ENGAJAMENTO DO CLIENTE E LEALDADE À MARCA: UMA REVISÃO BIBLIOMÉTRICA E CIENTOMÉTRICA

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND SCIENTOMETRIC REVIEW

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Objetivo do estudo
Mapear e analisar a evolução da literatura científica sobre customer engagement e brand loyalty, identificando abordagens teóricas, temas emergentes, obras influentes, redes de colaboração e oportunidades de pesquisa empírica futura na interseção desses dois construtos centrais do marketing.

Relevância/originalidade
Apesar da proximidade conceitual entre engagement e loyalty, nenhum estudo havia testado empiricamente sua integração bibliográfica. A originalidade reside em evidenciar que os dois construtos formam comunidades acadêmicas amplamente independentes, mapeando estruturalmente a interface como sítio de integração não realizada.

Metodologia/abordagem
Análise bibliométrica e scientométrica de 1.399 documentos do Scopus e Web of Science (1995–2025), processados no Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny. Combinou análise de desempenho e mapeamento científico: co-ocorrência de palavras, acoplamento documental, mapa temático e evolução temática ao longo de fatias temporais sucessivas.

Principais resultados
A literatura cresceu exponencialmente (22,61% ao ano), consolidando-se em arquitetura bipolar: um núcleo motor centrado no cliente e um substrato centrado na marca, apoiados em bases citacionais independentes. Responsabilidade social corporativa ascendeu ao quadrante motor como driver central de lealdade.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas
Fornece o primeiro mapeamento estrutural da desintegração entre as literaturas de engagement e loyalty, localizando sua interface como principal lacuna de integração teórica. Oferece agenda baseada em evidências para frameworks integrativos e demonstra a aplicação rigorosa e replicável de técnicas scientométricas.

Contribuições sociais/para a gestão
Sinaliza que a gestão de lealdade torna-se algoritmicamente mediada, exigindo engajamento adaptativo atento a confiança, privacidade e autonomia. Alerta que engagement e loyalty são geridos em silos organizacionais distintos e que a RSC deve integrar a proposta de valor central.

Palavras-chave: Engajamento do cliente, Lealdade à marca, Análise bibliométrica, Mapeamento científico, Marketing digital

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND SCIENTOMETRIC REVIEW

Study purpose
To map and analyse the evolution of the scientific literature on customer engagement and brand loyalty, identifying theoretical approaches, emerging themes, influential works, collaboration networks, and opportunities for future empirical research at the intersection of these two central marketing constructs.

Relevance / originality
Despite the conceptual proximity between engagement and loyalty, no study had empirically tested their bibliographic integration. The originality lies in evidencing that both constructs form largely independent scholarly communities, structurally mapping their interface as a site of unrealised integration.

Methodology / approach
Bibliometric and scientometric analysis of 1,399 documents from Scopus and Web of Science (1995–2025), processed in Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny. It combined performance analysis and science mapping: keyword co-occurrence, document coupling, thematic mapping, and thematic evolution across successive time slices.

Main results
The literature grew exponentially (22.61% annually), consolidating into a bipolar architecture: a customer-centred motor core and a brand-centred substrate, drawing on independent citation bases. Corporate social responsibility rose into the motor quadrant as a central loyalty driver.

Theoretical / methodological contributions
It provides the first structural mapping of the disintegration between the engagement and loyalty literatures, locating their interface as the principal gap for theoretical integration. It offers an evidence-based agenda and demonstrates a rigorous, replicable scientometric application.

Social / management contributions
It signals that loyalty management is becoming algorithmically mediated, requiring adaptive engagement attentive to trust, privacy, and autonomy. It warns that engagement and loyalty are managed in separate organisational silos and that CSR should be embedded in the core value proposition.

Keywords: Customer engagement, Brand loyalty, Bibliometric analysis, Science mapping, Digital marketing

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY: A BIBLIOMETRIC AND SCIENTOMETRIC REVIEW

1 Introduction

Customer engagement and brand loyalty have each generated substantial bodies of literature. This study traces the conceptual trajectories of each construct, identifies the theoretical traditions, maps the key debates at their intersection, and establishes the gap that motivates a bibliometric investigation of their co-evolution.

This article aims to map and analyze the evolution of scientific literature on customer engagement and brand loyalty, with the goal of identifying theoretical approaches, emerging themes, and opportunities for future empirical research.

To capture the field's intellectual structure, this study analyzes a curated dataset of 1,399 documents (1,345 journal articles) from Scopus and Web of Science, published between 1995 and 2025. This empirical mapping identifies dominant research streams, influential works, collaboration networks, and underexplored topics, offering a roadmap for future conceptual and empirical work (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The study addresses the following research questions: (RQ1) How has the volume of academic publications on customer engagement and brand loyalty evolved over the period analysed? (RQ2) Which journals, authors, and institutions have been the most influential in shaping research in this field? (RQ3) What are the main conceptual clusters that structure the literature? (RQ4) To what extent do these two constructs intersect? (RQ5) What emerging research themes signal opportunities or gaps for future studies?

By uncovering the intellectual structure of this growing field, the study identifies where theoretical integration is lacking and offers an evidence-based agenda for future conceptual and empirical work. The remainder presents the literature review, the methodological procedures for data collection and analysis, and the results and discussion, concluding with theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

Brand loyalty and customer engagement have each generated substantial literatures whose development has proceeded largely in parallel. This review traces each construct's trajectory, identifies the traditions connecting them, and establishes the gap motivating a bibliometric investigation of their co-evolution.

Brand loyalty has been progressively reconceptualised from a behavioural metric into a multidimensional relational construct. Early frameworks equated loyalty with repeat purchase (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978), but behavioural consistency may reflect inertia or switching costs rather than genuine preference. Crossing attitudinal strength with behavioural consistency yielded four motivationally distinct loyalty types (true, latent, spurious, and none) showing that aggregate loyalty is frequently not loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). The relational turn added affective and developmental dimensions: loyalty as a progression from cognitive evaluation through affective attachment and conative commitment to action (Oliver, 1999), with brand trust and brand affect mediating market share and price premium (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Community membership sustains loyalty through consumer-to-consumer ties (McAlexander et al., 2002), while digital commerce introduced antecedents with no offline equivalent, such as customisation and interactivity (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Recent work continues this trajectory, linking engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty across functional and emotional relationships (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019) and documenting oppositional loyalty in virtual communities (Cheng et al., 2024). This expansion has, however, rendered the construct's boundaries less precise and its relationship to engagement underspecified.

Customer engagement emerged to capture interactive, participatory behaviours that transactional metrics could not measure (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Its foundational definition positioned engagement as a psychological state arising from co-creative brand experiences (Brodie et al., 2011); a behavioural complement framed it as manifestations beyond purchase (word-of-mouth, recommendation, blogging) (Van Doorn et al., 2010); and a brand-level formulation cast it as cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment in brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011). Subsequent work advanced measurement through a validated tripartite scale (Hollebeek et al., 2014), broadened scope to participative behaviours (Vivek et al., 2012), and pursued integration by positioning engagement as a translator of satisfaction into value-adding outcomes within service-dominant logic (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2019). Yet definitional heterogeneity persists, particularly regarding loyalty, involvement, and experience.

Both constructs are embedded in relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Grönroos, 1994) and service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008), yet these foundations are applied asymmetrically. In the loyalty stream, trust and satisfaction act as antecedents of a stable attitudinal orientation (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002); in the engagement stream, as facilitators of ongoing co-creative processes (Brodie et al., 2011). Loyalty research models relational states; engagement research, relational processes; a division that value co-creation frameworks, operationalised primarily within engagement research (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), have not bridged.

Three positions structure the nexus. The dominant one treats engagement as an antecedent of loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011), supported in tourism (So et al., 2016) and online banking (Khan et al., 2016). A second treats them as mutually reinforcing, with virtual communities showing iterative loyalty–engagement cycles (Brodie et al., 2013). A third treats engagement as superordinate, subsuming loyalty (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). These coexist unresolved, most evidence being cross-sectional (Rather et al., 2022).

Digital transformation intensifies both constructs' relevance while reshaping their mechanisms. Platform-enabled behaviours create value but can trigger disengagement and backlash (Hollebeek et al., 2016), and the nonlinear customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2021) implies stage-dependent effects that comparative platform work confirms (Khan et al., 2023). More recently, algorithmic mediation and generative AI have moved to the centre of the marketing agenda (Dwivedi et al., 2021), raising the personalisation–privacy tension as a new boundary condition for engagement-driven loyalty (Martin & Murphy, 2017). No integrative framework yet accommodates this platform- and algorithm-specific variation, the gap this study maps.

Because these debates have unfolded across disciplinary silos and largely cross-sectional designs, narrative synthesis alone cannot reveal how the two constructs have actually co-evolved. A bibliometric and scientometric mapping addresses this by quantifying the field's intellectual structure, tracing thematic trajectories, and locating the points of convergence and separation between the engagement and loyalty streams (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021), thereby grounding the questions that follow.

3 Method

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Approach

This study adopts a bibliometric and scientometric design to map the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of scholarly publications on customer engagement and brand loyalty. Bibliometric analysis quantifies publication patterns, influential authors, and source impact, while scientometric techniques visualize conceptual structures and keyword co-occurrences (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Together, these methods offer a systematic, replicable approach for identifying dominant research streams, collaboration patterns, and emerging themes (Donthu et al., 2021).

The dataset used two leading databases, Scopus and Web of Science, selected for broad coverage and consistent indexing. The search, conducted on March 30, 2026, used a Boolean combination of keywords on two axes: (1) brand loyalty: "brand loyalty," "e-loyalty," "online loyalty," "customer loyalty," "consumer loyalty," "digital loyalty," or "customer retention"; and (2) customer engagement: "customer engagement," "consumer engagement," "brand engagement," "brand experience," "brand interaction," or "digital branding."

The search was applied to the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields, following standard practices in science mapping (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Results were filtered by document type (journal articles only), language (English), and publication date (1995–2025). These filters ensured that the study focused on the most relevant and accessible output for the analysis.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 1995 and 2025; conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, reviews, dissertations, and non-English publications were excluded for consistency and quality. Following a PRISMA-aligned workflow, identification retrieved 2,188 records (1,192 Scopus; 996 Web of Science); after removing 789 duplicates and excluding 2026 records as incomplete, 1,399 documents met the inclusion criteria (1,345 articles and 54 reviews, both treated as peer-reviewed journal contributions).

Scopus data were exported as CSV and Web of Science data as plain text, per each platform's conventions. Both were imported into RStudio (Version 2024.12.1+563) and processed with the Bibliometrix package and its Biblioshiny interface (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Preprocessing standardized metadata fields (author names, journal titles, keywords), removed duplicates, and corrected citation inconsistencies (Donthu et al., 2021).

3.3 Analytical Techniques

The analytical strategy combined performance analysis with science mapping (Donthu et al., 2021). Performance analysis examined annual output, the most productive and most cited sources, authors, and affiliations, and the most globally cited documents. Science mapping comprised co-word analysis of author-keyword co-occurrence, keyword-based document coupling, thematic mapping, and thematic evolution across successive time slices (Callon et al., 1983; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Trend-topic analysis identified the emergence and recency of key terms, and co-authorship network analysis at author and country levels mapped the field's collaborative structure (Waltman et al., 2010).

4 Results

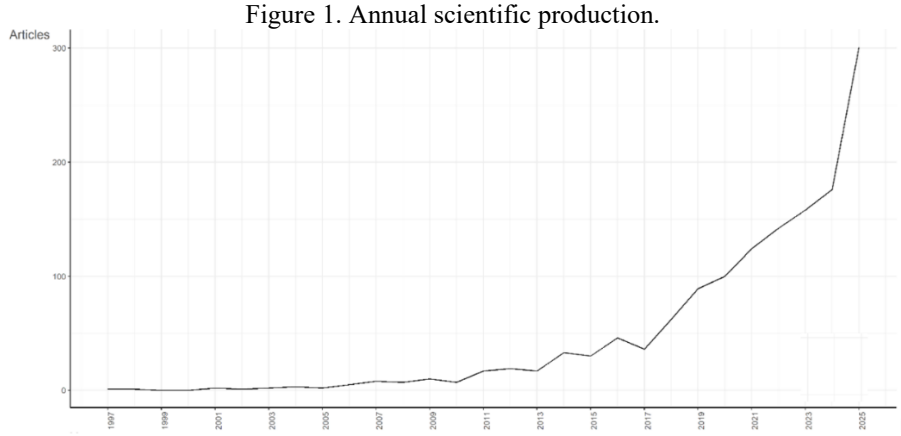
4.1 Trends and impacts

The bibliometric profile comprises 1,399 documents across 563 sources between 1995 and 2025. The annual growth rate of 22.61% signals rapid, sustained expansion, consistent with growing attention to the customer engagement and brand loyalty intersection in digital contexts. The average of 38.54 citations per document indicates a high-impact domain, while the average document age of 5.17 years shows a relatively recent corpus. It draws on 88,021 references, reflecting a broad, well-established intellectual foundation.

Authorship patterns reveal a predominantly collaborative field. A total of 3,516 authors contribute to the dataset, with an average of 3.12 co-authors per document. The dominance of journal articles (representing 96.14%) confirms that the field's output is concentrated in peer-reviewed outlets, lending credibility to the dataset's analytical foundations. The richness of the keyword architecture, with 3,601 author keywords and 1,665 Keywords Plus, provides a robust basis for the thematic and co-occurrence analyses that follow.

The annual distribution of publications (Figure 1) reveals a clear exponential growth trajectory. The field remained incipient during the first decade, with annual output never exceeding three documents between 1995 and 2005. A gradual increase began around 2006, reaching 10 publications in 2009, followed by visible acceleration from 2011 onward, coinciding with the emergence of customer engagement as a formalised construct following the influential conceptualisations of the early 2010s.

Figure 1. Annual scientific production.



Source: Bibliometrix

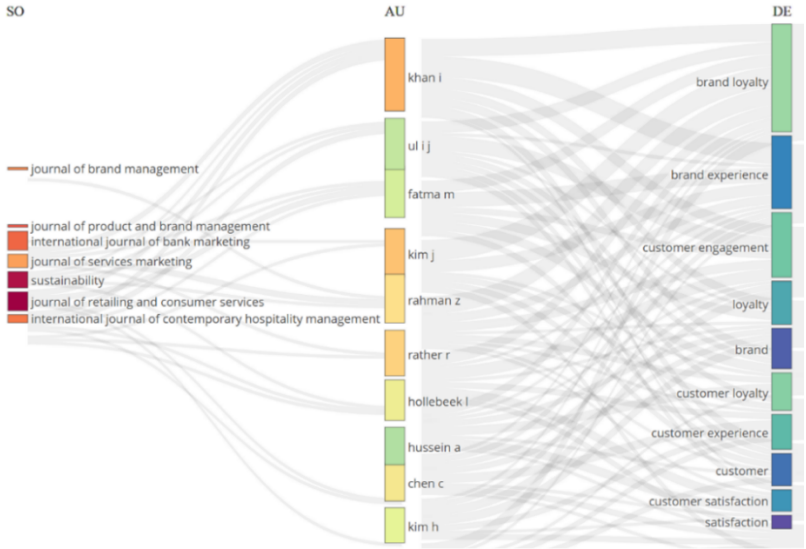
A second, more pronounced inflection occurs around 2018, when production surpassed 60 articles. Output crossed 100 documents in 2020 and climbed sharply, reaching 142 articles in 2022, 158 in 2023, 176 in 2024, and a peak of 301 in 2025. The period 2019–2025 alone accounts for approximately 70% of the corpus (991 of 1,399 documents), confirming the nexus consolidated as a major research front within the last six years, driven by digital touchpoints, platform economies, and data-driven strategies that redefined how consumers form and sustain brand loyalty.

The distribution of average citations per year (1995–2025) reveals a pattern characteristic of maturing fields, in which early foundational works attract disproportionate citation impact relative to their volume. The most prominent spike occurs in 2002, when a single publication achieved 1,862 mean total citations and 74.48 per year, indicating a seminal contribution. Secondary peaks appear in 1998 (1,274; 43.93 per year) and 2010 (588.71; 34.63 per year). Each spike is associated with very small annual output (one, one, and seven documents), confirming the early architecture was established by a few highly influential works. From 2011 onward, average citations per year stabilise within roughly 4 to 8, coinciding with the rapid rise in production shown in Figure 1.

The overall citation trajectory confirms a two-phase structure: an initial period (1997–2010) dominated by a few highly cited foundational texts, followed by a consolidation phase (2011–2025) of broader participation, higher output, and more distributed citations. This marks the transition from an emerging to an established research front, where production shifts from paradigm-setting contributions to incremental elaboration and empirical diversification.

The three-field plot (Figure 2) maps the structural relationships among the most productive sources (SO), the most prolific authors (AU), and the most frequent author keywords (DE) within the dataset, thereby revealing which journals serve as primary outlets for specific authors and which conceptual themes those authors prioritise in their research agendas. The density of connections between authors and keywords reveals that the most prolific scholars in this field operate primarily at the conceptual interface of brand experience, customer engagement, and loyalty, confirming that these constructs form the thematic core.

Figure 2. Three-field plot - relationships among sources, authors, and keywords.



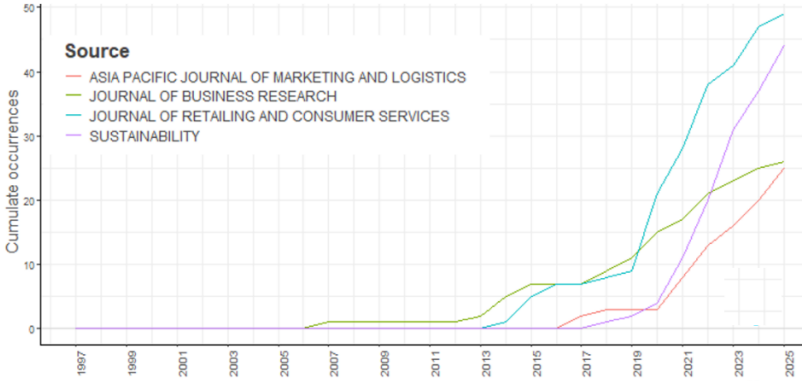
Source: Bibliometrix. SO = source, AU = author, DE = keyword.

4.2 Most influential sources and relevant contributions

The cumulative production of the four most active journals (Figure 3) shows a broadly similar growth pattern, with publication activity accelerating considerably after 2019. The ranking of sources by publications shows a clear concentration of the literature within high-impact marketing, branding, and services journals. The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services leads with 49 articles (h-index: 167; SJR: 3.439; Q1). Sustainability follows with 44 (207; 0.688; Q1). The Journal of Business Research ranks third with 26 and holds the highest SJR in the top ten (3.499; 292; Q1). The Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics contributes 25 (72; 1.186; Q1).

The remaining top-ten sources are Cogent Business & Management (24 articles; h-index: 56; SJR: 0.596; Q2), the Journal of Product and Brand Management (22; 112; 1.886; Q1), the International Journal of Bank Marketing (18; 113; 1.439; Q1), the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (17; 139; 3.141; Q1), the Journal of Brand Management (17; 75; 1.514; Q1), and the Journal of Services Marketing (15; 130; 1.364; Q1). Nine of the ten hold Q1 status, indicating a knowledge base concentrated in outlets of recognised influence and editorial rigour. The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services' prominence aligns with the field's emphasis on customer-facing retail and digital phenomena, while sector-specific journals like the International Journal of Bank Marketing and the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management show the nexus has diffused beyond general marketing theory into applied contexts, particularly financial services and hospitality.

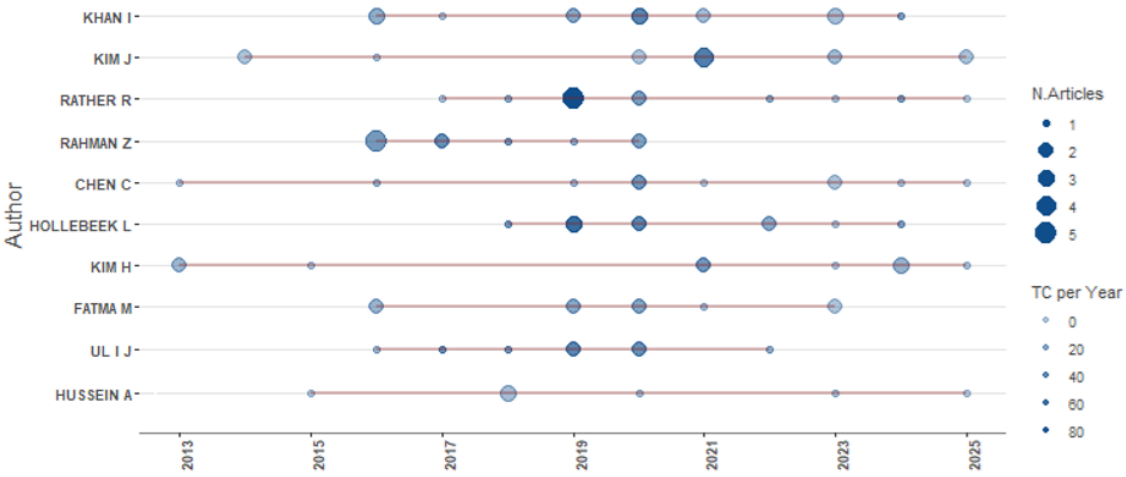
Figure 3. Cumulative source production over time for the four most active journals.



Source: Bibliometrix.

Sustained authorial engagement with the customer engagement and brand loyalty nexus began only in the mid-2010s (Figure 4; bubble size = annual output, colour intensity = citation volume per year): the earliest contributions among the ten most prolific scholars emerge around 2013 to 2014. The most productive period for the majority of these authors falls between 2018 and 2021, during which the largest and darkest bubbles are concentrated.

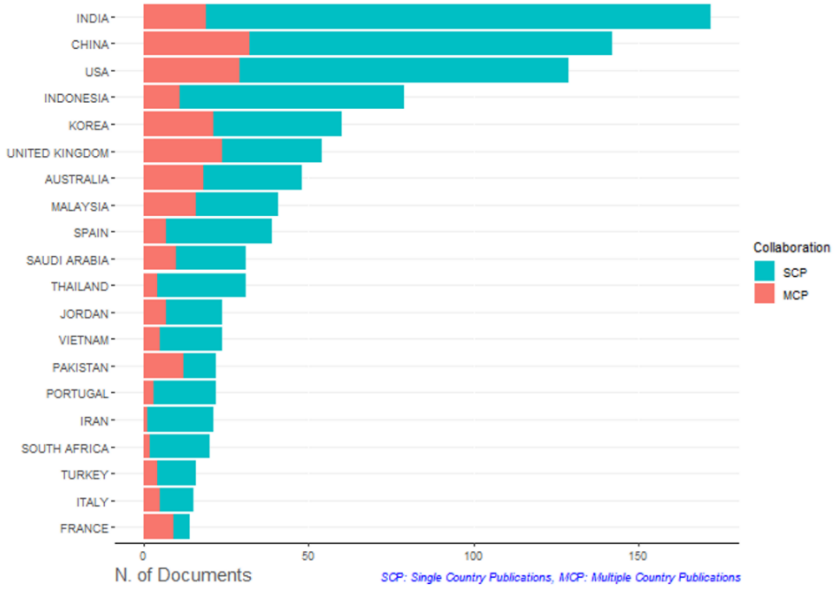
Figure 4. Authors' production over time and associated citation impact.



Source: Bibliometrix.

The geographic distribution of corresponding authors (Figure 5) confirms the literature is driven primarily by Asia-Pacific scholars: India leads with 172 articles (12.29%), followed by China (142; 10.15%), the United States (129; 9.22%), and Indonesia (79; 5.65%), which together account for over 37% of total output.

Figure 5. Corresponding author countries and collaboration type.



Source: Bibliometrix.

The distinction between single-country (SCP) and multiple-country publications (MCP) reveals differences in collaborative orientation. High-volume producers (India, China, Indonesia) generate most output through intra-national collaboration, which may limit the diversity of perspectives and assumptions. The absence of South American countries among

the top 20 suggests a significant opportunity to expand research capacity, international collaboration, and production. The overall international co-authorship rate of 23.52% appears modest for a field of this size, suggesting cross-national integration remains underexploited.

The most relevant institutional affiliations also reveal a geographically diverse landscape. Amity University (India), Bina Nusantara University (Indonesia), and Griffith University (Australia) share the top with 24 articles each, followed by Prince Sultan University (Saudi Arabia) with 23. Notably, none belongs to the traditional Anglo-American centres that dominate many marketing subfields.

The middle tier includes the University of Johannesburg (South Africa, 19 articles), Swinburne University of Technology (Australia, 18), Curtin University (Australia, 17), and Islamic Azad University (Iran, 17, plus 15 under a variant name). The lower tier, comprising Sejong University (South Korea, 15), Universitas Airlangga (Indonesia, 15), the University of Jordan (15), and the University of Valencia (Spain, 15), reinforces the field's dispersion across East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Southern Europe.

The 10 most globally cited documents identify the foundational works shaping the field's intellectual architecture. Three stand markedly above the rest: Van Doorn (2010) with 2,333 total citations, Brodie (2013) with 2,012, and McAlexander (2002) with 1,862. Their separation from the fourth-placed Bolton (1998), with 1,274 citations, confirms the foundations rest on a few paradigm-defining contributions. Van Doorn (2010) and Brodie (2013) are recognised for formalising customer engagement as a theoretical construct, while McAlexander (2002) represents an earlier tradition centred on brand community and relational loyalty.

The lower tier of the ranking reflects a cluster of works published between 2009 and 2012 that consolidated the theoretical transition from transactional loyalty models to experience-driven and engagement-centred frameworks. Several authors contributed to this conceptual shift by introducing or refining constructs such as brand experience, customer engagement behaviours, and service-dominant perspectives on loyalty.

Collectively, this citation landscape confirms that the field's theoretical core was established between 2002 and 2013, with subsequent expansion into contextual applications and digital environments. For research seeking to position a novel contribution, this distribution implies that theoretical leverage now lies less in the consolidated core than at its expanding edges, where the foundational constructs are being extended into platform-mediated and computational contexts that the original formulations did not anticipate.

4.3 Keyword mapping

The keyword mapping offers a structured view of the dominant themes in research focused on customer-centric approaches within the domains of business, strategy, and marketing, directly addressing RQ3. By analyzing the keywords most frequently used by authors, this stage of the study helps to identify established research areas, assess the current thematic landscape, and uncover emerging topics gaining traction in the field.

"Brand loyalty" dominates with 300 occurrences, followed by "customer loyalty" (242), "customer engagement" (165), "customer experience" (154), and "loyalty" (154). This upper tier confirms the two conceptual axes used to build the dataset (brand/customer loyalty and customer engagement) as the field's organising constructs. The separation of "brand loyalty" from "customer loyalty" suggests they are related but non-interchangeable, the former anchored in branding theory, the latter in relationship marketing. The prominence of "customer experience" (154) and "brand experience" (129) further indicates experiential constructs have become central mediators linking engagement to loyalty.

The middle tier reveals the field's core relational and evaluative constructs. "Customer satisfaction" (146) remains a strong antecedent and competing predictor of loyalty despite growing emphasis on engagement. "Social media" (72) marks the digital context, while "trust"

(60) and "brand trust" (46), 106 occurrences combined, bridge satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty. "Service quality" (57) reflects the enduring services-marketing tradition, linking engagement research to earlier quality-satisfaction-loyalty paradigms.

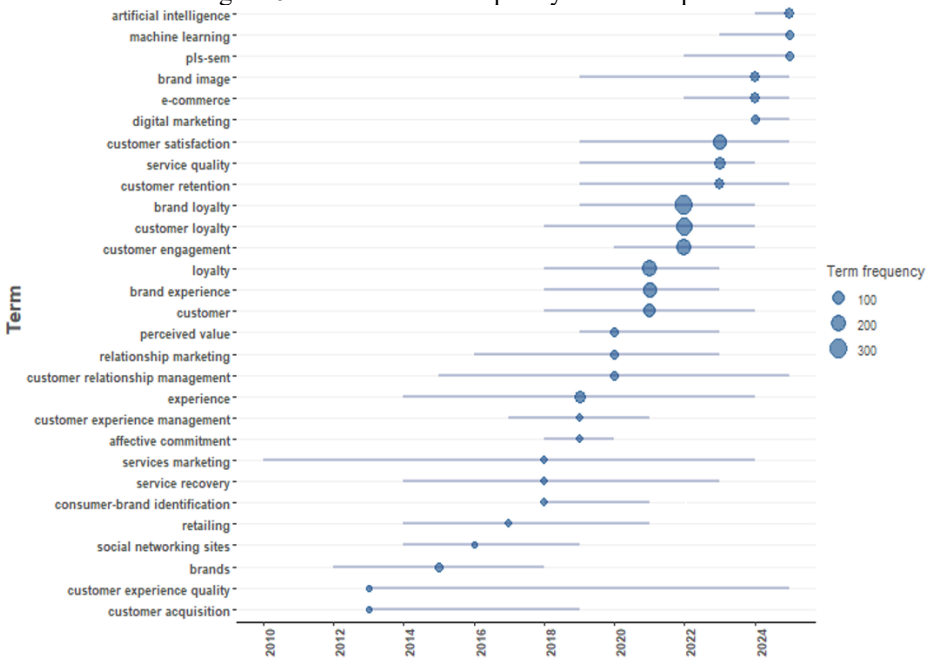
The lower tier defines the field's emerging and affective boundaries. "Brand equity" (44), "brand love" (44), and "consumer engagement" (44) appear equally, marking parallel streams on the economic, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of the relationship, while "customer retention" (39) ties the literature to managerial outcomes. Overall, the architecture rests on three layers: loyalty and retention as focal outcomes, engagement and experience as processual mechanisms, and satisfaction, trust, and service quality as evaluative antecedents.

The trend-topic analysis (Figure 6) maps the emergence and recency of key terms, each bar spanning Q1–Q3 usage years, the diamond marking the median, and bubble size the frequency. "Services marketing" (Q1: 2010), the earliest term, confirms the field's roots in service-dominant logic and quality-satisfaction paradigms.

The field's core constructs cluster with median years between 2020 and 2022, the period of maximal conceptual consolidation. "Brand loyalty", "customer loyalty", "customer engagement", "customer satisfaction", "brand experience", and "loyalty" all reached median usage within a narrow three-year window. This convergence indicates the principal constructs matured simultaneously rather than sequentially.

The rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning signals a computational turn toward algorithmic personalisation, while "pls-sem" marks the growing adoption of partial least squares SEM for complex engagement-loyalty models. "Digital marketing", "e-commerce", and "brand image" confirm accelerating digitisation. Overall, the field moved from foundational service and relationship constructs, through engagement-and-experience consolidation, into a third phase defined by AI, digital platforms, and advanced quantitative methods.

Figure 6. Evolution and frequency of trend topics.



Source: Bibliometrix.

4.4 Thematic Structure

The relational structure among documents is examined through keyword-based coupling, linking documents by shared author keywords rather than shared references or citations. This co-word technique identifies semantic relationships between documents on similar topics, revealing the field's conceptual architecture (Callon et al., 1983).

Keyword-based document coupling resolves the field's core intellectual structure into two distinct clusters. The analysis was conducted on 250 documents using the Walktrap clustering algorithm, with a minimum frequency threshold of 4, author keywords (DE) as label terms, and global citation impact as the performance measure. The resulting two-cluster solution provides a parsimonious but revealing portrait of how the customer engagement and brand loyalty literature organises itself at the document level.

The dominant cluster occupies the upper-right quadrant, identified by four labels: "brand loyalty" (70.9%), "customer engagement" (97.8%), "loyalty" (52.2%), and "customer loyalty" (52.8%). Its position as a motor theme confirms the engagement-loyalty nexus as the field's conceptual and citational core. The near-unity confidence for "customer engagement" (97.8%) marks a stabilised grouping and the defining concept of the field's most central stream, while the lower values for "brand loyalty," "customer loyalty," and "loyalty" show these labels attach more diffusely, reflecting loyalty's multiple operationalisations across branding, consumer behaviour, and relationship marketing, entering as a shared outcome. Its high centrality and impact drive the field's agenda.

The second cluster is positioned in the lower-left quadrant (low centrality, low impact), labelled by "brand experience" (confidence: 77.1%), "customer experience" (confidence: 86.7%), "brand loyalty" (confidence: 29.1%), and "loyalty" (confidence: 47.8%). This placement classifies it as an emerging or declining theme, one that is internally coherent but weakly connected to the field's citational mainstream. The high confidence scores for "customer experience" (86.7%) and "brand experience" (77.1%) identify a lexically convergent, conceptually stabilised research community organised around experiential constructs, internally coherent yet, given its low centrality, operating with limited bibliographic overlap with the engagement-loyalty motor cluster.

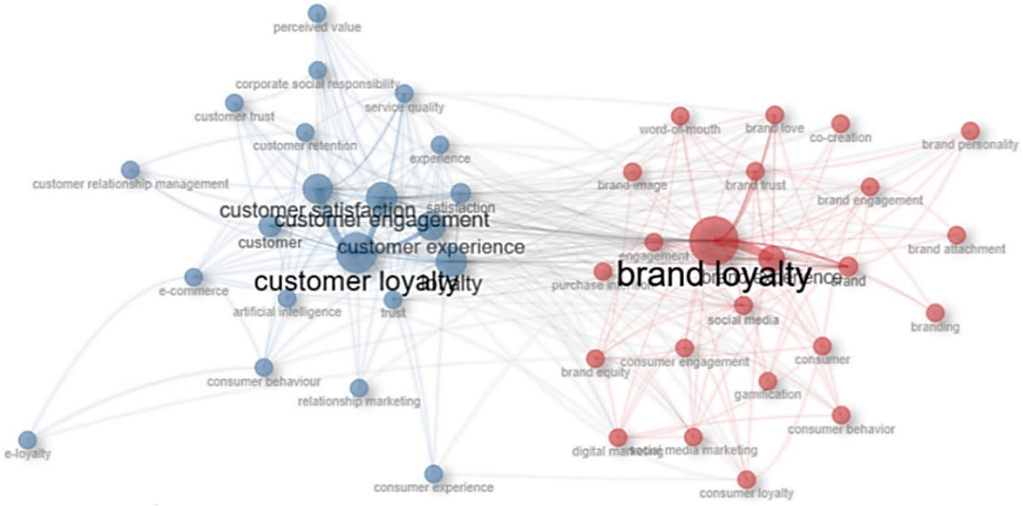
The reappearance of "brand loyalty" and "loyalty" here, with substantially lower confidence (29.1% and 47.8%), marks a diffuse, boundary-spanning attachment: 29.1% means fewer than one in three documents assigns "brand loyalty" as a primary term, implying the experiential stream invokes loyalty as an outcome but not as a primary theoretical object, addressing it through distinct references and traditions. Co-word coupling suggests these literatures rely on largely separate citation bases. As bibliometric proximity does not establish conceptual (in)compatibility, this pattern is best read as a hypothesis for integrative work rather than a settled finding.

4.5 Conceptual structure

The keyword co-occurrence network reveals a clear bipolar intellectual structure (Figure 7), organised around a customer-centred cluster anchored by "customer loyalty" and a brand-centred cluster dominated by "brand loyalty." The blue cluster groups constructs associated with customer-centred relational and evaluative processes: "customer engagement," "customer satisfaction," "customer experience," "satisfaction," "perceived value," "service quality," "corporate social responsibility," "customer trust," "customer retention," "customer relationship management," "trust," "experience," "e-commerce," "artificial intelligence," "consumer behaviour," "relationship marketing," and "e-loyalty."

The red cluster organises constructs associated with brand-centred identity, affect, and symbolic processes: "brand trust," "brand love," "brand image," "brand engagement," "brand attachment," "brand personality," "brand equity," "word-of-mouth," "co-creation," "social media," "social media marketing," "digital marketing," "purchase intention," "consumer engagement," "consumer loyalty," "gamification," "branding," "consumer," and "consumer behavior." It captures the field's strategic, brand-management dimension, where loyalty is the product of affective bonds, identity-based attachment, and symbolic consumption.

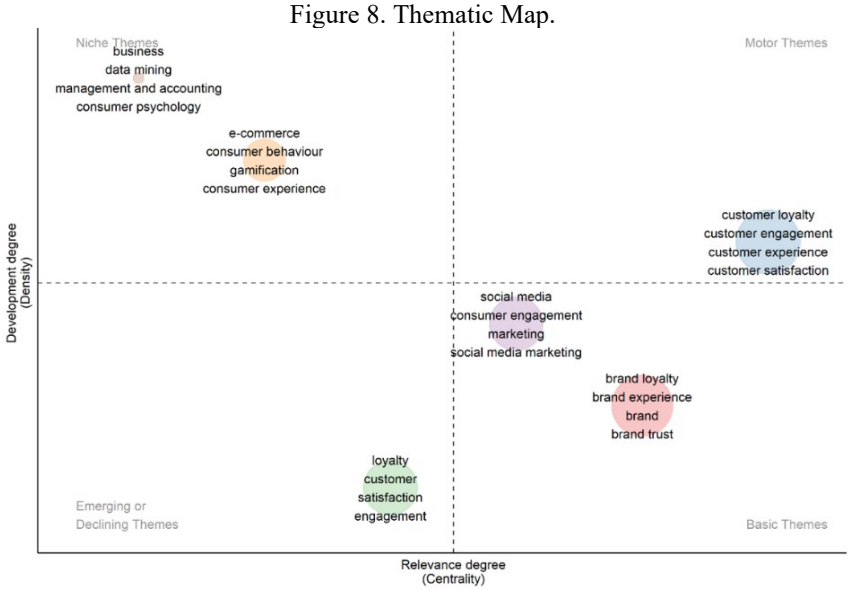
Figure 7. Keyword co-occurrence network.



Source: Bibliometrix.

The thematic map (Figure 8) identifies the customer-centred cluster as the driving core and positions the brand-centred and social-media streams as foundational but underdeveloped, supporting a diagnostic reading of the field's maturity and priorities.

Figure 8. Thematic Map.



Source: Bibliometrix.

The motor quadrant (upper-right) contains a single cluster ("customer loyalty," "customer engagement," "customer experience," "customer satisfaction") whose top position in both centrality and density confirms it as the field's driving core. The co-presence of these constructs indicates the customer-centred stream has achieved high theoretical integration, with engagement, experience, and satisfaction forming a cohesive system of antecedents and mediators leading to customer loyalty. This aligns with the co-occurrence network (Figure 7), where they formed the dense nucleus of the blue cluster.

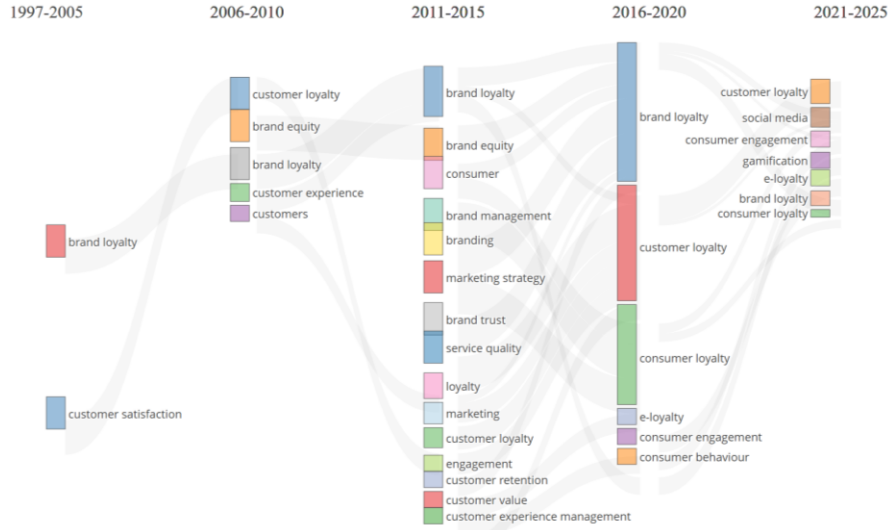
The basic themes quadrant (lower-right) hosts two clusters of high centrality but low density. The first ("brand loyalty," "brand experience," "brand," "brand trust") represents the brand-centred dimension: high centrality confirms brand loyalty research is foundational, yet low density signals incomplete development, as the theoretical relationships among these constructs lack the rigour of their customer-centred counterparts. The second ("social media," "consumer engagement," "marketing," "social media marketing") signals digital and social

media engagement research is widespread and relevant but lacks the cohesion of a developed theme. Together they define the field's foundational but underdeveloped substrate, where high connectivity has not yet translated into deep theoretical articulation.

The niche quadrant (upper-left) contains two clusters. The first ("business," "data mining," "management and accounting," "consumer psychology") is a small, specialised community at the intersection of computational methods and psychological approaches; high density but low centrality indicates a self-contained pocket with limited interaction with the broader literature. The second ("e-commerce," "consumer behaviour," "gamification," "consumer experience") reflects an applied, digitally oriented stream focused on interactive and gamified engagement. These niche themes are productive but isolated specialisations that could gain influence if connected to the motor and basic clusters. Finally, the emerging/declining quadrant (lower-left) contains a single cluster ("loyalty," "customer," "satisfaction," "engagement") whose low centrality, density, and generic keywords suggest residual concepts.

The thematic evolution map (Figure 9) traces the literature across five time slices, revealing how the field's vocabulary expanded, differentiated, and reconfigured over nearly three decades; flow ribbons indicate continuity, while new and disappearing nodes signal thematic births, transformations, and absorptions.

Figure 9. Thematic Evolution.



Source: Bibliometrix.

The earliest period (1997–2005) is defined by “brand loyalty" and "customer satisfaction". The second period (2006–2010) marks the first significant differentiation. Five themes emerge ("customer loyalty," "brand equity," "brand loyalty," "customer experience," and "customers") as the literature began distinguishing brand-level from customer-level loyalty while incorporating experiential and equity-based perspectives. Both "brand loyalty" and "customer satisfaction" from the first period feed into this set, confirming the original two streams as generative sources for diversification.

The third period (2011–2015) represents rapid proliferation. The vocabulary expands to "brand loyalty," "brand equity," "consumer," "brand management," "branding," "marketing strategy," "brand trust," "service quality," "loyalty," "marketing," "customer loyalty," "engagement," "customer retention," "customer value," and "customer experience management." This signals the transition to a multifaceted field integrating trust, service quality, retention, and value alongside the original loyalty and equity foundations, with "engagement" marking its formal entry into the vocabulary.

The fourth period (2016–2020) introduces consolidation. The previous period's themes converge into three clusters: "brand loyalty" (absorbing brand loyalty, brand equity, consumer, brand management, branding, marketing strategy), "customer loyalty" (absorbing brand trust, service quality, loyalty, marketing, customer loyalty), and a smaller cluster of "e-loyalty," "consumer engagement," and "consumer behaviour." The field thus moved from fragmentation toward coherence, with brand-centred and customer-centred streams crystallising as the two dominant pillars, while the distinct "e-loyalty"/"consumer engagement" cluster signals the accelerating digital turn.

The final period (2021–2025) reveals the current configuration. "Brand loyalty" flows into "customer loyalty" and a composite cluster of "social media," "consumer engagement," "gamification," "e-loyalty," "brand loyalty," and "consumer loyalty," while "customer loyalty" maintains continuity. The prominence of "social media," "gamification," and "e-loyalty" confirms digital, platform-mediated engagement now constitutes a defining frontier. The evolution thus describes a trajectory of foundational isolation (1997–2005), initial differentiation (2006–2010), rapid proliferation (2011–2015), structural consolidation (2016–2020), and digital-experiential expansion (2021–2025).

The 2021–2025 slice reveals a fragmented, diversifying field with no consolidated motor theme. Most notably, corporate social responsibility rises into the motor zone alongside consumer loyalty and experience, marking CSR's shift from peripheral topic to central loyalty driver. Customer loyalty, customer experience, and customer engagement occupy the basic themes quadrant as the most central yet underdeveloped constructs. Brand loyalty and brand experience remain foundational but shallow, while social media, engagement, and satisfaction lack theoretical density. E-loyalty and machine learning sit in the emerging/declining quadrant, confirming digital loyalty and computational methods are rising but not yet embedded.

Together, the document-coupling, co-occurrence, and thematic-map analyses converge on one finding: the literature forms two weakly connected communities addressing the same phenomena through largely separate citation bases: a customer-centred stream (customer engagement, experience, satisfaction, loyalty) and a brand-centred stream (brand loyalty, experience, trust, love), of which the engagement-versus-experience split is one facet. Complementary yet bibliographically disjoint, they leave the engagement–loyalty interface as the field's principal site of unrealised integration.

5 Discussion

The analysis reveals a rapid, structurally significant transformation. The 22.61% annual growth rate, with about 70% of the corpus in 2019–2025 (Figure 1), confirms the nexus moved from nascent interest to a consolidated front in under a decade, addressing RQ1 and aligning with the shift toward digital, platform-mediated, experience-driven models (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2021). The citation analysis shows two phases: paradigm-defining works by Van Doorn et al. (2010), Brodie et al. (2013), and McAlexander (2002); then consolidation with higher output and a more distributed citation landscape, matching the life-cycle model where foundational works set a vocabulary later tested (Donthu et al., 2021).

On the field's institutional and geographic architecture (RQ2), the findings challenge assumptions of Anglo-American dominance. India leads corresponding-author output, followed by China and the United States, with Amity University, Bina Nusantara University, and Griffith University among the most productive institutions. This polycentric, largely South and Southeast Asian structure shapes the knowledge base's perspectives. Yet diversity has not produced proportionate integration: the co-authorship rate of 23.52% is modest, and prolific authors work in bounded regional teams. The fragmented network of four weakly connected clusters leaves cross-national diversification underexploited. Lower-output, higher-MCP countries like France, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom could serve as connective nodes.

The conceptual structure emerges from the co-occurrence network, thematic map, and document coupling. These converge on a persistent bipolar architecture: a customer-centred stream (customer loyalty, engagement, experience, satisfaction) distinct from a brand-centred stream (brand loyalty, experience, trust, love). The thematic map places the customer-centred cluster in the motor quadrant (high centrality, high density), indicating full integration, and the brand-centred cluster in the basic-themes quadrant (high centrality, low density), signalling foundational relevance but incomplete development. Despite their complementarity, the two streams draw on largely independent citation bases and have not converged; the engagement-versus-experience split is one facet of this same division.

Read against the three competing positions on the engagement-loyalty nexus, this configuration is more informative than descriptive mapping alone. The motor cluster (in which engagement, experience, and satisfaction form a cohesive system associated with customer loyalty), is consistent with (though it does not confirm) the dominant position that treats engagement as an antecedent of loyalty. The two less-developed positions, namely, the mutually reinforcing reading (Brodie et al., 2013) and the superordinate reading in which loyalty is subsumed within engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017), find little structural expression, since their co-evolutionary logic presupposes the brand- and customer-level integration the citation structure shows to be absent.

This absence is consistent with the asymmetric uptake of service-dominant logic and value co-creation documented earlier in this review: because these processual frameworks were operationalised primarily within the engagement literature while loyalty research retained outcome-focused models, the structural separation observed here can be read as the citational trace of a conceptual division, between modelling relational states and modelling relational processes, that predates the digital era. Co-occurrence and coupling capture structural proximity rather than causal sequence, and the bibliometric evidence therefore cannot adjudicate among the three positions; what it establishes is that the field's empirical architecture has consolidated around one of them while leaving the alternatives theoretically underspecified, which both explains the persistence of the debate and locates where integrative work is most needed.

The bibliometric data map term proximity but cannot establish how each construct is theorised. The keyword structure is consistent with treating loyalty as a relational state and engagement as a relational process, revealing three layers: loyalty and retention as outcomes, engagement and experience as mechanisms, and satisfaction, trust, and service quality as antecedents. The separation of "brand loyalty" (300 occurrences) from "customer loyalty" (242) confirms these are related but non-interchangeable, the former anchored in branding theory, the latter in relationship marketing. The thematic evolution map traces this from a pre-paradigmatic state of only "brand loyalty" and "customer satisfaction" (1995–2005) to a frontier defined by social media, gamification, and e-loyalty.

Emerging themes draw on the trend-topic analysis and the 2021–2025 thematic map. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and PLS-SEM (all median year 2025) mark the newest computational frontiers. Corporate social responsibility follows a distinct path, moving from a peripheral keyword to the motor quadrant as a central loyalty driver. Yet the corpus addresses CSR almost exclusively from the perspective of private firms adding social credentials to commercial brand relationships. Organisations for which the social mandate is constitutive, such as social enterprises and public utilities in competitive markets, pursuing social legitimacy and commercial performance simultaneously, are absent from the keyword architecture.

These gaps converge on one diagnostic: rapid empirical growth has outpaced theoretical integration. The most central constructs (customer loyalty, experience, and engagement) sit in the basic-themes quadrant, high in relevance but low in internal density. With the persistent customer- versus brand-centred separation, this signals a critical need for integrative frameworks bridging engagement mechanisms and loyalty outcomes. Reliance on domestically

bounded networks and regional teams likely deepens the fragmentation by narrowing the perspectives informing model development.

6 Conclusion

This study mapped the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaborative dynamics of the literature through a bibliometric and scientometric analysis of 1,399 documents (1995–2025). The field has grown exponentially, consolidating within the last six years around a persistent bipolar architecture: a customer-centred motor theme (engagement, experience, satisfaction) and a brand-centred substrate (brand loyalty, experience, trust). Despite their complementarity, the two streams rely on largely independent citation bases and remain theoretically unintegrated.

The study's contributions are threefold. First, it provides an empirical mapping of the field's growth trajectory, identifying the foundational works of Van Doorn et al. (2010), Brodie et al. (2013), and McAlexander (2002) as the intellectual anchors of the field, and documenting an acceleration phase from 2018 to 2025 that accounts for the majority of scholarly output. Second, it reveals a polycentric geographic structure led by India, China, and the United States, challenging assumptions about Anglo-American dominance while exposing a modest international co-authorship rate (23.52%) that limits cross-national theoretical exchange. Third, it identifies artificial intelligence, machine learning, and corporate social responsibility as the field's most active emerging frontiers, with CSR's elevation to the motor quadrant in the most recent period representing the most structurally significant thematic shift.

For practitioners, three implications follow. First, CSR's migration into the motor quadrant shows social and ethical positioning has become a central loyalty driver; firms should embed CSR in the core value proposition rather than treat it as a reputational add-on. Second, the emergence of AI, machine learning, and platform terms signals that loyalty management is becoming algorithmically mediated; firms should invest in adaptive, data-driven engagement while addressing the trust, privacy, and autonomy concerns it raises. Third, the customer- versus brand-centred separation has an organisational counterpart: engagement is managed through digital-interaction functions, loyalty through brand-identity and communications functions. Whether integrating digital-interaction and brand-management functions improves loyalty outcomes is an empirical question this mapping cannot resolve but helps to frame.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on author keywords introduces potential terminological inconsistency, and bibliometric methods, by design, capture structural patterns rather than the substantive quality or theoretical rigour of individual contributions. Future research should prioritise integrative frameworks articulating how customer engagement translates into brand loyalty across digital and physical touchpoints, bridging the two streams. Cross-cultural and longitudinal designs are needed to address the field's geographic concentration and limited collaboration, and the role of AI, machine learning, and algorithmic personalisation warrants dedicated investigation, particularly its effects on trust, privacy, and consumer autonomy in platform-mediated relationships.

CSR's rise into the motor zone (Figure 9) exposes a narrow framing: the corpus models CSR only as a private-firm reputational attribute, leaving hybrid mandate organisations (social enterprises, B-corporations, and public utilities) absent despite their constitutive social legitimacy and loyalty relevance. In such contexts, the mechanisms linking engagement to loyalty may operate distinctively, as consumers navigate overlapping commercial and civic identities, and constructs such as trust, perceived value, and co-creation carry meanings beyond conventional market exchange.

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