

Digital Engagement in Relationship Marketing: A Hybrid Systematic Review and Bibliometric Mapping of Conceptual and Intellectual Structures

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to map the development of literature related to digital engagement within the context of relationship marketing through a hybrid systematic review and bibliometric analysis approach. Data were collected from 177 scientific articles indexed in the Scopus database and analyzed using VOSviewer software. The results of the analysis reveal six main clusters in the conceptual structure that reflect a close relationship between digital engagement and the variables of customer loyalty, satisfaction, and trust. The intellectual structure highlights the dominant contributions of seminal references such as Brodie et al. (2011), Van Doorn et al. (2010), and Hollebeek et al. (2014). This study provides an important contribution by presenting a comprehensive literature map and offering directions for the future development of research and practices in long-term, relation-based digital marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has caused significant disruption in global marketing practices. This transformation not only affects how companies deliver value but also reshapes the relationship between brands and customers. Digitalization has expanded the interaction space into a more dynamic, open, and data-driven environment. This phenomenon has driven the emergence of the concept of digital engagement, which refers to active customer involvement with a brand through various digital channels such as social media, mobile applications, websites, and online communities (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009; Brodie et al., 2013).

Digital engagement is no longer seen merely as a form of interaction; it has evolved into a process of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement that contributes to the formation of a holistic and valuable customer experience (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). In this context, digital engagement does not only reflect customer participation in digital campaigns or content but also strategic involvement in the value co-creation process, decision-making, and voluntary brand advocacy (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012).

This shift in interaction patterns has also prompted changes in the relationship marketing paradigm, a marketing approach that emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term relationships between companies and customers. The commitment-trust theory developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) serves as the foundation for explaining how trust and commitment act as the two primary elements in the success of relational marketing. In the digital era, the application of relationship marketing requires integration with digital platforms as a means to maintain customer loyalty and strengthen brand attachment.

Research conducted by Sashi (2012) underlines that digital engagement is a central element in maintaining customer relationships in the digital era. Customer engagement formed through digital channels can enhance perceived value, strengthen emotional bonds, and generate long-term loyalty. Digital-based customer engagement also serves as the foundation for the sustainable formation of customer trust and satisfaction (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016).

A study by Hollebeek et al. (2019) shows that the integration between digital engagement and relationship marketing has direct implications for brand loyalty, particularly in the context of social media-based marketing. The results of their study found that customers who are actively engaged digitally have a greater tendency to exhibit loyal behaviors, provide positive reviews, and maintain long-term relationships with the brand.

Although the literature on digital engagement has experienced rapid growth over the past decade, gaps remain in terms of conceptual synthesis and the mapping of knowledge structures.

Previous studies have largely focused on technological aspects or consumer behavior in isolation, without comprehensively integrating the relationships between digital engagement, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty within a relationship marketing framework. Most reviews are also descriptive and have

not provided visual mapping of the evolving conceptual and intellectual structures of the literature (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Recognizing these shortcomings, this study was designed to conduct a systematic review and bibliometric mapping to understand how digital engagement is constructed within relationship marketing literature. The approach used combines a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric mapping, enabling the mapping of dominant conceptual clusters, the identification of key intellectual actors, and current research trends in this field (Fahimnia et al., 2015). The ultimate goal of this study is to present a more integrative conceptual framework and provide direction for the development of theory and practice in long-term relationship-based digital marketing.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Digital Engagement

Digital engagement is a strategic dimension in modern marketing that reflects the level of customer involvement with a brand through digital channels. The concept of digital engagement is not limited to social media participation; it reflects active involvement encompassing affective (emotional), cognitive (thought-based), and behavioral aspects of customers as they interact with brand content and values digitally (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). In the context of relational marketing, digital engagement serves as the intersection between customer interaction and experiences that are personal, collaborative, and technology-driven (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). According to Brodie et al. (2011), engagement in a digital context is not passive; rather, it is the result of dynamic interactions among customers, the community, and the company that facilitate value co-creation. This form of involvement includes consumption, contribution, and advocacy carried out by customers toward a brand.

Conceptually, digital engagement can be understood as a transformation from traditional customer engagement into interactions based on technology and digital platforms. Research by Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012) reinforces that engagement is a multidimensional process that evolves across channels along with the increasing complexity of customer relationships with brands in creating emotional connections and long-term loyalty. Meanwhile, Hollebeek et al. (2019) emphasize that engagement is a form of relational value formed through relevant and meaningful digital experiences, thereby strengthening long-term customer loyalty and retention.

In practice, digital engagement can occur across various digital channels such as social media, interactive websites, mobile applications, and customer community platforms. Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) state that the quality of digital interaction is the primary determinant of successful customer engagement, where content relevance, experience personalization, and user-centric platform design play key roles.

In Indonesia, a study conducted by Prabowo and Nugroho (2020) shows that digital engagement plays a significant role in increasing customer repurchase intentions in e-commerce. High digital engagement is measured through the frequency of interaction with the platform, the quality of the user

experience, and the perception of personal value derived from that involvement. Meanwhile, Fajaryati and Sulistyani (2021) emphasize that content strategies based on storytelling and user-generated content are effective in increasing consumers' emotional engagement with local digital-based brands.

As the behavior of digital customers grows more complex, digital engagement is no longer considered an output; it has evolved into a strategic mechanism that bridges brand experience, brand trust, and brand loyalty. This aligns with the findings of Kumar and Pansari (2016), who state that companies capable of creating strong digital engagement will reap benefits in the form of increased relationship value, sustained loyalty, and a positive impact on word-of-mouth. Therefore, a deep understanding of the concept of digital engagement and its dimensions is essential for building relational marketing strategies in the digital era. In this research framework, digital engagement is positioned as a central element in the structure of relationship marketing, serving either as a direct influence or as a mediating or moderating variable for customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is a strategic paradigm in marketing science that focuses on building, developing, and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term relationships between companies and customers. Unlike the transactional marketing approach, which is oriented solely toward immediate sales, relationship marketing emphasizes the importance of customer retention, loyalty, and continuous interaction to sustain business viability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The most well-known theoretical framework explaining relationship marketing is the Commitment-Trust Theory developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). This theory states that the two key components in building effective marketing relationships are trust and commitment. Trust reflects the customer's belief that the company possesses integrity and goodwill, while commitment indicates the extent to which both parties are psychologically and emotionally bound to maintain the relationship. Both factors have been proven to significantly influence customer loyalty and the effectiveness of long-term relationships.

In the context of the digital era, relationship marketing has undergone a significant transformation. Companies no longer build relationships solely through direct communication, but also through various digital platforms such as social media, apps, email, and other interactive channels. This provides new opportunities to expand relationships with customers in a more personal, responsive, and data-driven manner (Payne & Frow, 2005). The application of digital technology allows companies to understand customer behavior in real time, enabling relationship marketing strategies to be dynamically adjusted according to individual preferences.

According to Sashi (2012), the modern relationship marketing approach consists of five major stages: (1) awareness, (2) exploration, (3) expansion, (4) commitment, and (5) dissolution or loyalty. Each stage can be strengthened

through integrated digital engagement, such as interactive campaigns, service personalization, or app-based digital loyalty programs. Digital interactivity serves as a bridge between customer satisfaction and the formation of continuous trust.

In Indonesia, an empirical study conducted by Widodo and Haryanto (2020) on marketplace customers states that the success of digital-based relationship marketing is heavily influenced by the company's consistency in providing transparent information, responsive service, and an enjoyable digital experience. Similar research by Surya and Wahyuni (2022) indicates that the dimensions of trust, commitment, and communication managed digitally can significantly increase customer loyalty, especially in the service sector.

Conceptually, relationship marketing is also closely related to other variables such as customer satisfaction, brand trust, and customer loyalty, which are the outcomes of a well-managed long-term relationship process. According to Garbarino and Johnson (1999), satisfaction and trust are the two primary determinants in creating strong relational bonds, particularly in the service sector driven by digital interactions.

Therefore, in this study, relationship marketing is positioned as the foundational framework for understanding the complex relationships among digital engagement, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Digital engagement is regarded as a catalyst that strengthens this relational structure, both in building emotional value and extending the customer relationship lifecycle within the digital ecosystem.

Integration Digital Engagement in Relationship Marketing

The integration between digital engagement and relationship marketing represents a shift from the traditional marketing paradigm toward a more interactive, personalized, and technology-driven approach. Digital engagement acts as a medium that reactivates the core principles of relationship marketing namely trust, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty through digital communication channels that are more adaptive and responsive to the dynamics of customer behavior (Hollebeek et al., 2019).

In the context of modern relational marketing, digital engagement functions as a bridge connecting the customer experience with long-term loyalty intentions. Engaging digitally allows companies to create two-way dialogues, build customer communities based on shared values, and continuously deliver meaningful experiences. This aligns with the findings of Brodie et al. (2013), who state that digital engagement within virtual brand communities contributes to increasing customers' emotional and cognitive involvement with the brand.

Research by Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan (2012) shows that digital customer engagement not only mediates the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty but also strengthens elements of trust and commitment. Engagement formed through digital interaction has the capacity to create positive experiences that enhance customers' perceptions of relationship quality, while simultaneously extending the customer lifetime value.

Practically, the integration of digital engagement into relationship marketing strategies manifests in the form of personalized campaigns, digital reward systems, community-based social interactions, and swift responses powered by chatbot or AI technologies. Kumar and Pansari (2016) state that companies developing effective engagement will cultivate customers who are more loyal, more involved in organic promotion, and more likely to contribute long-term value. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) add that in the digital economy context, engaged customers tend to have higher value because they do not just purchase products but also become brand ambassadors. Intense digital engagement generates proactive, co-creative interactions and produces social influence effects that strengthen the brand's position in the market.

From a theoretical standpoint, digital engagement is also viewed as a mediating and moderating mechanism that explains how customer experience and satisfaction can be transformed into stable and sustainable loyalty. Within this research framework, digital engagement is positioned as a driving force capable of strengthening relational bonds with customers, as well as an indicator of organizational adaptability to changing consumer behaviors in the digital era.

Consequently, understanding the mechanisms of digital engagement integrated with relationship marketing is not only academically important but also practically strategic. It provides a theoretical foundation for companies to design marketing approaches that are not merely transaction-oriented, but instead focus on forming value-based long-term relationships.

Research Gaps and the Role of Bibliometrics

While the study of digital engagement and relationship marketing has grown rapidly over the past decade, the available literature exhibits a tendency toward fragmentation, both conceptually and methodologically. Many studies focus on aspects of customer behavior in digital contexts (such as social media engagement) but do not systematically connect them to relational dimensions like trust, satisfaction, and loyalty within a relationship marketing framework (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Vivek et al., 2012). Furthermore, most prior studies are descriptive and contextual, lacking deep exploration into how the interconnectedness of concepts develops within a holistic literature structure.

For instance, research by Brodie et al. (2013) and Sashi (2012) provided important contributions to the conceptual understanding of customer engagement but did not explicitly map the position of digital engagement as a strategic component in trust- and loyalty-based marketing relationships. On the other hand, several studies utilize survey-based quantitative approaches or specific case studies which, though practically relevant, remain limited in terms of theoretical generalizability and comprehensive mapping of the discipline (Dessart et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

Another identified deficiency in the literature is the lack of studies uniting digital engagement and relationship marketing through a systematic review approach capable of representing intellectual development and research evolution directions. In many cases, studies on digital engagement and

relationship marketing contain only narrative reviews without clear visual mapping or literature clustering.

To address these gaps, a bibliometric analysis approach is employed as a method that enables quantitative and visual mapping of the literature. This method provides the ability to identify influential authors, topic trends, relationships between concepts, and the conceptual and intellectual structures of a research field (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Bibliometric analysis is also deemed more objective than narrative reviews because it relies on bibliographic data and citation networks (Donthu et al., 2021).

By integrating Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methods and bibliometric analysis, this study offers a hybrid approach that not only presents a systematic review of the development of digital engagement in relationship marketing but also maps how these conceptual and intellectual structures are formed, grow, and interconnect. The primary contribution of this approach lies in building a structured research framework, unifying scattered findings, and identifying research gaps that can serve as foundations for future studies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a hybrid approach by combining Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis methods to explore the evolution of literature regarding digital engagement within the context of relationship marketing. This approach was chosen because it provides systematic, measurable, and visual conceptual and intellectual mapping. Donthu et al. (2021) state that bibliometric methods are highly relevant in management studies because they can identify relationships between concepts, scientific actors, and trends dominating a specific field. This hybrid approach also aligns with the recommendations of Zupic and Čater (2015), who suggest combining SLR and bibliometrics to produce data-driven and comprehensive literature reviews.

The data source for this study is the Scopus database, selected for its reputation as one of the largest and most prestigious scientific indexes in management, business, and social sciences. Scopus provides complete metadata, including citations, keywords, and author affiliations required for bibliometric analysis (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The search strategy used a combination of keywords: "customer engagement" OR "digital engagement", searched within the title, abstract, and keywords fields. The search was restricted to English-language journal articles, keywords matching the research theme, and open-access documents. This process followed the guidelines outlined by Tranfield et al. (2003) for systematic reviews in management sciences.

The literature selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram developed by Moher et al. (2009). Based on the initial identification phase, 9,724 documents were retrieved from the Scopus database. After applying specific keyword filters, 4,841 documents remained. Next, an initial screening based on duplication and contextual relevance was performed, yielding 830 articles for closer review. From this stage, 4,92 articles were assessed for eligibility through full-text reading. During the eligibility stage, exclusions were made based on

open-access license types, resulting in a final selection of 177 articles utilized for the systematic review and bibliometric analysis.

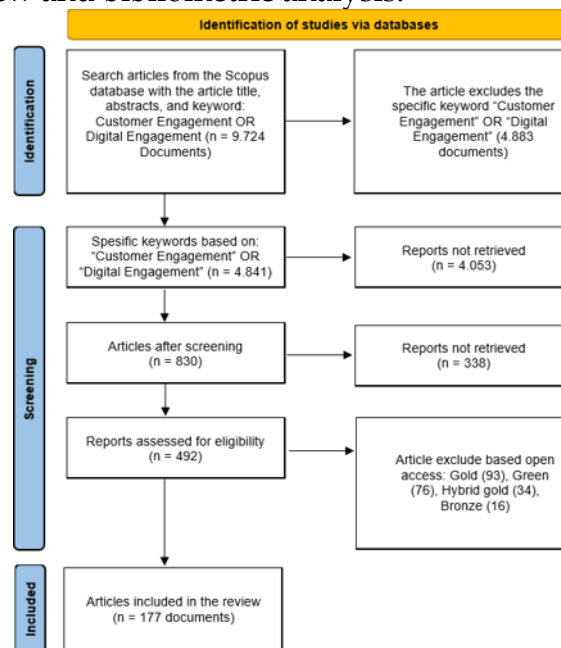


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart

Inclusion criteria for this study comprised articles published in peer-reviewed journals, written in English, relevant to the topics of digital engagement and relationship marketing, available in full text, and published between 2011 and 2025. Non-journal articles such as conference proceedings, editorials, book chapters, and articles focusing outside the primary topic were excluded.

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using the latest version of VOSviewer software. Three primary analysis types were used to map the literature structure: co-citation, co-occurrence, and trend topic analysis. First, co-citation analysis was utilized to identify links between articles and authors frequently cited together, thereby forming the intellectual structure of the study field (Small, 1973; White & Griffith, 1981). Second, co-occurrence analysis was applied to keywords to reveal the conceptual structure based on the frequency of appearance and interconnectedness within the literature network (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Third, trend topic analysis was deployed to observe the evolution of themes over time and identify emerging topics within digital engagement and relationship marketing literature.

Bibliometric data obtained from Scopus were exported in CSV format, then processed using the Louvain algorithm to identify key clusters within the knowledge network. Visualization of the analysis results was generated in the form of network maps and density maps to facilitate the interpretation of the resulting conceptual and intellectual structures.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics of the Literature

The article selection process based on the PRISMA flow diagram yielded 177 scientific articles for analysis in this study. The distribution of publications

by year shows a significant increase over the past decade. Since 2018, the number of articles discussing digital engagement within relationship marketing has shown a consistent upward trend, peaking in 2023 with 41 documents. Although a decline is observed in 2024 and 2025, this is likely due to incomplete indexing processes for the current ongoing years.

This trend demonstrates that digital engagement has become a vital topic in modern marketing studies, alongside the growth of digital technology, social media adoption, and the transformation of customer interaction models. The graph in Figure 2 illustrates the progression of published documents each year from 2011 to 2025.

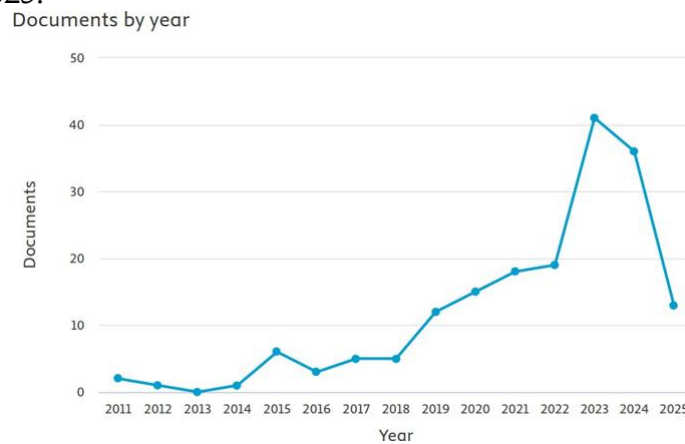


Figure 2. Distribution of Document Count by Publication Year (2011 – 2025)

Beyond the temporal perspective, the distribution of documents was also analyzed by subject area. The results show that this topic is most frequently studied within the realm of business and management at 24.8%, followed by social sciences at 19.6%, and computer science at 12.2%. The remainder is spread across disciplines such as psychology, economics, engineering, and environmental science. These findings reinforce the evidence that digital engagement is multidisciplinary, involving theoretical and practical approaches from various scientific perspectives.

Documents by subject area

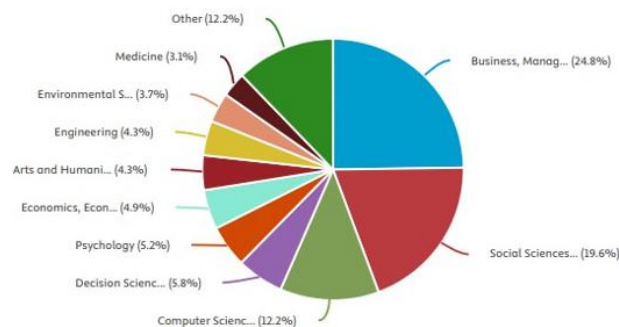


Figure 3. Distribution of Documents by Subject Area

Overall, this descriptive statistical analysis highlights that the study of digital engagement has not only grown rapidly quantitatively but also shows wide thematic expansion across multiple fields, establishing it as a strategic topic in the era of long-term relation-based digital marketing.

Conceptual Structure: Results of Co-Occurrence Analysis

The analysis of the conceptual structure in this study was performed using the co-occurrence technique via VOSviewer software on the keywords of the 177 selected articles. This technique aims to identify connections between concepts based on the frequency of keywords appearing together in a single document. This method was selected for its capacity to visually and systematically map network relationships within the literature (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

By setting a minimum occurrence threshold of two times, the main network view visualization revealed the formation of six primary clusters representing the conceptual structure of digital engagement and relationship marketing literature. The keyword network visualization is displayed in Figure 4.

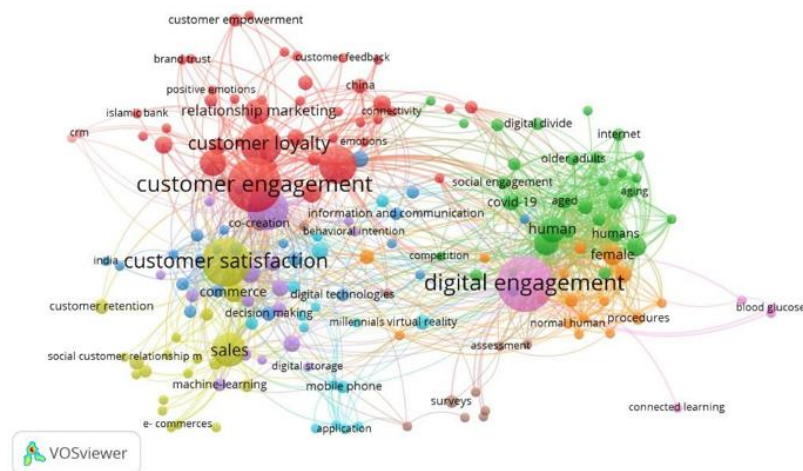


Figure 4. Keyword Network Visualization Based on Co-Occurrence (Network View)

The visualization illustrates that the topic of digital engagement is highly interconnected with various other concepts such as customer engagement, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, relationship marketing, brand trust, as well as social issues and digital technology. The breakdown of each major cluster is as follows:

Red Cluster: Relations and Loyalty

Consists of keywords such as customer engagement, customer loyalty, relationship marketing, brand trust, and customer empowerment. This cluster highlights the link between customer involvement and the relational dimensions that form the bedrock of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Green Cluster: Demographic and Social Context

Contains words like digital divide, older adults, social engagement, human, and internet. This cluster shows that digital engagement studies also factor in demographic aspects and technological divides.

Yellow Cluster: E-Commerce and Digital Transactions

Includes keywords like customer satisfaction, sales, commerce, machine learning, and e-commerce. This cluster depicts the relationship between digital engagement and customer satisfaction within technology-based transaction contexts.

Purple Cluster: Engagement Media and Technology

Comprises words like digital engagement, mobile phone, surveys, connected learning, and virtual reality. The focus of this cluster is on the technologies used in the customer engagement process.

Light Blue Cluster: Decision Making

Features keywords like decision making, digital technologies, customer retention, and millennials. This cluster showcases digital engagement supporting customer decision-making processes and long-term retention.

Orange Cluster: Participation and Applications

Displays keywords such as co-creation, application, competition, and digital technologies. This cluster emphasizes the role of customer participation in co-creating value via digital platforms.

The interconnections among keywords are visualized through lines linking the nodes. Thicker and shorter lines signify a higher correlation of keyword co-occurrence within a single document. The node size reflects the frequency of appearance of each term across the entire dataset. These findings reveal that digital engagement is not merely an isolated entity but is closely tied to other relational and technological variables. Digital engagement acts as a binder between customer experience, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty within the relationship marketing framework. This is in line with research by Brodie et al. (2013) and Vivek et al. (2012), which stresses that engagement is multidimensional and dynamic.



Figure 5. Keyword Density Visualization Based on Frequency of Occurrence (Density View)

Figure 5 shows the density map, which represents how frequently specific keywords appear and serve a central role in the literature. Bright yellow areas

indicate keywords that appear most frequently, while dark blue areas indicate keywords with lower occurrence frequencies.

The analysis shows that customer engagement, digital engagement, and customer satisfaction are the keywords with the highest density, indicating that these terms form the conceptual center of gravity in the literature review. Other terms such as customer loyalty, co-creation, and relationship marketing also exhibit high density, supporting the integration of engagement within the relationship marketing framework. This visualization provides a deeper understanding of the core structure within the literature network and highlights the concepts dominating the associated academic discourse.

Intellectual Structure: Results of Co-Citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis was used in this study to identify the intellectual structure of the literature addressing digital engagement in a relationship marketing context. Co-citation reflects how frequently two authors are cited together by other literature, thereby illustrating the scale of their theoretical contributions to a specific topic (Small, 1973; White & Griffith, 1981).

The analysis was performed using VOSviewer software, with cited authors as the unit of analysis and the minimum threshold for co-citation set at 10 citations. This analysis yielded a network visualization that groups key authors into several colored clusters based on the strength of their shared citation links.

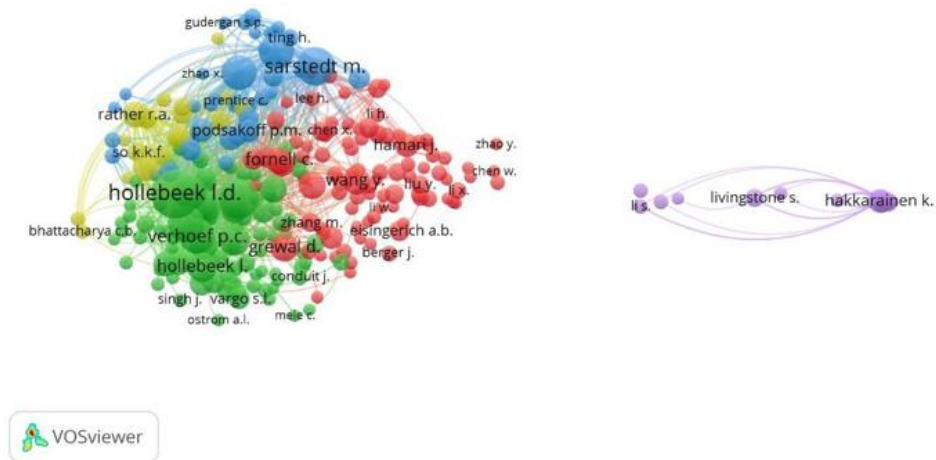


Figure 6. Author Co-Citation Network Visualization (Network View)

The visualization displays nodes representing frequently cited authors, where node size indicates co-citation frequency, and color indicates different conceptual clusters. Lines between nodes represent the strength of the shared citation connection (thicker lines mean stronger correlation). The results reveal four primary clusters:

Green Cluster: Customer Engagement Theory

Contains names such as Hollebeek L.D., Verhoef P.C., Vargo S.L., and Ostrom A.L., who are widely recognized for developing customer engagement theory and service-dominant logic.

Red Cluster: Digital Management and Transformation

Includes authors like Wang Y., Hamari J., and Eisingerich A.B., who extensively study digital transformation, interactive technology, and co-creation value in digital marketing.

Blue Cluster: Methodology and Statistics

Features figures such as Sarstedt M., Podsakoff P.M., and Fornell C., who play vital roles in the development of research methodologies like PLS-SEM and measurement validity.

Purple Cluster: Education and Digital Society

Contains Hakkarainen K., Livingstone S., and Li S., who contribute to studies of digital engagement within educational contexts, digital literacy, and digital social experiences.

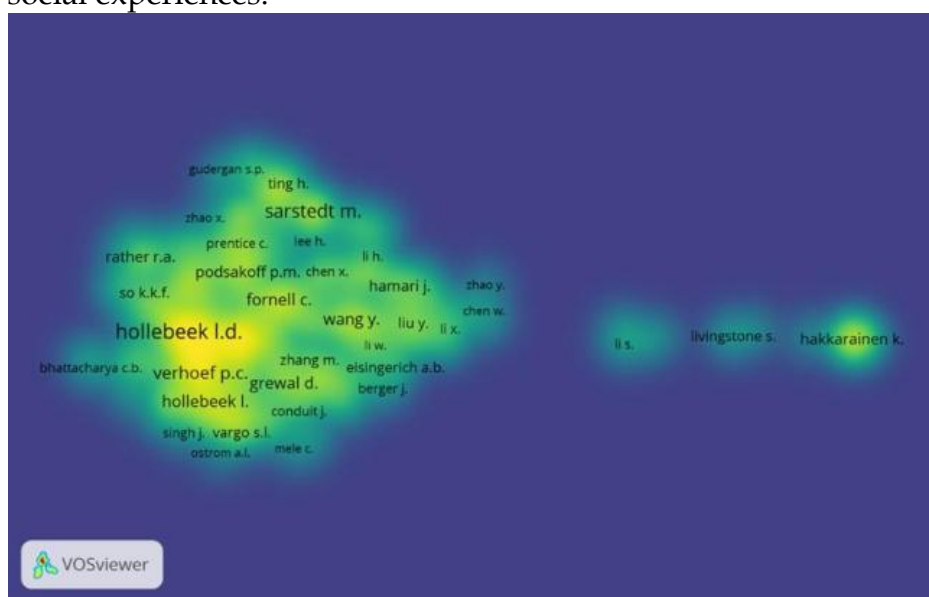


Figure 7. Author Co-Citation Density Visualization (Density View)

The density visualization shows how dominant or influential each author is within the intellectual structure based on shared citation intensity. Bright yellow indicates authors with very high levels of interconnectedness. The results show that Hollebeek L.D., Sarstedt M., Verhoef P.C., and Fornell C. are the most frequently co-cited authors, holding central positions in the intellectual mapping of this field. High density is also observed around Hamari J. and Wang Y., showing that technology-based approaches and digital transformation have become integral parts of the engagement literature.

This visualization provides a quantitative and visual overview of the most influential authors in the development of theory and methodology related to digital engagement in academic literature. To further examine the intellectual structure of digital engagement within the relationship marketing context, a co-citation analysis was performed on the references most frequently cited together across the 177 selected documents. This analysis helps identify seminal works that form the conceptual and methodological foundations of the field of study (Small, 1973; White & Griffith, 1981).

The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software, with cited references as the unit of analysis. The minimum co-citation threshold was set at

10 shared citations. The network visualization resulting from this analysis is presented in Figure 8.

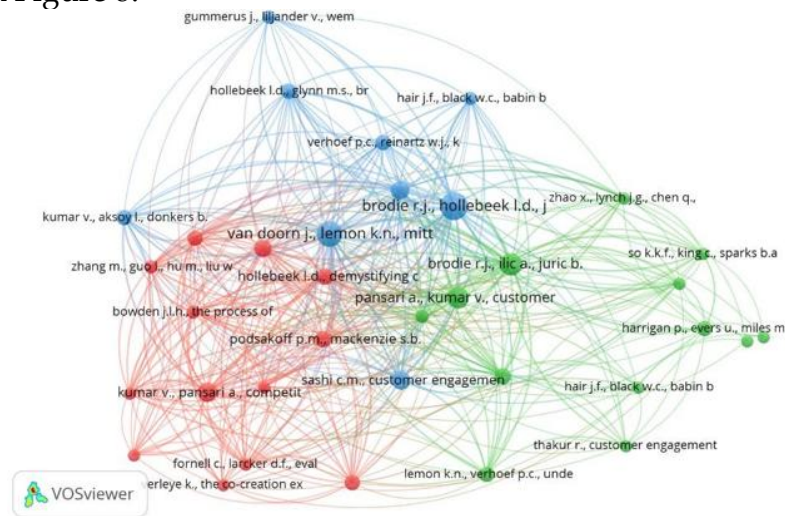


Figure 8. Reference Co-Citation Network Visualization (Network View)

In this visualization, each node represents a reference (an article or a book), while node size depicts the co-citation frequency. Node colors indicate clusters formed automatically based on citation link patterns. The relationships between references are illustrated by lines that grow thicker as the co-citation connection strengthens. The visualization results reveal three main clusters:

Red Cluster: Concept Development of Customer Engagement and Brand Experience

Includes works by Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek et al. (2014), which define customer engagement as a multidimensional phenomenon, as well as Van Doorn et al. (2010), who expanded the understanding of engagement into behaviors arising from brand stimuli.

Blue Cluster: Theoretical Models and Relationship Marketing Frameworks

Includes classic references such as Verhoef (2003) and Lemon & Verhoef (2016), which address customer experience and the role of engagement in shaping customer loyalty and value.

Green Cluster: Measurement, Co-Creation, and Managerial Contexts

Includes Sashi (2012), Fornell & Larcker (1981), and Podsakoff et al. (2003), which support quantitative approaches, alongside Vargo & Lusch (2004) regarding service-dominant logic theory and value co-creation.

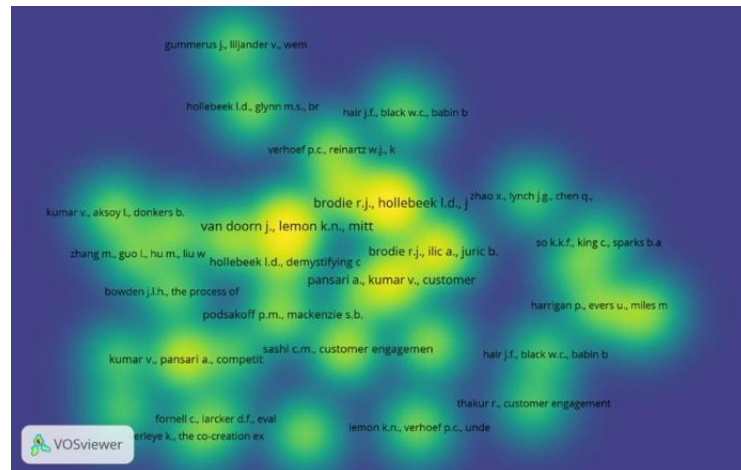


Figure 9. Reference Co-Citation Density Visualization (Density View)

The density visualization depicts the level of dominance or intellectual weight of each reference. Bright yellow indicates that the reference has the highest rate of co-citation in the literature, while blue indicates more marginal references. Based on the co-citation density visualization, several references can be identified as having the highest level of intellectual influence in the analyzed literature network. The references with the highest density include the work of Van Doorn et al. (2010), which introduced the concept of customer engagement as a form of participatory and proactive consumer behavior. Next, Brodie et al. (2011) stands out as a crucial reference for defining customer engagement within virtual brand communities. Hollebeek et al. (2014) contributed significantly through the development of a consumer brand engagement measurement scale based on social media interactions. Meanwhile, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) strengthened the understanding of the customer journey through a more structured and holistic customer experience framework. Additionally, Sashi (2012) serves as a primary reference with a modern relationship engagement framework integrating customer involvement into the dynamics of long-term buyer-seller relationships.

These findings indicate that the conceptual foundations in digital engagement studies are heavily influenced by theories emphasizing active involvement, customer participation, and interactive experiences within the relationship marketing process. These works serve as the main pillars forming the intellectual structure underlying the literature's development on this topic.

Topic Trends: Results of Overlay Visualization

To identify the development and evolutionary path of topics in the literature examining digital engagement within a relationship marketing context, a topic trend analysis was performed using the overlay visualization feature of the VOSviewer software. This visualization enables the mapping of keywords based on their average publication year, showcasing topics that dominated during specific periods as well as emerging topics that have begun to grow in recent years.

The overlay visualization displays keywords in a gradient color scheme, where dark blue indicates keywords appearing heavily in earlier publications (around 2013–2017), while bright yellow represents keywords more dominant in recent publications (2022–2024). Green represents a middle or transitional position (2018–2021). This color scheme helps visually and temporally identify the shifting focus of research.

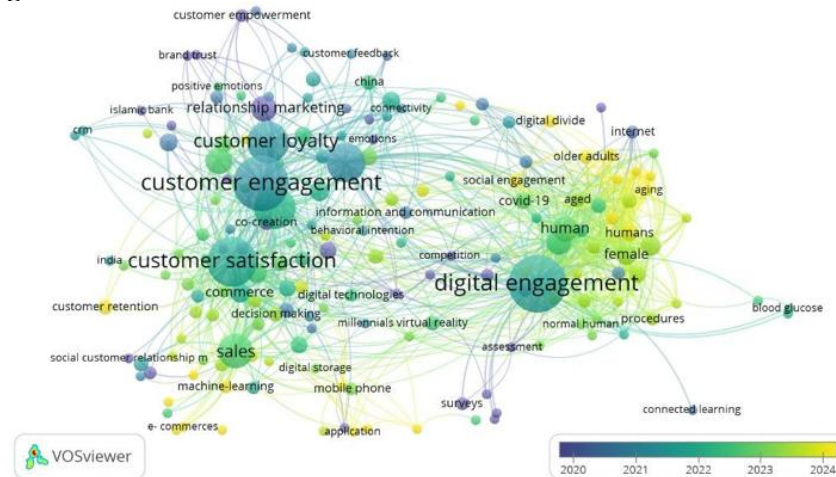


Figure 10. Topic Trend Visualization Based on Keyword Appearance Year (Overlay Map)

The visualization shows that several topics dominating the literature at the start of the last decade (indicated in blue) are classic terms like CRM, co-creation, relationship marketing, and customer engagement. These terms have served as the foundation for studies on customer involvement and relational marketing strategies. Meanwhile, topics appearing during the transition period (green) include customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, purchase intention, and value co-creation. These keywords reflect an expansion of research focus toward integrating customer experience, value perception, and purchasing behavior as outcomes of digital engagement.

Bright yellow topics, such as digital engagement, connected learning, social engagement, virtual reality, AI, and mobile phone, indicate newer and still-evolving research trends. These topics reflect a shift in engagement approaches from simple brand-based interactions toward technology-driven, automated, and data-backed digital experiences. This indicates that digital engagement research is increasingly moving toward personalized approaches, interactive platforms, and integration with disruptive technologies.

Thus, the topic trend analysis shows an evolution in the research landscape from traditional relation-based approaches toward more dynamic, digital, and technology-driven approaches. This also serves as an important indicator for future research directions, emphasizing customer engagement through adaptive, intelligent, and integrated digital channels.

DISCUSSION

The results of the bibliometric analysis in this study uncover various crucial dimensions shaping the literature map of digital engagement in a relationship

marketing context. The findings from each analysis type do not stand alone; they complement one another to form a comprehensive, multi-layered structure of knowledge.

Conceptually, the co-occurrence results show that digital engagement occupies a central position closely connected to other dimensions like customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, brand trust, and customer experience. The thematic clusters formed indicate that digital customer engagement not only drives increased loyalty but also plays an important role in creating value and building trust-based, long-term relationships. This reinforces customer engagement theories such as those put forward by Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek et al. (2014), which emphasize that customer engagement is multidimensional, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral interactions.

From an intellectual perspective, the co-citation analysis identifies the references and authors most influential in establishing the scientific foundation of this field. Seminal works like Van Doorn et al. (2010), Lemon & Verhoef (2016), and Sashi (2012) are proven to be the primary references in the associated literature, especially when discussing the relationships between customer experience, engagement, and loyalty. This finding confirms that digital engagement studies are largely grounded in classic relationship marketing approaches extended into digital contexts. Additionally, references from researchers like Sarstedt and Podsakoff indicate attention toward methodological validity and variable measurement within customer engagement studies.

Meanwhile, the topic trend analysis via overlay visualization shows that the literature has experienced a shift from traditional focuses like CRM and co-creation toward cutting-edge topics like digital engagement, connected learning, mobile phones, and virtual reality. This shift indicates a dynamic change in customer engagement approaches, increasingly moving toward personalization, interactivity, and integration with disruptive technologies. This serves as an important signal that future research needs to adopt more contextual, adaptive, and data-driven approaches in response to changing digital consumer behaviors.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that digital engagement is not merely a popular buzzword; it has evolved into a central concept bridging various dimensions in modern marketing relationships. The conceptual, intellectual, and temporal mapping in this study provides a thorough overview of how digital customer engagement is understood, researched, and developed. Furthermore, this study affirms that bibliometric approaches can make strategic contributions by identifying research gaps, directing future studies, and supporting the development of theories relevant to today's digital market dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that digital engagement has grown into a strategic element within the modern relationship marketing structure. Through bibliometric analysis of 177 scientific articles, a mapping of conceptual and intellectual structures was obtained, demonstrating a strong connection between digital engagement and customer loyalty, trust, and satisfaction. Six major clusters show that digital engagement does not stand alone but is embedded within

technology-based relational systems. The co-citation analysis reinforces the role of seminal references as the theoretical foundation of this field. The discovered topic trends also indicate an evolutionary path for research moving toward the utilization of disruptive technologies and the personalization of customer relationships.

Suggestions

For research development, future studies are advised to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore causal relationships among variables within digital engagement. Research can also focus on local contexts or specific industries to enrich contextual understanding. Marketing practitioners can leverage these findings to design digital strategies oriented toward long-term relationships through interactive, adaptive, and customer experience-based platforms.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could extend this study by incorporating longitudinal analysis, cross-disciplinary comparisons, and emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, social commerce, and marketing automation to examine how digital engagement continuously shapes relationship marketing. Further empirical studies may also validate the conceptual and intellectual structures identified through bibliometric mapping across different industries, cultures, and consumer segments.

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