

Economic and Business Horizon

ISSN: 2963-2765

Economic and Business Horizon

Volume: 05

Issue: 03

Year: 2026

Page: 213-228

Citation:

Rahmawati, N. A., Wijaya, T., & Utama, A. (2026).

Evolution of customer satisfaction, delight, and retention drivers in the service industry: A bibliometric analysis.

Economic and Business Horizon, 5(3), 213-228 .

Evolution of Customer Satisfaction, Delight, and Retention Drivers in the Service Industry: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

Increasing dynamics of the global service industry require a shift in focus from mere customer satisfaction toward deeper emotional engagement and customer experience to sustain loyalty. The aim of this research is to map the intellectual structure and development of studies related to customer satisfaction, customer experience, and customer delight within the service marketing literature. The method employed is a bibliometric approach based on 271 documents retrieved from the Scopus database, analyzed using VOSviewer through keyword co-occurrence analysis to identify major clusters and research trends. The results reveal five main clusters encompassing cognitive evaluation dimensions, customer experience, emotional and service interaction, brand perception, and long-term relational loyalty. The findings also indicate a paradigm shift toward experience-based and personalization-oriented approaches, with customer experience acting as a key mediating construct between service quality and customer loyalty, while customer delight remains relatively underexplored. In conclusion, the literature reflects a transition from a transactional model to an emotionally driven experience-based model. The implications suggest that service organizations should prioritize strategies focused on creating emotionally engaging experiences to enhance sustainable customer loyalty.

Keywords

Bibliometric Analysis, Customer Delight, Customer Experience, Customer Retention, Customer Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

In the increasingly dynamic and competitive landscape of the global service industry, a firm's capacity to achieve sustainable customer retention has emerged as a vital indicator of long-term business viability. For decades, traditional marketing literature has consistently positioned customer satisfaction as the primary antecedent and most critical determinant of loyalty and repeat purchase behavior (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Oliver, 1999; Kotler, 2000). This conventional paradigm rests on the linear assumption that when a service provider successfully meets or exceeds a customer's baseline expectations, retention is automatically generated as a logical consequence of this cognitive evaluation. However, in modern market environments characterized by an abundance of substitutes and low switching costs, the efficacy of this traditional formula has been called into question, as it no longer guarantees absolute market protection for firms.

Contemporary market phenomena indicate a significant paradigm shift, wherein mere satisfaction has proven insufficient to permanently secure customer loyalty. This phenomenon is reinforced by empirical evidence showing that customers who describe themselves as "just satisfied" still exhibit a high propensity to defect and switch to competitors when presented with slightly more attractive value propositions or incentives (Jones & Sasser, 1995). This destructive reality has prompted a major reorientation in both academic research and global managerial practice, moving away from transactional, satisfaction-based approaches. The industry is now shifting toward the creation of a holistic customer experience and the stimulation of profound customer delight to build a more robust fortress of loyalty (Berman, 2005; Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Although academic interest in the transition from the satisfaction dimension to customer delight has increased rapidly, the literature exploring this topic remains highly fragmented and dominated by partial empirical studies. This condition leaves a distinct research gap, as comprehensive and systematic reviews capable of mapping the intellectual structure and conceptual evolution of this domain on a global scale remain scarce. Furthermore, an unresolved theoretical debate persists regarding the ontological position of customer delight. Specifically, whether the construct is merely an extreme manifestation of cognitive satisfaction or a separate, independent emotional entity (Oliver et al., 1997; Kumar et al., 2001; Finn, 2005). Despite growing scholarly interest, the interaction of utilitarian and hedonic experiential elements in fostering this emotional transition has not yet been systematically mapped within a coherent research roadmap. Moreover, the expanding volume of publications across global databases complicates efforts to identify overarching research trends and developments, highlighting the need for broader synthesis and integrative analysis in customer loyalty and satisfaction research (Ratnasari et al., 2025).

Driven by these theoretical and methodological gaps, this study is designed with the primary objective of objectively and comprehensively mapping the intellectual structure of customer retention strategy research through a bibliometric analysis approach. By utilizing secondary bibliographic data extracted from the Scopus database and network visualization via VOSviewer software, this study aims to identify the main topical clusters that interlink the conceptual relationships between customer satisfaction, experience, and delight. Furthermore, this research seeks to analyze emerging trends within the service marketing domain, thereby providing clear navigational guidance for future scholarly inquiries.

This study is expected to offer a significant theoretical contribution by providing conceptual validation for the crucial integration of emotional aspects into modern customer loyalty models, moving beyond the boundaries of traditional satisfaction. The contribution of this study lies in its ability to synthesize the complexity of global

literature into a scannable visual map, which enables academics to easily identify under-researched areas. For the practitioner community, the results of this analysis provide a managerial contribution by offering strategic insights for decision-makers in the service industry to design emotion-based retention programs that are more effective, precise, and relevant to contemporary market dynamics.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Evolution

Customer satisfaction has traditionally been viewed as the foundational cornerstone of relationship marketing strategies. Within the framework of Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, satisfaction is defined as a fulfillment response that occurs when the performance of a product or service at least meets customer expectations (Oliver, 1980). However, contemporary marketing literature increasingly views satisfaction merely as a “hygiene factor,” meaning its presence represents a minimum baseline standard that must be achieved, yet it no longer guarantees robust, long-term loyalty (Herzberg, 2003; Johnston, 2004). In saturated markets, customers who are “just satisfied” typically lack the psychological barriers that prevent them from defecting to alternative service providers when offered marginally better value propositions (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Kotler, 2000). The conventional paradigm built upon the linear assumption that satisfaction automatically translates into repeat purchase behavior is progressively being abandoned (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Oliver, 1999).

In response to these limitations, academic focus has shifted toward a higher-order emotional construct, namely customer delight. In contrast to satisfaction, which is predominantly cognitive and evaluative, customer delight is conceptualized as a profound emotional reaction triggered when service performance surpasses customer expectations to a surprising or unexpected degree (Oliver et al., 1997; Berman, 2005). While satisfaction addresses the fulfillment of basic functional or utilitarian needs, delight is deeply intertwined with affective dimensions involving elements of surprise and joy. Empirical evidence demonstrates that delight leaves a stronger, more enduring imprint on customer memory than standard satisfaction (Finn, 2005; Torres & Kline, 2006). Nevertheless, the theoretical debate regarding whether this construct is merely an extreme manifestation of cognitive satisfaction or a distinct, separate emotional entity continues to persist within global marketing literature (Kumar et al., 2001).

2.2. Knowledge Mapping

The transition from mere satisfaction to delight is heavily influenced by the quality of the customer experience, which represents an internal and subjective response to every interaction with a firm (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). In the service industry context, this experience is bifurcated into two crucial dimensions: utilitarian experience and hedonic experience. The utilitarian dimension relates to task completion and functional efficiency, whereas the hedonic dimension pertains to pleasure, aesthetics, and affective responses during service consumption (Babin et al., 1994). Literature indicates that while fulfilling utilitarian aspects merely yields baseline satisfaction, the hedonic dimension frequently acts as the primary catalyst for generating customer delight. However, the massive surge in publication volume regarding the interaction of these experiential elements across global databases often obscures researchers’ ability to discern a cohesive research roadmap due to highly fragmented data.

The strategic objective of managing this conceptual evolution is to maximize customer retention, reflecting a sustained commitment to repeat purchasing behavior (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Modern loyalty models suggest that the relationship between delight and retention is non-linear and asymmetric; while a failure to

achieve baseline satisfaction decimates retention, the attainment of delight accelerates retention exponentially (Reichheld, 1996). A bibliometric analysis approach utilizing the Scopus database and VOSviewer network visualization software is deployed in this study. This knowledge mapping approach aims to objectively identify the primary topical clusters interconnecting satisfaction, experience, and delight. Furthermore, it systematically analyzes emerging trends within the service marketing domain to provide comprehensive theoretical validation for the advancement of modern customer retention strategies.

2.3. Customer Experience: Utilitarian and Hedonic Perspectives

Customer experience has become a key construct in service marketing, representing customers' subjective responses to interactions across multiple touchpoints. Unlike traditional approaches that focus primarily on service performance and satisfaction, customer experience encompasses both functional and emotional dimensions that influence perceptions and behavioral intentions. It is commonly classified into utilitarian and hedonic perspectives, where utilitarian experience relates to functional efficiency and task accomplishment, while hedonic experience involves pleasure, enjoyment, and emotional gratification during service encounters (Babin et al., 1994). Recent studies suggest that these two dimensions shape customer evaluations and relationship outcomes in different ways, highlighting their distinct roles in service experiences (Barrett et al., 2025).

The utilitarian dimension remains important because customers expect services to be reliable, convenient, and capable of meeting their practical needs. However, in highly competitive markets, functional benefits alone are often insufficient to sustain long-term loyalty. As a result, firms increasingly focus on creating hedonic experiences that generate positive emotions and memorable interactions. Duan and Fang (2025) found that utilitarian and hedonic values jointly enhance customer commitment through customer experience, highlighting the importance of balancing both dimensions in building long-term customer relationships.

Recent empirical evidence suggests that the interaction between utilitarian and hedonic elements contributes to memorable customer experiences, which subsequently influence satisfaction, delight, and loyalty. Studies have shown that both dimensions significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty through memorable experiences (Chen, 2024). Similarly, brand experience strengthens loyalty through the mediating roles of hedonic value and customer satisfaction (Halim et al., 2024). While utilitarian attributes provide the foundation for satisfactory service delivery, hedonic attributes often trigger delight by creating feelings of surprise, enjoyment, and emotional engagement. Therefore, balancing these dimensions is crucial for developing effective customer retention strategies and advancing service marketing research.

3. Methods

This study applies a quantitative bibliometric approach designed to objectively map the intellectual structure and evolution of global research trends regarding customer retention strategies. The bibliometric method was selected as the primary design due to its superior capacity to handle large volumes of scientific data, while providing macro-level insights into citation impacts and publication networks within a specific field of study (Donthu et al., 2021). Through this quantitative approach, the subjectivity inherent in conventional literature reviews can be minimized, allowing the conceptual development from customer satisfaction to customer delight to be mapped mathematically and systematically.

The population of this study encompasses all global scientific documents that integrate the concepts of customer experience, satisfaction, delight, and retention within the service marketing domain. The Scopus database was selected as the

primary data source because it has a proven broader coverage of reputable and high-quality journals in the social and management sciences compared to competing databases like Web of Science (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Based on the established inclusion criteria, the types of documents retrieved as a representative sample include journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters to capture dynamic research developments.

Bibliographic data collection was conducted in November 2025 using a keyword search technique implemented within the title, abstract, and article keyword fields in Scopus. The search query was rigorously constructed using Boolean operators to connect the primary variables, with the search carried out inclusively without restricting specific subject areas in order to capture a comprehensive, multidisciplinary perspective. Through a strict, step-by-step selection process to ensure data relevance and completeness, this study successfully harvested and downloaded a total of 271 scientific documents, which were subsequently utilized as the final dataset for analysis.

Data analysis and network visualization of conceptual relationships were performed using VOSviewer software version 1.6.20, which is widely recognized for its efficacy in visualizing bibliometric maps based on the distance between nodes (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The analytical technique applied was co-occurrence analysis based on author keywords using the full counting method to identify relationships among variables that are frequently studied together (Zupic & Čater, 2015). To ensure the accuracy of the service marketing landscape visualization, the minimum threshold for keyword occurrence was set to 3 times to filter out less significant terms.

4. Results

4.1. Research Landscape Analysis

To provide an overview of the development of research in this field, an analysis of annual publication trends was conducted using documents indexed in the Scopus database. Examining publication growth is important for identifying the level of scholarly attention and the evolution of research interest over time. The results offer an initial indication of the maturity and emerging relevance of studies related to customer satisfaction, customer experience, customer delight, and customer retention within the service marketing domain.

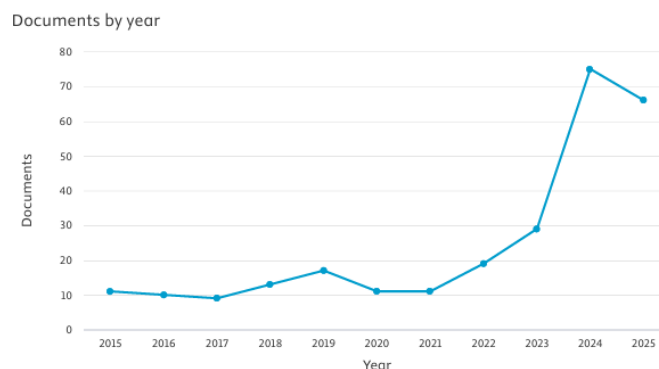


Figure 1. Annual Scientific Publication Trends

Figure 1 visualizes the evolution of scientific publication volume related to the research topic from 2015 to 2025. The data reveals a highly positive growth trend, particularly within the final three years of the observed timeframe. During the initial period (2015–2021), research productivity remained relatively stagnant, averaging fewer than 20 documents per annum. However, an exponential growth trajectory

emerged in 2023, which recorded 29 documents, followed by a dramatic surge that more than doubled the output to 75 documents in 2024. This momentum persisted into 2025, with 66 documents indexed in the database. This sharp increase indicates that the integration of customer experience and customer delight has transformed into an urgent and pivotal theme within contemporary marketing discourse (Mir et al., 2023).

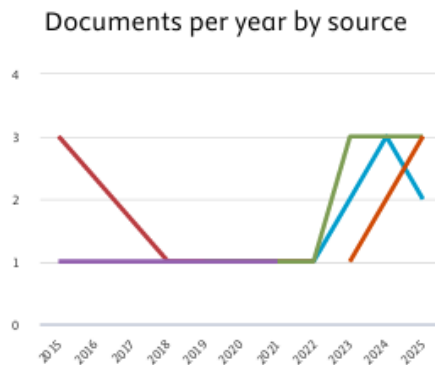


Figure 2. Publication Dynamics by Journal Source per Year

Figure 2 illustrates the publication patterns of the top five most active journals featuring this topic. The data reveals a growing consistency among reputable journals in publishing articles related to customer retention and customer experience over time. This trend reflects that the research topic has gained substantial academic legitimacy and achieved widespread acceptance across prominent scientific publication outlets, no longer remaining confined to specific or niche journals.

Table 1. Distribution of Scientific Documents

No	Author Name	Document Count
1	Abareshi, A.	4
2	Pittayachawan, S.	4
3	Band, G.	3
4	Bhatti, H.S.	3
5	Kim, H.S.	3
6	Alamsyah, A.	2
7	Aras, M.	2
8	Bhatnagr, P.	2
9	Boakye, K.G.	2
10	Brandão, A.	2

Table 1 delineates the top ten most prolific authors contributing to this specific research domain. The empirical data reveal that Abareshi, A., and Pittayachawan, S. lead the publication volume, with each scholar contributing 4 documents to the dataset. They are followed closely by Band, G., Bhatti, H.S., and Kim, H.S., who have each published 3 documents. The remaining scholars, Alamsyah, A., Aras, M., Bhatnagr, P., Boakye, K.G., and Brandão, A., exhibit an identical distribution of 2 documents each. This distribution indicates that while the field is gaining traction, research productivity remains evenly distributed among early core contributors without being dominated by a single individual.

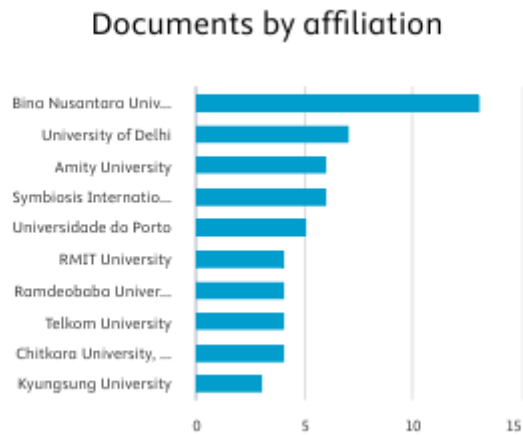


Figure 3. Distribution of the Most Active Institutional Affiliation

Figure 3 illustrates a compelling dominance of educational institutions located within the Asian region. Bina Nusantara University (Indonesia) ranks first globally as the most prolific institution contributing to this research topic. This leading position is followed by the University of Delhi (India) and Amity University. Furthermore, the inclusion of Telkom University within the top tier reinforces the evidence that the academic ecosystem in Indonesia is highly responsive to customer experience management issues. Consequently, this provides robust empirical validation for the contextual relevance of conducting this study within the Indonesian market.

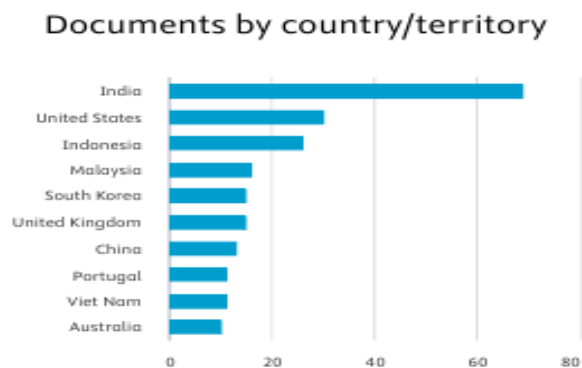


Figure 4. Publication Contributions by Country/Region

Figure 4 demonstrates that emerging market nations predominantly anchor the landscape of this research domain. India leads the global output with the highest volume of publications (approaching 70 documents), followed by the United States in the second position with approximately 30 documents. A significant finding emerges regarding Indonesia, which ranks third globally with more than 20 documents, outperforming developed and developing nations alike, such as Malaysia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. These empirical data confirm that Indonesia serves as a key growth center for contemporary global service marketing literature.

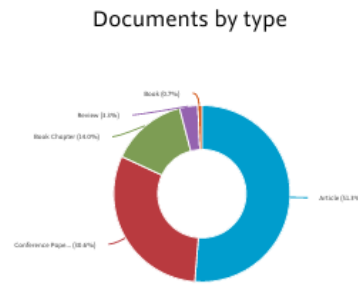


Figure 5. Proportion of Publication Document Types

Figure 5 illustrates the analysis of document types, demonstrating the diversity of knowledge dissemination channels within this research domain. The vast majority of the literature is published in the form of Journal Articles, which dominate the distribution at 51.3%. The second largest share is held by Conference Papers at 30.6%, followed by Book Chapters at 14.0%. The dominance of journal articles indicates that this topic rests upon a well-established theoretical foundation. However, the high percentage of conference proceedings accounting for nearly one-third of the total output provides a critical indication that customer experience and customer delight issues are highly dynamic and rapidly evolving. This trend suggests that many cutting-edge research findings are initially disseminated through scientific conference forums to secure immediate peer feedback prior to their full publication in reputable journals (Donthu et al., 2022).

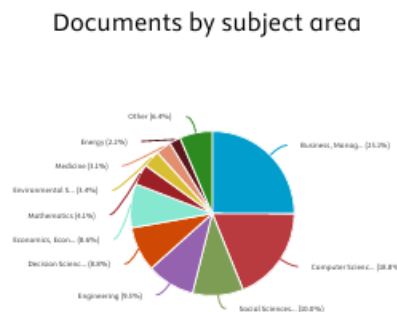


Figure 6. Distribution of Publications by Subject Area

The subject area classification analysis in Figure 6 demonstrates that this research topic possesses a highly multidisciplinary character. The Business, Management, and Accounting domain commands the largest share at 25.1%. This dominance confirms that research constructs such as customer satisfaction, delight, and retention serve as fundamental concepts within core managerial strategies. A compelling finding emerges from the substantial contribution of Computer Science, which occupies the second position at 18.8%. This indication suggests that contemporary research on customer experience is increasingly integrated with digital technology, including the implementation of data-driven Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems and digital consumer behavior analytics (Mullick & Singh, 2025). Furthermore, significant contributions arise from the social sciences at 10.0%, engineering at 9.5%, and decision sciences at 8.8%. The diversity of these subject areas indicates that customer retention strategies are currently viewed through a holistic lens, encompassing sociological dimensions, service systems engineering, and data-backed strategic decision-making.

Table 2. Distribution of Research Funding Institutions

Research Funding Institution	Number of Documents
Binus University	4
National Research Foundation (NRF)	4
Ministry of Education	3
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)	2
Ministry of Science and ICT	2
Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (ANID)	1
Ajou University	1
Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq)	1
Covenant University	1
Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)	1

The analysis of research funding sponsors in Table 2 reveals a high level of institutional support backing this research domain. Binus University emerges as a primary sponsor with 4 funded documents, securing a top-tier position alongside the National Research Foundation, which similarly financed 4 documents.

Furthermore, the involvement of government bodies such as the Ministry of Education, with 3 funded documents, alongside other agencies, including the Ministry of Science and the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, with 2 funded documents each, indicates a critical trend. This pattern suggests that customer experience and retention strategies are not merely themes of academic interest; rather, they are recognized as possessing significant strategic value and practical impact worthy of substantial research investments from both educational institutions and state funding agencies.

4.2. Main Topic Clusters Linking Satisfaction, Experience, and Delight

Figure 7 visualizes the conceptual landscape of the 271 selected articles through an author keyword co-occurrence analysis, wherein the node size represents the intensity of academic discourse and the line thickness reflects the semantic association strength between variables (Donthu et al., 2021). The network exhibits a polycentric structure organized into five thematic clusters, with the most significant finding being the distinct spatial demarcation between the green and red clusters. The customer satisfaction node dominates the green cluster, which is oriented toward cognitive and functional evaluations and is tightly interconnected with service quality and perceived value. The customer delight node forms the epicenter of the red cluster, which focuses on affective dimensions and is strongly linked to emotions and service encounters.

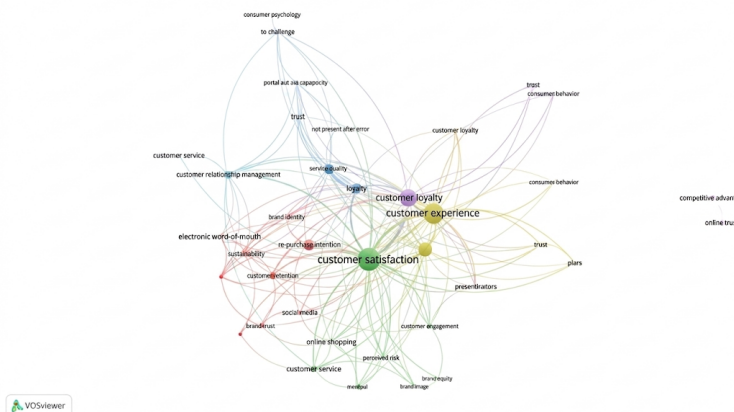


Figure 7. Author Keyword Co-occurrence Network Visualization

This visual separation provides empirical evidence that contemporary academic literature treats delight as a psychological construct distinct from mere satisfaction, thereby validating the research urgency to examine both independently (Malek & Dave, 2025). Within this dichotomy, the customer experience node in the yellow cluster occupies a strategic position as an integrative bridge linking service quality dimensions with long-term loyalty outcomes, confirming that holistic experience management encompassing both utilitarian and hedonic aspects serves as the pivotal mechanism converting service inputs into sustainable customer retention.

Based on the network visualization results, VOSviewer identifies five primary clusters representing distinct research streams. The first cluster (red) focuses on the emotional and service interaction dimension, centering on customer delight and its close links with emotions, service encounter, and co-creation. This suggests that customer delight is viewed as an affective outcome generated through meaningful service experiences and collaborative interactions between customers and service providers (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The second cluster (green), the largest in the network, reflects the classical theoretical foundations of value evaluation. Dominated by customer satisfaction, it incorporates service quality, perceived value, and servqual as key antecedents that contribute to customer retention. The structure of this cluster supports the traditional perspective that cognitive evaluations of quality and value shape customer satisfaction, which subsequently drives retention behavior. Moreover, the separation between the satisfaction and customer delight clusters indicates that delight represents a distinct construct beyond conventional satisfaction-based evaluations.

The third cluster (yellow) connects customer experience with customer engagement, trust, and personalization, indicating that modern marketing views services as a holistic customer journey rather than a purely transactional process. The presence of personalization highlights the importance of tailored service delivery in strengthening engagement and enhancing customer experiences. The fourth cluster (blue) focuses on brand perception, linking brand image, perceived service quality, and net promoter score. This suggests that accumulated service experiences play a significant role in shaping corporate image and customer advocacy outcomes (Chen, 2024). The fifth cluster (purple) represents long-term relationship outcomes, integrating customer loyalty with relationship marketing, customer journey, and e-CRM strategies. This cluster emphasizes the importance of technology-enabled relationship management and customer journey optimization in fostering sustainable loyalty. Together, these clusters illustrate the multidimensional nature of customer loyalty, encompassing emotional, experiential, relational, and brand-related perspectives.

4.3. Emerging Research Trends in Service Marketing

The overlay visualization in Figure 8 presents the temporal evolution of the research topic, wherein the node colors represent the average publication year of the articles containing those specific keywords. The color scale transitions from dark blue, indicating historical topics published prior to 2020, to bright yellow, signifying contemporary themes emergent between 2023 and 2024. This analysis is crucial for identifying research novelty and delineating the trajectory of future academic inquiries (Verma et al., 2025). Based on this temporal mapping, a distinct transition is observable, moving away from transactional marketing frameworks toward experiential paradigms. The dark blue and green nodes are predominantly occupied by foundational concepts such as customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and perceived service quality, indicating that investigations into basic satisfaction and service quality represent well-established domains heavily litigated in earlier literature.

critical analysis of the peripheral zones uncovers significant, under-explored research opportunities.

The areas encompassing customer delight, emotions, and service encounter exhibit a substantially dimmer color intensity relative to the satisfaction domain. This phenomenon empirically underscores a critical research gap: although the conceptual importance of customer delight is widely acknowledged, the volume of empirical research specifically investigating this construct remains scarce compared to traditional satisfaction studies. By focusing on the integration of customer delight and its corresponding emotional facets, this study directly addresses this literary omission, offering an original contribution to a domain that has not yet reached empirical saturation (Singla & Sawhney, 2023).

5. Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric study indicate a substantial paradigm shift within the service marketing literature, transitioning from traditional satisfaction-oriented approaches toward perspectives that increasingly emphasize customer experience and emotional dimensions. The growing academic attention devoted to customer experience and customer delight suggests that customers are no longer perceived merely as rational evaluators of service quality, but also as individuals seeking memorable, personalized, and emotionally engaging experiences. This finding is consistent with the experience economy concept proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), which argues that modern economic value is increasingly derived from the creation of memorable experiences rather than solely from products or services. Furthermore, the dominance of experiential dimensions within recent research also supports the experiential marketing perspective advanced by Schmitt (2011), emphasizing the importance of sensory, affective, and relational experiences in shaping customer perceptions and behavioral outcomes.

The identification of five thematic clusters in this study demonstrates that customer satisfaction and customer delight are treated as two distinct constructs within contemporary academic discourse. The clear separation between clusters oriented toward cognitive-functional evaluation and those centered on affective-emotional dimensions indicates that delight extends beyond the fulfillment of customer expectations and involves emotional surprise, pleasure, and positive arousal exceeding ordinary satisfaction. This finding aligns with the research of Oliver et al. (1997), who conceptualized customer delight as an emotional response that surpasses basic satisfaction. Moreover, the strong association among delight, emotions, and service encounter supports the argument of Rust and Oliver (2000), who emphasized that emotionally rich service experiences significantly influence customer evaluations and long-term loyalty. Therefore, this study reinforces the argument that customer satisfaction alone is no longer sufficient to sustain customer loyalty within increasingly competitive service industries.

This study also reveals that customer experience occupies a strategic position as a central linkage connecting service quality, customer engagement, trust, and loyalty outcomes. The central placement of customer experience within the thematic network suggests that experience management functions as an integrative mechanism bridging operational service inputs with long-term relational outcomes. This finding supports the work of Lemon and Verhoef (2016), who explained that customer experience encompasses customers' cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral responses throughout the service journey. Additionally, the emergence of personalization and co-creation as contemporary research trends further strengthens the service-dominant logic perspective developed by Vargo and Lusch (2008), which emphasizes that service value is collaboratively created through interactions between firms and customers. Consequently, service organizations are

increasingly required to develop adaptive, interactive, and customer-centric service systems capable of delivering individualized experiences.

The overlay and heatmap visualizations further reveal that future directions in service marketing research are increasingly concentrated on technology-driven relationship management and emotionally oriented service strategies. The growing prominence of themes such as e-WOM, trust, personalization, and e-CRM indicates that digital transformation has become inseparable from modern customer experience management practices. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Verhoef et al. (2010), who both emphasized the significant role of digital interactions in shaping customer engagement and loyalty. On the other hand, the relatively lower research density surrounding customer delight indicates that this construct remains underexplored compared to customer satisfaction. Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by positioning customer delight as a promising avenue for future research, particularly concerning its emotional antecedents, digital service contexts, and long-term implications for customer retention and relationship sustainability.

6. Conclusion

This bibliometric study demonstrates that research on customer satisfaction, customer experience, and customer delight has experienced significant growth within the modern service marketing literature. The analysis identifies five major clusters representing the emotional dimensions of service, the foundations of satisfaction and value, customer experience, brand perception, and long-term relational loyalty. The findings also indicate a paradigm shift from a transactional marketing approach toward a more experience-oriented model that emphasizes personalization and emotional customer engagement. Furthermore, customer experience is found to play a strategic mediating role between service quality and customer loyalty, while customer delight emerges as an increasingly relevant yet comparatively underexplored construct relative to customer satisfaction. From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that service organizations should develop strategies that go beyond functional satisfaction and focus on creating emotionally engaging experiences that foster sustainable customer loyalty.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis relies solely on the Scopus database, meaning that relevant publications indexed in other databases may not have been captured. In addition, as a bibliometric study, it does not examine causal relationships between variables empirically. Therefore, future research is encouraged to integrate multiple international databases, employ systematic literature review or meta-analysis approaches, and develop empirical studies that test the effects of customer delight, personalization, and digital customer experience on customer loyalty and retention across various service industry contexts.

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