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VALUE CO-CREATION RESEARCH TRENDS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW

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Abstract

The digital era has intensified academic interest in value co-creation as a key mechanism of value creation in interactive and technology-mediated markets. This study aims to systematically examine the development, intellectual structure, and research trends of value co-creation literature through a bibliometric review. Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database covering the period 2015–2025 and analyzed using bibliometric techniques to assess publication trends, geographical distribution, influential articles, and keyword co-occurrence patterns. The findings reveal a significant growth in value co-creation research, particularly since 2020, reflecting its increasing relevance across multiple disciplines. The results identify dominant research streams encompassing theoretical foundations grounded in service-dominant logic, customer-centric and behavioral perspectives, and emerging technology-driven themes associated with digital transformation. Despite its global diffusion, value co-creation research remains geographically concentrated. This study provides an integrative overview of the evolving value co-creation literature and offers insights for future research directions in the digital era.

Keywords: value co-creation, bibliometric review, digital transformation, service-dominant logic, research trends

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally transformed how value is created, exchanged, and experienced in contemporary markets. Advances in digital technologies have shifted marketing and service systems away from firm-centric models toward interactive, network-based configurations that emphasize collaboration among multiple actors. Within this transformation, value co-creation (VCC) has emerged as a central concept, positing that value is not embedded in products or services but is jointly created through interactions between firms, customers, and other stakeholders within service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Customers are increasingly recognized as active operant resources who contribute knowledge, skills, creativity, and relational capabilities to the value creation process, rather than passive recipients of firm offerings (Frempong et al., 2020).

Digital technologies further intensify value co-creation processes by enabling continuous connectivity, user participation, and peer-to-peer interaction across platforms. Social and digital environments facilitate information sharing, user-generated content, and collaborative problem solving, thereby expanding opportunities for co-creation beyond traditional firm–customer dyads (Laroche et al., 2012; Peters et al., 2013). As a result, value co-creation has become a unifying mechanism across diverse research domains, including marketing, innovation management, tourism, logistics, public services, and digital entrepreneurship (Ahmed & Mustafa, 2025; Eichholz et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2023). This broad applicability underscores the strategic and theoretical importance of understanding how value co-creation operates in digitally mediated contexts.

The growing relevance of value co-creation is reflected in the rapid expansion of academic research on the topic. Bibliometric and systematic review studies consistently report a significant increase in VCC-related publications over the past decade, with particularly strong growth since 2020 (AlMazrouei & Demir, 2025; Bosisio, 2024). Bibliometric mappings reveal that early research primarily focused on conceptual foundations rooted in service-dominant logic and customer participation, whereas more recent studies have shifted toward empirical investigations of co creation behavior, customer engagement, digital platforms, innovation outcomes, and customer-to customer interactions (Eichholz et al., 2023; John & Supramaniam, 2024). These developments indicate that value co-creation research has evolved into a complex and multidisciplinary field with expanding thematic diversity.

Despite this rapid development, the value co-creation literature remains fragmented. Bibliometric analyses show that many studies examine co-creation within specific industries or narrow contexts, often without providing an integrative overview of the field's intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging research directions (Bosisio, 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2023). In addition, conceptual overlap and inconsistent use of related terms—such as co-creation, co-design, and co production—have contributed to theoretical dispersion and hindered cumulative knowledge development (Agnello et al., 2023). Recent bibliometric and network-based reviews explicitly call for comprehensive mappings that synthesize existing research, identify influential works and thematic clusters, and highlight underexplored areas within value co-creation scholarship (Ahmed & Mustafa, 2025).

Responding to these calls, this study conducts a bibliometric review of value co-creation research in the digital era to systematically map publication trends, influential studies, and thematic structures within the literature. By providing an integrative overview of the intellectual landscape of value co-creation, this article aims to consolidate fragmented knowledge, clarify the evolution of the field, and offer a structured foundation for future theoretical and empirical research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Value co-creation has become a central construct in contemporary marketing and service research, particularly in response to the digital transformation of markets. The concept is rooted in service-dominant logic (SDL), which reframes value as something that does not reside in products or services but emerges through use and experiential processes involving multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Within this paradigm, value is understood as the outcome of resource integration, especially the application of operant resources such as knowledge, skills, and experiences, mobilized by actors within service ecosystems. Moreover, customer experience as the result of affective and cognitive evaluation,serves as a critical operant resource in this process; since each actor functions as a resource integrator, customer experience significantly supports and enriches value co-creation outcomes within consumer markets (Sanaji et al., 2022). Consequently, consumers are conceptualized as active contributors to value creation rather than passive recipients, a shift that has significantly influenced the trajectory of value co-creation research.

A foundational element of SDL that underpins value co-creation scholarship is Foundational Premise 6 (FP6), which states that *the customer is always a co-creator of value* (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Importantly, this premise positions value co-creation as an inherent characteristic of market exchange rather than an optional managerial strategy. Value co-creation, in this sense, should be distinguished from co-production. While co-production refers to context-specific and discretionary customer involvement in activities such as design or production, value co-creation represents a positive, descriptive assertion that value necessarily emerges from the interactions and resource contributions of multiple actors within interdependent systems (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This distinction has guided much of the theoretical refinement and empirical differentiation observed in the value co-creation literature.

As digital technologies have evolved, value co-creation research has increasingly shifted toward digitally mediated contexts. Digital platforms enable interaction, communication, and resource integration to occur beyond direct, face-to-face encounters, allowing value to be co created through information sharing, experience exchange, and collective sense-making among dispersed actors (Hinson et al., 2019; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This shift has expanded the analytical scope of value co-creation studies and contributed to the diversification of research themes across disciplines, including digital marketing, innovation management, tourism, public services, and platform-based ecosystems.

In the digital era, value co-creation is often facilitated through interactive environments that support user participation and multi-actor engagement. Research has shown that digital interactions enable actors to contribute experiential knowledge and contextual insights that shape shared understandings of value (Ahn et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2015). In this regard, social interaction plays a foundational role in sustaining co-creation dynamics, as a continuous flow of knowledge exchange through frequent conversations, shared experiences, and collaborative activities, enables community members with close relationships to gain and exchange greater levels of knowledge, ultimately reinforcing knowledge-sharing behavior among actors within digital environments (Artanti, 2019). Moreover, digitally mediated interactions among consumers, such as electronic word of mouth, play a significant role in the collective construction of meaning and value by enabling actors to integrate their resources through peer-to-peer exchanges (Cheung et al., 2020; Seifert & Kwon, 2020). These developments have reinforced the prominence of value co-creation as a unifying mechanism in digitally intensive research streams.

Overall, SDL provides a coherent conceptual foundation for understanding the evolution of value co-creation research in the digital era. By emphasizing value as an emergent, interactional, and system-level phenomenon, SDL explains why value co-creation has become a focal point across multiple research domains and why its conceptualization continues to expand alongside digital transformation. Establishing this theoretical grounding is essential for systematically mapping research trends, thematic clusters, and intellectual structures within the value co-creation literature, which constitutes the primary objective of the bibliometric review undertaken in this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to systematically examine research trends, intellectual structures, and thematic developments in value co-creation literature in the digital era. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research approach that enables the objective and replicable synthesis of large bodies of scientific literature by analyzing bibliographic metadata such as citations, keywords, and publication patterns (Donthu et al., 2021). Compared with traditional narrative reviews, bibliometric methods reduce subjectivity and are particularly suitable for mapping fragmented and rapidly expanding research domains, such as value co-creation research, which spans multiple disciplines and theoretical perspectives (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Bosisio, 2024).

The bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, which is widely recognized for its comprehensive coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals in business, management, and social sciences (Donthu et al., 2021). Scopus is frequently used in bibliometric studies due to its standardized indexing and robust citation data, which facilitate reliable performance and science mapping analyses (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). To capture the core literature on value co-creation, a structured search query was applied to article titles, abstracts, and author keywords using the terms *"value co-creation" OR "value cocreation"*. The search was limited to English-language journal articles to ensure consistency and comparability across publications. The period of analysis covered 2020 to 2025, reflecting the phase in which value co-creation research has expanded substantially in response to digital transformation and platform-based interaction (Ahmed & Mustafa, 2025; Bosisio, 2024).

Following data extraction, the initial dataset was screened to remove duplicate records, non article document types, and publications in which value co-creation was not a central research focus. This screening process ensured that the final dataset represented a coherent and thematically relevant body of literature suitable for bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). Bibliographic information, including authors, publication year, journal source, citations, keywords, and reference lists, was then exported in CSV format for further analysis.

The analysis was conducted using Biblioshiny, a web-based interface of the *bibliometrix* R package, which is widely adopted for bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).The analytical procedure combined performance analysis and science mapping techniques. Performance analysis was used to examine annual scientific production, leading journals, influential authors, and highly cited publications, thereby providing an overview of the growth and impact of value co-creation research over time (Donthu et al., 2021). Science mapping techniques, including keyword co-occurrence analysis and citation-based analysis, were applied to identify dominant research themes, intellectual foundations, and the structural relationships among research streams within the value co-creation literature.

Consistent with the objectives of this study, the bibliometric analysis focuses on synthesizing research trends, thematic clusters, and intellectual structures rather than testing causal relationships or developing empirical models. By integrating performance indicators and science mapping techniques, this methodology provides a systematic and transparent overview of how value co creation research has evolved in the digital era and offers a robust foundation for identifying emerging topics and future research directions (Agnello et al., 2023; Ahmed & Mustafa, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the bibliometric analysis on value co creation research in the digital era. The results provide an overview of publication growth, geographical distribution, influential articles, and dominant research themes. By combining performance indicators and science-mapping techniques, this section highlights the intellectual structure and evolving research trends within the value co-creation literature

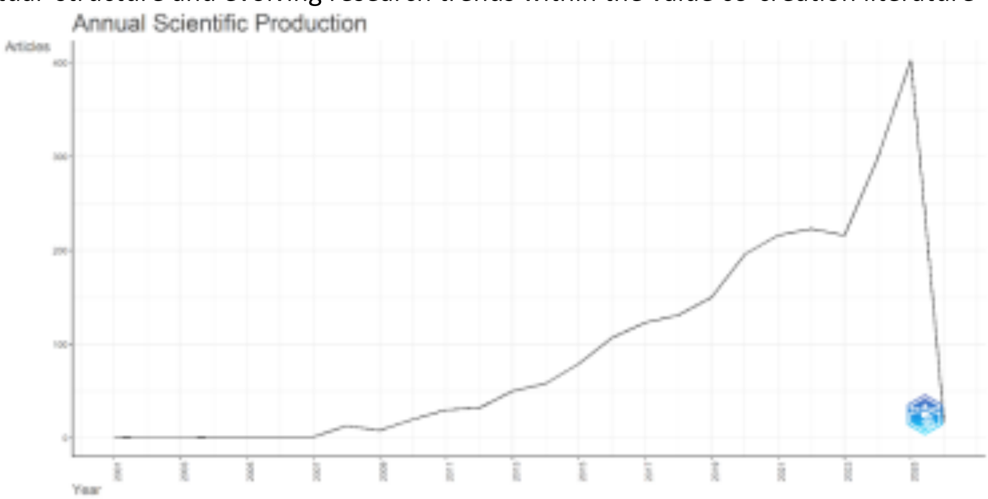

Figure 1. Annual Scientific Production

Figure 1 presents the annual scientific production of value co-creation research, revealing a clear upward trend that reflects the growing academic relevance of the concept. The publication trajectory indicates relatively limited output during the early years, followed by a gradual increase that becomes more pronounced after 2015. This pattern is consistent with prior bibliometric and systematic reviews, which identify value co-creation as an emerging research stream that gained momentum as service-dominant logic became more widely adopted across marketing and service research (Bosisio, 2024; Eichholz et al., 2023).

A particularly notable acceleration is observed in the period 2020–2025, where the number of publications increases steadily from approximately 100 articles in 2020 to nearly 190 articles in 2025, with a significant surge occurring in 2024. This growth pattern aligns with findings from previous bibliometric studies, which report that value co-creation research has expanded rapidly in response to intensified digital transformation, platformization, and the proliferation of multi-actor interactions enabled by digital technologies (Ahmed & Mustafa, 2025; AlMazrouei & Demir, 2025). The observed surge suggests a shift from exploratory and conceptual discussions toward more diversified and application-oriented investigations across multiple domains.

The increasing volume of publications during this period also reflects the theoretical maturation of value co-creation research. Earlier studies predominantly focused on conceptual foundations rooted in service-dominant logic, whereas more recent contributions emphasize empirical analysis, contextual applications, and interdisciplinary integration, including customer engagement, digital platforms, innovation, and service ecosystems (John & Supramaniam, 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2023). This evolution indicates that value co-creation has transitioned from a peripheral concept to a central analytical lens for understanding value creation in digitally mediated environments.

Moreover, the trend depicted in Figure 1 provides strong empirical support for the argument that value co-creation is not only theoretically significant but also a rapidly expanding field of scholarly inquiry. The sustained growth in scientific production underscores increasing consensus on the importance of collaborative value creation in explaining contemporary market dynamics characterized by multi-actor interaction and resource integration (Agnello et al., 2023; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Consequently, this publication trend justifies the need for a bibliometric review to synthesize accumulated knowledge, identify dominant research themes, and highlight emerging directions, thereby situating the present study firmly within the most recent developments of the value co-creation literature.

Table 1. Country Scientific Production

Region	Frequency	Region	Frequency
CHINA	889	SWEDEN	176
USA	633	INDIA	167
UK	560	GERMANY	146
AUSTRALIA	323	FRANCE	135
ITALY	302	MALAYSIA	123
SPAIN	210	INDONESIA	112
FINLAND	209	BRAZIL	107

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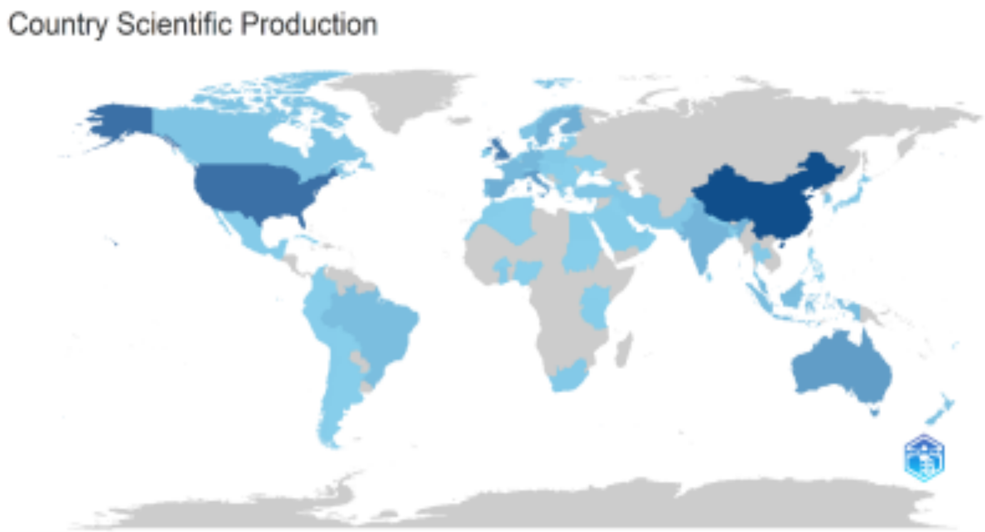

Figure 2. Country Scientific Production

Based on Table 1 and Figure 2, the distribution of scientific production by country reveals an uneven geographical contribution to value co-creation research. The results show that China is the most productive country with 889 publications, followed by the United States (633) and the United Kingdom (560). These countries account for a substantial proportion of the total publications, indicating their dominant role in the development of value co-creation research. A second group of contributing countries consists of Australia (323), Italy (302), and Spain (210). These countries demonstrate a notable level of research activity and contribute to the expansion of value co-creation studies across different academic contexts. Their publication output suggests sustained scholarly engagement with value co-creation as a research topic. Further contributions are observed from Finland (209) and Sweden (176), which show relatively high publication counts despite their smaller research communities. India (167) and Germany (146) also display substantial scientific production, reflecting the growing interest in value co-creation research across diverse national contexts.

The remaining countries within the top fifteen—France (135), Malaysia (123), Indonesia (112), and Brazil (107)—indicate the gradual diffusion of value co-creation research into emerging and developing economies. Although their publication volumes are lower than those of the leading countries, their presence highlights the increasing global reach of value co-creation research.

Overall, the country-level analysis presented in Table 1 and Figure 2 demonstrates that value co-creation research is globally distributed but remains concentrated in a limited number of countries. This uneven distribution suggests opportunities for future research to further explore value co-creation in underrepresented geographical contexts.

Table 2. Most Cited Article

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year
PAYNE A, 2008, J ACAD MARK SCI	2587	136,157895
BRODIE RJ, 2013, J BUS RES	2488	177,714286
VARGO SL, 2008, EUR MANAGE J	2305	121,315789

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GRÖNROOS C, 2013, J ACAD MARK SCI	2000	142,857143
LUSCH RF, 2015, MIS QUART MANAGE INF SYST	1703	141,916667
YI Y, 2013, J BUS RES	1252	89,4285714
GRÖNROOS C, 2011, MARK THEORY	1236	77,25
SAWHNEY M, 2005, J INTERACT MARK	1077	48,9545455
EDVARDSSON B, 2011, J ACAD MARK SCI	1074	67,125
JAAKKOLA E, 2014, J SERV RES	1058	81,3846154
RANJAN KR, 2016, J ACAD MARK SCI	960	87,2727273
MAGLIO PP, 2008, J ACAD MARK SCI	926	48,7368421
BUHALIS D, 2019, J SERV MANAGE	828	103,5
ECHEVERRI P, 2011, MARK THEORY	733	45,8125
NAMBISAN S, 2009, J PROD INNOVATION MANAGE	720	40
GALVAGNO M, 2014, MANAGING SERV QUAL	682	52,4615385
PLÉ L, 2010, J SERV RES	672	39,5294118
MERZ MA, 2009, J ACAD MARK SCI	661	36,7222222
STORBACKA K, 2016, J BUS RES	659	59,9090909
AARIKKA-STENROOS L, 2012, IND MARK MANAGE	638	42,5333333
ZWICK D, 2008, J CONSUM CULT	634	33,3684211
VARGO SL, 2015, IND MARK MANAGE	631	52,5833333
GRÖNROOS C, 2011, J SERV MANAGE	605	37,8125
LENKA S, 2017, PSYCHOL MARK	507	50,7
SPOHRER J, 2008, PROD OPER MANAGE	497	26,1578947

Table 2 presents a summary of the most cited articles in value co-creation research. As shown in Table 2, the study by Payne et al. (2008) has received the highest number of citations, underscoring its seminal role in developing a process-based framework that conceptualizes value co-creation through customer, encounter, and supplier processes. The second most cited work is Brodie et al. (2013), which made an important contribution by integrating value co-creation with customer engagement and emphasizing its relational and behavioral implications. The third highly cited article is Vargo and Lusch (2008), which further refined service-dominant logic and positioned value co creation as a fundamental principle of market exchange.

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Several other influential studies listed in Table 2 have significantly shaped the development of the field. Grönroos and Voima (2013) provided conceptual clarity by distinguishing value co-creation from value facilitation and highlighting the role of interaction, while Lusch and Nambisan (2015) extended the discussion toward service ecosystems and institutional arrangements. Yi and Gong (2013) contributed one of the most widely used empirical scales for measuring customer value co creation behavior, which explains its strong citation performance. Earlier foundational works, such as Sawhney et al. (2005) and Edvardsson et al. (2011), emphasized customer participation and interaction as central mechanisms of co-creation.

More recent yet highly cited contributions, including Buhalis et al. (2019) and also Nambisan and Baron (2009), reflect the increasing attention to digital platforms and technology-enabled environments in value co-creation research. Overall, the citation patterns reported in Table 2 indicate that value co-creation research is anchored in a strong theoretical core rooted in service dominant logic and interaction-based perspectives, while progressively incorporating digital and platform-oriented contexts.

Table 3. Most Frequent Keyword

Terms	Frequency
value co-creation	1284
co-creation	224
service-dominant logic	224
value co creations	202
innovation	96
social media	80
value creation	76
value co-destruction	74
marketing	68
value	67
sustainability	61
customer engagement	58
sales	58
ecosystems	56
service quality	54

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customer satisfaction	53
consumption behavior	49
service innovation	46
resource integration	45
service ecosystem	43

Figure 3. Most Frequent Keyword

Table 3 and Figure 3 presents the most frequent keywords in value co-creation research, highlighting the dominant themes of the literature. The keyword *"value co-creation"* appears most frequently (1,284 occurrences), confirming its central role in the field, followed by closely related terms such as *"co-creation"*, *"service-dominant logic"*, and *"value co creations"*. The prominence of *service-dominant logic* underscores its position as the main theoretical foundation guiding value co creation research. In addition, keywords related to outcomes and applications—such as *innovation*, *customer engagement*, *customer satisfaction*, *service quality*, and *sustainability*—indicate a strong focus on understanding the managerial and behavioral implications of co-creation. The presence of *social media* and *value co-destruction* further reflects the field's growing attention to digitally mediated contexts and to the potential negative consequences of interaction, suggesting a more nuanced and mature development of value co-creation research.

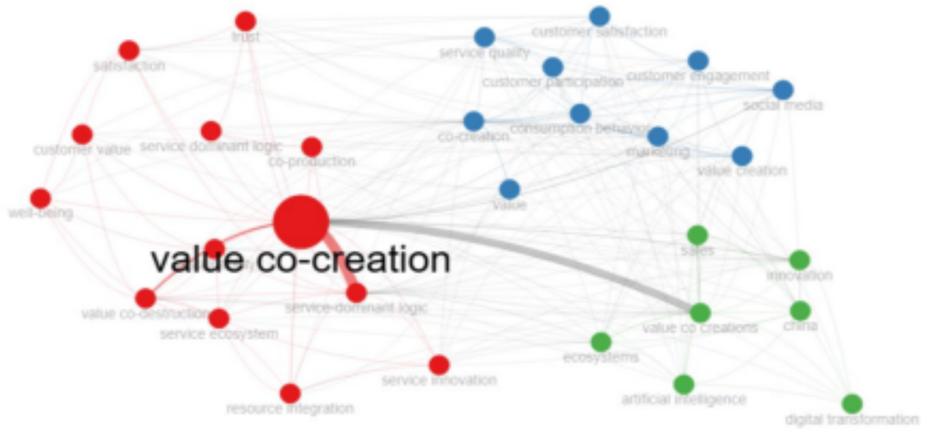

Figure 4. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

Figure 4 presents the keyword co-occurrence network, which reveals the intellectual structure of value co-creation research through the formation of three main thematic clusters. The clustering illustrates how frequently co-occurring keywords are grouped, indicating dominant research streams and conceptual linkages within the literature.

Cluster 1 represents the theoretical and systemic foundation of value co-creation research. This cluster is centered on *"value co-creation"* and *"service-dominant logic"*, accompanied by closely related concepts such as *resource integration*, *service ecosystem*, *co-production*, *customer value*, *trust*, *well-being*, *sustainability*, and *value co-destruction*. The presence of these keywords indicates that this cluster primarily focuses on the conceptual development of value co-creation, emphasizing value as an emergent outcome of interaction among multiple actors within service ecosystems. The inclusion of *value co-destruction* and *well-being* also suggests a more mature and critical perspective, where scholars examine both positive and negative outcomes of co-creation processes, as well as their broader societal implications. Cluster 2 captures the customer-centric and behavioral perspective of value co-creation research. Keywords such as *co-creation*, *value creation*, *customer engagement*, *customer participation*, *customer satisfaction*, *service quality*, *consumption behavior*, *marketing*, and *social media* dominate this cluster. This grouping reflects a strong empirical orientation toward understanding how interactive processes influence customer experiences, engagement, and behavioral outcomes. The prominence of *social media* highlights the growing importance of digitally mediated interaction as a key context in which value co-creation unfolds, positioning customers as active participants in marketing and service processes. Cluster 3 reflects an emerging, technology-driven research stream within value co-creation scholarship. This cluster includes keywords such as *innovation*, *digital transformation*, *artificial intelligence*, *ecosystems*, *sales*, and *China*. The co-occurrence of these terms indicates a growing scholarly focus on how advanced technologies and digital infrastructures reshape value co-creation mechanisms across organizational and national contexts. The inclusion of *China* suggests increasing empirical attention to large-scale digital ecosystems in emerging and rapidly digitalizing markets, reinforcing the global and contextual expansion of value co-creation research.

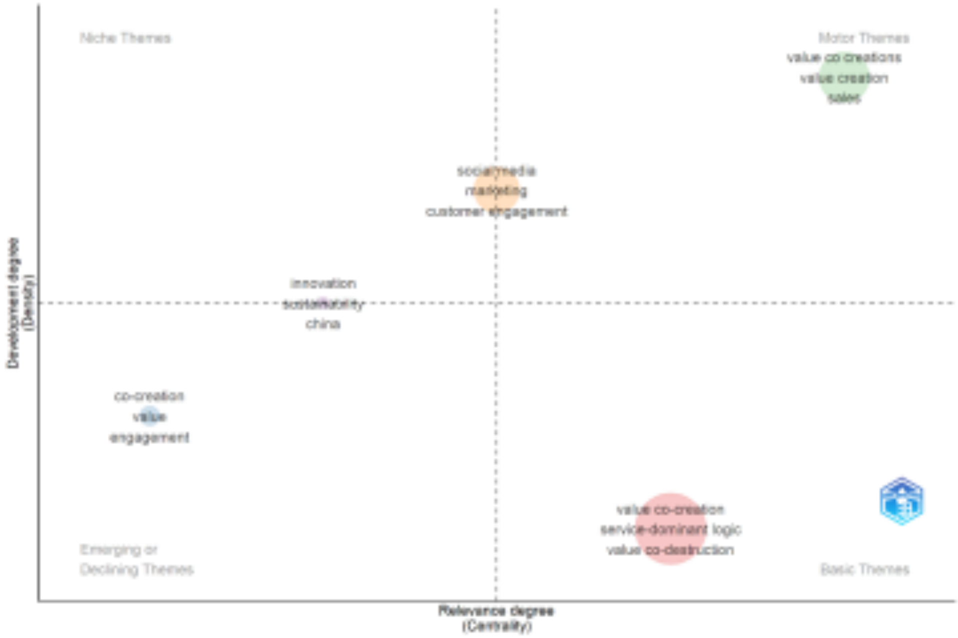

Figure 5. Thematic Map

Figure 5 presents the thematic map of value co-creation research based on centrality (relevance) and density (development), which classifies themes into four quadrants: motor themes, basic themes, niche themes, and emerging or declining themes. This mapping provides insight into the maturity and strategic importance of research themes within the value co-creation literature.

The motor themes quadrant is dominated by *value co creations*, *value creation*, and *sales*. These themes exhibit both high centrality and high density, indicating that they are well-developed and play a driving role in the overall research field. Their position suggests that studies focusing on value co-creation outcomes and value creation mechanisms are central to the literature and are supported by a relatively mature body of research.

The basic themes quadrant includes *value co-creation*, *service-dominant logic*, and *value co destruction*. These themes show high centrality but lower density, implying that they form the conceptual backbone of value co-creation research while still offering room for further theoretical refinement and empirical development. Their location confirms the foundational role of service dominant logic and highlights increasing scholarly attention to both positive and negative outcomes of co-creation processes.

Themes such as *social media*, *marketing*, and *customer engagement* are positioned near the boundary between motor and basic themes, indicating moderate to high relevance and development. This suggests that these topics are actively researched and increasingly integrated into the core value co-creation discourse, particularly in digitally mediated contexts.

The emerging or declining themes quadrant includes *co-creation*, *value*, and *engagement*. Their low centrality and density suggest that these concepts are either being reframed within more specific constructs (such as value co-creation or customer engagement) or are transitioning into other thematic clusters. Meanwhile, themes such as *innovation*, *sustainability*, and *China* appear closer to the central area with moderate density, indicating developing research attention that may evolve into more central themes in future studies

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric review of value co-creation research in the digital era, offering a systematic overview of publication trends, geographical distribution, influential studies, and thematic structures within the literature. The results demonstrate that value co-creation has developed into a well-established and multidisciplinary research field, with a notable acceleration of scientific output since 2020. The growth in publications reflects increasing scholarly attention to collaborative value creation in digitally mediated environments and multi-actor service ecosystems.

The bibliometric findings reveal a structured intellectual landscape. Citation analysis confirms a strong theoretical core grounded in service-dominant logic and interaction-based perspectives. Keyword co-occurrence and thematic mapping further show that value co-creation research is organized around distinct yet interconnected themes. Motor themes emphasize value creation outcomes and performance-related issues, while basic themes, such as value co-creation, service dominant logic, and value co-destruction, form the conceptual backbone of the field. In addition, customer engagement, marketing, and social media-related topics occupy an increasingly central position, reflecting the growing integration of digital contexts into value co-creation research. Emerging themes related to innovation, sustainability, and geographically specific contexts indicate ongoing diversification and contextual expansion of the literature.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis relies solely on the Scopus database, which may exclude relevant studies indexed elsewhere or published in non English outlets. Second, the focus on journal articles excludes books, conference proceedings, and practitioner publications that may also influence the development of value co-creation research. Third, bibliometric techniques emphasize quantitative patterns and thematic structures and do not assess the theoretical depth or methodological quality of individual studies.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating multiple bibliographic databases to enhance coverage and representativeness. Further empirical studies are also needed to explore value co-creation in underrepresented geographical contexts and emerging economies. In addition, the thematic map highlights opportunities to advance research on value co-destruction, sustainability, and technology-driven value co-creation, particularly in relation to digital transformation and artificial intelligence. By building on these directions, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of value co-creation in the digital era.

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