

An Examination of the Concepts of Voluntary Simplicity and Anti-consumption within the Framework of Religiosity in the Marketing Literature**

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Abstract: A segment of consumers, recognizing the adverse effects of excessive consumption, is taking a stand against overconsumption. Some of these consumers adopt this behavioral stance due to their religious beliefs and an awareness of the wastefulness and moral wrongs associated with such consumption. This study aims to examine existing marketing literature regarding the choice not to consume and the concept of voluntary simplicity—practices relevant to contemporary consumer attitudes and lifestyles—within the framework of religiosity, thereby shedding light on future research in this field. In this study, 438 publications from the Web of Science database were subjected to bibliometric analysis using the VOSviewer software.

Keywords: Anti-consumption, Voluntary Simplicity, Religiosity

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, all living beings—including humans—are caught in an endless cycle of consumption to survive. This cycle is influenced by numerous factors such as age, gender, income, marital status, the impact of fashion, and popular culture. Humans, whose needs must be met daily, have gone beyond merely satisfying necessities; they have begun to consume for reasons such as gaining social acceptance, earning respect, forging an identity, distinguishing themselves, or simply seeking gratification—to the point where they have become enslaved by consumption. For individuals who place material objects at the center of their lives, consumption has ceased to be merely a means of fulfilling needs and wants and has instead become a life purpose in itself. Consumers who recognize the negative impacts of this excessive consumption on the environment, culture, personal satisfaction, and conscious consumption are now taking a stand against such overconsumption (Köysüren and Şener, 2024: 704). A need has emerged to strike a balance between consumption—viewed by many as a fundamental aspect of existence—and the necessity for sustainable resource use during that process (Cintamür, 2026).

In today's postmodern world, consumers who reject excessive consumption and adopt this awareness as a life philosophy—regardless of whether their motivation stems from anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, minimalism, or religious belief—form groups that exhibit an anti-consumption stance (Köysüren and Şener, 2024: 704). Zavestoski (2002: 150) defines anti-consumption as "resistance to consumption, a dislike of it, or even anger towards it." When viewed from a macro perspective, the term is understood as opposition to the consumption of everything, whereas from a micro perspective, it is conceived as an individual reducing consumption regarding their own essential needs. For instance, research on voluntary simplicity—which is regarded as a form of anti-consumption—indicates that anti-consumption is a lifestyle driven by the desire to lead a good life (Cherrier and Murray, 2007: 4). In the contemporary world, consumers who adopt voluntary simplicity and minimalist lifestyles constitute a segment of the groups exhibiting anti-consumption behavior. According to Yıldız (2026: 30), anti-consumption can also manifest in "off-network" spaces through lifestyle simplification, boycotts, or activist movements.

Furthermore, from the perspective of religiosity, the fact that unnecessary consumption is viewed negatively highlights the close relationship between these concepts. Wastefulness can generally be defined as the squandering of resources. From a religious standpoint, the issue of waste holds significant importance; Islam advocates for the optimal use of resources and classifies usage or consumption that exceeds actual needs as waste (Ak and Görmüş, 2020: 1486).

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This study aims to examine the concepts of voluntary simplicity and non-consumption within the framework of religiosity and to contribute to the literature by conducting analyses intended to serve as a guide for researchers wishing to study these concepts.

1.1. Anti-consumption and Voluntary Simplicity

The degradation resulting from environmental destruction is becoming increasingly severe with each passing year and now threatens the comfortable lives of people. Issues such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, and the dwindling of water resources are reaching alarming levels. At the root of environmental degradation lie lifestyles focused on material prosperity. Until now, humankind has consumed natural resources as if they were limitless. However, the global environment is a closed and finite system that provides natural resources, including land and oil. Consequently, the depletion of natural resources will pose a fatal threat to humanity's continued existence. (Iwata, 1997: 233). Consumption is generally defined as the act of exhausting existing resources to meet the fundamental needs—which are indispensable for the survival of individuals and societies and persist from birth until death (Karakaş, 2001: 15). However, in the modern era, consumption is no longer merely an act aimed at satisfying consumer needs; it has also evolved into a means of signaling social status and a vehicle for personal gratification. In other words, consumption within societies has transcended its nature as a purely economic phenomenon to become a cultural, sociological, and even psychological one (Babaoğlu and Buğday, 2012: 77). *When looking at developed nations, it becomes evident that consumers engage in consumption not merely to satisfy their needs, but also to shape their identities, forge relationships, and construct various psychological frameworks. Consequently, the act of consumption has transcended its fundamental function to secure a central place in cultural life. Similarly, contemporary consumer culture has transformed the social fabric of markets in developing countries.* (Kuanr vd., 2020: 260).

Anti-consumption aims to mitigate the negative consequences caused by excessive consumption. In this sense, anti-consumption does not mean refraining from consumption or abstaining from consumption activities altogether; it does not entail opposing the consumption of food, water, and oxygen necessary for survival. Lee et al. (2011: 1681) state that the consumption addressed in the context of anti-consumption refers to "a commercial process in which people acquire, use, and sell commodified goods (ideas, services, products, brands, and experiences)." When consumption is defined in this manner, anti-consumption signifies opposition to lifestyles that harm nature, hinder individuals from making free choices regarding consumption, or impose consumption as a necessity. Penaloza and Price (1993: 124) highlight that the common characteristic of anti-consumption movements and attitudes is resistance against consumer culture and mass production.

With rising consumer awareness, anti-consumption activities are becoming increasingly prevalent. Research on anti-consumption highlights it as a long-term behavioral pattern in consumer orientations (Yıldız, 2026: 31). Anti-consumption questions the prevailing social and economic system; consequently, it manifests as attitudes and behaviors that resist the forces pushing for increased consumption (Lee et al., 2011: 1700). Reactions against globalization, environmental degradation, and social problems play a significant role in the rise of anti-consumption. A central theme in anti-consumption is the idea that consumption exploits both humanity and nature (Karaboğa, 2016: 2075). This is because, in the era of postmodernism, consumption has become a marker of shared identity. People have shifted from working to meet their vital needs to working to purchase consumer goods. The value individuals assign to objects—and decisions regarding which objects should be consumed—are determined by the capitalist system.

Modern societies frequently exhibit a structure dominated by materialist values and constant consumption (Dittmar, 2008: 10-12). The aim here is to encourage greater consumption (Nar, 2015: 946). However, consumers' growing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of their own consumption has led many to re-evaluate their consumption choices. Consequently, these consumers are defined by a focus on conscious consumption or on reducing their consumption levels to a more sustainable point through "voluntary simplicity." (Shaw and Newholm, 2002: 168).

Voluntary simplicity is an oppositional lifestyle strategy that rejects the high-consumption, materialistic lifestyles of consumer cultures and embraces what is often termed "simple living" or "downshifting" (Alexander, 2011). It reflects anti-consumerism and is regarded as a conscious choice regarding consumption, ownership, and the use of goods (Hoffmann and Lee, 2016: 5; Lee et al., 2011). It characterizes a tendency to reduce material consumption, limit spending, and maximize independence or direct control over daily activities (Peyer et al., 2017: 39; Shaw and Newholm, 2002: 168). This approach emphasizes that individuals who embrace voluntary simplicity redefine their selves through intangible elements—such as interpersonal relationships,

experiences, spiritual values, and personal growth—rather than through material objects. Consequently, voluntary simplicity offers a significant perspective that complements materialist and consumption-oriented interpretations of the extended self, suggesting that the self can be constructed upon experiential foundations. (Çildir, 2026: 310). The nature of this lifestyle is characterized by its voluntary adoption—rather than being imposed by authorities or adopted merely as a budgeting strategy during tough economic times (Leonard-Barton, 1981: 243). It entails meeting material needs in the simplest and most direct ways possible, minimizing expenditure on consumer goods and services, and increasingly directing time and energy toward resources that provide non-material satisfaction (Etzioni, 1999: 3). Craig-Lees and Hill (2002: 192) have categorized voluntary simplicity into five themes: the freedom to lead a simpler life, the reduction of material consumption, ease of access to education and skill development, a sense of control and the accompanying personal satisfaction, and prioritizing spiritual fulfillment over high income. Often, this means gaining the time and freedom to pursue life goals—such as community engagement, social interaction, spending more time with family, artistic or intellectual projects, more fulfilling employment, sustainable living, reading, and relaxation—in exchange for accepting lower income and consumption levels; these pursuits do not require money (or significant amounts of it) but rather depend on cultivating personal values (Hamilton and Denniss, 2009: 222).

The approach of voluntary simplicity does not entail completely abandoning consumption. Rather, it is about shedding the excess needs present in one's life and thereby making room for spiritual values and personal growth—such as becoming aware of the world we inhabit, recognizing and embracing the beauty around us, revitalizing human relationships, alleviating the troubles of others and sharing in their happiness, and evolving from an individual who acts solely for themselves into one who contributes to society and the world (Babaoğlu and Buğday, 2012: 85).

Elgin and Mitchell (1977) classified individuals based on the concept of voluntary simplicity. This classification comprises those indifferent to voluntary simplicity, those sympathetic to it, partial voluntary simplifiers, and full voluntary simplifiers. Those Indifferent to Voluntary Simplicity are individuals who are either unaware of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle or opposed to it; these consumers are unwilling to forgo the opportunities afforded by their income. Sympathizers of Voluntary Simplicity are individuals who view the lifestyle favorably but do not wish to adopt it themselves. Partial Voluntary Simplifiers are individuals who incorporate some of the fundamental elements of voluntary simplicity into their lives. Full Voluntary Simplifiers are individuals who wholeheartedly embrace a life of voluntary simplicity. Recycling, gardening, cycling more frequently, consuming organic foods, engaging in family-oriented meditation, and backpacking during vacations are key characteristics of individuals in this category (Köysüren and Şener, 2024: 707).

Etzioni (1999: 4-9) described the voluntary simplicity lifestyle adopted by consumers by identifying three levels of intensity: downshifters, strong simplifiers, and holistic simplifiers. Downshifters practice a relatively moderate form of voluntary simplicity; they are economically secure individuals who voluntarily forgo certain consumer goods they could easily afford, yet fundamentally maintain quite affluent and consumption-oriented lifestyles. For instance, these individuals dress in a distinctly "simple" manner—wearing jeans, inexpensive loafers, and T-shirts—and tend to drive older, beat-up cars. The "strong simplifiers" group comprises individuals who leave high-paying, high-stress professions—such as law, business, or investment banking—to live on a lower, or often significantly lower, income. This category includes many workers who choose to retire voluntarily before they are required to do so, accepting lower current income and reduced pension payments in exchange for more leisure time. Holistic simplifiers are similar to strong simplifiers but align their entire lifestyle with the ethos of voluntary simplicity; this may involve moving to an area with a lower standard of living (perhaps a rural setting) in order to lead a simpler life.

Similarly, Iyer and Muncy (2009: 161) define voluntary simplifiers as individuals who purchase organic food, seek out products made from recycled materials, and practice recycling. Huneke (2005: 28) found that the most significant activities of voluntary simplifiers were avoiding impulse purchases, recycling, and decluttering. In the scale she developed, Leonard-Barton (1981) listed the most common activities of voluntary simplifiers, including making gifts instead of buying them, eating vegetarian meals, changing their own car oil, enhancing self-reliance, and learning how to recycle and putting that knowledge into practice.

In summary, the type of consumer who adopts a voluntary simplicity lifestyle can be characterized as an individual who is environmentally conscious and respectful of nature—thereby consuming fewer resources—and who prioritizes social, personal, and environmental development when purchasing goods or services, tending to select options that strongly support such development; furthermore, these individuals engage in planned shopping, utilize natural fertilizers like compost (or even participate directly in production), value

recycling, and prioritize the use of eco-friendly products (Kaynak and Ekşi, 2011: 33; Bayat and Sezer, 2018: 3; Kurtuluş et al., 2019: 112).

1.2. Religiosity

Religiosity is a universal concept encompassing all religions and it is inextricably intertwined with many aspects of sociocultural life, influencing people's values, behaviors, personalities, and belief systems. Religiosity is, fundamentally, a concept concerning the extent to which an individual internalizes their religious beliefs and translates them into their daily life. While religion exerts an influence on the individual through its dimension of belief, it simultaneously holds significant sway over society through the system of rules that governs social life. Religion constitutes the totality of values, beliefs, and acts of worship that regulate both personal and social life. In this respect, it is undeniable that religion performs important functions in both the personal and social spheres (Akpınar, 2024: 8). By affecting relationships among individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, religion directly or indirectly shapes and molds its adherents' moral standards, thoughts, actions, attitudes, and socialization processes (Choi, 2010: 157). At its core, religiosity entails embracing a religious system and shaping one's lifestyle accordingly. Societally established rules constitute the fundamental determinants of religiosity. Consequently, religiosity—and the accompanying process of cultural shaping—also influences the economic decision-making of individuals (Ak and Görmüş, 2020: 1486). This cultural shaping permeates individuals' lifestyles. Individuals shape all their economic decisions—ranging from excessive consumption to waste—in line with this significant motivation.

Based on this reality, the existence of a relationship between religiosity and consumption habits is posited. For instance, research conducted by Gayatri et al. in 2011 with Muslim customers in Indonesia presents findings indicating that culture and religion are positioned as important factors to be considered in service quality studies. Yousaf and Malik (2013) found that religiosity significantly influences the decision-making processes of Pakistani consumers across both high- and low-involvement product categories; they determined that religious consumers are more rational, price- and value-conscious, and socially influenced individuals who exhibit lower levels of hedonism, impulsivity, and fashion consciousness, and who do not experience confusion when making choices based on information and are less innovative in their purchasing. In 2013, Küçük and Ayyıldız examined the direct and mediating relationships between Islamic religiosity, voluntary simplicity, and Muslim consumer behavior, using data collected from consumers over the age of 18 living in Türkiye. Research shows that individuals from different religions exhibit different attitudes and behaviors.

1.3. Bibliyometrik Analiz

Bibliometric analysis has gained significant popularity in business research in recent years. More importantly, the popularity of bibliometric analysis in business research is not a passing fad, but rather a reflection of its utility in processing vast amounts of scientific data and generating high research impact (Donthu vd., 2021: 285). Bibliometric analyses are systematic mapping studies used to access various types of information, such as prominent keywords, authors who have published the most or received the highest number of citations on a subject, and the sources most frequently utilized in studies within the field (Çalhan et al., 2025: 203-204; Aykan and Ülker, 2026: 76). In other words, bibliometric analysis is useful for dissecting and mapping the cumulative scientific knowledge and evolutionary nuances of established fields by rigorously making sense of large volumes of unstructured data. Consequently, well-conducted bibliometric studies can lay a solid foundation for advancing a field in novel and meaningful ways; they enable and empower scholars to gain a comprehensive overview, identify knowledge gaps, generate new research ideas, and position their intended contributions to the field. (Donthu vd., 2021: 285).

2. METHOD

A search conducted on Web of Science on September 23, 2026, across "all fields" using the keywords "anti-consumption," "religiosity," and "voluntary simplicity"—and subsequently filtered for English-language publications, specific indices (SSCI, ESCI, BKCI-SSH, and SCI-EXPANDED), and the "Business" subject category—

yielded 438 studies. The data obtained from this research were analyzed using the VOSviewer software to examine publication distribution, co-authorship, author citations, keywords, and country-level data.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Distribution of publications and counts by year

An examination of the Web of Science database reveals the year-by-year distribution of 438 records concerning research on voluntary simplicity, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of publications and counts by years

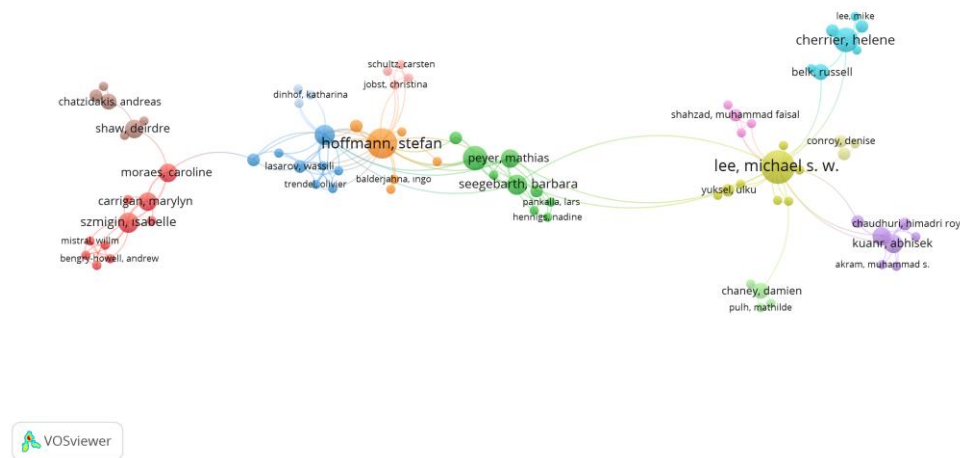
Publication Years	Count	Publication Years	Count	Publication Years	Count
2026	21	2017	16	2008	3
2025	32	2016	21	2006	2
2024	27	2015	18	2005	4
2023	29	2014	11	2004	1
2022	27	2013	17	2002	5
2021	36	2012	12	2000	1
2020	29	2011	24	1992	1
2019	35	2010	14	1986	1
2018	33	2009	16	1981	2

These data indicate that the initial studies on the subject were conducted in 1981, with a total of two studies produced that year. The topic saw its greatest surge in the number of publications in 2021, with 36 studies.

3.2. Co-authorship of Authors

A co-authorship analysis was conducted to identify the most prolific authors in the field of voluntary simplicity and to determine the authors who collaborated with them. To identify authors with the highest number of connections and collaborations, a minimum threshold of one publication and one citation was set. Based on this information, the author network analysis was generated as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Co-authorship of Authors

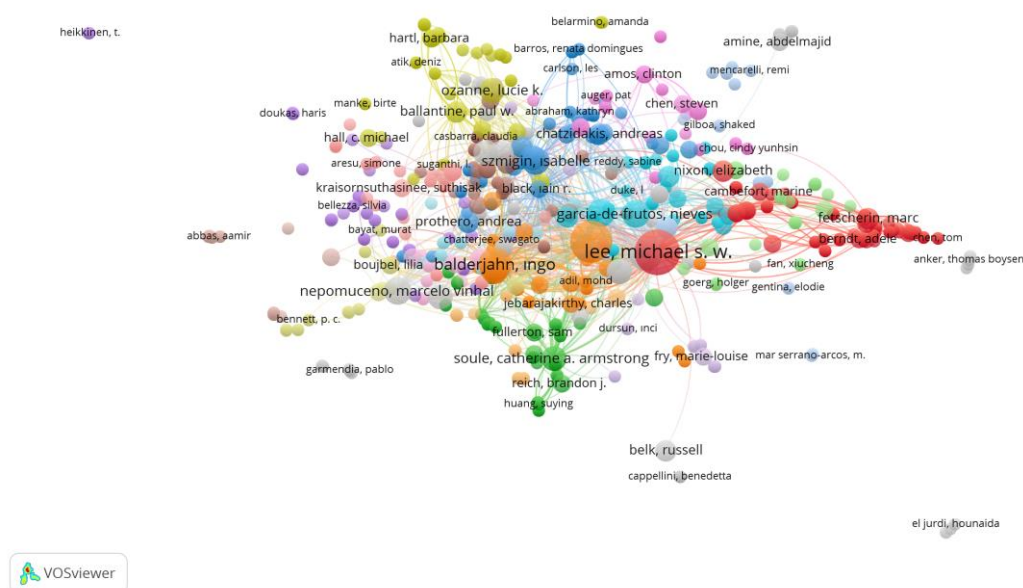


The network map data revealed a total of 79 authors grouped into 13 clusters, with 162 connections and a total connection strength of 194. An examination of the data regarding publication volume showed that Lee was the most prolific author with 13 publications, followed by Hoffmann with 11 publications, while Balderjahn and Cherrier ranked third with 7 publications each. Regarding the number of connections, Hoffmann again held the highest number, followed by Lee in second place and Mai in third. These results indicate a direct correlation between productivity and the number of connections.

3.3. Citation of Authors

Having at least one publication and receiving at least one citation were established as the fundamental criteria for the author citation analysis. A visualization of the network analysis regarding author citations is presented in Figure 2. The analysis, conducted on 761 observed units identified as interconnected, revealed a total of 26 clusters, 12,057 links, and a total link strength of 14,945.

Figure 2. Citation of Authors

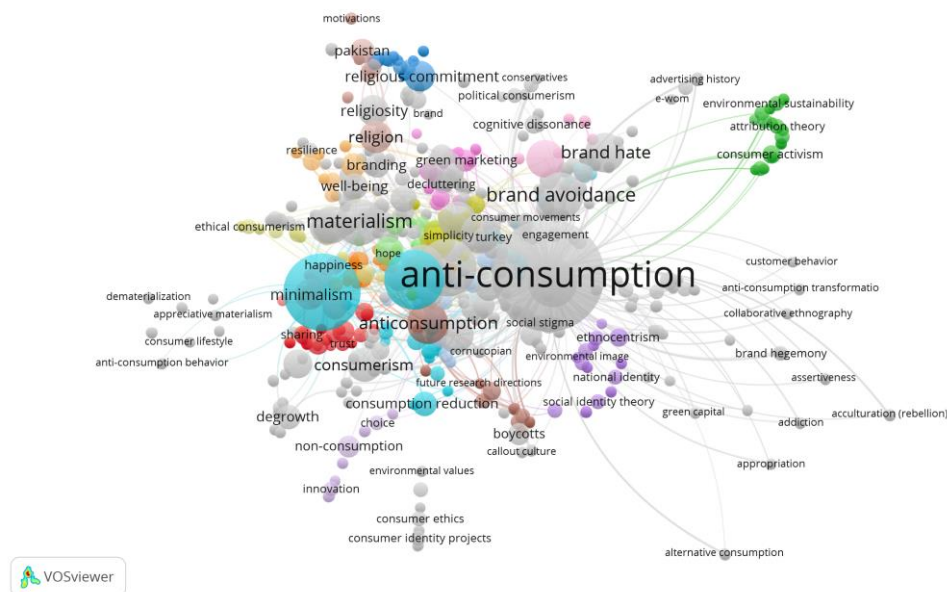


Based on the citation counts within the network analysis data, Lee ranks first with 843 citations, followed by Cherrier in second place with 789 citations, and Hoffmann in third place with 455 citations.

3.4. Keyword analysis

A keyword analysis was conducted to identify the terms or phrases most frequently encountered in the literature by researchers studying non-consumption and voluntary simplicity. For this analysis, a minimum frequency of one occurrence was required for the terms. The data revealed that, out of 1,312 keywords, five appeared 20 or more times. A visualization of the analysis is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Keyword analysis



As shown by the network analysis, the term "anti-consumption"—associated with voluntary simplicity—ranks first with 104 occurrences. "Voluntary simplicity" ranks second with 49 occurrences, followed by "sustainable consumption" in third place with 30 occurrences. The ranking based on connection strength follows the same order.

3.5. Countries with the highest contributions to the field

A network analysis was conducted to determine the countries that produced the most research on the subject between 1981 and 2026. A criterion requiring a minimum of one publication was applied for the analysis. Data regarding the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Countries with the highest contributions to the field

Countries/Regions	Count	Countries/Regions	Count	Countries/Regions	Count
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USA	112	NETHERLANDS	7	HUNGARY	2
ENGLAND	58	PORTUGAL	7	ISRAEL	2
AUSTRALIA	45	SOUTH AFRICA	7	JAPAN	2
FRANCE	38	SWEDEN	7	LEBANON	2
GERMANY	34	SWITZERLAND	7	MONACO	2
NEW ZEALAND	29	TURKIYE	6	TUNISIA	2
INDIA	23	SAUDI ARABIA	5	U ARAB EMIRATES	2
CANADA	22	AUSTRIA	4	VIETNAM	2
SCOTLAND	20	INDONESIA	4	BRUNEI	1
SPAIN	19	POLAND	4	CYPRUS	1
FINLAND	14	THAILAND	4	GHANA	1
PEOPLES R CHINA	14	WALES	4	KUWAIT	1
TURKIYE	14	BELGIUM	3	MEXICO	1
ITALY	13	IRAN	3	MOROCCO	1
PAKISTAN	12	LITHUANIA	3	OMAN	1
SOUTH KOREA	11	NORWAY	3	PERU	1
BRAZIL	10	SLOVENIA	3	QATAR	1
DENMARK	7	CROATIA	2	SINGAPORE	1
IRELAND	7	CZECH REPUBLIC	2	SRI LANKA	1
MALAYSIA	7	GREECE	2	TAIWAN	1

The results indicate that the USA produced the highest number of studies, with a total of 112. The United Kingdom ranked second with 58 studies, followed by Australia in third place with 45 studies. Türkiye ranked 11th with 14 studies, sharing this position with the People's Republic of China and Finland.

4. CONCLUSION

In today's world, where consumption is rapidly increasing—bringing with it various negative consequences—anti-consumption and conscious consumption are becoming increasingly important. Consequently, discussing the choice *not* to consume, rather than consumption itself, has become essential. Various factors drive consumers toward anti-consumption during the decision-making process; religious belief is one such factor. Marketing literature indicates that religious beliefs—rooted in the principle of avoiding waste—can steer individuals away from consumption. However, while studies have observed this effect, there has been no prior bibliometric research on the subject. Therefore, this study aims to examine the concepts of non-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and religiosity from a bibliometric perspective to shed light on future research; in doing so, it yields significant findings intended to assist researchers who may be unsure of where to begin in this field. The study identified 438 works published between 1981 and 2026 concerning non-consumption, voluntary simplicity, and religiosity. The highest number of studies was conducted in 2021. The most prolific researchers were Lee, Hoffmann, and Balderjahn, in that order. "Non-consumption" and "voluntary simplicity" emerged as the most frequently used terms. A notable observation is that, despite its presence in the literature, "religiosity" ranked quite low among the most frequently encountered terms; this is attributed to the specific index limitations applied to the study (SSCI, ESCI, BKCI-SSH, and SCI-EXPANDED). The USA was the leading country for research on this topic, followed by the UK and Australia. As with all studies, this study has certain limitations. The study utilized the WoS database, and it is recommended that future studies employ different databases.

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