



**INSIGHTS FROM B2B BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND CUSTOMER
SERVICE VALUE TRENDS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management</i>
Manuscript ID	IJRDM-02-2025-0098.R4
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Bibliometric analysis, Business-to-Business (B2B), Customer service value, SciMAT, VOSviewer, Buying behaviour

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“Insights from B2B buying behaviour and customer service value trends: A systematic review”

Abstract

Purpose: Despite the growing number of publications in the field of B2B buying behaviour and customer service value, the existing research remains fragmented and lacks a cohesive framework for understanding these interrelated domains. The primary aim of this research is to conduct a systematic literature review of B2B buying behaviour and customer service value over the past twenty years.

Design/methodology/approach: Utilising bibliometric tools SciMAT and VOSviewer, authors analyse the performance and evolution of these themes in the B2B context.

Findings: The results offer a framework for pinpointing research needs for both academia and industry, highlighting thematic areas that have received varying degrees of attention, and providing a roadmap for future research by assessing the status of the domain.

Practical implications: Based on the evolution map presented and looking to the future, authors recommend that scholars examine four areas of research: sales innovation, smart technologies, alliances and markets and, online buying, which offer opportunities for further exploration.

Originality/value: This approach provides a framework for establishing research needs for academia and industry, identifying areas that have had less or even more focus in recent years to provide a roadmap for future research, and analysing and identifying the status of the domain.

Keywords Bibliometric analysis, business-to-business (B2B), buying behaviour, customer service value, SciMAT, VOSviewer

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Investigating business-to-business (B2B) markets presents researchers with distinct difficulties that demand different strategies from those typically used in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts (Wiersema, 2013). Unlike B2C purchasing, which is often driven by more personal, emotional, and relatively simpler decision-making within small household units (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015), B2B purchasing entails organisational buying processes involving multiple participants with varied roles, backgrounds, and motivations. Data collection in B2B research also poses greater challenges than in B2C studies. It is generally more limited and harder to obtain, often requiring collaboration across numerous organisations (Gould *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, B2B buying processes are marked by complexity and diversity (Aarikka-Stenroos *et al.*, 2018). The purchase decisions often involve highly specialised products that demand expert knowledge and customer service value.

The B2B landscape has experienced significant transformation in recent years. B2B strategies have shifted from a transactional, exchange-centered focus to one emphasising relationships and behavioural approaches (Xu and Hao, 2021). Recent years have seen a clear acceleration of academic and managerial interest in B2B buying behaviour and customer service value. This is reflected in the intensifying strategic focus of firms on mastering these areas to drive growth and competitiveness (Oueslati *et al.*, 2021; Sales-Vivó *et al.*, 2021; Trivedi *et al.*, 2023).

The economic and strategic significance of B2B markets underscores the need for this study's focus. According to McKinsey (2024), B2B commerce generates more than one-third of sales revenue for companies offering e-commerce channels, surpassing traditional in-person channels. Meanwhile, Gartner (2023) reports that although 75% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience, deals involving sales reps with digital tools are 1.8 times more likely to be

considered high-quality, highlighting the need for firms to balance digital convenience with expert human support. These trends reveal a complex distribution challenge: designing service systems that maintain trust and personalised value.

Retailers and distributors must understand how B2B customer expectations for seamless, omnichannel service and personalised value shape channel strategy (Forbes, 2025). B2B buying behaviour is deeply entwined with value creation through service, with supplier–buyer relationships and co-created service value. Given these distinctive features, achieving a clear understanding of B2B buying behaviour and customer service value remains a high-priority research goal (Xu and Hao, 2021).

Our systematic review addresses this gap by integrating these strands to offer a holistic view of their evolution and interconnections. This study is motivated by the recognition that B2B buying behaviour and customer service value are not merely adjacent but fundamentally interdependent constructs (Mora *et al.*, 2021). Understanding the dynamic evolution of B2B buying behaviour and customer service value is crucial because these constructs have undergone significant transformation in response to sweeping changes in technology, organisational structures, and market environments (Rustholkarhu *et al.*, 2022).

Theoretical background

B2B buying behaviour and customer service value

B2B buying behaviour has traditionally been conceptualised as a rational, structured process driven by efficiency, cost reduction, and value optimisation (Geiger and Naacke, 2023). In this view, industrial buyers aim to maximise utilitarian outcomes through formalised decision-making. However, contemporary research highlights that B2B buying is far from purely transactional: it increasingly relies on value co-creation, relational interactions, and customer experience management (Srivastava *et al.*, 2024).

Buying behaviour in B2B markets is shaped by complex, multi-stage decision processes involving multiple stakeholders, where the perceived and co-created value delivered through service interactions is critical for supplier selection, trust-building, and long-term relationship management (Scarpi *et al.*, 2022). Despite this theoretical and practical interdependence, existing research has tended to treat B2B buying behaviour and customer service value as distinct topics, leading to fragmented insights.

Customer service value in B2B contexts is evolving. Traditionally centred on functional benefits like technical support, store atmospherics, product quality, and delivery reliability, it now also encompasses relationship quality, trust-building, and collaborative problem-solving. Research indicates that B2B buyers expect personalised engagement and value-added services that extend beyond price or product features (Mohan *et al.*, 2022). This shift aligns with service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2011), which views customers as co-creators of value rather than passive recipients.

Recent studies show that principles from B2C retail are increasingly applicable to B2B settings, particularly regarding customer experience (CX) management (Dant and Brown, 2008; Noad and Rogers, 2008). For example, Lim (2023) demonstrates that B2B buyers in construction retail environments value professional advice, physical store interactions, and transformative marketing. This convergence is further evident in research on retail atmospherics and store design (Mukhopadhyay *et al.*, 2025).

Research underscores that B2B service value is co-created through interactions across multiple touchpoints, including sales meetings, after-sales service, and retail environments (Lundin and Kindström, 2024). Service quality in B2B is thus multi-dimensional, spanning technical performance, responsiveness, and the ability to customise solutions to complex client needs. These dynamics align with broader shifts in distribution management toward hybrid and omnichannel models that integrate self-service, online procurement, and in-person consultation

(McKinsey, 2024). As such, retail and distribution management research must account for the increasingly blurred lines between B2B and B2C approaches to service delivery and channel strategy (Mohan *et al.*, 2022). This study contributes a comprehensive framework for understanding B2B buying behaviour and customer service value in ways that are directly relevant to retail and distribution management scholars and practitioners.

Systematic literature review. The use of bibliometrics in the B2B context

Systematic literature reviews are essential in advancing knowledge in B2B marketing by synthesising dispersed findings, identifying dominant themes, and highlighting critical gaps (Mohan *et al.*, 2022). Unlike narrative reviews, systematic approaches provide rigor and transparency, reducing bias and enabling replication (Paul and Criado, 2020). In the B2B context, the complexity of buying processes, spanning multiple decision-makers, long cycles, and relational dynamics, makes structured evidence mapping particularly valuable (Bilro *et al.*, 2023). Bibliometric techniques have emerged as especially useful for these reviews, offering quantitative, replicable methods to trace scholarly influence, map thematic evolution, and objectively identify the intellectual structure of a field (Donthu *et al.*, 2022).

Bibliometrics allows researchers to quantify research performance by identifying prolific authors, impactful papers, and influential journals (Paul *et al.*, 2021). Beyond these productivity measures, bibliometric science mapping techniques, such as co-citation and co-word analysis, reveal conceptual connections, thematic clusters, and the evolution of research topics over time (Santana and Cobo, 2020). The use of thematic maps enables scholars to distinguish well-developed “motor themes” from emerging or declining topics, supporting evidence-based agendas for future research. Such mapping has become a powerful tool in B2B marketing to systematise fragmented research traditions spanning customer behaviour, relationship management, service value, and technology adoption (Mohan *et al.*, 2022).

Despite B2B's maturity as a marketing subfield, bibliometric reviews of customer behaviour and customer service value specifically remain limited. Previous analyses have tended to focus narrowly on social media (Pradhan *et al.*, 2023), service ecosystems (Palakshappa *et al.*, 2024), or digital transformation.

Bibliometrics enables researchers to visualise overlaps and disconnects across theories, supporting the development of integrative frameworks for understanding buying behaviour and service value creation (Lichtenthal *et al.*, 2018). A bibliometric systematic review also addresses the call for greater methodological transparency and replicability in distribution research (Klarin, 2024). This transparency is particularly critical in B2B, where research often suffers from context-specific insights that are difficult to generalise.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a bibliometric systematic literature review to examine two decades of research on B2B buying behaviour and customer service value. Bibliometric techniques were selected because they allow for replicable, quantitative mapping of research streams, while reducing bias associated with narrative reviews. To ensure rigor and transparency, we followed a three-step process: (i) data collection and citation analysis, (ii) co-citation analysis and group identification, and (iii) co-occurrence analysis of keywords to describe thematic structures over time (Klarin (2024). The process was supported by two established science mapping tools: VOSviewer (v.1.6.15) and SciMAT.

Data collection and screening

Data were retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) database, which is widely recognised for its comprehensive coverage and quality of indexed journals (Öberg, 2023). The search was limited to publications between 2000 and 2020 in order to capture the evolution of research

across two decades. The search strategy combined three sets of keywords linked with the Boolean operator “AND”: context: (“business-to-business” OR “B2B”), behaviour: (“buying behaviour” OR “buying behavior”), value: (“consumer value” OR “customer service value” OR “cocreation”).

The queries were further refined to include only English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals ranked in leading marketing and business outlets (as identified by Hult *et al.*, 2009; Morgan *et al.*, 2019). The initial search yielded a broad set of records. After screening for relevance and removing duplicates or unrelated material, a final dataset of 192 articles was retained. To ensure consistency, two independent coders reviewed the dataset. Each reviewed half of the articles, and agreement was subsequently cross-checked. Because full consensus was reached, no further reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen’s Kappa) were necessary.

Pre-processing and dataset organisation

To enhance accuracy, concepts with the same meaning were de-duplicated. The 20-year review period was then divided into three “eras” to reflect distinct phases in the evolution of the field: 2000–2014 (Era 1) – foundational studies (60 publications), 2015–2018 (Era 2) – conceptual expansion (70 publications), 2019–2020 (Era 3) – digital and relational sophistication (62 publications).

This division reflects both the volume of publications and thematic transitions identified in the literature.

Science mapping procedures

Two complementary bibliometric approaches were applied:

- Co-citation analysis (VOSviewer):

Used to visualise the intellectual structure of the field by mapping how frequently authors and studies are cited together. This technique combines mapping and clustering techniques by applying multidimensional weighted scaling (MDS). According to van Eck and Waltman

(2017), this feature distinguishes itself by arranging the most crucial elements in the center and the less significant ones at the edges. Articles co-cited at least twice were included in the mapping. The resulting clusters reveal research traditions and schools of thought, enabling the identification of pivotal authors and works.

- Co-word and thematic evolution analysis (SciMAT):

Used to trace the conceptual development of the field by analysing keyword co-occurrence. It is supported by co-word analysis and the h-index. SciMAT has established different stages (Santana and Cobo, 2020). Thematic clusters were classified according to centrality (connections with other themes) and density (internal development). This produced four categories of themes: motor, basic, specialised, and emerging/declining. The analysis enabled the identification of dominant topics in each era, as well as their evolution across time.

Data analysis and results

Most co-cited authors

VOSviewer analysis (see Figure 1) illustrates the co-citation structure of the B2B buying behaviour and customer service value. The articles located placed in a more pivotal position on the map are connected to other papers and can be considered critical. Each point on the map identifies an item from the set co-cited by at least two other items in the complete database. The size of each circle denotes the amount of co-citations for that item. Whereas the axes' position is arbitrary, the position of the studies on the map and their contents propose that the intellectual core of the field is structured in two main dimensions. On one side, the horizontal axis (one dimension) symbolises the object of analysis, and the articles located in the right quadrants are mainly focused on value co-creation. In contrast, those located in the left quadrants are concentrated on other aspects of B2B organisations, such as capabilities resources, performance, competitive advantage, or customer engagement.

On the other side, the vertical axis (second dimension) represents the level of analysis. The articles located at the top of the map have a micro-perspective, mainly analysing the Service-Dominant Logic and value exchange theories. In contrast, those located at the bottom have a macro-perspective, including studies on segmentation, branding, firm performance, or social media. As a result, four clusters are identified through the VOSviewer mapping technique and each of which included a set of articles with a similar co-citation profile. These clusters indicate the likelihood of sharing the same knowledge base or topic and are labeled as follows: cluster 1: firm performance; cluster 2: customer service value creation and co-creation; cluster 3: customer interactions; and cluster 4: engagement, social media, and branding.

VOSviewer analysis of 89 authors with at least 20 co-citations reveals the intellectual structure of the field. Not surprisingly, the most co-cited author is Vargo (204 co-citations). Close authors share a similar co-citation value. In Cluster 1, the most influential works are those by Homburg *et al.* (2010), and Ramani and Kumar (2008). Cluster 2 is characterised by the frequent co-citation of Grönroos (2017), and Vargo and Lusch (2011). In Cluster 3, the leading studies are those by Anderson *et al.* (2006) and Ulaga (2003). Finally, in Cluster 4, the most frequently co-cited authors are Cretu and Brodie (2007), and Storbacka and Nenonen (2011).

Insert Figure 1 here

Science mapping analysis: Three research "eras"

To understand thematic evolution, we divided the period 2000–2020 into three “eras” based on publication volume and thematic shifts: 2000–2014, 2015–2018, and 2019–2020. Each era shows distinct dominant themes, illustrated by strategic diagrams (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 here

Era 1 (2000-2014): "Give value to your B2B customers": B2B buying behaviour pivots on 12 research themes, with the following seven significant themes (motor and basic

themes): customer service value, co-creation, lifetime value, innovation, performance, and behaviour. This period is characterised by the foundational establishment of value in buyer–seller relationships (Flint *et al.*, 2022). Customer service value emerges as the motor theme, with strong interconnections to buyer-seller relationships (Möller, 2006), quality (Bruhn *et al.* 2014), satisfaction (Lam *et al.*, 2004), and service ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch, 2011).

Era 2 (2015-2018): "Co-creation in B2B: everybody wins": This period marks a conceptual shift toward relational and collaborative models of value creation. It includes 16 themes, with eight dominant ones: co-creation, impact, product, loyalty, decision-making, professional business services, markets, and social media. Co-creation becomes the clear motor theme, building on service-dominant logic and evolving from the customer service value emphasis of Era 1. This era demonstrates the field's growing sophistication in integrating relational, technological, innovation, knowledge, and strategic dimensions of B2B buying behaviour (Goduscheit and Faullant, 2018).

Era 3 (2019-2020): "Manage your customers' relationships": It reflects an even more mature and nuanced understanding of buyer–supplier interactions, with themes converging around managing complex, digitally enabled relationships. This period shows 15 themes, with eight dominant ones: service-dominant logic (Makkonen *et al.*, 2019), sales management (Friend *et al.*, 2020), trust (Taiminen and Ranaweera, 2019), internationalisation (Pyper *et al.*, 2020), distribution management (Kuster-Boluda *et al.*, 2020), customer service value (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2019), smart technologies (Kostis and Ritala, 2020), and management (Acharya, 2020). The performance measures for the themes in this period show that service-dominant logic is notable for its higher citation and h-index score.

This research revisits earlier ideas and concepts in several ways, such as using the concept of customer service value. Specifically, the theme service-dominant logic has the

highest centrality score, and it is linked to co-creation, bestseller relationships, branding, experience, and firms.

Thematic evolution

From the analysis of the themes that emerged in each period and how these themes have evolved, this study identified nine thematic areas: sales innovation, customer lifetime value, smart technologies, value creation, word-of-mouth (WOM) management, alliances and markets, online buying, product-service performance, and customer segmentation. In Figure 3, the bold stripes denote a topic linkage. A dotted line joining two clusters indicates that they share a series of keywords, but neither is the main one. The gauge of the border is a proportion of the inclusion index, and the circle dimension is proportionally the number of collected papers in each topic.

Sales innovation is a thematic area that has been composed of motor themes and has covered the link between the impact of innovation on sales management in the B2B context (Friend *et al.*, 2020; Goduscheit and Faullant, 2018; Noordhoff *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Changes in the recent period with increased globalisation, the effects of COVID-19, and worldwide policy restructuring have altered the way employees and sales teams interact with consumers. To cope with uncertainty, remain relevant, stabilise revenue, and forge new disruptive growth paths, leaders of B2B organisations must reinvent their approach to sales, focusing on innovation-linked aspects. In doing so, organisations must take strategic steps to combat the economic consequences of the downturn, successfully capture market share and keep pace with ever-changing customer demand.

Customer lifetime value is a theme composed of motor topics. This thematic area associates the customer lifetime value concept with loyalty and trust. Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) is defined as the total value a customer represents to a company throughout their business

relationship (Lam *et al.*, 2004; Nenonen and Storbacka, 2016; Ramaswamy and Arunachalam, 2016). This tool helps determine the amount of money an organisation invests in attracting a customer and the number of purchases the customer will make for the business relationship. Each moment of connection between a customer and the organisation (such as visits to the store, how requests are answered, purchases, and the use of the service or product offered) will determine the experience with which a person will define a business and the number of times he or she will visit it. Constantly improving this aspect of the relationship allows the customer to remain loyal to the organisation for much longer.

A thematic area related to CLV is customer segmentation (Müller *et al.*, 2018). This research scope has lost a certain amount of interest in the last period. The B2B marketing field requires a holistic perspective on the segmentation process to measure and test the influence of each stage on the following one via an ethnography/observation approach. Specifically, the virtualisation of markets has enabled B2B companies to access consumers online without having any physical facilities in the target market country. In such cases, the behavioural segmentation based on the consumer digital footprints, rather than demographic, geographical, or psychographic segmentation, should be preferred by firms.

Insert Figure 7 here

Smart technologies are devoted to organisation, social media, and smart (Breidbach and Maglio, 2016; Kostis and Ritala, 2020; Hilton *et al.*, 2013; Pöyry *et al.*, 2020). The number of publications related to this theme has been increasing in recent years, and it could be considered one of the most important topics linked to B2B in future years. Technology has enabled that tools like mobile wallets, video conferencing, social networking sites, e-commerce sites, cryptocurrency, and peer sharing sites to facilitate B2B transactions. It would be worth exploring the impact of the innovative marketing channels, such as reverse channels,

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3 blockchain-based channels, augmented reality, and virtual reality-based channels on the B2B
4 customers, cost, and competition (Rustholikarhu *et al.*, 2022).
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8 The thematic area of value creation is the largest one and achieves the best performance
9 indicators. Value creation has more themes in the second period and covers topics related to
10 customer service value, co-creation, and service-dominant logic (Grönroos, 2017; Vargo and
11 Lusch, 2011). Organisations must pioneer new ways to listen to and understand customer needs
12 and stay close now and in the future as the market and needs change. To do so, they must
13 continually nurture customer visibility and serve them in real-time, reach them with empathetic
14 messages, improve sales approaches with tools driven by smart technologies, and deepen
15 consumer needs to create sales opportunities. These actions will enable the creation of more
16 excellent customer service value in the B2B arena.
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28 The WOM management research area comprises the following concepts: co-creation, and
29 social influence (Wang *et al.*, 2016). This area of study analyses how the co-creation of a
30 product or service between the organisation and consumer in B2B environments has a value on
31 the consumer. From this co-creation value created, a social influence of this satisfied consumer
32 on its environment is generated. These results are reflected currently in a WOM communication
33 activity by the consumer in the B2B context (Ishii and Kikumori, 2023). Typically, potential
34 buyers within the B2B environment consult peers within the industry, influencing their
35 purchasing decision. In this regard, suppliers can use private or public social media platforms
36 to increase their credibility, thus facilitating this process.
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49 Alliances and markets thematic area is linked to managing a series of business alliances
50 and the relationship with specific consumer markets (Ozdemir *et al.*, 2017). The importance of
51 various alliances to share activities and risks has been demonstrated throughout the literature.
52 Moreover, this cooperation encourages the creation of innovation together with other partners.
53 Each party provides its level of know-how. To achieve success, the parties (partners) should
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3 have a firm grasp of the desired characteristics of the other party and confidence between the
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5 members.
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8 A related research area is online buying. This context examines the relationship between
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10 the Internet and buying behaviour in the second and third eras (Muzellec *et al.*, 2015). There
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12 are various marketing channel options for organisations, like the company's own channels,
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14 independent intermediaries, and a hybrid model. It would be interesting for future researchers
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16 to find out the most efficient channel in the B2B context in terms of revenue, profit, or customer
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18 satisfaction.
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22 Finally, while relevant, the theme of product-service performance is of diminishing
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24 importance in the third period (Homburg *et al.*, 2010). It is considered of great importance in
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26 the literature to be opened to adopting new approaches. To this end, it is essential to reposition
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28 existing product and service offerings to overcome not satisfying customer needs in real-time.
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30 This requires continuous use of new customer data sources and big data, predictive analytics,
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32 and CRM tools that uncover changes in purchasing propensity. Within the increased
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34 performance of products and services, innovation is paramount. Furthermore, the results
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36 suggest that B2B service managers should go beyond simply tracking the performance of their
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38 services. They should also measure customer knowledge, customer perceptions of relationship
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40 trust and perceived facilitation of economic outcomes to optimise service delivery.
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47 **Conclusions and implications**

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49 This study systematically reviews two decades of research on B2B buying behaviour and
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51 customer service value, identifying key themes, their evolution, and emerging opportunities.
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53 Beyond mapping these findings, our review offers several important theoretical, practical
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55 implications and directions for practical research in B2B marketing, distribution management,
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57 and service research.
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Theoretical implications

Our results demonstrate that B2B buying behaviour and customer service value are not merely parallel streams but interdependent constructs central to value co-creation and competitive advantage in industrial markets. The identification of motor themes such as service-dominant logic, co-creation, sales management, and trust underscores the shift from transaction-focused views toward relational, process-oriented perspectives (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). This evolution supports calls for integrating customer journey frameworks (Durmusoglu *et al.*, 2022) into B2B buying contexts, where value is co-created across multiple touchpoints involving complex decision-making units. Moreover, our mapping reveals uneven development across themes: while service-dominant logic and co-creation have become well-developed conceptual cores, themes like online buying and smart technologies remain under-explored. This suggests an urgent need to expand theory to address digitalisation, AI-enabled sales processes, and new distribution channels in B2B settings (Rustholkarhu *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, this study highlights the value of bibliometric science mapping for clarifying fragmented literatures. While prior B2B reviews (e.g., Lichtenthal *et al.*, 2018) have taken narrative approaches, the use of SciMAT and VOSviewer enables researchers to visualise conceptual structures and track evolution systematically over time. This approach can support future meta-reviews, comparative studies across contexts (e.g., emerging vs. mature markets), and interdisciplinary mapping of B2B buying behaviour in adjacent fields such as supply chain management or service systems.

Practical implications

For practitioners in B2B marketing, sales, and distribution management, our findings provide a roadmap for adapting to changing buyer expectations. The prominence of customer service

value and co-creation themes suggests organisations must move beyond cost-based selling toward delivering differentiated value through collaborative solutions and superior service experiences. Sales innovation, identified as an emerging area, underscores the need to integrate digital channels, AI-driven insights, and customer journey management into sales processes (Durmusoglu *et al.*, 2022). Trust and relationship management remain foundational, but must adapt to remote interactions and globalised supply chains. For industry and policymakers, our mapping reveals opportunities to foster innovation ecosystems, support SME digitalisation, and design standards or frameworks that encourage sustainable, value-focused B2B relationships.

Improving service value and collaboration among industrial buyers and suppliers can enhance supply chain resilience, promote sustainability through shared goals, and drive innovation that benefits consumers and communities. Policymakers should note that supporting B2B firms in adopting service-dominant strategies and smart technologies can have ripple effects on economic development and competitiveness.

Directions for future research

Our bibliometric mapping highlights several important research gaps that merit sustained scholarly attention.

1. Advancing understanding of sales innovation in B2B contexts.

Our analysis indicates that sales innovation has evolved from themes such as sales management, impact, and innovation, particularly in the third era. However, empirical research remains limited on how B2B firms can systematically innovate sales processes to address turbulence, crises, and global competition. Scholars such as Trivedi *et al.* (2023) have examined service quality dimensions in manufacturer–distributor relationships, but questions remain about how technological and organisational innovations reshape the roles of sales teams, customer interactions, and trust-building. Future research could investigate how AI-driven tools, digital

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3 CRM systems, and data analytics support sales force effectiveness and value co-creation across
4 multi-channel strategies.

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8 2. Exploring the online/hybrid distribution models and the transformative role of smart
9 technologies.

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12 Despite its increasing relevance, research on online procurement platforms and hybrid channel
13 strategies in B2B contexts remains limited (Oueslati *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the emergence
14 of smart technologies as a theme signal growing but fragmented interest in how technological
15 innovations enable value co-creation. Studies such as Rustholkarhu *et al.* (2022) have
16 examined AI-empowered customer journey management, but the field lacks integrative
17 frameworks linking specific technologies (e.g., IoT, blockchain, AR/VR) to buying behaviour
18 and service customisation across industries. Researchers can examine how smart technologies
19 impact trust, relationship quality, and service delivery in complex B2B supply chains.

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22 3. Examining alliances and markets for collaborative value creation.

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25 Themes related to alliances and markets suggest a need for deeper exploration of inter-
26 organisational collaboration as a driver of innovation and value co-creation. While Brown *et*
27 *al.* (2024) discuss internal marketing for sustainable value co-creation, there is less empirical
28 focus on how alliances, joint ventures, and strategic partnerships in B2B markets enable shared
29 risk-taking and technological advancement. Comparative work across industries can help
30 clarify when and how alliances deliver superior service value to business customers.

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33 4. Developing integrated conceptual models linking service-dominant logic, customer journeys,
34 and firm performance.

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37 Finally, our review reveals that while service-dominant logic and co-creation are well-
38 developed themes, they often remain theoretically isolated from work on the B2B buying
39 journey and organisational outcomes (Durmusoglu *et al.*, 2022). Studies such as Sales-Vivó *et*
40 *al.* (2021) emphasise value co-creation activities but do not fully integrate these with models of

buying behaviour stages, trust dynamics, and loyalty-building. There is scope for developing comprehensive conceptual frameworks that link co-created service value to supplier selection, relationship quality, customer lifetime value, and firm performance outcomes (e.g., Geiger and Naacke, 2023). Empirical validation of such models would advance theory and offer practical guidance for firms designing effective B2B marketing and distribution strategies.

Limitations and further research

Although the study provides a more in-depth understanding of how the literature on buying behaviour and customer service value in B2B contexts has evolved, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the use of keywords may not be exempt from bias. Further research could include other keywords to analyse different concepts related to buying behaviour and customer service value. Second, the bibliometric analysis is based on papers that have been published and cited. The authors know that current "hot topics" related to buying behaviour were not identified as key research streams. Finally, other types of research techniques such as correspondence analysis could be incorporated to generate additional meaningful insight.

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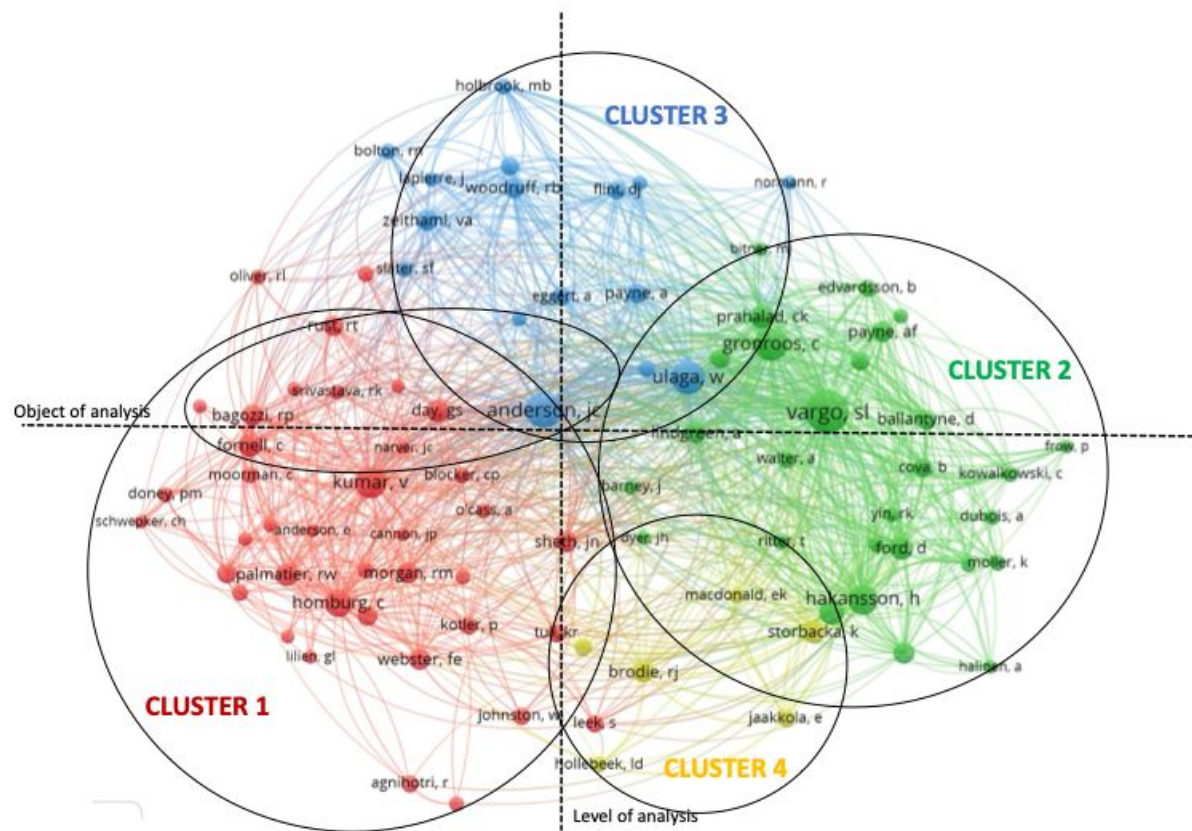
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Figure 1 Map of authors on B2B buying behavior

Note: Citation network of the central papers. There is a proportionality between the size of the nodes and the number of citations received; the colors represent the clusters.

Figure 2 Strategic diagrams and performance of the themes for the 2000-2020 period

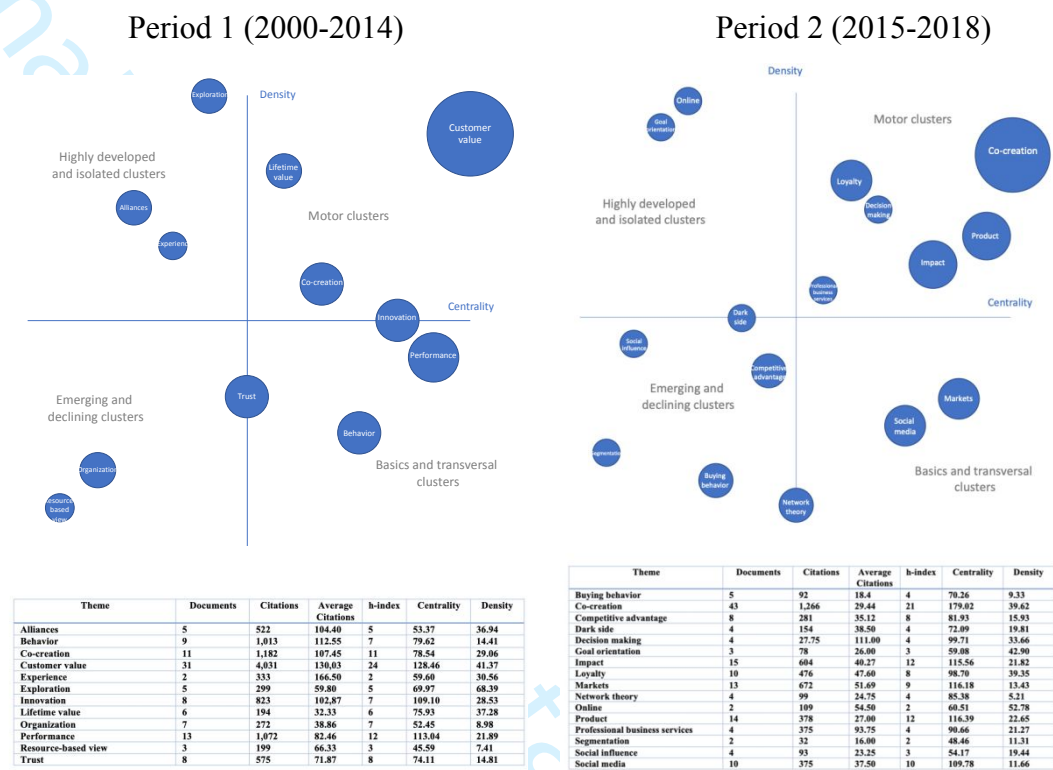
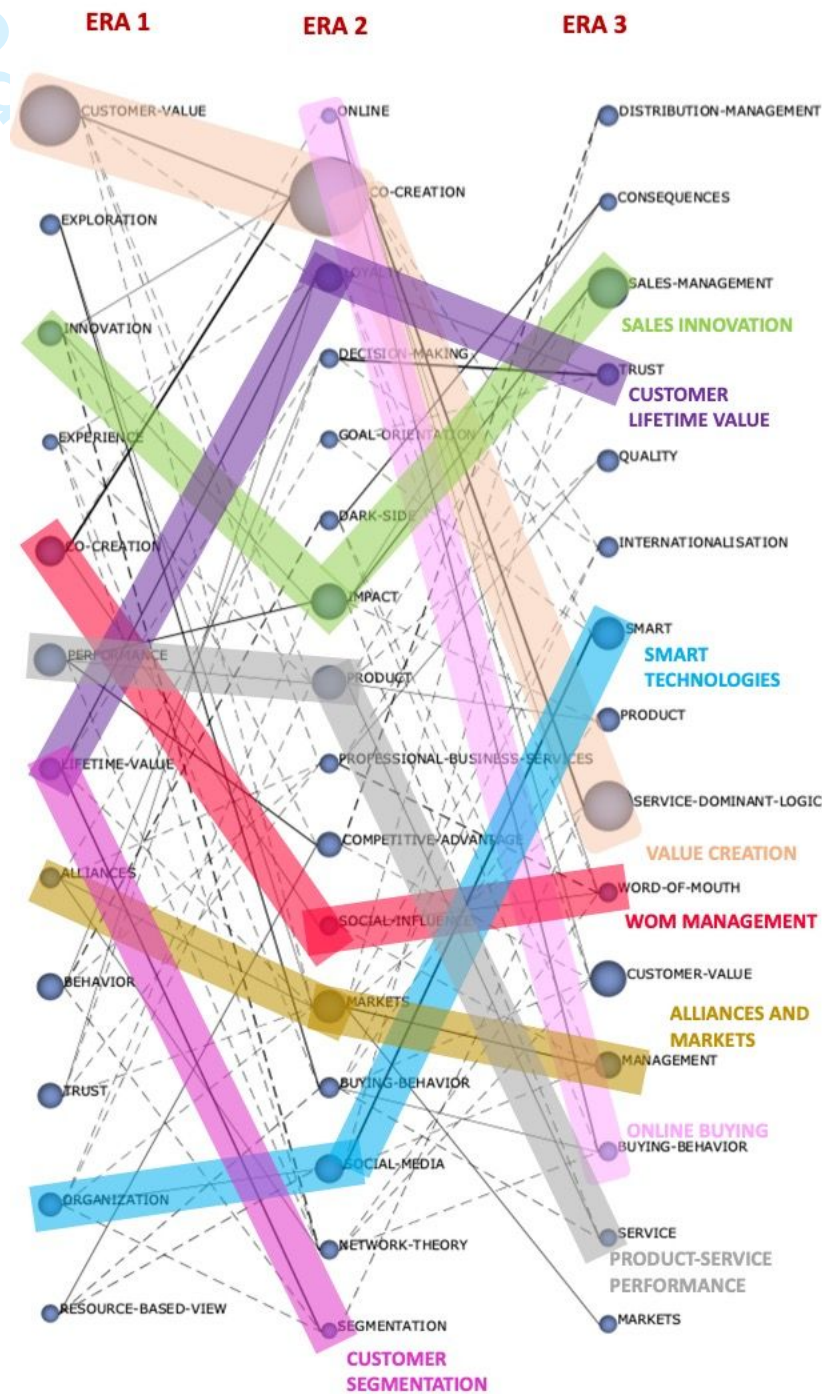


Figure 3 Thematic evolution (Period 2000-2020)

Appendix

PERIOD 1: 2000-2014

1. Fostering client-agency relationships: A business buying behavior perspective
2. Creating value that cannot be copied
3. The impact of market and organisational challenges on marketing strategy decision-making: a qualitative investigation of the business-to-business sector
4. Exploring the phenomenon of customers' desired value change in a business-to-business context
5. A longitudinal study of customers' desired value change in business-to-business markets
6. Customer value, satisfaction, loyalty, and switching costs: An illustration from a business-to-business service context
7. The role of transactional versus relational data in IMC programs: Bringing customer data together
8. Buyer attentiveness in buyer-supplier relationships
9. Role of competences in creating customer value: A value-creation logic approach
10. Building competences for new customer value creation: An exploratory study
11. Interrelationships among key aspects of the organizational procurement process
12. Ethics and value creation in business research: comparing two approaches
13. Unpicking the meaning of value in key account management
14. The relationship between personal values and perceived value of education
15. The influence of brand image and company reputation where manufacturers market to small firms: A customer value perspective
16. Interfirm relational drivers of customer value
17. Interaction orientation and firm performance
18. Determining the indirect value of a customer
19. Why integrating purchasing with marketing is both inevitable and beneficial
20. Expanding the Role of Marketing: From Customer Equity to Market Capitalization
21. Investigating the service brand: A customer value perspective
22. An exploratory investigation of the elements of B2B brand image and its relationship to price premium
23. Brand awareness in business markets: When is it related to firm performance?
24. Calculating, creating, and claiming value in business markets: Status and research agenda
25. Mapping the values in B2B relationships: A systemic, knowledge-based perspective
26. Service Performance-Loyalty Intentions Link in a Business-to-Business Context: The Role of Relational Exchange Outcomes and Customer Characteristics
27. Exploring Cross-National Differences in Organizational Buyers' Normative Expectations of Supplier Performance
28. When do B2B brands influence the decision making of organizational buyers? An examination of the relationship between purchase risk and brand sensitivity
29. The Bright Side and Dark Side of Embedded Ties in Business-to-Business Innovation
30. The structure and evolution of business-to-business marketing: A citation and co-citation analysis
31. To JM on Its 75th Anniversary
32. Modeling customer value perceptions in cross-cultural business markets
33. It's all B2B ... and beyond: Toward a systems perspective of the market
34. A conceptualisation of supplier-perceived value

35. Markets as configurations
36. Does salesperson's customer orientation create value in B2B relationships? Empirical evidence from India
37. Measuring customer attractiveness
38. Customer relationship management processes: How faithful are business-to-business firms to customer profitability?
39. Using cross-functional, cross-firm teams to co-create value: The role of financial measures
40. What factors influence buying center brand sensitivity?
41. Types of linkages between service characteristics and customer consequences
42. Uncovering Customer Profitability Segments for Business Customers
43. A framework of brand value in B2B markets: The contributing role of functional and emotional components
44. Creating superior customer value for B2B firms through supplier firm capabilities
45. Relationship and Market Conditions: Outcomes in Marketing Channels
46. Managing and measuring value co-creation in business-to-business relationships
47. Supplier representative activities and customer perceived value in complex industrial solutions
48. Towards a framework of customer value assessment in B2B markets: An exploratory study
49. Customer Participation and Project Performance: The Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing in the Chinese Telecommunication Service Industry
50. Business service networks and their process of emergence: The case of the Health Cluster Portugal
51. Development of B2B marketing theory
52. Customer-Centric Leadership: HOW TO MANAGE STRATEGIC CUSTOMERS AS ASSETS IN B2B MARKETS
53. Value creation processes and value outcomes in marketing theory: Strangers or siblings?
54. Recovering Hidden Buyer-Seller Relationship States to Measure the Return on Marketing Investment in Business-to-Business Markets
55. Developing an integrated vision of customer value
56. Co-production and self-service: The application of Service-Dominant Logic
57. Adopting self-service technology to do more with less
58. Impact of component supplier branding on profitability
59. Managerial perceptions of service-infused IORs in China & India: A discursive view of value co-creation
60. Antecedents and consequences of the quality of e-customer-to-customer interactions in B2B brand communities

PERIOD 2: 2015-2018

61. Transaction Attributes and Customer Valuation
62. Building industrial brand equity by leveraging firm capabilities and co-creating value with customers
63. B2B and internal relationships and curative international marketing: A polish case study
64. Interpersonal influence strategies in complex B2B sales and the socio-cognitive construction of relationship value
65. Value Co-Creation Processes-Early Stages of Value Chains Involving High-Tech Business Markets: Samsung-Qualcomm Semiconductor Foundry Businesses

66. Direct and Indirect Effects of Buyers and Sellers on Search Advertising Revenues in Business-to-Business Electronic Platforms
67. Organizational and institutional barriers to value-based pricing in industrial relationships
68. Making value co-creation a reality - exploring the co-creative value processes in customer-salesperson interaction
69. Complexity of sales situation and sales lead performance: An empirical study in business-to-business company
70. Value-based selling: An organizational capability perspective
71. Two-sided Internet platforms: A business model lifecycle perspective
72. Exploring service failure in a business-to-business context
73. Influence of the ethical servant leader and ethical climate on customer value enhancing sales performance
74. Antecedents to value diminution: A dyadic perspective
75. Divided attitudinal loyalty and customer value: role of dealers in an indirect channel
76. Competitive Advantage Through Engagement
77. Theory and practice of value co-creation in B2B systems
78. Provider and relational determinants of customer solution performance
79. The customer as enabler of value (co)-creation in the solution business
80. Value co-creation practices and capabilities: Sustained purposeful engagement across B2B systems
81. Technology-enabled value co-creation: An empirical analysis of actors, resources, and practices
82. Do professional service firms benefit from customer and supplier collaborations in competitive, turbulent environments?
83. Every cloud has a silver lining - Exploring the dark side of value co-creation in B2B service networks
84. Advertising to businesses: Does creativity matter?
85. The use of social media in sales: Individual and organizational antecedents, and the role of customer engagement in social media
86. Social media and value co-creation in multi-stakeholder systems: A resource integration approach
87. The impact of sellers' social influence on the co-creation of innovation with customers and brand awareness in online communities
88. To be or not to be (loyal): Is there a recipe for customer loyalty in the B2B context?
89. Outcome versus process value in service delivery
90. Retrospective: tracking the impact of communications effectiveness on client satisfaction, trust and loyalty in professional services
91. Securing business-to-business relationships: The impact of switching costs
92. Driving shareholder value with customer asset management: Moving beyond customer lifetime value
93. Sustainable value co-creation in business networks
94. Effects of task complexity on creative customer behavior
95. Social media use in B2b sales and its impact on competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling: Examining the role of learning orientation as an enabler
96. Selling Value in Business Markets: Individual and Organizational Factors for Turning the Idea into Action
97. Is perceived value more than value for money in professional business services?
98. The role of horizontal and vertical new product alliances in responsive and proactive market orientations and performance of industrial manufacturing firms

99. Entrepreneurial marketing of international high-tech business-to-business new ventures: A decision-making process perspective
100. Customer reference marketing: Conceptualization, measurement and link to selling performance
101. Servitization in global business-to-business distribution: The central activities of manufacturers
102. Customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences
103. What's in it for me? Capital, value and co-creation practices
104. Social bonding as a determinant of share of wallet and cross-buying behaviour in B2B relationships
105. The Impact of Client-Professional Relationships in Ex Ante Value Creation: A Service-Dominant Logic Perspective
106. Determinants of services co-creation with business customers
107. Strategic B2B customer experience management: the importance of outcomes-based measures
108. Psychological ethical climate, leader-member exchange and commitment to superior customer value: influencing salespeople's unethical intent and sales performance
109. Identifying the right solution customers: A managerial methodology
110. Reflections on "social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales" and a research agenda
111. Which resources and capabilities underpin strategic key account management?
112. Customer value co-creation behavior: A dyadic exploration of the influence of salesperson emotional intelligence on customer participation and citizenship behavior
113. Social media engagement strategy: Investigation of marketing and R&D interfaces in manufacturing industry
114. Paths Toward Radical Service Innovation in Manufacturing CompaniesA Service-Dominant Logic Perspective
115. Initiating value co-creation: Dealing with non-receptive customers
116. Digital, Social Media, and Mobile Marketing in industrial buying: Still in need of customer segmentation? Empirical evidence from Poland and Germany
117. Enhancing firm performance: The role of brand orientation in business-to-business marketing
118. The relative influence of functional versus imagery beliefs on brand sensitivity in B2B professional services
119. Influence of interfirm brand values congruence on relationship qualities in B2B contexts
120. Investigating relationship types for creating brand value for resellers
121. Push and pull strategies by component suppliers when OEMs can produce the component in-house: The roles of branding in a supply chain
122. Sensemaking, sensegiving and absorptive capacity in complex procurements
123. Managerial perspectives on crowdsourcing in the new product development process
124. The impact of social media on resource mobilisation in entrepreneurial firms
125. IMP thinking and IMM: Co-creating value for business marketing
126. The Relative Influence of Economic and Relational Direct Marketing Communications on Buying Behavior in Business-to-Business Markets
127. Conceptualizing and communicating value in business markets: From value in exchange to value in use
128. The role of a solutions salesperson: Reducing uncertainty and fostering adaptiveness
129. Rapport building in authentic B2B sales interaction
130. Resource integration for co-creation between marketing agencies and clients

PERIOD 3: 2019-2020

131. Opportunities for ethnographic methodologies in B2B service research
132. Investigating international strategic brand management and export performance outcomes in the B2B context
133. Capability-driven industrial firms: Considering resources, capabilities, and competencies for marketing developments
134. A platform approach in solution business: How platform openness can be used to control solution networks
135. Do salespeople matter in competitive tenders?
136. Strengthening Customer Value Development and Ethical Intent in the Salesforce: The Influence of Ethical Values Person-Organization Fit and Trust in Manager
137. Service quality versus service experience: An empirical examination of the consequential effects in B2B services
138. Customer participation antecedents, profiles and value-in-use goals in complex B2B service exchange
139. Advancing social media driven sales research: Establishing conceptual foundations for B-to-B social selling
140. Fostering brand engagement and value-laden trusted B2B relationships through digital content marketing The role of brand's helpfulness
141. A transition from goods-dominant to service-dominant exchange logic in a B2B relationship: A relationship positioning perspective
142. Developing business customer engagement through social media engagement-platforms: An integrative S-D logic/RBV-informed model
143. Managing customer engagement at trade shows
144. Twitter and behavioral engagement in the healthcare sector: An examination of product and service companies
145. Operationalizing thought leadership for online B2B marketing
146. A comparison of social media marketing between B2B, B2C and mixed business models
147. Toxic Collaborations: Co-Destroying Value in the B2B Context
148. Collective engagement in organizational settings
149. Customer referencing as business actor engagement behavior - Creating value in and beyond triadic settings
150. Business interaction and institutional work: When intermediaries make efforts to change their position
151. Mapping value in business markets: An integrative framework
152. Using Ethical Leadership to Improve Business-To-Business Salesperson Performance: The Mediating Roles of Trust in Manager and Ethical Ambiguity
153. Drivers and outcomes of relationship quality with professional service firms: An SME owner-manager perspective
154. Stereotypical supplier evaluation criteria as inferred from country-of-origin information
155. The role of prosocial and proactive personality in customer citizenship behaviors
156. Adding co-creation as an antecedent condition leading to trust in business to-business relationships
157. The darker side of sustainability: Tensions from sustainable business practices in business networks
158. Assessing Value From Business-to-Business Services Relationships: Temporality, Tangibility, Temperament, and Trade-Offs

159. Fostering collaborative mind-sets among customers: a transformative learning approach
160. The role of a central actor in increasing platform stickiness and stakeholder profitability: Bridging the gap between value creation and value capture in the sharing economy
161. An analysis of configurations of relationship quality dimensions to explain sources of behavioral outcomes in globalized manufacturing
162. The network orchestrator as steward: Strengthening norms as an orchestration practice
163. The Role of Frontline Employees' Competitive Intelligence and Intraorganizational Social Capital in Driving Customer Outcomes
164. Social media, customer engagement, and sales organizations: A research agenda
165. Can cooperation drive the success of suppliers in B2B crowdsourcing innovation projects? A large scale data perspective
166. Organizing actor Engagement: A platform perspective
167. Modular interconnected processes, fluid partnering, and innovation speed: A loosely coupled systems perspective on B2B service supply chain management
168. An identity perspective of key account managers as paradoxical relationship managers
169. The Coronavirus crisis in B2B settings: Crisis uniqueness and managerial implications based on social exchange theory
170. Opportunities for value-based selling in an economic crisis: Managerial insights from a firm boundary theory
171. Digital Artifacts in Industrial Co-creation: How to Use VR Technology to Bridge the Provider-Customer Boundary
172. Performative corporate brand identity in industrial markets: The case of German prosthetics manufacturer Ottobock
173. The emotional side of organizational decision-making: examining the influence of messaging in fostering positive outcomes for the brand
174. Value propositions in a digitally transformed world
175. The effects of an articulated customer value proposition (CVP) on promotional expense, brand investment and firm performance in B2B markets: A text based analysis
176. How B2B suppliers articulate customer value propositions in the circular economy: Four innovation-driven value creation logics
177. Entrepreneurial marketing decision-making in rapidly internationalising and de-internationalising start-up firms
178. Customer involvement in big data analytics and its impact on B2B innovation
179. Engaged, but with what? Objects of engagement in technology-aided B2B customer interactions
180. Digital engagement strategies and tactics in social media marketing
181. A typology of business usage center members
182. Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts
183. Product radicalness and firm performance in B2B marketing: A moderated mediation model
184. B2B purchase engagement: Examining the key drivers and outcomes in professional services
185. Intention to Continue Relationship in B to B Setting - Case of Guinness Ghana Breweries - Some Preliminary Findings
186. Exploring proactive market strategies
187. Good match matters: Knowledge co-creation in international joint ventures

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188. Co-creating social media agility to build strong customer-firm relationships

189. What drives customer Re-engagement? The foundational role of the sales-service interplay in episodic value co-creation

190. Blurring B2C and B2B boundaries: corporate brand value co-creation in B2B2C markets

191. The Ambidextrous Sales Force: Aligning Salesperson Polychronicity and Selling Contexts for Sales-Service Behaviors and Customer Value

192. Robotics for Customer Service: A Useful Complement or an Ultimate Substitute?

INSIGHTS FROM B2B BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND CUSTOMER SERVICE VALUE TRENDS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

*Estrella Díaz¹, Rocío Carranza², David Martín-Consuegra³, Carlos Sánchez-Camacho⁴

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Manuscript ID IJRDM-02-2025-0098

**“INSIGHTS FROM B2B BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
VALUE TRENDS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW”**

Dear Editor,

Thank you for reading and taking into consideration our manuscript. Your comments and the reviewers’s remarks and concerns were well-received, and the corresponding suggestions have been incorporated in this new revised version. The comments received enabled us to improve the paper considerably.

We have provided a cover letter to explain the details of our modifications to the manuscript and our responses to the reviewers’ comments. To make the changes easily viewable, our responses follow the structure of the reviews. We have highlighted changes to the manuscript in red so they can be readily found and reviewed. You can find below a summary of the responses from the authors to each reviewer’s comments and suggestions.

Below are our responses to the comments:

Response to Reviewer 1

Comment 1: The following sentence is not complete: “Meanwhile, Gartner (2023) reports that although 75% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience……?”

Answer/comment: We thank the reviewer for pointing out the incomplete sentence regarding the Gartner (2023) report. We have revised the manuscript to complete the sentence as follows:

(p. 2; para. 3): Meanwhile, Gartner (2023) reports that although 75% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience, deals involving sales reps with digital tools are 1.8 times more likely to be considered high-quality, highlighting the need for firms to balance digital convenience with expert human support.

Comment 2: The first sentence of the abstract is confusing as it is not clear in which exact field (“this field”?) the existing research remains fragmented: “Despite the growing number of publications in this field, the existing research remains fragmented and lacks a cohesive framework for understanding B2B buying behaviour and customer service.



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Answer/comment: Thank you for highlighting the lack of clarity in the opening sentence of the abstract. We have revised it to improve precision, and the updated version now reads:

(p. 1; para. 1): Despite the growing number of publications in the field of B2B buying behaviour and customer service value, the existing research remains fragmented and lacks a cohesive framework for understanding these interrelated domains.

Comment 3: Regardless of the significant improvements made to the manuscript, my earlier concern regarding the transparency and reproducibility of the analysis remains partially unresolved. Only representative papers for each era are presented, rather than the full list of identified, coded and classified articles underlying Figure 1 and the Findings section. While Figure 2 is verifiable through related tables, this is not the case for Figure 1. Given the IJRDM's volume constraints, the author(s) should at minimum provide an appendix or repository link with the complete dataset and detailed methodology. Without this, the analysis remains unverifiable. Such documentation would enhance the credibility of the findings and facilitate replication.

Answer/comment: We thank the reviewer for raising this important point regarding transparency and reproducibility. In line with your suggestion, we have rewritten the description of our methodology and provided access to the complete dataset of the 192 identified in an appendix to ensure transparency and allow for replication.

Methodology

Research design

(p. 6; para. 3): This study adopts a bibliometric systematic literature review to examine two decades of research on B2B buying behaviour and customer service value. Bibliometric techniques were selected because they allow for replicable, quantitative mapping of research streams, while reducing bias associated with narrative reviews. To ensure rigor and transparency, we followed a three-step process: (i) data collection and citation analysis, (ii) co-citation analysis and group identification, and (iii) co-occurrence analysis of keywords to describe thematic structures over time (Klarin (2024). The process was supported by two established science mapping tools: VOSviewer (v.1.6.15) and SciMAT.

Data collection and screening

(p. 6; para. 4): Data were retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) database, which is widely recognised for its comprehensive coverage and quality of indexed journals (Öberg, 2023). The search was limited to publications between 2000 and 2020 in order to capture the evolution of research across two decades. The search strategy combined three sets of keywords linked with the Boolean operator "AND": context: ("business-to-business" OR



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“B2B”), behaviour: (“buying behaviour” OR “buying behavior”), value: (“consumer value” OR “customer service value” OR “cocreation”).

(p. 7; para. 2): The queries were further refined to include only English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals ranked in leading marketing and business outlets (as identified by Hult et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2019). The initial search yielded a broad set of records. After screening for relevance and removing duplicates or unrelated material, a final dataset of 192 articles was retained. To ensure consistency, two independent coders reviewed the dataset. Each reviewed half of the articles, and agreement was subsequently cross-checked. Because full consensus was reached, no further reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen’s Kappa) were necessary.

Pre-processing and dataset organisation

(p. 7; para. 3): To enhance accuracy, concepts with the same meaning were de-duplicated. The 20-year review period was then divided into three “eras” to reflect distinct phases in the evolution of the field:

2000–2014 (Era 1) – foundational studies (60 publications),

2015–2018 (Era 2) – conceptual expansion (70 publications),

2019–2020 (Era 3) – digital and relational sophistication (62 publications).

This division reflects both the volume of publications and thematic transitions identified in the literature.

Science mapping procedures

(p. 7; para. 5): Two complementary bibliometric approaches were applied:

- Co-citation analysis (VOSviewer):

(p. 7; para. 6): Used to visualise the intellectual structure of the field by mapping how frequently authors and studies are cited together. This technique combines mapping and clustering techniques by applying multidimensional weighted scaling (MDS). According to van Eck and Waltman (2017), this feature distinguishes itself by arranging the most crucial elements in the center and the less significant ones at the edges. Articles co-cited at least twice were included in the mapping. The resulting clusters reveal research traditions and schools of thought, enabling the identification of pivotal authors and works.

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Response to Reviewer 2

Dear Reviewer,

We sincerely thank you for your positive evaluation and recommendation to accept our manuscript. We greatly appreciate your constructive feedback throughout the review process, which has helped us refine and strengthen the paper. We are pleased to know that you find the updated version well aligned with the proposed idea, with appropriate methodology, clear results, and well-formed implications.

We are grateful for your suggestions, comments, and recommendations to enhance the manuscript. Thanks to these, we believe that the new document matches the goals of IJRDM and provides contributions and potential insights for IJRDM's readers. We hope that you find the revised paper satisfactory.

Sincerely,

The authors



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Response to Reviewer 1

**“INSIGHTS FROM B2B BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
VALUE TRENDS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW”**

Dear Reviewer,

We are very grateful for the opportunity to revise the manuscript. We have addressed all your comments in this new revision and believe it has led to a more rigorous, consistent, and insightful study. This letter explains the details of the revisions we made to the manuscript, including responses to your comments. To make the changes easily viewable, our responses follow the structure of the reviews. Please note that the new/edited content included in the original manuscript (which we refer to in this letter) is highlighted in red so as to be readily found and reviewed.

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Thank you once again for your thoughtful review and support in improving our work.

Sincerely,

The authors