

## 14 Years of Online Customer Engagement: A Systematic Literature Review Using the SPAR-4-SLR Protocol

## أربعة عشر عامًا من إشراك العملاء عبر الإنترنت: مراجعة منهجية للأدبيات باستخدام بروتوكول SPAR-4-SLR

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### Abstract:

**Objectives:** The aim of the study is to conduct bibliometric and content analyses based on reading and analyzing 871 online customer engagement papers published in the last 14 years.

**Methods:** The SPAR-4-SLR protocol and Vos Viewer tool for bibliometric and content analysis.

**Results:** The study enabled us to conduct a bibliometric analysis, through which we examined the performance of authors in terms of citations and co-citations, as well as the performance of countries in relation to online customer engagement articles. We also conducted a content analysis, which allowed us to identify five clusters derived from the most frequently occurring keywords, and provide insights into the main thematic areas where online customer engagement is explored.

**Conclusions:** This review underscored the need to examine the specific context and informed methodologies used to measure customer engagement in social media, highlighting its multifaceted character. This study makes a valuable contribution in identifying the direct and indirect influencing factors of customer engagement and the role of new technologies in customer engagement.

**Keywords:** Online customer engagement; SPAR-4-SLR; bibliometric analysis; content analysis.

### الملخص:

**الأهداف:** تهدف الدراسة إلى إجراء تحليلات بيبليومترية ومضمونية استنادًا إلى قراءة وتحليل 871 ورقة بحثية حول إشراك العملاء عبر الإنترنت نُشرت خلال السنوات الأربع عشرة الماضية.

**المنهجية:** استخدام بروتوكول SPAR-4-SLR وأداة Vos Viewer في التحليل البيبليومتري والمضموني.

**النتائج:** أتاحت لنا هذه الدراسة إجراء تحليل بيبليومتري قمنا من خلاله بفحص أداء المؤلفين من حيث عدد الاستشهادات والتشارك في الاستشهادات، بالإضافة إلى تحليل أداء الدول فيما يتعلق بالمقالات المتعلقة بإشراك العملاء عبر الإنترنت. كما أجرينا تحليلًا مضمونيًا مكّننا من تحديد خمس مجموعات ناتجة عن الكلمات المفتاحية الأكثر تكرارًا، مما وفر رؤى حول المحاور الموضوعية الرئيسية التي يُستكشف من خلالها إشراك العملاء عبر الإنترنت.

**الخلاصة:** سلّطت هذه المراجعة الضوء على الحاجة إلى دراسة السياق المحدد والمنهجيات المعتمدة لقياس إشراك العملاء عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، مبرزة الطابع المتعدد الأبعاد لهذا المفهوم. وتُشكل هذه الدراسة مساهمة قيّمة في تحديد العوامل المؤثرة بشكل مباشر وغير مباشر في إشراك العملاء، إلى جانب إبراز دور التقنيات الحديثة في تعزيز هذا الإشراك.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إشراك العملاء عبر الإنترنت؛ بروتوكول SPAR-4-SLR؛ التحليل البيبليومتري؛ التحليل المضموني.

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## 1 Introduction

In the dynamic realm of digital commerce, the notion of online customer engagement has emerged as a focal point for businesses aiming to forge and sustain meaningful relationships with their customers.

With the proliferation of internet access and the widespread adoption of digital technologies, consumers increasingly turn to online platforms to interact with brands, make purchasing decisions, and seek product recommendations. As a result, understanding and effectively harnessing the power of online customer engagement has become imperative for companies striving to succeed in today's highly competitive world market. Digital transformation drives a different culture of innovation and prepares companies to polarize and engage more customers. It has fundamentally transformed the way businesses interact with their customers.

Online customer engagement encompasses a wide range of interactions and activities that occur between customers and brands in the digital realm. From social media actions and email connections to website browsing and online reviews, these engagements play a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions, influencing purchasing behavior, and building long-term relationships with the brand. As such, businesses are investing significant resources into developing strategies and tactics to enhance online customer engagement and drive positive outcomes for their bottom line.

Despite its importance, the concept of online customer engagement remains complex and multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions such as interactivity, value co-creation, personalization, and community building. Furthermore, the swift progression of technological innovation and shifting consumer preferences continue to reshape the landscape of online engagement, presenting both opportunities and challenges for businesses to remain at the forefront of industry trends.

In light of these developments, this literature review endeavors to furnish an extensive synopsis of the current research concerning online customer engagement, synthesizing insights from various disciplines such as marketing, consumer behavior, and digital communication. By examining key concepts, theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practical implications, this review seeks to shed light on the factors influencing online customer engagement, the strategies employed by businesses to enhance engagement, and the outcomes associated with effective engagement practices.

Through a critical study of the literature, this review will explore the following key questions: The research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the bibliometric trends (performance) of online customer engagement research?
- **RQ2:** What are the factors that influence online customer engagement?

By addressing these questions, this literature review aims to offer valuable perspectives for businesses striving to craft and execute efficient approaches for customer engagement in the digital era. Moreover, it will pinpoint weaknesses in current research and propose pathways for future exploration, aiming to enhance our comprehension of online customer engagement and its practical and theoretical ramifications. This review holds the potential to shape the future of research in online customer engagement.

Following the SPAR-4-SLR framework, this comprehensive review identifies five thematic clusters that represent the extent of online customer engagement. These segments are not only intended for scholars equipped with a comprehensive overview of the field, capturing the tacit theoretical and practical innovations that still define discourse but also facilitating further investigation. The first cluster, primarily focused on customer engagement, internal organizational dynamics, and strategy application, examines how companies' internal strategies influence engagement outcomes, sensitizing interdisciplinary research that is taking place at the intersection of marketing, strategic management, and organizational behavior. The second cluster calls for examining the technology and ethical frontier in the business sector, finding such a mission to be in line with the need to explore further the role of automation, personalization, and transparency in digital interactions. Customer experience across multiple channels further highlights the imperative requirement of a comprehensive understanding of customer experiences across various digital and physical touchpoints.

Additionally, the third cluster, dedicated to brand communities in both B2B and B2C settings, views social interaction as one of the primary agents of change in terms of loyalty and advocacy. Thus, the last cluster, which focuses on corporate strategy, stakeholder relations, and sustainable engagement, emphasizes that customer engagement must also be considered within a broader context of social and environmental challenges. In general, these revelations lay solid groundwork for subsequent academic research, including the refinement of conceptual models, the recognition of research gaps, and the broadening of the methodological spectrum that is, qualitative and quantitative analyses, as well as bibliometric approaches.

By adopting a practical approach, companies can leverage the meaningful benefits that come from analyzing online customer engagement through a methodical examination. The digital environment today is changing rapidly, and firms must constantly adjust their customer interaction strategies. This is a situation where a systematic review provides a comprehensive and evidence-based overview of effective engagement mechanisms. The uncovered elements aim to identify the factors that can be used to enhance customer interaction, sustain loyalty, and foster brand advocacy across different online channels. Enterprises that implement these approaches are better equipped to improve user journeys, refine marketing operations, and foster stronger digital connections with their audiences. Additionally, the review may reveal areas in the strategy that are not fully covered or new opportunities arising from specific markets, customer segments, or technology platforms. In other words, the understanding created by this review is far from being theoretically relevant only; it provides very concrete, research-based guidance for companies seeking to optimize their digital engagement strategies.

## 2 Theoretical Background

The concept of online customer engagement (OCE) was not recognized until 2010, although it has been involved in academic literature since 2006. To this day, customer engagement (CE) has been defined from many perspectives (e.g., behavioral, psychological, emotional, etc.), but there is no clear definition.

Customer engagement has been studied primarily from a relationship marketing perspective (Vivek et al., 2012) that is aligned with the principles of Social Exchange Theory (SET). This perspective considers that customers make proactive efforts towards their relationships with companies rather than simply receiving benefits (Grönroos, 1997). Marketers engage consumers to facilitate relational exchanges to shape customer behavior. Customers expend personal resources (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and physical resources) depending on the benefits they receive from their interactions with companies (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Therefore, SET, which emphasizes the principles of fairness and reciprocity, is an excellent theoretical framework for exploring customer engagement. It has also been extensively adopted in prior research on customer engagement (e.g., (Harrigan et al., 2018; Simon & Tossan, 2018)).

SET has been the basis for previous studies examining the relationships between organizations and consumers in offline contexts (Nunkoo et al., 2010). The theory holds that in a social relational setting, when exchange takes place, individuals rely on a relative analysis of the benefits and costs that can be economic, social, or a mix of both. Customers receive benefits in the form of quality of service, prompt handling of requests, and customer-focused interactions, and other programs strive to engage customers at each possible point of contact and provide unique brand experiences (L. Hollebeek, 2011).

In the literature to date, CE is defined as a composite of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions. Based on the studied papers, there are two main perspectives on customer engagement: behavioral and psychological perspectives. In the following, we present insightful definitions of CE based on systematic analysis (i.e., more cited, h-index, etc.).

(van Doorn et al., 2010) address the concept of customer engagement from a behavioral perspective. They define it as the behavioral reactions of customers beyond the purchase of a brand or company, triggered by motivational factors. Customer Engagement Behavior (CEB) comprises various behaviors, such as recommendations, blogs, text reviews, word of mouth, sales, and transaction metrics. The authors propose a conceptual model of CEB, including antecedents and consequences, by considering three types of factors (i.e., customer-based, firm-based, and context-based). Companies can manage CEB by adopting more inclusive and comprehensive approaches, recognizing their expansion and impact over time.

(Bijmolt et al., 2010) state that the manifestations of customer engagement include word of mouth, customer co-creation, and complaint behavior. Their paper provides a brief outline of "traditional" models addressing customer transactions. Further, it discusses how the critical behavioral manifestations of customer engagement (e.g., WOM, co-creation, and complaint behavior) can be incorporated into these models. The authors identify three phases: customer acquisition, development, and retention. They also address several organizational challenges related to customer engagement analysis that present roadblocks to the introduction of customer engagement analysis.

(Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014) provide the initial attempt to conceptualize the role of CEB in value co-creation within a multi-stakeholder service system. They identify four types of CEB: augmenting, co-developing, influencing, and mobilizing behavior, and investigate the value outputs that the different stakeholders experienced. This paper suggests that CEB influences value co-creation under the various resource

contributions of customers toward the focal firm and other stakeholders that change and/or increase the offering and/or impact the perceptions, preferences, expectations, or actions of different stakeholders towards the firm or its offering. The authors study the case of a public transportation service system involving consumers, communities, businesses, and government organizations. They provide nine propositions related to the four types of CEB, which explain the links between CEB and value co-creation by core customers, the core business, and other stakeholders.

(Kumar & Pansari, 2016) define customer engagement as "dynamic interactions of a consumer with a company, with prospects and with other shoppers, whether they are transactional or non-transactional in nature." The authors show that CE would positively affect the firm's performance. These favorable performance results are due to improved transactional customer engagement behavior rather than non-transactional behavior.

(Mollen & Wilson, 2010) consider online brand engagement as a multi-dimensional concept including cognitive treatment, experiential value (i.e., emotional congruence), and instrumental value (i.e., purpose and relevance) dimensions. The authors also clearly differentiate the concept from that of "involvement". It is argued that CE goes beyond involvement as it includes a proactive and interactive customer relationship with a specific brand. As a result, the authors assert that CE goes beyond the simple exercise of cognition. Unlike involvement, CE requires satisfaction with instrumental and experiential values. This approach is coherent with the vision of CE within the transcending relationship theory in the service-dominant logic, which emphasizes interactivity and customer experience (Brodie et al., 2011). CE is the customer's cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value.

(Brodie et al., 2011) defines the CE from a psychological perspective. CE is a cognitive process based on interactive and co-creative customer experiences with a brand in targeted service relationships. It emerges under a specific set of contextual conditions, leading to different levels of CE. It is considered as a dynamic and iterative process in service relationships that yields value co-creation. CE plays a vital role in a nomological network controlling service relationships where other relational items (e.g., involvement, commitment, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in the iterative processes of CE. It is a multi-dimensional concept that depends on a context-specific and/or stakeholder-specific expression of the relevant cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions. Similarly, Brodie et al. (2013) (Brodie et al., 2013) adopt an ethnographic method to examine the nature and breadth of customer engagement in a digital brand community environment. From their conceptual model, CE leads to connection and emotional bonding, customer empowerment, customer loyalty, satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

For (Sashi, 2012), customer engagement is considered to satisfy customers by providing superior value over the competition to build long-term trust and commitment. The online customer is engaged with the company through word of mouth, such as product reviews on websites, blog communities, and social networks.

(Guesalaga, 2016) defines customer engagement in social media as "the extent to which the organization's important customers are active in using social media tools."

(Harmeling et al., 2017) found that customer engagement measurements can be categorized into four main perspectives: intrinsic motivations, psychological states, customer activities, and contributions to firms. The authors propose that Customer engagement marketing is a firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure a customer's voluntary contribution to the firm's marketing functions beyond the core economic transaction.

From these definitions, we identified two perspectives of customer engagement (i.e., psychological and behavioral). These perspectives provide insight into how customers interact with a brand or business on both a mental and physical level. The psychological perspective focuses on the emotional and cognitive aspects of CE. It delves into the customer's mindset, feelings, and perceptions when interacting with a brand (Brodie et al., 2011, 2013; Guesalaga, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017; Sashi, 2012). The behavioral perspective of CE focuses on observable actions and interactions between customers and the brand. It emphasizes the actions that customers take as a result of their engagement (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; van Doorn et al., 2010). This leads us to deduce the following definition: Online customer engagement can be defined as a dynamic, context-dependent, and complex construct characterized by purposeful and interactive exchanges between consumers and firms through digital channels. This concept may manifest in cognitive (e.g., awareness, attention, and understanding), emotional (e.g., trust, attachment, and satisfaction), and behavioral (e.g., repeat purchases, word-of-mouth, user-generated content, and participation in social media communities) forms. It occurs when consumers, perceiving value in their interactions, voluntarily invest their resources, such

as time, emotional energy, and effort, beyond monetary transactions. Hence, they actively contribute to the co-creation of the brand's online presence, innovation, and the firm's competitive advantage.

### 3 The Development of Theoretical Perspectives on Online Customer Engagement Over Time

Before the 1990s, marketing activities were primarily influenced by a transactional orientation, which focused on maximizing short-term customer value. Some of the methods used included Recency, Frequency, and Monetary Value (RFM) analysis and the Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule), which were employed to identify the most profitable customers. Gradually, this model evolved into a relationship marketing approach, as advocated by (Berry, 1995) and (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), who emphasized that continuous customer relationships based on trust, satisfaction, and loyalty were necessary. However, studies such as (Shankar et al., 2003) have found that customer satisfaction alone is insufficient to maintain loyalty in the long-term, and the concept of customer engagement has emerged as a more advanced relational construct.

Customer engagement (CE) was first inspired by social psychology. Lewin (1949, 1951) noted that individuals who make decisions voluntarily have a significant impact on their future behavior. Going further, (Kiesler, 1971) introduced the theory of commitment psychology, which posits that people are more likely to be consistent with their past actions than with their inner beliefs. The characteristics of voluntary choice include the extent of engagement intensity, the irrevocability of the decision, frequency, consequences, and cost (Champy, 1999).

At the same time, the social exchange theory (Harrigan et al., 2018; Homans, 1958; Rather & Sharma, 2019) has become the key framework for understanding customer engagement behaviors. According to this, customers are more likely to engage if they experience a positive interaction with the service provider, meaning that the benefits they expect from the service outweigh the costs they incur, such as time, money, or effort. This perspective is consistent with Adams' (1965) (Adams, 1965) equity theory, which posits that customer engagement stems from a fair comparison of their inputs and the outcomes they receive.

Relationship marketing theory took the concept of engagement one step further by underlining the importance of high-quality interactions over time (Berry, 1995) rather than just isolated exchanges. The adoption of strategies such as loyalty programs and personalized digital communication — via email campaigns or social media — has been ongoing to facilitate and increase engagement levels. To gain a psychological understanding, attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth, as cited in (Miljkovitch, 2017)) enables the identification of the emotional aspect of customer-brand relationships, illustrating how emotional bonds can be the driving force behind loyalty and engagement.

Viewing it through the lens of survival and growth psychology, attachment theory (Miljkovitch, 2017) emphasizes the emotional content of customer-brand relationships, suggesting that emotional attachment may become the driving force behind loyalty and engagement. Complementary theoretical perspectives, such as cognitive dissonance theory (Adams, 1963), have revealed that unfulfilled brand promises and the brand's inconsistent conduct can erode customer engagement. This fact underscores the importance of consistency, transparency, and personalized interactions in business practices.

Social factors are another group of elements that have a decisive impact on the formation of engagement. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) posits that a person usually tends to become part of groups or communities with the same interests, such as a brand community, to maximize their engagement by gaining a sense of identification or through peer influence. In a similar vein, the theory of planned behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011; Sánchez-García et al., 2007) outlines how engagement comes as a consequence of the intentions to behave that are formulated under the influence of one's attitudes towards the behavior, one's social norms, and the perception of one's control over the behavior (Steg & Nordlund, 2012). At the same time, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) considers two forms of motivation — intrinsic and extrinsic — which constitute the reasons for involvement in an activity. On the other hand, expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) suggests that people are more likely to become involved when they anticipate receiving prizes that they consider worthwhile.

Web 2.0 technologies are primarily responsible for the significant shift in consumer behavior. Consumers today are omnichannel, well-informed, demanding, and co-creative. As a result, companies are continually required to develop new strategies that involve a deeper understanding of customer needs and the promotion of customer loyalty. Social exchange theory has been significantly extended through its reinterpretation into the context of electronic interactions (Van Vugt et al., 1995) with a more prominent focus on virtual value exchanges. Novel approaches, such as gamification (Deterding et al., 2011) and UX design (Barcenilla & Bastien,

2009; Hassenzahl, 2003; Lallemand & Gronier, 2018), have been employed to enhance engagement through the design of smooth interfaces, user-friendliness, and the integration of interactive features.

Today, customers have become active participants in value creation (Mostaghel et al., 2022; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2019) rather than being mere recipients of products and services. Interactive digital platforms (IDPs) facilitate the consumer's active participation, situating engagement as a fluid and mutual undertaking (L. D. Hollebeek & Belk, 2021). New technologies, such as AI, AR, and gamification, are also contributing to this change (L. D. Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Huang & Rust, 2022; Singh et al., 2021).

According to our systematic literature review, the most significant issues affecting online engagement were explored in 178 articles. Trust (67% of studies), satisfaction (65%), commitment (25%), channel integration quality (16%), and digital transparency (5%) were the most frequently cited antecedents. These findings confirm that online engagement is affected not just by the quality of the relationships but also by the technical infrastructure and ethical standards organizations maintain.

## 4 Method

Our study applies a systematic literature review to examine relevant existing literature on online customer engagement. To achieve this goal, we use the proposed protocol by (Paul et al., 2021), namely SPAR-4 SLR, to conduct the study in three stages (i.e., assembling, assessing, and arranging) and six sub-stages (i.e., identification, acquisition, organization, purification, evaluation, and reporting). These steps are presented in Figure 1.

### 4.1 Assembling

The first stage of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol is assembling, which involves identification (i.e., review domain, research questions, source type, and source quality) and acquisition (i.e., search mechanism and material acquisition, search period, search keywords) of articles for review. It includes the identification and acquisition of literature that has not been synthesized (Paul et al., 2021).

In the sub-stage of identification, the domain, research questions, source type, and source quality are determined. The domain and the research questions that guided this review are presented in detail in Figure 1, RQ1, and RQ2. The study material consisted of peer-reviewed research articles either published or in a state of "in press" in international peer-reviewed journals. The Scopus journal quality list was used to evaluate the source quality and identify the journals. Furthermore, the quality of articles was assessed with article impact factors and citations.

In order to conduct the search, we choose (1) "customer engagement" and "social media", (2) "consumer engagement" and "social media", (3) "brand engagement" and "social media", and (4) "business engagement" and "social media" as exact keywords for the search because of the centrality of these concepts to our review (i.e., customer = consumer, business). We checked the "title of the article" option in "advanced search" to produce finer-grained search results. The keywords were consistent in both American and British English, and thus, alternative spellings were not considered. Moreover, the decision to use only four combinations of keywords for the search (i.e., one combination for one search) is in line with the recommendation of a recent systematic review by (Lim et al., 2021). This echoed the adequacy, appropriateness, and logic of using a few but meaningful combinations of keywords.

In the second sub-stage, acquisition, the research articles published or in a state of "in press" between 2010 and 2024 were gathered in January 2024 in the Scopus database using the search words "customer engagement" for titles, abstracts, and keywords. Research terms generated 2060 studies in Scopus. In addition, the reference lists of the articles found through systematic searches were scrutinized to capture all the relevant material in the background of this review.

### 4.2 Arranging

The process of arranging involves organization and purification. In the organization step, articles from the English language were filtered, the document type selected was all research and review articles, and the source type was selected as journals only. Three subject areas were selected in the domain of social sciences: "Business, Management and Accounting", "Social Sciences", and "Economics, Econometrics, and Finance". The total number of articles returned after refinement was 1858, which was downloaded in BibTex format. In terms of purification, 987 articles were not directly related to the context of customer engagement, and some of them

were duplicated. After purification and data cleaning, a total of 871 documents were included for review purposes.

### 4.3 Assessing

The final phase of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol is assessing, which encompasses the evaluation and documentation of the articles under review. During the evaluation process, bibliometric analysis was employed, entailing the examination of publication trends, identification of prominent authors, analysis of highly cited papers, and determination of significant sources of literature, in terms of journal performance and through network analysis utilizing bibliographic coupling and cluster analysis. This analysis was conducted using VOSVIEWER to elucidate historical and current trends in Customer Engagement (CE) research. For forecasting future trends in Online Customer Engagement (OCE) research, thematic analysis was utilized, employing the agenda proposal method [20]. Findings were reported through the presentation of figures, tables, and textual explanations. The limitations of the study include reliance on a single database, namely Scopus, and a focus limited to bibliometric analysis and content cluster analysis using keyword co-occurrence networks. Notably, no financial support was required as the review was based on secondary data sources.

## 5 Results

The output of the review is presented in two parts according to the research questions: (1) bibliometric analysis, which covers CE's corpus, article, author, country, and journal performance as revealed by the performance analysis, and (2) content analysis which encapsulates the importance of technologies, digitization and all factors influencing customer engagement.

### 5.1 Bibliometric Analysis

In recent years, the proliferation of online platforms and digital technologies has transformed the landscape of customer engagement, reshaping the way businesses interact with their clientele. Online customer engagement, encompassing a spectrum of interactive behaviors and experiences between customers and brands in virtual environments, has emerged as a critical area of inquiry in marketing, e-commerce, and consumer behavior research. Understanding the dynamics, drivers, and outcomes of online customer engagement is essential for businesses seeking to thrive in the digital era.

The concept of customer engagement has evolved from traditional notions of customer satisfaction and loyalty to encompassing more dynamic and interactive relationships between customers and brands across various online channels and touchpoints. With the rise of social media, mobile apps, and online communities, customers now have unprecedented opportunities to interact, communicate, and co-create value with brands in virtual spaces. These interactions range from simple actions such as likes, comments, and shares to more complex forms of participation such as reviews, ratings, and user-generated content.

Despite the growing importance of online customer engagement, the literature on this topic remains fragmented, with diverse theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and empirical findings scattered across various academic disciplines and research domains. A systematic analysis of the existing literature is therefore warranted to synthesize knowledge, identify trends, and discover insights into the nature and impact of online customer engagement.

In this bibliometric analysis, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the scholarly research on online customer engagement, focusing on publications from peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and other academic sources. By employing bibliometric techniques such as citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and keyword analysis, we seek to map the intellectual structure of the field, identify influential works and authors, and uncover emerging trends and research themes.

#### 5.1.1 Corpus Performance

Our review analyses 871 papers published between 2010 and 2024 (14 years). Figure 2 depicts the increasing prevalence of CE publications, indicating heightened research interest in the field. The analysis of publication trends in customer engagement (CE) and its intersection with social media unveils intriguing insights into the evolving landscape of consumer behavior and digital communication. Beginning in 2011, there has been a noticeable uptick in the number of papers published annually on CE, coinciding with the rise of social media platforms as prominent channels for customer interaction and brand engagement. This correlation suggests a symbiotic relationship between CE and social media, wherein the proliferation of digital platforms has

facilitated a more nuanced understanding of customer engagement strategies and their effectiveness. Furthermore, the exponential growth of CE research from 2016 to 2024, punctuated by peaks in 2020 and 2021, underscores the enduring relevance of CE in the digital age. Amidst the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in CE publications reflects a heightened awareness among businesses of the imperative to adapt and innovate in their customer engagement practices. Consequently, the integration of social media into CE strategies has emerged as a vital component for organizations seeking to foster meaningful connections with their clientele in an increasingly digitized marketplace.

### 5.1.2 Author & Citation Performance

The review corpus contains contributions from 218 authors in the field of CE. Table 1 displays the top 25 most prolific CE authors, showcasing their h-index and total citations from Scopus for their CE articles in separate columns. This ranking is based on the authors' h-index and total citations, providing varied insights into their productivity, influence, and impact within the field. The top five CE authors ranked by their total citations are Hollebeek, Kumar, Brodie, Pansari, and Aksoy. The total citations garnered by these top authors underscore their ability to make a substantial mark in academic literature, irrespective of the frequency of publishing CE articles.

Linda D. Hollebeek emerges as a prolific contributor with the highest number of documents (35) and citations (5770), suggesting significant scholarly impact in the field. Following closely is V. Kumar, with 14 papers and 3706 citations, indicating substantial influence despite fewer publications. Raouf Ahmad Rather stands out with a notable total link strength of 36, reflecting strong connections between his work and others in the literature. Overall, the table showcases a diverse range of authors contributing to the discourse on online customer engagement, with varying degrees of productivity, influence, and collaboration. Analyzing these metrics provides valuable insights into the landscape of research in this domain, aiding in the identification of influential authors and emerging trends within the field.

Linda D. Hollebeek has made a profound impact on the field of customer engagement from 2011 to 2024 through her extensive research contributions. Over this period, her work has significantly advanced conceptualization, measurement, and understanding of customer engagement, shaping scholarly discourse and informing managerial practices. Hollebeek's pioneering research has provided clarity on the multidimensional nature of engagement, distinguishing between cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. Her development and validation of robust measurement scales have facilitated empirical studies, enabling researchers to explore the antecedents and consequences of engagement with rigor and precision. Moreover, Hollebeek's investigations into the drivers and outcomes of customer engagement have shed light on its strategic importance for firms, highlighting its role in fostering brand loyalty, advocacy, and positive business performance. Through her theoretical insights and practical recommendations, Hollebeek has established herself as a leading authority in the field, inspiring further research and guiding organizations in cultivating meaningful and enduring relationships with their customers.

Linda D. Hollebeek is considered the brightest star in the marketing research sphere for her innovative study of customer engagement (CE). Her paper (L. D. Hollebeek, 2013), "The Customer Engagement/Value Interface: An Exploratory Investigation," not only provided the scholarly community with empirical evidence relating customer engagement to customers' perception of value but also substantiated the dialogue of customer engagement research with the customer value literature. The qualitative study done by Hollebeek aims to accomplish this by employing an exploratory research design that conveys the nature and context of engagement. In particular, Hollebeek, Linda D., utilizes in-depth interviews, along with a focus group comprising 14 participants, as her data collection methods. Qualitative analysis, employing open and axial coding techniques, provides a detailed account of the core dimensions of engagement. The novelty of that work lies in the fact that it was the first in marketing literature to challenge conventional wisdom in practice. In other words, it showed that merely increased engagement may not always induce added value and called into question the importance of classic loyalty strategies. Besides, this study shows that the results differ significantly when it comes to the brand in question. The effect of engagement with hedonic brands is more substantial, resulting in a more positive perceived value compared to its utilitarian counterpart, which is more functional.

Kumar is known for his extensive work on customer relationship management (CRM), customer lifetime value (CLV), and marketing analytics, in addition to customer engagement. His research often integrates these

areas to provide comprehensive insights into customer behavior, customer engagement, and firm performance. Kumar usually employs quantitative methods and data analytics in his research, leveraging large datasets and statistical analyses to uncover insights into customer behavior and engagement patterns.

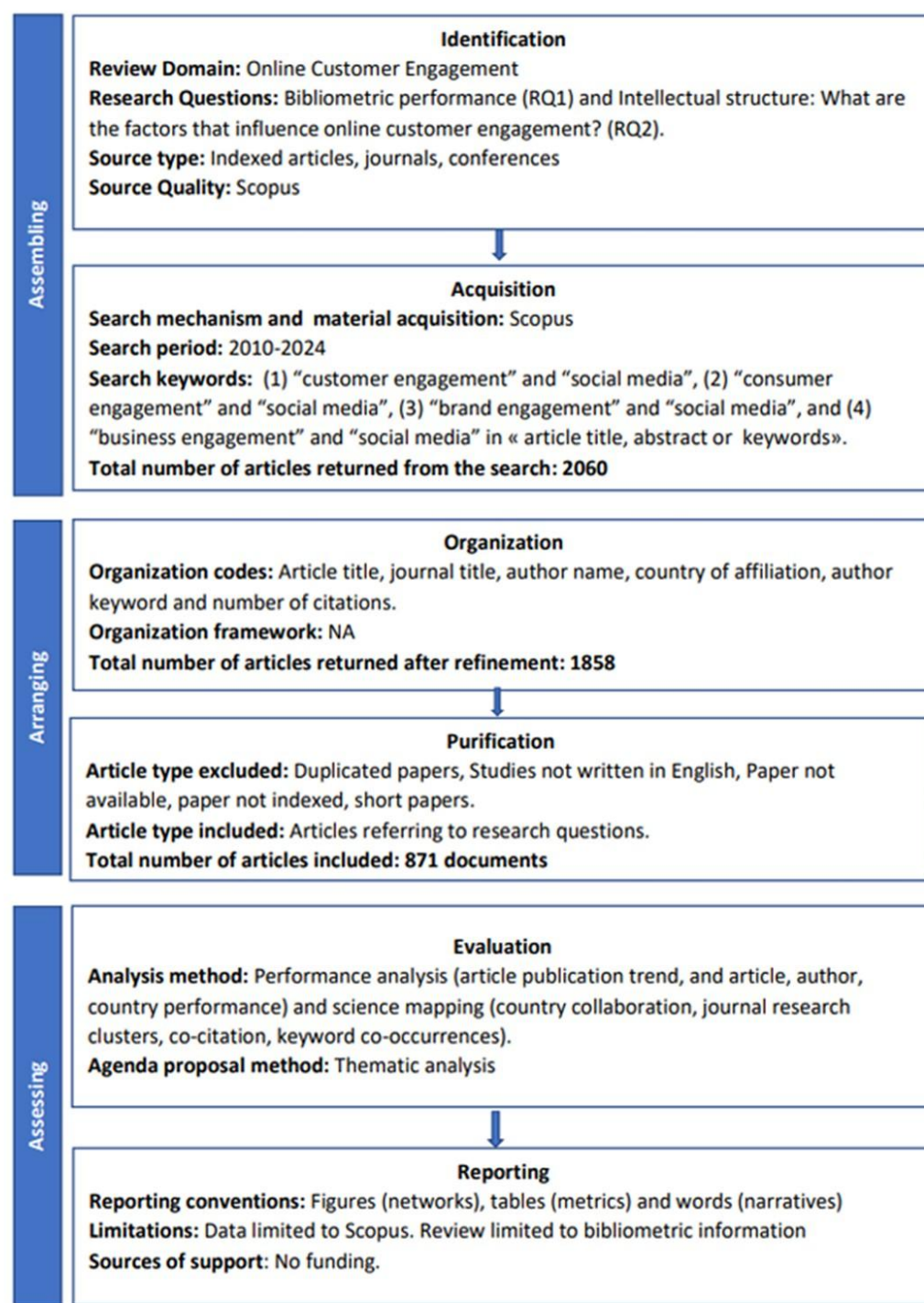
V. Kumar and Anita Pansari, in their paper (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) titled "Competitive Advantage through Engagement," draw a comprehensive conceptual model that demonstrates the direct linkage between customer engagement (CE), employee engagement (EE), and overall organizational performance. The authors refrain from focusing on traditional measures of customer satisfaction or loyalty and instead suggest the creation of a deeper, more vibrant type of engagement characterized by continuous, purposeful, and reciprocal interactions between consumers and the company. Utilizing an empirical dataset sourced from 120 leading U.S. companies, their findings reveal a strong positive correlation between high engagement levels, both internal and external, and improved financial outcomes, including increases in revenue and profitability.

Kumar's approach stands out because of his redefinition of customer engagement as a measurable strategic asset that goes beyond transactional behavior. He includes not only purchasing activity but also peer recommendations, influence through digital channels, and constructive feedback that can be used for product innovation as various behavioral manifestations of CE. Such elements constitute a more multidimensional approach to customer value, especially within the context of digitally driven environments where engagement is frequently demonstrated through observable, trackable online actions.

A significant part of Kumar's work is that he places a strong emphasis on the relationship between employee engagement and customer engagement. He believes that a motivated and engaged workforce is the primary factor in attracting customer engagement, and this bond is particularly crucial in service-oriented industries and business-to-business contexts. This system-based view recognizes the complexity of digital touchpoints and highlights the importance of frontline employees in creating meaningful brand interactions.

Furthermore, Kumar considers "Engagement Orientation" as a new strategic orientation for the current business environment. This perspective extends beyond traditional concerns about the product or market attribute, instead orienting the firm's value creation around lasting, interactive relationships with both internal stakeholders (employees) and external stakeholders (customers), which are more considered. This trailblazing concept makes Kumar a pioneering figure in digital and relationship marketing.

Ultimately, V. Kumar's scholarship, a leader in the field of customer loyalty, has shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of customer engagement and suggested practical strategies for its implementation. His comprehensive and practical perspective enables companies to be well-prepared to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive marketplace.



**Figure 1:** The SPAR-4-SLR protocol.

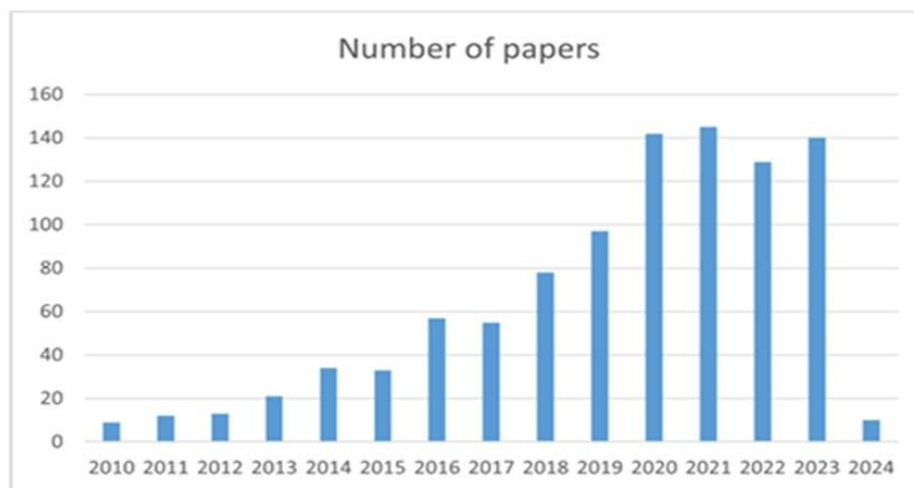
(Source: made by authors).

R.J. Brodie's work encompasses customer engagement within the broader context of marketing and consumer behavior. He explores the multifaceted nature of engagement, considering its cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and how they influence customer-brand interactions. While customer engagement is a central theme, Brodie's research also delves into related areas such as customer experience, brand management, and digital marketing. Brodie employs a variety of research methods to study customer engagement, including quantitative surveys, experimental designs, and qualitative analyses. His research methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of engagement dynamics, capturing both the quantitative metrics and qualitative insights into customer behavior and perceptions. Similar to Kumar and Hollebeek, Brodie's research offers practical insights for managers and marketers seeking to enhance customer engagement and drive business performance. His work emphasizes strategic implications for firms in terms of optimizing marketing strategies, fostering brand loyalty, and leveraging digital technologies to engage with customers effectively.

A landmark paper by Brodie (Brodie et al., 2011) has established the path to an extended theoretical framework for customer engagement (CE) in marketing, with the majority of connections being made in the digital sphere. Their paper presents a consistent and varied nature of CE, from viewing it as a psychological state caused by interactions between customers and brands, primarily in online ecosystems. They emphasize the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral aspects of engagement while also examining its impact and outcomes, particularly its role in the co-creation of value. These authors significantly contributed to the new research area by thematizing corporate aspects, which is consistent with the development of social media and interactive marketing practices, by proposing this comprehensive framework. The enduring influence of this paper is evident in the number of times it is cited and its theoretical impact, thereby positioning Brodie as the primary source for both practical and theoretical research on digital customer engagement.

In summary, R.J. Brodie's research on customer engagement complements the work of Kumar and Hollebeek, offering a multidimensional perspective that integrates insights from marketing, consumer behavior, and digital technology. His contributions contribute to a deeper understanding of engagement dynamics and their implications for businesses and consumers in today's rapidly evolving marketplace.

Ashish Pansari's work centers on customer engagement, with a focus on understanding its antecedents, consequences, and managerial implications. He explores various aspects of engagement, including its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, and how they influence customer-brand relationships and business outcomes. Pansari's research contributes to theoretical understanding of customer engagement while also offering practical insights for marketers and managers.



**Figure 2:** Number of CE papers published between 2010 and 2024.

(Source: made by authors).

Figure 3 from VOSViewer illustrates a network graph representing authors based on the number of documents they have published and the number of citations their work has received. Each author is represented as a node in the network, with the size of the nodes indicating the relative number of documents authored by each individual. Authors with a larger node size have contributed a greater number of documents to the literature on online customer engagement. Additionally, the nodes are color-coded or shaded to represent the total citations received by each author, with darker shades indicating higher citation counts. This visualization allows for the identification of authors who have made significant contributions to the field both in terms of the quantity of their publications and the impact of their work as reflected by citation counts. Figure 4 provides a comprehensive overview of author productivity and influence within the context of online customer engagement research, facilitating further analysis and exploration of collaborative networks and thematic clusters within the literature.

**Table 1:** Twenty-five most-cited CE authors according to h index and total citations

| Authors                        | Number of documents | Citation | H-index |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|----------|---------|
| Hollebeek, linda d.            | 35                  | 5770     | 53      |
| Kumar, v.                      | 14                  | 3706     | 16      |
| Brodie, roderick j.            | 5                   | 2597     | 6       |
| Pansari, anita                 | 3                   | 1803     | 4       |
| Aksoy, lerzan                  | 3                   | 1551     | 2       |
| Rather, raouf ahmad            | 25                  | 1506     | 36      |
| Jaakkola, elina                | 4                   | 1230     | 5       |
| Rahman,zillur                  | 9                   | 1207     | 15      |
| Kandampully, jay               | 4                   | 1045     | 5       |
| Islam, jamid ul                | 9                   | 1039     | 22      |
| So, kevin kam fung             | 8                   | 1019     | 8       |
| Alexander, matthew             | 7                   | 907      | 5       |
| King, ceridwyn                 | 4                   | 880      | 4       |
| Harrigan, paul                 | 11                  | 873      | 5       |
| Guo, lingyun                   | 7                   | 839      | 8       |
| Chen, tom                      | 3                   | 780      | 5       |
| Carlson, jamie                 | 9                   | 739      | 11      |
| Prentice, catherine            | 14                  | 711      | 6       |
| Loureino, sandra maria correia | 9                   | 649      | 12      |
| Srivastava, rajendra K.        | 3                   | 636      | 7       |
| Bilgihan, anil                 | 4                   | 540      | 6       |
| Khan, imran                    | 12                  | 537      | 29      |
| Zhang, mingli                  | 5                   | 515      | 6       |
| Hu, mu                         | 3                   | 450      | 5       |

Source: made by authors.

### 5.1.3 Article Performance

A co-citation analysis was conducted to identify the top CE articles that have been cited the most by other CE articles (local citations), and thus, enables a more accurate evaluation of the citation performance of CE articles (as opposed to relying on global citations that include citations from non-CE articles). Table 2 presents the 10 most cited CE articles among 871 CE articles in the CE corpus retrieved from the Scopus database between 2010 and 2024. Figure 5 depicts the co-citation performance of the papers studied, where larger circles with dark colors present the most cited papers.

The table provided outlines the top 10 authors based on co-citation analysis within the literature on online customer engagement. Van Doorn J. emerges as the most frequently co-cited author, with 323 citations referring to their work. Brodie R.J. follows closely behind in the second position with 297 citations, demonstrating their significant influence and the widespread recognition of their contributions in the field. Linda D. Hollebeek also holds a prominent position, ranking third with 265 citations. Notably, Brodie R.J. appears twice in the list, indicating the high impact of their work on multiple facets of online customer engagement research. Additionally, V. Kumar, Vivek S.D., and Fornell C. are also recognized for their substantial contributions, as evidenced by their respective citation counts. This analysis highlights the key authors whose work serves as foundational or seminal references within the domain, providing valuable insights for researchers seeking to navigate and contribute to the literature on online customer engagement.

**Table 2:** Top 10 authors co-citation

| Rang | Auteurs        | Citations | References                     |
|------|----------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| 1    | Van doorn j.   | 323       | (van Doorn et al., 2010)       |
| 2    | Brodie r.j.    | 297       | (Brodie et al., 2011)          |
| 3    | Hollebeek l.d  | 265       | (Lim et al., 2021)             |
| 4    | Pansari a.     | 221       | (Pansari & Kumar, 2017a)       |
| 5    | Brodie r.j.    | 213       | (Brodie et al., 2011)          |
| 6    | Kumar v.       | 208       | (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016)       |
| 7    | Vivek s.d.     | 188       | (Vivek et al., 2012)           |
| 8    | Kumar v.       | 184       | (Kumar & Pansari, 2016)        |
| 9    | Fornell c      | 172       | (L. D. Hollebeek et al., 2014) |
| 10   | Hollebeek l.d. | 150       | (Harrigan et al., 2018)        |

Source: made by authors.

### 5.1.4 Country Performance

Table 3 shows the country's performance in terms of the number of documents, citations, and total link strength, which sheds light on the global landscape of research on customer engagement. The United States emerges as the leading contributor in terms of both the number of documents (332) and total citations (18,617), reflecting its strong research output and influence in the field. This dominance is further underscored by the exceptionally high total link strength (838,402), indicating extensive connections and collaborations within literature. Figure 6 illustrates the performance of countries in biomedical research based on a bibliometric analysis conducted using VOSviewer. Each node represents a country, and the size of the node corresponds to the country's relative contribution to the field. The colors indicate different performance metrics, with darker shades representing higher values. India and China follow closely behind, with 247 and 199 documents respectively, showcasing the growing interest and research activity in these populous countries. Despite having fewer documents, India demonstrates a comparable total link strength to the United States, suggesting a collaborative research environment and impactful contributions to the literature. China, while slightly trailing in total link strength, still exhibits significant engagement and collaboration within the field.

The United Kingdom and Australia also feature prominently in the analysis, with 184 and 161 documents respectively. Despite their smaller populations compared to countries like India and China, they demonstrate strong research outputs and notable total link strengths, indicating active participation and influence in the global discourse on customer engagement. Several factors may contribute to why customer engagement is more studied in certain countries. Firstly, the presence of leading academic institutions and research centers specializing in marketing and consumer behavior in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom could drive research activity in this area. Additionally, economic factors, industry trends, and government initiatives may also influence research priorities and funding allocations, leading to variations in research focus across countries. Cultural differences, consumer behavior patterns, and technological advancements may also play a role in shaping research agendas and driving interest in customer engagement research in specific regions. Overall, the analysis highlights the diverse geographical distribution of research on customer engagement and underscores the global significance of this topic in both academia and industry.

### 5.2 Content Analysis

Thematic performance or content analysis complements bibliometric analysis by delving deeper into the content and thematic evolution of scholarly literature within a specific research area. While bibliometric analysis quantifies the impact and dissemination of research, thematic analysis uncovers the underlying concepts, trends, and research clusters that shape the intellectual landscape.

The generated visualization map displays the keywords or terms in the data file based on the clustering techniques available in VOS Viewer. The unified VOSviewer clustering technique can be seen as a kind of weighted variant of modularity-based clustering, which has a resolution parameter to identify small clusters. Accordingly, the visualization map of term occurrence depicts the frequency of occurrence of certain key terms, hence called the occurrence metric. The terms are represented as nodes of varying sizes, proportional to the terms recorded frequency. Additionally, the analysis indicates the frequency with which the terms appear near one another. The co-occurrence of terms within a text network has a substantial effect on the construction of text clusters, also known as communities of terms.

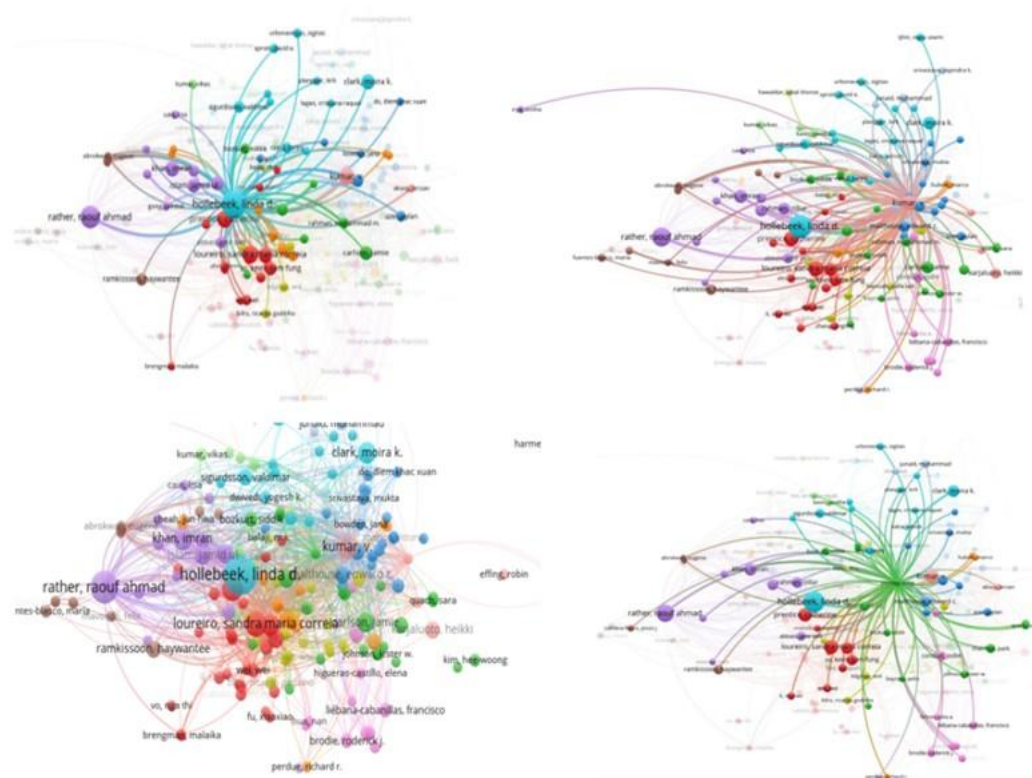


Figure 3: Top 4 Authors citation using Vos Viewer

A keyword co-occurrence analysis was conducted to delineate the knowledge production of CE research. In this analysis, the keywords that authors list for their OCE articles are extracted and clustered according to their thematic similarities. The clusters of CE articles revealed through a keyword co-occurrence analysis reflect the presence of OCE research. Based on the analysis, a total of five clusters of CE research were revealed: customer engagement as a means to influence consumption experiences, customer engagement in social media, customer engagement as a strategy to win customers, differences in customer engagement behavior, customer relationship management through customer engagement, and customer engagement in electronic commerce.

Table 3: Top 20 countries according to the number of papers

|                | Nombre de documents | Citation |
|----------------|---------------------|----------|
| USA            | 332                 | 18617    |
| India          | 247                 | 6678     |
| China          | 199                 | 6442     |
| United Kingdom | 184                 | 6014     |
| Australia      | 161                 | 8009     |
| Spain          | 78                  | 3268     |
| Malaysia       | 73                  | 1440     |
| France         | 67                  | 3222     |
| Taiwan         | 67                  | 1606     |
| Indonesia      | 65                  | 685      |
| Germany        | 58                  | 5545     |
| Portugal       | 53                  | 1491     |
| Saudi Arabia   | 48                  | 1225     |
| South Korea    | 47                  | 748      |
| Italy          | 46                  | 881      |
| Finland        | 42                  | 2839     |
| Thailand       | 37                  | 772      |
| Canada         | 36                  | 790      |
| New Zealand    | 36                  | 6642     |

Source: made by authors.

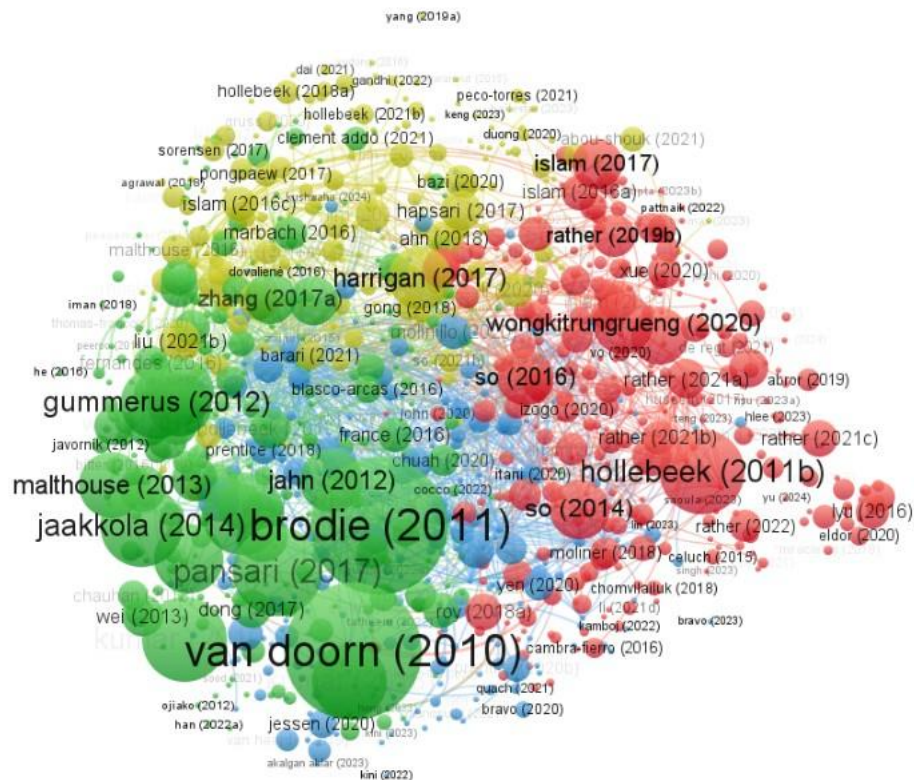
Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the network among the fifth clusters, which encapsulates 418 keywords that have appeared in the Scopus database of 871 articles. Setting the criterion that keywords are included when they have appeared in a minimum of  $k$  CE articles helps to curate a pragmatic set of clusters for network visualization based on how prolific or prominent keywords in clusters are in the corpus, which is necessary due to the sheer volume of keywords in this review. This criterion for keyword co-occurrence analysis

**Customer Engagement and Organizational Dynamics in Modern Business Environments:** This cluster encompasses a wide range of topics related to customer engagement, company performance, human resources, and organizational behavior. It reflects a holistic approach to understanding and improving various aspects of business operations and customer interactions. Central to this cluster is the importance of customer-centric strategies, highlighted by keywords, such as "customer orientation," "customer relationship management," and "customer service."

These concepts emphasize the importance of establishing strong relationships with customers, understanding their needs and preferences, and providing exceptional service to satisfy and retain them. The foundational work of (Brodie et al., 2011) and (van Doorn et al., 2010) conceptualized customer engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Building on this foundation, recent studies (Harrigan et al., 2018; L. D. Hollebeek et al., 2014; L. D. Hollebeek & Macky, 2019) and (Dessart, 2015) have extended the understanding of the customer engagement phenomenon into online settings, especially on social media platforms and within brand communities. These works emphasize how engagement through such digital spaces can lead to a wide range of desirable brand-related outcomes such as trust, loyalty, and value co-creation.

Additionally, the inclusion of terms such as "employee engagement," "leadership," and "management" underscores the integral role of organizational culture and leadership in promoting a customer-centric mindset and enhancing employee satisfaction and performance. (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between employee engagement and customer engagement, whereby both drive the other and enhance organizational performance. Effective leadership and management practices can empower employees, boost their engagement, and ultimately contribute to delivering exceptional customer experiences.

The cluster also addresses the role of technology in customer engagement and business performance, with keywords such as "mobile instant messaging," "predictive analytics," and "data management." Recent research by (L. D. Hollebeek & Macky, 2019) underscores the significant role that digital platforms and mobile technologies play in enhancing the intensity and richness of customer engagement experiences. The use of technology and data analytics enables companies to personalize interactions, predict customer behavior, and optimize operations to improve productivity and performance.



**Figure 4: Authors performance using Vos Viewer**

Overall, this cluster reflects the interconnection between customer engagement, employee satisfaction, organizational culture, and technology in business success. Analyzing these keywords provides a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of modern business activities and the strategies employed to enhance customer experience and foster sustainable growth.

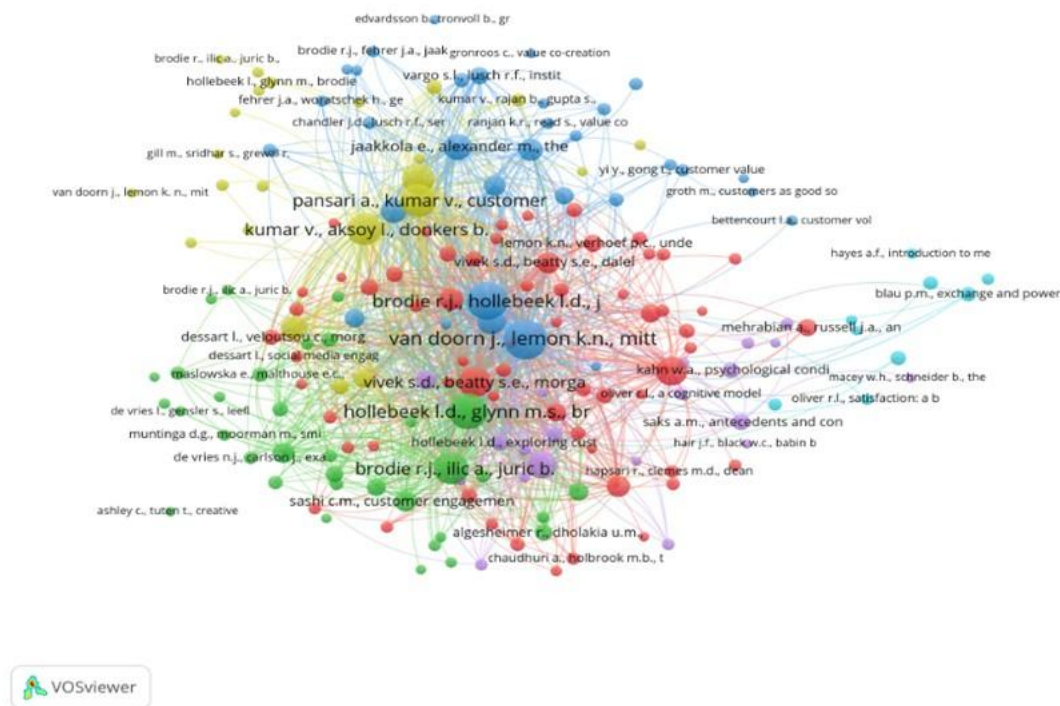


Figure 5: Article co-citation performance using Vos Viewer

**Enhancing Customer Engagement through Technological Innovation and Ethical, Transparent Business Practices:** This cluster illustrates the complex interaction between technology, business strategies, and customer engagement in modern companies. By focusing on leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and deep learning, companies aim to drive innovation and improve customer experience. Central to this cluster are efforts to understand and respond to customer needs, evidenced by themes such as customer feedback, preferences, and segmentation. Digital strategies such as chatbots, personalized online platforms, and emotional engagement techniques emphasize the commitment to fostering lasting customer relationships. Researchers like Linda D. Hollebeek, Roderick J. Brodie, and Van Doorn et al. have provided the primary impetus to marketing literature in their conceptualization of customer engagement as a multidimensional, interactive process in digital environments, where cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to brands are influenced by online communication, co-creation, and platform experiences.

Additionally, the cluster highlights the importance of innovation in business models, focusing on co-creation, gamification, and optimization strategies. As companies navigate this landscape, considerations around privacy and the adoption of ethical and transparent technologies remain paramount, ensuring that advances in AI and data analytics are balanced with respect for user privacy and ethical practices. Through a mix of technological prowess, customer-centric approaches, and ethical considerations, companies strive not only to generate sales and revenue but also to cultivate meaningful and lasting customer relationships. Empirical evidence has been provided by researchers such as (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Pansari & Kumar, 2017b), showing that digital engagement, through both direct contributions (purchases) and indirect ones (referrals, feedback, and social media influence), positively affects firm performance, which in turn allows customer lifetime value to be optimized strategically in tech-enhanced ecosystems.

This cluster also explores the nuances of brand engagement and customer behavior in modern marketing and online communication. Key themes revolve around building and interacting with customer loyalty and brand advocacy, evidenced by keywords such as brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty. The cluster emphasizes the importance of customer engagement and co-creation in shaping brand experience and fostering strong brand communities. Social media platforms play a significant role, with mentions of Facebook, Twitter, and user-generated content, highlighting the influence of online communication channels in brand engagement. In this context, (Vivek et al., 2012, 2014) have provided evidence of how user-generated content, emotional

relationships, and community dynamics energize brand advocacy and customer involvement across various digital touchpoints.

Additionally, concepts such as experiential value and perceived risk underscore the importance of creating positive brand experiences and addressing potential consumer concerns. The cluster also examines the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social networks on customer environments, emphasizing the significance of online shopping and social media platforms in influencing consumer behavior and preferences, as well as the role of mobile technology in facilitating customer engagement.

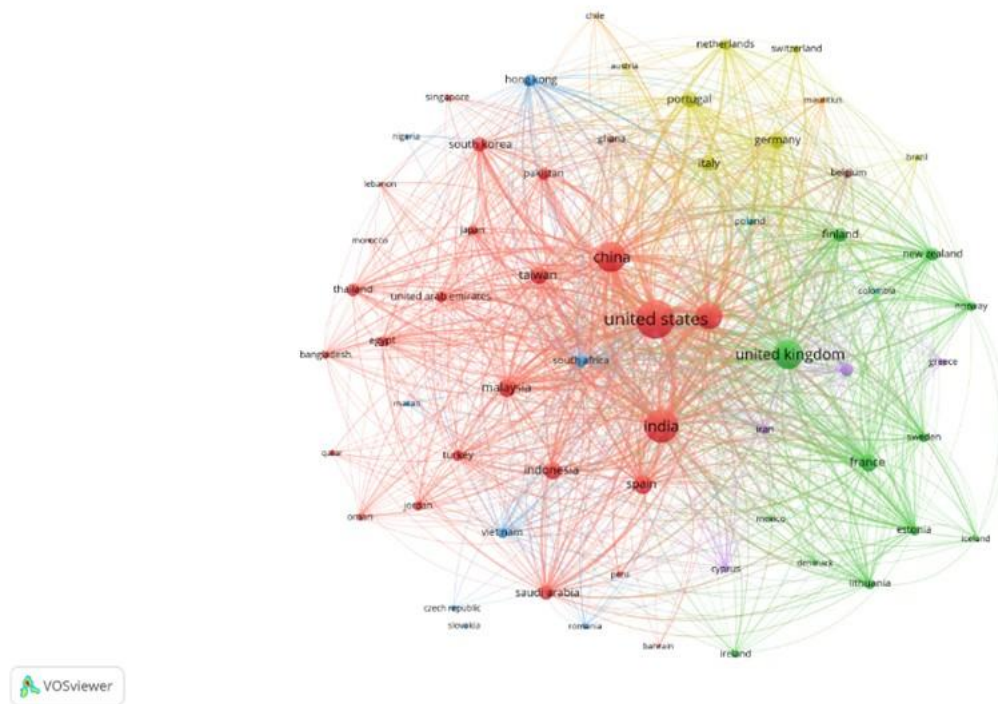


Figure 6: Country performance of studied papers using VosViewer

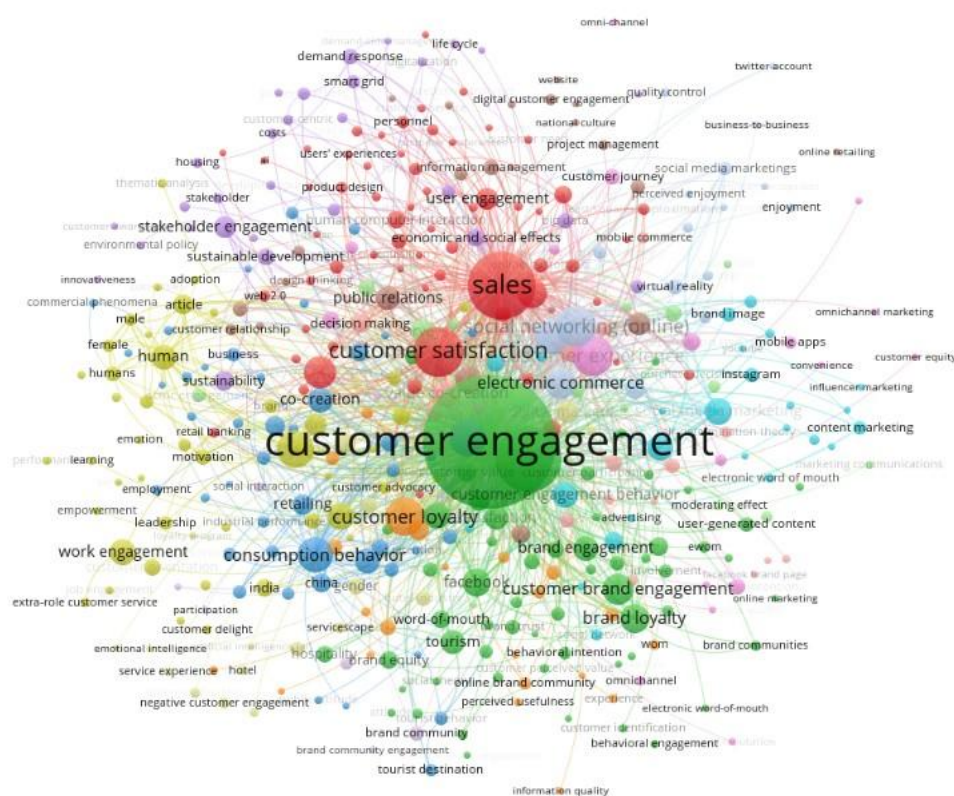
**Omnichannel Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement in the Digital Landscape:** This cluster revolves around the digital landscape and its impact on customer engagement, marketing strategies, and brand management. It highlights the importance of leveraging digital platforms and technologies to enhance customer experience and strengthen brand awareness. Key themes include the use of big data for data acquisition and analysis, as well as the utilization of augmented reality and mobile applications to create immersive customer experiences. (van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2012) are among the leading scholars who have focused their research on customer engagement behavior in multichannel and omnichannel environments. They have highlighted the role of participation, emotional connection, and behavioral engagement resulting from transactions in the new era of customer engagement.

Additionally, concepts such as content marketing, influencer marketing, and social media marketing underscore the significance of digital channels in reaching and engaging customers. The cluster also addresses the complexities of customer relationship management and stakeholder interactions in the digital age, emphasizing the need for effective customer experience management and stakeholder engagement strategies. Conceptual clarity regarding the co-creation of digital engagement, which is carried out through dynamic interactions between customers and firms across various platforms, has been provided by the work of (Brodie et al., 2011; L. D. Hollebeek, 2011; L. D. Hollebeek et al., 2022). Their study particularly focuses on social media, influencer ecosystems, and mobile contexts.

The cluster focuses on critical factors and strategies involved in advertising and marketing, particularly in the context of online customer engagement and omnichannel retail. Key themes include advertising, marketing, and channel integration quality, highlighting the importance of seamless integration across different channels to enhance customer experience. Concepts such as customer engagement behavior and inspiration emphasize the role of marketing efforts in interacting with and motivating customers. (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) provide empirical models that connect customer engagement across various touchpoints to business performance and illustrate how combined channel strategies and customer data can be utilized to generate not only direct but also indirect value.

Overall, this cluster provides insights into the multifaceted nature of marketing strategies and the essential role of online channels and customer engagement in shaping business performance and customer perceptions.

Thus, the cluster addresses social theories such as social exchange theory and social identity theory, highlighting the role of social influence and customer interactions in shaping customer behavior and engagement. Overall, this cluster provides a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics between customers and brands and the complex interaction of social factors and technological advancements in contemporary business environments.



The cluster examines various aspects of customer engagement and value creation in the context of business-to-business (B2B) and commercial environments. Key themes include customer perceptions, responses, and co-creation of value, emphasizing the importance of understanding and meeting customer needs in B2B relationships. Concepts such as enjoyment, immersion, and perceived pleasure highlight the importance of creating engaging and immersive customer experiences, whether through live streaming, mobile applications, or virtual reality technologies. Additionally, the cluster emphasizes the role of social media marketing, social

commerce, and online surveys in soliciting customer feedback. Several researchers have contributed to the emerging study of online customer engagement in B2B contexts. For example, in the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, (Youssef et al., 2018) conceptualize online customer engagement by incorporating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions and also suggest several online customer engagement antecedents, including trust and satisfaction, as well as their consequences for customer value. (Weiger, 2023) Similarly, it highlights the multidimensionality of engagement antecedents by uncovering the need for cultural heterogeneity to deliver superior online experiences and drive B2B customer engagement worldwide. Further, (Mora Cortez & Ghosh Dastidar, 2022), in the *Journal of Business Research*, show over time that online brand personality traits (e.g., competence, sincerity, excitement) influence online user engagement with B2B company brands on LinkedIn, reflected in online metric data such as likes, shares, subscriptions, and clicks.

The cluster also explores the dynamics of brand management and customer engagement within online communities. At the heart of this group are concepts such as brand community, brand trust, and brand equity, which emphasize the importance of fostering strong connections and relationships between customers and brands. Themes such as emotional engagement and loyalty underscore the importance of creating emotional and trust-based bonds with customers, promoting repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the cluster highlights the role of strategic planning and marketing strategies in developing online brand communities and enhancing customer interaction. Concepts such as relationship quality and purchase intention reflect the emphasis on maintaining long-term customer relationships and sustainable brand growth.

**Navigating the Digital Era: Corporate Strategy, Stakeholder Engagement, and Sustainable Customer Engagement:** This cluster examines various aspects of modern business operations, emphasizing the intersection of digital transformation, corporate strategy, and stakeholder engagement. Key themes include the adoption of digital technologies and e-commerce platforms, driving innovation, and enhancing business development. The cluster also highlights the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability in shaping public perception and stakeholder engagement. Customer engagement is a key component in this equation. (Jiang & Chen, 2025; Yuan et al., 2024) show that firms can reap benefits when they effectively engage their customers in environmentally friendly activities, especially when these initiatives are embedded in well-designed business models, not only by improving customer experience but also by enhancing their brand loyalty. (Alhouthi et al., 2024) share the same perspective, suggesting that these engagement tactics stimulate customers' psychological ownership, which consequently generates a richer brand attachment. Additionally, digital marketing and social media have been identified as essential for stabilizing long-term engagement. (Lim & Rasul, 2022) suggest such mechanisms can be utilized to encourage environmentally responsible behaviors, particularly when accompanied by transparent and morality-driven brand communication.

Concepts such as customer centricity and perceived quality underscore the importance of meeting customer expectations and enhancing brand image. Recent business model innovation frameworks, such as the one proposed by (Dwiviolita & Zuliarni, 2023) emphasize that sustainability can become a central element in how firms create value. Sustainability can be embedded in business models, either as a principle of value creation or as a central element of the business model, helping the firm not only to become more competitive but also to respond to societal expectations.

Fundamentally, digital transformation is not just about adopting new technologies; it transforms the way companies interact with stakeholders, creates value for customers and society, and aligns their strategy with sustainability challenges.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Comparison with Existing Literature Reviews on Customer Engagement

Previous literature reviews on customer engagement, such as those by (Brodie et al., 2011), (L. D. Hollebeek et al., 2016), and (Dessart, 2015), have played an essential role in defining and conceptualizing customer engagement in many contexts. However, these reviews were characterized by a lack of a structured and replicable protocol to provide transparency and rigor behind the processes of selection, extraction, and synthesis. For instance, (Brodie et al., 2011) served as a conceptual basis rooted in interpretative analysis but was not conducted according to a typical systematic review protocol. (L. D. Hollebeek et al., 2016) examined dimensions and drivers of customer engagement in digital contexts through thematic synthesis; however, strict eligibility criteria and search procedure were not explicitly described. (Dessart, 2015) used a narrative review methodology, which, although informative, is susceptible to research bias and limited replicability. On the other

hand, our research is the first to implement the SPAR-4-SLR protocol in the field of customer engagement. SPAR-4-SLR provides a structured, transparent, and replicable framework, which mitigates many of the shortcomings of prior reviews, through clearly documenting:

- Search strategy and sources (ensuring comprehensive coverage).
- Screening and selection process (enhancing reliability).
- Data extraction and analysis (supporting methodological rigor).
- Quality assessment of sources (ensuring robustness of conclusions).

## 6.2 Advantages of Our Approach

- **Methodological Rigor:** By using the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, this review enhances the credibility and reproducibility of the literature synthesis. It reduces subjectivity in study inclusion and improves the auditability of the process.
- **Transparency:** Each stage of the review—from identification to inclusion—has been explicitly reported, which is often lacking in previous reviews.
- **Scope and Coverage:** This review included a broader range of publication types and databases, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how customer engagement is studied across disciplines and industries.
- **Analytical Depth:** Our use of the SPAR-4-SLR protocol allowed for structured coding and thematic clustering, enabling a richer synthesis of findings, identification of gaps, and future research directions.
- **Innovative Contribution:** Introducing SPAR-4-SLR to the customer engagement literature provides a methodological advancement that future scholars can adopt and adapt, raising the overall standard of review articles in this domain.

## 6.3 Summary of Content Analysis

Based on the thematic analysis, all clusters address the complex dynamics of customer engagement in modern business landscapes, highlighting a holistic approach to fostering lasting relationships. Rooted in organizational dynamics, technological innovation, and ethical business practices, these strategies converge to shape customer interactions. Central to this approach is the integration of channels through omnichannel methods, ensuring seamless experiences across diverse platforms. Additionally, the pillars of trust, satisfaction, and commitment, encapsulated within relationship quality, underpin every facet of customer engagement. By fostering trust through transparent communication and reliable service, ensuring satisfaction by delivering personalized experiences, and nurturing commitment through consistent value delivery, businesses can cultivate strong brand-consumer relationships. Leveraging emerging technologies and strategic planning further enhances these efforts, enabling companies to navigate the digital landscape adeptly. Ultimately, by prioritizing customer-centric strategies and ethical considerations, businesses can optimize engagement across all touchpoints, ensuring sustained success and stakeholder satisfaction.

The purpose of our thematic analysis of online consumer engagement literature is to synthesize five significant research clusters, which contribute to the academic development of the online customer engagement concept and demonstrate to practitioners the importance of customer engagement in today's increasingly digitalized world. This section examines how each cluster corresponds with established literature and serves as the foundation for the recommendations provided in this study.

The first Cluster emphasizes the relationship between online customer engagement, employee experience, and broader organizational dynamics. It reinforces the conceptualization of engagement as a multidimensional construct, as earlier advanced by (Brodie et al., 2011) and (van Doorn et al., 2010), and builds upon this by incorporating internal variables, such as leadership styles and human resource management practices, as key antecedents of customer engagement outcomes. Theoretical implications, these findings provide support for the proposition of a mutually symbiotic relationship between employee and customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), recommending a unified theory of employee and customer engagement that encompasses both internal and external antecedents. Practical implications: Firms should create internal policies and leadership practices that support and reinforce customer-centric values. This supports our call to develop an internal organizational context that values customer experience as a strategic priority.

The second cluster emphasizes that technology solutions, for instance, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and conversational interfaces, can help companies interact with their customers more effectively. However, it also raises concerns about transparency, consent, and responsible engagement. The frequent co-occurrence of keywords such as “privacy” and “emotional engagement” suggests that digital engagement is increasingly being recognized and assessed in terms of ethical responsibility. As a Theoretical implication, the scope of online customer engagement models should be broadened to encompass trust, transparency, and responsible data practices as integral components of the engagement construct in digital environments. As a Practical implication, companies must balance technological advancement with the need for transparent and responsible use of customers’ data. This aligns with our call for ethical digital engagement approaches that prioritize trust and consumer empowerment.

The third Cluster highlights the crucial importance of aligning customer touchpoints across various digital channels, such as mobile, social media, and emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR). The roles of user-generated content (UGC) and online influences in fostering customer-brand relationships are also emphasized. As a Theoretical implication, these findings extend multichannel customer engagement frameworks (e.g., (van Doorn et al., 2010)) by showing that engagement processes are now consciously co-created across fragmented yet overlapping channels. As a Practical implication, marketing executives should fund integrated omnichannel approaches that support consistent, customized experiences throughout customer journeys.

The fourth cluster draws attention to several studies examining customer engagement in business-to-business settings, a topic that has traditionally received limited scholarly attention. It also draws attention to emotional attachments, trust-based relationships, and co-creation activities in digital brand communities. Theoretical implications: These studies suggest the development of engagement frameworks that are sensitive to the contextual and relational nuances of B2C and B2B contexts, particularly in terms of engagement triggers, types, and outcomes. Practical implications: Organizations, particularly in the B2B digital space, would benefit from developing strong digital brand communities to nurture trust, establish two-way conversations, and jointly create value – actions that are mirrored in our recommendations.

The last cluster examines online customer engagement from the perspective of broader societal expectations and stakeholder management. It finds CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), ethical branding, and consumer innovation to be increasingly essential topics in the long-term online customer engagement debate. Theoretical implications: These findings signal a shift towards an engagement framework that encompasses sustainability, ethics, and stakeholder theory. Practical implications: Firms are encouraged to integrate CSR and sustainability aspirations into their online engagement strategies. This aligns with our final recommendations regarding online customer engagement, societal expectations, and sustainable management practices.

#### 6.4 Theoretical Contributions

This article contributes to the existing Online customer engagement OCE by addressing the current digital challenges. While previous research (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011) has focused on the emotional and cognitive components of engagement, we found that issues such as digital ethics and sustainability concerns, as well as omnichannel engagement, have become important in influencing customer behavior. In line with our systematic literature review, we investigated the critical factors influencing online customers’ engagement across the reviewed articles. Trust (67% of studies), satisfaction (65%), commitment (25%), channel integration quality (16%), and digital transparency (5%) were the most identified antecedents. This implies that online engagement is influenced by both the quality of the relationships and the technological and moral standards that organizations uphold.

This provides the foundation for the development of the theoretical concept of Online Customer Engagement (OCE), which portrays the intricacy of customer interactions in a techno-mediated, value-conscious network.

## 6.5 Managerial Contributions

From a managerial perspective, the findings from our thematic analysis provide a series of recommendations for managers seeking to enhance customer engagement in a digital environment. They include:

- To embed a customer-centric culture from the inside out.
- To harness the power of AI and data analytics for personalized consumer experiences while being mindful of its ethical and privacy implications.
- To develop emotionally engaging customer experiences across multiple digital touchpoints.
- To build trust and value co-creation through online brand communities.
- To incorporate CSR and other organizational values in their customer engagement and branding.

Taken together, these are some of the key strategic guidelines that managers can utilize to cultivate sustainable and meaningful customer engagement in the digital context.

Additionally, the literature review revealed some unexpected insights. For instance, most of the studies were from Western countries, with very few from developing or emerging economies, which may affect the applicability of the findings. In addition, and somewhat surprisingly given the cross-disciplinary nature of the topic, there was a notable lack of methodological diversity, with an overreliance on cross-sectional quantitative methodologies, which may affect the depth and richness of insights generated.

Another unexpected result was the conceptual ambiguity in the field, with fundamental terms like "engagement" and "interaction" routinely invoked but seldom clearly defined or theoretically underpinned. Furthermore, we have found conceptual confusion between the concepts of "customer commitment" and "customer engagement." These terms were often used synonymously despite their different theoretical origins and consequences. Such confusion is likely to obscure the boundaries between closely related yet distinct concepts, thereby limiting conceptual clarity and hindering the development of a consistent theory.

Finally, the review also showed that numerous digital technologies and channels, many of which have become mainstream in practice, such as AI-based recommendation engines or newer social media platforms like TikTok, were either under-researched or missing altogether. Taken together, these unexpected findings highlight some significant gaps and suggest important avenues for future research.

## 7 Conclusions

In conclusion, the clusters identified through thematic analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of online customer engagement. From navigating organizational dynamics to driving customer engagement through technological innovation and ethical business practices, each cluster offers valuable insights into the enablers, future trends, and antecedents of effective customer engagement strategies.

This systematic review aimed to map the intellectual and thematic structure of the online customer engagement (OCE) literature and provide a comprehensive synthesis of the current body of knowledge, as well as identify avenues for future research. We followed the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, applying bibliometric techniques and thematic analysis to ensure transparency and rigor in the literature review process. Our findings revealed five thematic clusters that characterize the increasing complexity and scope of engagement strategies in digital environments. These clusters address the following topics: firms and employees as promoters, digital technologies and ethics, digital and omnichannel marketing, online brand communities, sustainability, and the role of customers and stakeholders.

In addition to capturing key insights, this review also raises several significant concerns and avenues for future research. One of the most pressing issues is the ethical quandaries of AI-mediated engagement, including data protection, privacy, informed consent, and algorithmic transparency and accountability. These challenges are becoming increasingly complex and require further conceptual and empirical research. Other research questions appear relatively neglected, such as customer engagement in B2B exchanges and digital business networks, including how engagement, trust, collaboration, and value co-creation are fostered and sustained in digital engagement contexts. The incorporation of CSR and sustainability into customer engagement frameworks also raises many questions and research opportunities at the intersection of marketing, business ethics, organizational behavior, and innovation management.

Future research could also benefit from cross-cultural and comparative studies to better understand how digital engagement manifests in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. From a methodological standpoint, more longitudinal and real-time research—utilizing tools such as digital trace data or experimental methods—would offer more profound insight into the evolving, interactive nature of online customer engagement.

In identifying these research priorities and underdeveloped areas, this study does more than summarize existing work—it lays the groundwork for the next generation of research. It offers a robust conceptual and methodological platform to support the development of a more ethical, diverse, and context-aware perspective on customer engagement in the digital era.

## 7.1 Future Research

- Considering the evolution of AI and algorithms: exploring new ways of online customer engagement and clarifying the impact of intelligent algorithm-based recommendation systems on OCE.
- Analyzing the impact of digital transparency, ethics, and company openness on online customer engagement.
- Making a deep understanding and distinction between online customer engagement and related concepts, such as online commitment and online citizenship behavior.
- Analyzing Cloud Computing's revolution in online customer engagement: Towards a more fluid, personalized, and secure customer experience.
- Further research is needed in developing and emerging countries to enhance the cross-cultural generalizability of the findings and provide a more inclusive understanding.
- Several digital trends, such as AI-driven personalization and short video platforms like TikTok, have not been extensively researched despite practitioners commonly utilizing them. Future studies should incorporate these changing technologies to align with the realities of the current marketplace and digital consumption patterns.

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