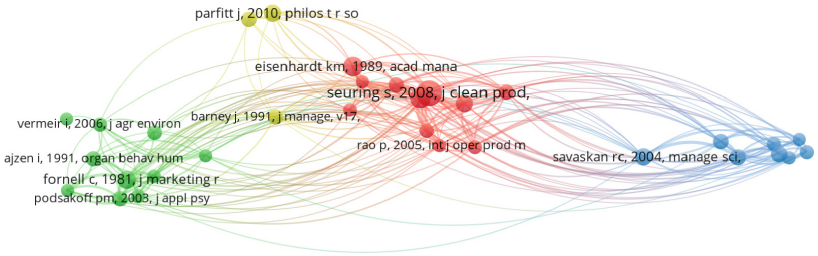


**Fig. 2.** Visualisation of identified co-citation article clusters (based on VosViewer)

Based on the bibliographic analysis conducted in the VosViewer, we can conclude that the field of sustainable retail supply chain management in terms of article co-citation can be organized into four different clusters as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** 32 most co-cited SRSCM papers (alphabetical order)

| | |
|---|---|
| Red Cluster 1: Sustainable supply chain management | Carter and Rogers (2008), de Brito et al. (2008), Eisenhardt (1989), Kleindorfer et al. (2005), Linton et al. (2007), Porter (2006), Rao and Holt (2005), Seuring and Müller (2008), Srivastava (2007), Vachon and Klassen (2008), Yin (2003) |
| Green Cluster 2: Marketing management and metrics quality papers | Ajzen (1991), Anderson and Gerbing (1988), Carrigan et al. (2004), Fornell and Larcker (1981), Hu and Bentler (1999), Laroche et al. (2011), Nunally (1978), Podsakoff et al. (2003), Roheim et al. (2011), Vermeir and Verbeke (2006) |
| Blue Cluster 3: Operations management | Benjaafar et al. (2013), Dong et al. (2016), Hua (2011), Liu (2012), Savasakan et al. (2006), Savaskan et al. (2004), Swami and Shah (2013) |
| Yellow Cluster 4: Food waste management | Barney and Wright (1998), Gustavsson et al. (2011), Parfitt et al. (2010) |

The green Cluster 'Sustainable Food/Marketing/Retail/Consumer' is dominated by the research articles from the marketing and psychology field, predominately empirical articles which were then used for the explanations of the methodological part of the research paper. The yellow cluster is represented by the food waste research stream. It looks the smallest, but it is gaining momentum.

The third cluster, represented in red, 'Supply Chain/Operations/Logistics/Management-oriented' is the core of SRSCM and includes topics around sustainable supply chain management, green supply chain management, green retail, green consumer behavior, green logistics and green retail operations in general, from the assortment level to the store level and collaborations in managing sustainable supply chain. The final cluster in blue presents the influence of management theory and is 'OR/Production/Transport-oriented'.

Figure 3 shows a visualization of the identified co-citation journal clusters, which structure is similar to the previously described co-citation article clusters.

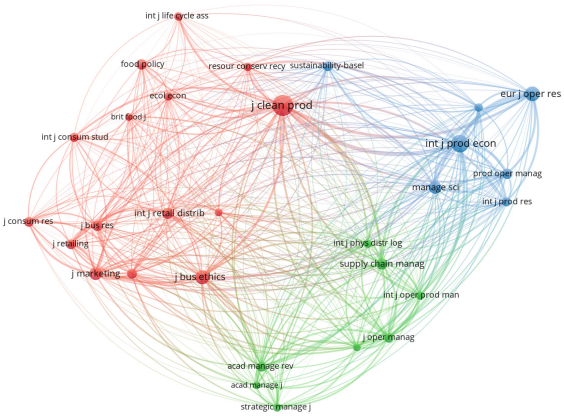


**Fig. 3.** Visualisation of identified co-citation journal clusters (based on VosViewer)

We see substantial dominance of jointly using marketing, food and retail related journals and sustainability journals in general (see Table 2). What is interesting to note is the high-quality level of the journals, so that we may conclude that the knowledge base of SRSCM takes its knowledge from the best research outlets, so its intellectual foundation is based on solid ground.

**Table 2.** 30 most co-cited SRSCM journals (alphabetical order)

| 30 most co-cited journals (alphabetical order) | |
|---|---|
| Green Cluster 'Sustainable Food/Marketing/Retail/Consumer' | British Food Journal; Business Strategy and the Environment; Ecological Economics; Food Policy; International Journal of Consumer Studies; International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment; International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management; Journal of Business Ethics; Journal of Business Research; Journal of Cleaner Production; Journal of Consumer Research; Journal of Marketing; Journal of Retailing; Resources, Conservation and Recycling |

(*continued*)

**Table 2.** (*continued*)

| 30 most co-cited journals (alphabetical order) | |
|---|---|
| Red Cluster 'Supply Chain/Operations/Logistics/Management-oriented' | Academy of Management Journal; Academy of Management Review; International Journal of Production and Operations Management; International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management; Journal of Operations Management; Journal of Supply Chain Management; Strategic Management Journal; Supply Chain Management: An International Journal |
| Blue Cluster 'OR/Production/Transport-oriented' | European Journal of Operational Research; International Journal of Production Economics; International Journal of Production Research; Management Science; Production and Operations Management; Sustainability; Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review |

## 4 Conclusions

The results of our study show that SRSCM is embedded in a number of various sub disciplines including sustainability, retail, logistics, operations and supply chain management but also consumer research. SRSCM research seems to be still in an early stage of a research life cycle as many cited references are related to methodological issues in regards to literature reviews.

The research domain is empirically founded, which is documented by the many sources referring to various empirical methodological approaches (both qualitative case studies and quantitative survey studies). The citation clusters themselves can be seen as representative foundations for specific research streams. Thereby we were able identify a stream of food waste that seeks its theoretical base in the resource-based view. The results of the journal co-citation analysis show that the most frequently used journals are highly reputable. Further we see a definition base that can be used for identifying the correct terminology in the area of green, environmental and sustainable operations and supply chain management. Another stream deals with green consumer behavior and is characterized by end-user price formation issues for environmental-friendly products. And the more OR-specific citation cluster represents closed-loop supply chain stream in combination with carbon footprint and emission trading references. So far, a specific SRSCM paper has not been yet identified amongst the most cited papers.

## Appendix 1

Top 25 Citations as identified by HistCite[1]

Nodes: 25, Links: 11
LCS, top 25; Min: 5, Max: 16 (LCS scaled)

| | | LCS | GCS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 14 Hatanaka M, 2005, FOOD POLICY, V30, P354 | 7 | 283 |
| 2. | 29 Quak HJ, 2007, J OPER MANAG, V25, P1103 | 8 | 69 |
| 3. | 38 Smith BG, 2008, PHILOS T R SOC B, V363, P849 | 5 | 58 |
| 4. | 51 Erol I, 2009, SUSTAIN DEV, V17, P49 | 7 | 38 |
| 5. | 79 Kolk A, 2010, BUS STRATEG ENVIRON, V19, P289 | 5 | 77 |
| 6. | 122 Gadema Z, 2011, FOOD POLICY, V36, P815 | 5 | 105 |
| 7. | 132 Dauvergne P, 2012, GLOBAL ENVIRON CHANG, V22, P36 | 9 | 97 |
| 8. | 133 Nagurney A, 2012, INT J PROD ECON, V135, P532 | 9 | 92 |
| 9. | 134 Choi TM, 2012, INT J PROD ECON, V135, P552 | 7 | 76 |
| 10. | 136 Caniato F, 2012, INT J PROD ECON, V135, P659 | 6 | 123 |
| 11. | 165 Kaipia R, 2013, INT J PHYS DISTR LOG, V43, P262 | 6 | 51 |
| 12. | 177 Hampl N, 2013, BUS STRATEG ENVIRON, V22, P202 | 5 | 14 |
| 13. | 183 Gleim MR, 2013, J RETAILING, V89, P44 | 10 | 152 |
| 14. | 196 Choi TM, 2013, TRANSPORT RES E-LOG, V55, P43 | 6 | 78 |
| 15. | 214 Shen B, 2014, J TEXT I, V105, P971 | 7 | 23 |
| 16. | 232 Hsueh CF, 2014, INT J PROD ECON, V151, P214 | 5 | 68 |
| 17. | 249 Cachon GP, 2014, MANAGE SCI, V60, P1907 | 7 | 77 |
| 18. | 253 Shen B, 2014, SUSTAINABILITY-BASEL, V6, P6236 | 8 | 56 |
| 19. | 283 Chkanikova O, 2015, CORP SOC RESP ENV MA, V22, P65 | 5 | 34 |
| 20. | 334 Chkanikova O, 2015, J CLEAN PROD, V107, P74 | 5 | 21 |
| 21. | 350 Bjorklund M, 2016, INT J RETAIL DISTRIB, V44, P38 | 5 | 11 |
| 22. | 390 Dong CW, 2016, ANN OPER RES, V240, P509 | 16 | 68 |
| 23. | 393 Cicatiello C, 2016, J RETAIL CONSUM SERV, V30, P96 | 6 | 39 |
| 24. | 456 Ji JN, 2017, J CLEAN PROD, V141, P852 | 7 | 63 |
| 25. | 482 Zhu WG, 2017, EUR J OPER RES, V258, P165 | 7 | 61 |

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[1] Underlined numbers indicate circle numbers in Fig. 1; LCS = Local citation score; GCS = Global citation score.

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