

A BIBLIOMETRIC EXPLORATION OF NEGATIVE REVIEWS AS CATALYSTS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract: *In an economic landscape increasingly defined by uncertainty and complexity, traditional quality management strategies often struggle to keep pace with rapidly shifting consumer expectations. This paper investigates an information asset that remains frequently underutilized during periods of crisis: negative customer feedback. Far from being a mere indicator of failure, negative reviews function as real-time market sensors, providing a critical map of product and process vulnerabilities. The research employs a hybrid methodology centered on a rigorous bibliometric analysis conducted using the bibliometrix package in the R software. By processing metadata from articles indexed in Web of Science the study maps the conceptual evolution of consumer dissatisfaction, tracing its transition from a perceived marketing barrier to a strategic catalyst for quality-driven innovation. The findings reveal a strong correlation between "negative sentiment" and "innovation agility," demonstrating that organizations capable of thriving in volatile economies are those that integrate complaints directly into the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) quality improvement cycle. The paper proposes a strategic framework in which the "critical voice" of the customer serves as fuel for resource optimization and the mitigation of nonconformity. The conclusions emphasize that, under conditions of uncertainty, competitiveness is not derived from the absolute avoidance of errors, but from the organizational capacity to transform digitally signaled failures into targeted, incremental improvement. This approach redefines quality management not as a state of static compliance, but as a dynamic and resilient dialogue with the market.*

Key words: *negative review, quality management, bibliometric analysis*

JEL classification: *M31, D83, L15*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's economic landscape, marked by intense volatility and systemic crises, the ability of organizations to move beyond mere crisis management and generate a sustainable competitive advantage has become a central theme in the academic literature. This transition is not merely a survival measure but reflects a strategic resilience through which threats are systematically converted into opportunities for development (Soane, 2024). An essential pillar of this process is negative feedback, which, although often perceived as an obstacle, actually acts as a catalyst for profound transformation, necessitating a critical reassessment of strategic directions (Chliova, Cacciotti, Kautonen and Pabez, 2025).

Although many studies have explored how negative feedback affects consumer psychology, we still know very little about how companies actually build this data into their quality management systems during tough economic times. This paper fills that gap. By using a bibliometric analysis, tracks how negative reviews have shifted from being seen as a simple marketing problem to becoming a key strategic tool for quality management.

Particular attention is paid to how negative reviews influence quality strategies. In a digital age where consumer perception is transparent and immediate, critical feedback becomes a valuable resource for companies seeking to strengthen their market position (Kim, Park, Kwak and Kang, 2025a), (Nilashi, et al, 2023). To extract value from this data, modern organizations no longer limit themselves to reactive responses but adopt complex methodologies such as using sentiment analysis to decode the nuances in customer feedback to refine services (Yazıcı & Ozansoy Çadırcı, 2024a) (Wang, Ji, Zhang, Li, Wang, Qu, 2022).

Beyond these practical applications, businesses are increasingly adopting frameworks such as the Kano model or Importance-Performance Competitor Analysis (IPCA) to pinpoint which product attributes demand urgent improvement (Joung & Kim, 2021; Kim, Park, Kwak, Kang, 2025b). Complementing these operational tools, bibliometric analysis has become an indispensable method for mapping the field's intellectual landscape and identifying emerging trends in quality research (Mikul & Mittal, 2024).

However, despite the clear benefits of leveraging feedback, several gaps in the research remain. Most notably, there is a lack of studies focusing on the long-term impact of negative reviews on strategic business changes. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive frameworks to integrate customer feedback directly into business strategy (Skačkauskienė & Nekrosiene, 2022). Additionally, current literature has not sufficiently explored the role of cultural differences in customer feedback (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021), nor has it adequately addressed how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) specifically can leverage these reviews for competitive advantage (Liu, Wang, Zhao, 2020). Addressing these areas is important for developing a more holistic understanding of how negative feedback drives organizational excellence.

This shift in perspective shows that businesses are moving away from seeing negative reviews as mere criticism, instead treating them as strategic opportunities for growth. By adopting this mindset, companies do more than just resolve immediate customer complaints; they actively build their market competitiveness through continuous improvement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamic landscape of global competitiveness necessitates a paradigm shift in how organizations perceive and manage consumer criticism. Modern scholarship suggests that managing negative reviews is no longer a defensive marketing task but a transformative strategic process (Zhang & Wang, 2025). As noted in recent studies, negative feedback functions as a market sensor, propelling organizations from crisis to competitiveness by highlighting critical service deficiencies and product vulnerabilities (Zhu & Liang, 2024). In highly volatile markets, consumer complaints exert significant pressure on firms to enhance total factor productivity, directly linking customer dissatisfaction with overall business performance improvements (Dakša & Kokina, 2025; Zheng et al., 2025).

To navigate these challenges, the adoption of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices remains a cornerstone of organizational resilience. Both "hard" TQM (technical tools and processes) and "soft" TQM (leadership and human resources) significantly influence customer behavior by prioritizing continuous improvement and innovation (Ershadi, Najafi, Soleimani, 2019). When performance review systems are aligned with these practices, they can effectively mitigate the impact of negative feedback while enhancing employee engagement (Liao, Soltani, Iqbal, van der Meer, 2024). However, researchers distinguish between tactical systems, which focus strictly on conformance quality, and dynamic systems that emphasize employee ownership of the quality process as a means to address recurring failures.

The impact of feedback is particularly pronounced in service-centric industries. In hospitality and tourism, specialized service quality models demonstrate that review sentiment and content are intrinsically linked to operational strategies (Hsueh & Hsu, 2024). In these environments, online reviews serve as the primary metric for evaluating hotel performance, where management responses and operational adjustments directly dictate subsequent customer satisfaction levels (Chan, Amin, Rasool, Syed, 2025). Similarly, in the e-tailing sector, the analysis of customer complaints through online platforms has become essential for identifying service gaps and informing logistics quality upgrades, thereby creating a sustainable competitive advantage (Hsiao, Chen, Hong, Huang, 2025).

In the era of Quality 4.0, the expansion of digital platforms for real-time feedback has provided organizations with unprecedented agility in strategic decision-making (Barravecchia, Mostragiacomo, Franceschini, 2025b). These mechanisms allow for the continuous monitoring of customer sentiments, offering timely insights that can be acted upon before a crisis escalates (Barravecchia, Mastrogiacono, Franceschini, 2025a). Social media platforms, in particular, provide a rich source of data that allows firms to benchmark their performance against rivals, helping to formulate strategies that enhance competitive positioning.

However, this digital reliance introduces the critical challenge of information quality. The prevalence of misinformation in online groups and product reviews can severely erode trust and distort managerial decision-making, especially in sensitive sectors like healthcare (Treadgold, Coulson, Campbell, Lambert, Pitchforth, 2025). Consequently, organizations must invest in

sophisticated data analysis tools to distinguish actionable intelligence from noise.

The strategic utility of feedback extends beyond mere quality fixes; it increasingly influences technical business decisions, such as dynamic pricing and product launch strategies. Review sentiment often drives firms to adapt their pricing models and product offerings in real-time to remain competitive (Wang, Guan, Feng, 2025). Furthermore, a proactive approach involves customizing services to meet specific customer needs, thereby fostering long-term loyalty and personalizing the consumer experience (Ziegler, Peisl, Raeside, 2023).

Ultimately, the literature emphasizes the integration of customer feedback into closed-loop quality cycles, such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) approach (Nilashi, Abumalloh, Ahmadi, Samad, 2023). By identifying the key drivers of satisfaction, organizations can focus their resources on the areas that most significantly impact the customer journey (Yazıcı & Ozansoy Çadırcı, 2024b). While the role of Artificial Intelligence in automating these cycles is a growing area of interest (Hakimi, Haq, Ghouri and Valette-Florence 2025; Hossain & Rahman, 2023), the human element (specifically how organizations leverage feedback to protect and enhance their reputation) remains the deciding factor in achieving market differentiation and long-term stakeholder trust (Krishna, Ramu, Chaitanya, Ram, Balayesu, Gandikota and Jagadesh, 2025). By harnessing the power of AI, businesses can gain deeper insights into customer sentiments, predict quality trends, and implement effective strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness (Devi, Anilkumar, Sowjanya and Kotagiri, 2024).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding these complex dynamics requires a systematic review of the latest academic work. I chose to perform a bibliometric analysis of the past five years of data from Web of Science because it is the most effective way to organize the massive amount of recent research. This approach helps us see the bigger picture and pinpoint how the core themes of the study are evolving right now. By systematically mapping recent publications, this analysis helps reveal not only established theoretical successes but also the blind spots where future research is most urgently needed to bridge the gap between customer feedback and strategic excellence.

To achieve this, the current study employs a bibliometric analysis designed to provide a structured and comprehensive assessment of the scientific contributions within this field. By integrating qualitative synthesis with quantitative science-mapping techniques, the approach goes beyond simple data collection to ensure both conceptual depth and analytical rigor. This methodology allows for a critical examination of how these strategies are operationalized in real-world scenarios, effectively evaluating their implications for long-term sustainability and market competitiveness.

The selection of studies was guided by the PRISMA framework to ensure the process remains transparent and easy to replicate. By setting clear inclusion and exclusion criteria from the outset, the focus was kept strictly on empirical research and reviews that directly address how negative feedback and quality models are applied in business. This structured approach helped filter out irrelevant data, ensuring that only the most impactful evidence was used for the analysis.

The Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection was chosen as the primary data source for this study, given its high indexing standards and the detailed metadata necessary for a precise bibliometric analysis. To capture the most relevant literature, a specific search query was developed to link core concepts of feedback and quality management with strategic adaptation. The following Topic Search (TS) query was applied to ensure all key dimensions were covered: TS = (("negative feedback" OR "customer reviews" OR "online feedback" OR "negative ratings") AND ("quality strategy" OR "quality improvement" OR "quality management" OR "service quality") AND ("strategic change" OR "organizational change" OR "competitiveness" OR "market positioning") AND ("implementation" OR "adoption" OR "application" OR "management"))".

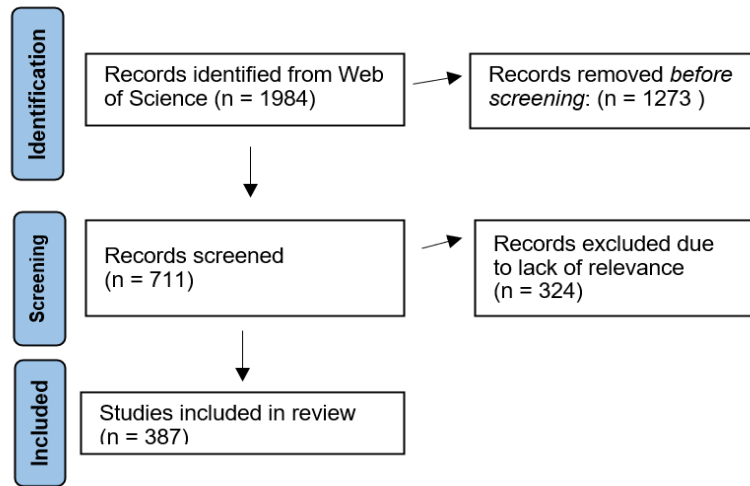
During the initial selection phase, 1,984 bibliographic records—including titles, abstracts, keywords, and metadata—were exported from the Web of Science Core Collection into Microsoft Excel for systematic organization. After removing duplicates and clearly irrelevant entries, the remaining documents underwent a rigorous screening process.

First, a preliminary review of titles and abstracts was conducted to exclude studies that, despite containing the search terms, did not align with the specific scope of this research. This stage focused on filtering out papers that lacked a direct connection to the strategic application of feedback

or failed to address the core objectives of quality improvement. Following this, the remaining articles were subjected to a more detailed eligibility assessment to ensure conceptual and thematic consistency. Studies focusing on unrelated sectors or those providing only descriptive or historical accounts without strategic relevance were also excluded.

After this multi-step refinement process, 395 articles met all inclusion criteria and formed the final corpus for analysis. The entire selection procedure, ensuring transparency and focus, is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for document inclusion



Source: own creation

The bibliometric analysis was performed using R software and the Bibliometrix package (version 4.2.2), utilizing the Biblioshiny interface for data visualization. This workflow integrates performance analysis with science-mapping techniques to evaluate the structural and temporal evolution of the field.

The performance analysis tracked publication trends, citation impact, and the influence of key journals and authors, providing a clear overview of the domain's intellectual growth. Simultaneously, science-mapping (specifically co-word and co-occurrence network analyses) was used to identify dominant themes and conceptual clusters.

To ensure a robust assessment, the analysis triangulated data from Keywords Plus, titles, and abstracts. This approach combines indexed descriptors with author-defined framing, offering a more coherent and comprehensive picture of how negative feedback and quality strategies are integrated into modern business research.

Thematic mapping was employed to classify research topics by their importance and development, helping to distinguish between well-established concepts and emerging trends. To capture how the field has shifted over time, trend

topic analysis and thematic evolution techniques was used. By examining titles and abstracts, the movement of key ideas was tracked. Sankey diagrams was used to visualize these conceptual transitions. The complete analytical framework for this study is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Bibliometric research framework

Method	Unit of Analysis
Performance Analysis	
Evolution of the Field	Annual scientific production; country-level output over time.
Citation Impact	Most cited countries and total citation counts.
Sources and Authors	Top journals (H-index), leading authors, and collaboration.
Science Mapping	
Conceptual Structure	Word clouds and co-occurrence networks (Keywords Plus).
Thematic Structure	Thematic mapping (clustering) to classify topics by development.
Knowledge Transitions	Thematic evolution/Sankey diagrams for shifts.

Source: own elaboration

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An analysis of the Web of Science database revealed a considerable number of articles addressing the topic of negative reviews. By applying the necessary filters related to the field (business and management), the time period (the last 5 years), and the document type (articles), the number of articles was narrowed down; nevertheless, a growing interest in this field over the past few years can still be observed. The research shows a clear surge in interest, with the number of publications jumping from 62 in 2023 to a peak of 113 in 2024, remaining steady throughout 2025. This recent momentum, with over half of all papers published in just the last two years, proves that negative feedback and quality strategies are now top priorities for the business research community.

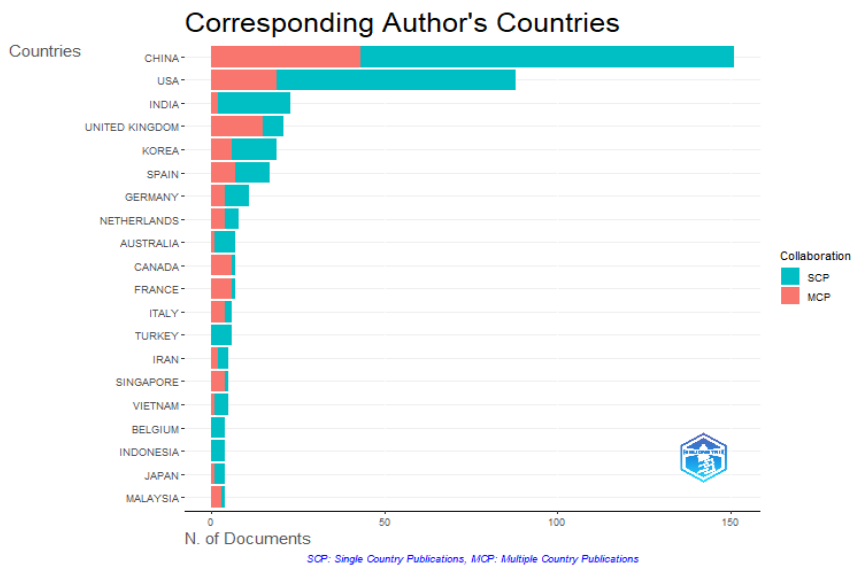
Geographically, the research is dominated by China and the USA, which contribute 135 and 103 publications respectively, highlighting their leadership in this field. This dominance is not merely quantitative but reflects the advanced state of the platform economy in these regions. In China, the integration of social commerce necessitates sophisticated feedback loops, while in the USA, the focus on consumer psychology drives theoretical development. Other significant contributions come from England, India, and

South Korea, while a steady output from countries like Australia, Spain, and Germany confirms that the strategic importance of feedback is a global academic interest.

The analysis of corresponding authors' countries reveals distinct patterns of international collaboration. While China and the USA lead in both total output and multiple-country publications (MCP), countries like the United Kingdom show a remarkably high ratio of international partnership. In contrast, emerging contributors such as India and Turkey rely primarily on single-country publications (SCP), suggesting that while the field is expanding globally, cross-border research networks are more concentrated among established academic economies.

This high MCP ratio in established economies suggests that the theoretical framework of feedback management is being refined through cross-cultural validation, essential for globalized service brands. In contrast, the reliance of emerging contributors like India and Turkey on single-country publications (SCP) may indicate a focus on localized consumer behavior, highlighting a need for more integrative, global-scale studies to bridge regional market specificities.

Figure 2. International collaboration patterns by country



Source: Biblioshiny

Regarding the most relevant sources, the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services leads with 21 publications, followed by the Journal of Business Research (15).

The prominence of journals focused on hospitality, tourism, and e-commerce highlights that the strategic management of feedback is most intensely studied in service-oriented and digital

markets, where consumer ratings directly influence business outcomes. Furthermore, the inclusion of management and information technology journals reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field, blending consumer psychology with technical quality systems. From a theoretical perspective, this reflects Signaling Theory, as the intangible nature of tourism means negative reviews act as powerful warnings that outweigh positive feedback, forcing the industry to lead the way in developing smart reputation management strategies.

In terms of scientific influence, the USA and China lead with 1,827 and 1,559 citations respectively, establishing themselves as the primary authorities in the field. While China produces a larger volume of papers, the USA remains the most cited, indicating a high level of global academic impact. The United Kingdom follows as a key secondary hub, while the inclusion of the United Arab Emirates in the top ten highlights a growing regional focus on service quality and consumer feedback within Middle Eastern markets.

The analysis of Keywords Plus highlights word-of-mouth as the most dominant theme (140 occurrences), underscoring its critical role in how consumer feedback spreads.

This dominance underscores the shift from one-to-one complaint handling to one-to-many reputation management.

The high frequency of terms like impact, satisfaction, and performance suggests an evolution toward accountable management, where feedback is no longer a qualitative nuance but a quantitative metric of firm health. Keywords such as trust and behavior reveal a deep interest in the psychological drivers behind consumer perceptions.

Overall, the data suggests that research in this field is moving toward understanding the complex, moderating factors that link feedback to business success.

Figure 3. Visual mapping of dominant Keywords Plus



Source: Biblioshiny

The co-occurrence network identifies three main thematic clusters that define the research landscape.

The blue cluster represents the core connection between word-of-mouth and business impact, linking social media interactions to strategic management.

The red cluster focuses on the outcomes, specifically how feedback influences customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall

performance. Finally, the green cluster highlights the importance of information and trust, exploring how the credibility of online reviews shapes consumer behavior.

This tripartite structure reveals a shift in the research paradigm: the field is moving away from simply capturing data (the blue cluster) toward a behavioral-strategic nexus (red and green clusters), where the goal is to convert psychological insights into measurable competitive advantages.

a level of maturity in the last two years, which underscores the urgent need to integrate consumer opinions into continuous improvement cycles.

Geographically and structurally, the study reveals the dominance of the USA and China while highlighting the crucial role of international collaboration networks (such as those in the UK) in disseminating best practices. The concentration of publications in retail, hospitality, and e-commerce journals demonstrates that feedback-based strategies are most advanced in sectors where direct customer interaction and digital reputation are critical for economic survival.

The thematic evolution identified through Sankey diagrams and strategic maps indicates a paradigm shift: research no longer treats negative feedback as an isolated incident but as a complex mechanism that directly influences loyalty, trust, and organizational performance. The transition of concepts from innovation toward strategy suggests that experimental methods for managing dissatisfaction have now become standardized business procedures.

The practical value of this work lies in the integration of digital feedback into the PDCA cycle, demonstrating that the check phase is now dominated by real-time consumer data. While the study is limited to the Web of Science database, it opens the door for future research into how AI will further automate these quality adjustments. Ultimately, the findings suggest that in the volatile economy of 2026, the ability to listen to the unhappy customer is the ultimate competitive advantage.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although this study provides a detailed overview of the field, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. First, the data collection was restricted to the Web of Science Core Collection. While this database is known for its high-quality peer-reviewed content, relying on a single source may have excluded relevant studies indexed in other platforms like Scopus or Google Scholar. Second, because the analysis focused primarily on English-language publications, it might not fully capture unique quality management perspectives from emerging markets where research is published in local languages. Finally, as a bibliometric study, this work identifies broad quantitative trends but does not delve into the specific qualitative nuances of each individual case study.

Looking ahead, several exciting paths for future research emerge. A key area to explore is the

integration of Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Models (LLMs) in automating the response to negative feedback. As we move toward Quality 4.0, understanding how AI can translate unstructured reviews into real-time operational changes will be indispensable. Furthermore, future studies could shift the focus toward the human side of this digital shift (specifically, how frontline employees handle the increasing volume of online criticism) and what psychological tools they need to maintain service quality. Lastly, comparing feedback across different platforms, such as comparing the professional tone of specialized retail sites with the more emotional nature of social media, could offer deeper insights into how organizations should tailor their quality recovery strategies.

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