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Recent Trends in Customer Centricity: A Systematic Literature Review in Sustainability Economics

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Abstract

This study aims to review recent literature published from 2014 to 2024 on customer centricity and the customer-centric paradigm in organisations, with particular emphasis on the integration of sustainability economics concepts to achieve long-term success. This research is in the form of a systematic literature review using the help of the watase uake site to filter articles that match the predetermined criteria. Article selection criteria include open full access text articles with publication dates no more than the last 10 years (2014-2024), and article sources must be articles published in reputable international journals from Q1 to Q4 based on the Scopus Rankings Index. The initial data obtained amounted to 315 articles, which were then filtered according to the criteria to produce 46 articles to be analysed in this study. The results of this study are expected to confirm the use of customer centricity and customer-centric in various research contexts with a variety of different terms, and highlight the importance of integrating sustainability economics in customer-centric strategies to create sustainable added value. Where in this study can be a literature that helps companies understand the concept of customer centricity more deeply in the context of sustainable economics.

Keywords

Trends, Customer Centricity, Economics, Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Customer centricity is a long-standing concept. The Practice of Management (1954), drucker asserts that the customer determines what a business is, what it produces, and whether it will succeed. Similarly, Sheth (2020) argues that businesses should focus on meeting consumer demand rather than merely selling products. This aligns with the findings of those who report that marketers dedicating at least 50% of their efforts to customer-focused processes and competencies achieve a marketing investment return at least 30% higher than their less customer-oriented peers. Consequently, understanding how a business can effectively transform to harness these benefits is crucial. According to Lamberti (2013), a customer-centric business should encompass (a) interactive customer management, which involves gathering information about customers; (b) customer integration, which includes customers in the development of new products; (c) internal integration, where companies work together to collect and share customer information; and (d) external coordination, where businesses collaborate with their supply chain partners.

Despite the ongoing production of literature in this field, several important aspects remain unclear. First, the exact components that make up the construct of customer-centricity are still not well-defined, as noted (Lamberti, 2013). Second, the degree to which customer-centricity can genuinely benefit organizations is still under debate, highlighted (Gummesson, 2008). Most importantly, the specific requirements and advantages of implementing customer-centric practices for both customers and businesses have yet to be fully understood. Among the various studies and discussions on customer-centricity, three main contributions stand out for addressing these critical issues. These works delve into identifying the core elements of a customer-centric approach, assessing the potential impact on organizational success, and outlining the practical steps and benefits involved in adopting a customer-focused strategy. This comprehensive examination aims to provide a clearer understanding of how businesses can effectively transform themselves to harness the potential rewards of customer-centricity.

Sheth et al. (2000) identify five key trends that are propelling the move towards a customer-centric business model. Firstly, there is a growing pressure on companies to enhance their marketing productivity, requiring more efficient and effective strategies to reach and engage customers. Secondly, markets are becoming increasingly diverse, necessitating a more tailored and nuanced approach to meet varied consumer needs. Thirdly, the competitive landscape is becoming more intense, driving businesses to differentiate themselves through superior customer understanding and service. Fourthly, customers and consumers are more informed than ever before, empowered by access to vast amounts of information and higher expectations for quality and service. Lastly, rapid technological advancements are transforming how businesses operate and interact with their customers, enabling new ways to gather data and personalize offerings. In addition to identifying these trends, the authors outline the significant benefits of adopting a customer-centric business approach. By focusing on customer needs and preferences, companies can expand the scope of their marketing activities to include supply management and the co-creation of products and services that are both relevant and customized. Furthermore, leveraging digital technologies allows for fixed- cost marketing, where initial investments in technology can lead to scalable and cost-effective marketing solutions. These benefits collectively contribute to a more responsive and agile business, capable of meeting the evolving demands of the market and fostering stronger customer relationships (Sheth et al., 2000).

To effectively achieve customer centricity, Shah et al. (2006) proposes several key areas for intervention. Firstly, they emphasize the importance of campaign

leadership. Senior managers need to embrace and champion a customer-first paradigm, a concept supported by Day (1999). This involves leaders at the highest levels of the organization actively promoting and prioritizing customer-centric values and practices, ensuring that the entire company culture shifts towards placing the customer at the forefront of all decision-making processes. Secondly, the authors discuss the necessity of organizational alignment. It is crucial for the marketing function to guide the entire organization towards a unified focus on the customer. This can be achieved through either a horizontal or a hybrid organizational structure. A horizontal approach encourages cross-functional collaboration and communication, breaking down silos and ensuring that all departments work together seamlessly to enhance the customer experience. A hybrid approach combines elements of both traditional hierarchical and modern horizontal structures, ensuring flexibility and adaptability in meeting customer needs.

Lamberti (2013) explores the foundational elements, or antecedents, that characterize businesses prioritizing a customer-centric approach. He identifies several critical factors that contribute to this orientation. Firstly, individual factors play a significant role, particularly concerning corporate leadership. Effective customer-centric companies often have leaders who are committed to and actively promote a strong focus on customer needs and satisfaction. These leaders set the tone for the entire organization, ensuring that customer-centric values are embedded in the corporate culture. Secondly, intra-organizational factors are essential. These factors involve the internal processes that facilitate cross-functional integration within the company. A customer-centric organization encourages collaboration and communication across different departments, ensuring that all parts of the business are aligned and working together towards a common goal of enhancing the customer experience. This internal cohesion is vital for creating a seamless and consistent approach to customer service and product development.

Sheth et al. (2000) assert that marketing with a customer-centric view focuses on the needs and wants of customers since the initiation of the planning process. Customer centricity encourages employees at all levels to engage with customers, aiming to generate value for them and the organization (Lamberti, 2013). Customer centricity and its relevance to the long-term success of companies has been widely discussed over the years (Shah et al., 2006). However, many companies are still struggling to build organizations with a customer-centric paradigm Ulaga (2018), which is the basis of our motivation to explore trends and topics related to customer centricity in order to see the current state of how customer centricity helps these companies.

In the context of sustainability economics, a customer-centric approach plays an important role in ensuring economic practices that are financially profitable while being environmentally and socially friendly. A customer focus enables companies to develop relevant and sustainable products and services, reduce waste and maximize resource use, and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. By understanding customer preferences and needs, companies can innovate to meet sustainability expectations educate consumers about the importance of sustainability, and drive positive behavior change (Sheth et al., 2011). Transparency and clear communication about a company's sustainability efforts also strengthen customer relationships, creating long-term value for both parties (Peattie & Belz, 2010).

Concepts like market orientation, as developed by Kohli & Jaworski (1990); Narver & Slater (1990), market-based learning, as explored by Vorhies & Morgan (2005), were introduced to help firms gain a deeper understanding of individual customer needs and preferences. This understanding is believed to lead to superior

marketplace performance. Some researchers have discussed these concepts in the context of significant management paradigm shifts, such as moving from product-based to customer-centric strategies. This shift is highlighted in works (Gale, 1994; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Sheth, 2005). Additionally, the transition from a goods-centric dominant logic to a service-dominant logic, as proposed by Vargo & Lusch (2004), further underscores this evolution.

The overarching results of various studies, including the one being discussed, suggest that the true essence of the customer-centric paradigm does not lie merely in the methods used to sell products. Instead, it focuses on creating value for customers. To successfully implement customer centricity, organizations need to cultivate a culture where both managers and employees regard building deep and meaningful relationships with customers as the company's most valuable asset. This perspective is reinforced by Shah et al. (2006), who argue that fostering such relationships should be at the core of the business strategy. The purpose of this study is to review the literature published from 2014 to 2024 regarding customer centricity and the customer-centric paradigm in organizations to develop a systematic literature review that has been updated with the latest trends and conditions, making it possible to improve perspectives on a broader field (Toorajipour et al, 2021). What are the definitions, theories, themes, and methodologies in studies related to the concept of customer centricity. What are the implications of customer centricity in sustainability economics.

This study uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) literature review methodology (Asar et al., 2016). This research is divided into several sections. The first section is the background of the study and the process associated with asking the question. The second section describes the methodology used to conduct the systematic bibliometric analysis, including the steps in searching for articles using the watase uake website. The third section describes the clustering and results discussion in more detail to answer the research questions using a systematic literature search process. The last section describes the research conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2. Methods

In this study, the terms and standards used to conduct a systematic literature review on customer centricity are described. Bibliometric approaches are an important part of research evaluation methodologies, especially in applied and scientific fields (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). The first criterion based on the rules of bibliometric analysis, data is obtained by reading publications that contain titles, abstracts, or keywords related to the research subject. In this study, the theme to be researched is the concept of customer centricity and the application of the customer-centric paradigm in various contexts, along with specific keywords used to obtain data and other fields. The articles used were obtained from the Scopus database using the watase uake site. This site helped the author to obtain a collection of articles relevant to the research theme. The second criterion in this research is to use sources in the form of articles, conference proceedings, books, and theses. Third, the data were taken from articles published on reputable international portals with the Scopus database from Q1 to Q4 based on the Scopus Ranking Index. Fourth, articles must be written in English.

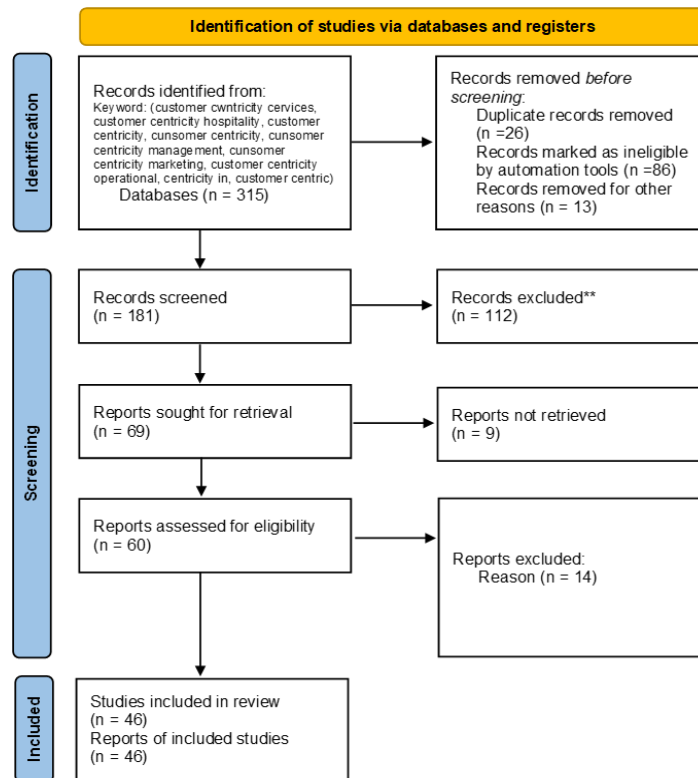


Figure 1. PRISMA Methodology Flow Chart

The study used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) literature review methodology (Asar et al., 2016). This method helps us ensure that the SLR and reported comprehensively and transparently, thus improving the quality and credibility of the study. The PRISMA methodology is conducted with five steps; namely, determining the research protocol, literature search, screening studies, extracting relevant data, and data analysis. A summary flowchart of the methodology used in this article is shown in Figure 1, while further explanation of the PRISMA methodology steps will be discussed in the next section.

The first step was to develop a clear research framework, including research questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, data sources, data extraction and analysis methods. As explained in the previous section, the research questions consisted of "What research has been done before?" and "What are the suggestions or agenda for future research?". Then the inclusion criteria used are articles published through reputable international journal portals indexed by Scopus from Q1 to Q4 based on the Scopus Rankings Index, as well as articles written in English. As for the exclusion criteria in this study are articles that do not have abstracts, articles written in languages other than English, and articles that are duplicates of articles in the previous search.

Screened studies obtained from the literature search based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Documented the reasons for exclusion of studies that did not meet the criteria. The data obtained were 315 journal articles from the Scopus database using predetermined keywords on the Watase Uake website. The data retrieved were only 46 literatures that had the criteria of being articles from reputable international journals and published from trusted indexers. The next process is to classify the data that has been obtained.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Customer-Centered Definitions in Various Research Contexts

This research investigates the meaning of customer-centric in its various meanings. This is despite the fact that existing definitions of this concept are not always precise and clear (Rupprecht, 2020). However, this research discusses some customer-centric notions that are relevant to marketing. Sidhartha & Thenarasu (2020) define customer-centric as an effort to understand the needs and wants of customers regarding product features and their interactions with the company, and this is embedded in business processes. This definition is in line which states that the philosophy of the customer-centric approach is to understand consumer needs and make products accordingly.

Table 1. Details of Various Definitions of Customer Centricity and Customer-centric

Title and Researcher	Specialized Terms Used	Definition	Context
Yen et al., 2021	Customer-centric Socialization	An approach that places the customer as the main actor in the socialization and value-creation process.	Tourism Industry
Sheth et al., 2020	Customer-centric Support Services	Understand customer needs, wants, and preferences to provide a superior experience and ensure customer satisfaction throughout their journey with the company.	Customer Service
Van Riel et al., 2021.	Customer-centric Approach	A customer-centric approach as a change agent in driving sustainability in the service ecosystem.	Hospitality Industry
Manishimwe et al., 2022.	Customer-centric Marketing Approach	Customers as the top priority in marketing strategy, with the aim to create, build and maintain strong relationships with customers.	Hospitality Industry
Habel et al., 2019	Perceive Customer Centricity	Customer perception of the extent to which the company prioritizes customer interests in all operations.	Banking and Information Technology Industry
Osakwe, 2019.	Customer Centricity Strategy	Transforming customer understanding into a seamless customer journey.	Micro-sized Firm
Dash, 2023	Customer Centricity Construct	Actively prioritize customer needs over the company's internal business processes and orient the company and salespeople towards customers.	Software Company
Radebe, et al., 2023	Customer-centric Perspective	This perspective prioritizes a deep understanding of the customer to create sustainable added value.	Small Business
Azeem, et al., 2021.	Customer-centric Business Strategies	Development and implementation of strategies aimed at improving customer relationship management (CRM).	Pharmaceutical Industry
Palacios-Marqu et al., 2016.	Customer-centric Philosophy	A philosophy that emphasizes the importance of understanding customer preferences, behaviours, and desires in order to create unique and satisfying experiences for them.	Hospitality Industry
Lee et al., 2015.	Customer-centric Structure	Organizing a company around customer groups that have a wide range characteristic can have a positive impact on financial results in the long term.	Financial Performance

The results of the data extraction, analysis, and synthesis process where several specific customer centricity and customer-centric terms used in various research contexts were found. Sheth et al. (2020) used the term Customer Centric Sustainability (CCS) which is a framework for marketers to systematically address sustainability challenges by focusing on customers. In contrast to other sustainability approaches, CCS emphasizes that sustainability dimensions such as environmental, social, and economic should be measured with reference to consumers, not just on company performance. This is because current sustainability strategies are considered to have three main weaknesses: they do not focus directly on customers, do not recognize the threat of global over-consumption, and do not take a holistic approach.

3.2. Customer Centricity Sustainability in Sustainability Economics

Customer centricity has evolved into the concept of customer-centric sustainability. In the economic world, sustainability is one of the most important aspects. The discussion on this topic will cover aspects of sustainability related to challenges within a company. The level of sustainability effectiveness within companies can be improved by adopting a customer-centric approach, known as customer centricity sustainability. Customer Centric Sustainability (CCS) is a customer-focused approach to improving sustainability effectiveness within companies. This approach capitalizes on the reciprocal relationship between businesses and consumers, and makes sustainability an integral part of business strategy and operations. Sustainability economics emphasizes the importance of considering the impact of economic activity on the well-being of consumers and society at large, not just the financial performance of the company. This concept is in line with CCS, which measures the dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social, economic) with a focus on consumers.

Customer-focused sustainability addresses how consumption influenced by marketing activities impacts consumers' environmental, personal, and economic well-being. One of the primary environmental concerns associated with the rapid growth of consumption is the limitation of ecosystem resources. This concept, supported by Meadows et al. (1972); Speth (2008), posits that the earth's resources are finite and cannot sustain unlimited consumption growth. As consumption increases, we risk depleting these critical resources, leading to significant ecological constraints. Another major concern is the risk of environmental degradation, which refers to the deterioration of the natural environment due to human activities. This degradation encompasses a wide range of issues, from pollution and deforestation to the loss of biodiversity. Understanding the implications of environmental degradation is crucial within the framework of customer-focused sustainability, as it directly affects human health and overall well-being. Studies by McMichael et al. (2006); Norton (1992) have highlighted the adverse health impacts resulting from environmental damage, such as respiratory problems, waterborne diseases, and other health issues linked to pollution and resource depletion.

In the context of customer-focused sustainability, it is essential to explore how these environmental challenges resource limitations and degradation impact both individual and collective human well-being. Addressing these issues involves not only recognizing the finite nature of our ecosystem but also implementing sustainable marketing practices that promote responsible consumption. This holistic approach ensures that marketing strategies not only drive economic benefits but also contribute positively to environmental preservation and the long-term health and well-being of consumers. By prioritizing sustainability, businesses can play a pivotal role in mitigating environmental risks and fostering a healthier, more sustainable future.

Issues related to economic sustainability centered on customers include challenges of consumption deficiency and overconsumption within a country. From

the perspective of both aspects of customer-centric sustainability (CCS), consumption can become problematic when it exists at either extreme, as highlighted (Jackson 2009; Quelch & Jocz, 2007; Seyfang, 2009). Insufficient consumption poses a significant problem for the majority of people at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP), which, according to various estimates, represents nearly two-thirds of the global population. These individuals often lack access to basic needs and resources, leading to widespread economic hardship and limited opportunities for development. Conversely, overconsumption is a CCS issue in mainstream markets, comprising middle- and high-income consumers worldwide with substantial income for expenditure. Quelch & Jocz (2007) note that consumption impacts one's emotional and physical state, and consumption that provides momentary pleasure can undermine sustainable well-being. From an economic well-being standpoint, overconsumption is often associated with excessive spending that can lead to financial strain (Schor, 1999).

In short, addressing economic sustainability centered on consumers requires a balanced approach that mitigates issues of both consumption deficiency and overconsumption. By promoting sustainable consumption practices, businesses and policymakers can work towards enhancing economic well-being and fostering a more equitable distribution of resources (Sheth et al., 2011). In the business arena, particularly in marketing, consumption typically serves as an indicator of market demand, and increased consumption is generally seen as beneficial for businesses. Therefore, marketing professionals and researchers rarely view high or excessive consumption as problematic. When consumption is identified as an issue, the focus often revolves around environmental sustainability, although this receives limited attention. An alternative market-driven approach to addressing overconsumption involves reshaping consumer behaviour rather than simply restricting consumption. This approach forms the basis of customer-centric sustainability, emphasizing mindful consumption (Iddris et al., 2022).

Mindful consumption involves conscientious awareness in thought and behaviour regarding the consequences of consumption. It operates under the premise that individuals have the autonomy to decide what and how they consume, free from external pressures or market constraints (Sheth, 2020). Instead, consumers make intentional choices based on their values and personal preferences. This shift towards mindful consumption encourages a sustainable approach where individuals take accountability for their consumption habits, aligning them with broader environmental and social objectives. At the core of the customer-centric sustainability approach lies the idea of conscientious consumption, which plays a crucial role in translating marketing efforts into outcomes that promote CCS. This concept of mindful consumption further bolsters solutions based on customer-centric sustainability by harmonizing consumer interests with business objectives. In doing so, it promotes the shared interests of both consumers and companies in achieving economic and environmental sustainability.

4. Conclusion

In an era where customer preferences are changing rapidly and competition is getting tougher, understanding and meeting customer needs is key to a company's success. The focus on customer centricity is not only about increasing sales, but also includes a customer-centric sustainability aspect, which emphasizes the importance of considering the environmental impact of marketing and consumption activities on environmental well-being. In the customer-centric sustainability framework, the environmental dimension relates to the impact of consumption on environmental well-being, including the impact on human health and well-being due to environmental changes caused by consumption. This focus not only builds strong

relationships with customers, but also helps companies to be more innovative, improve business processes, and build a positive brand reputation.

This study provides several important implications for companies. Companies need to make customer centricity a top priority in their business strategy. By focusing on consumer needs and wants, companies can design marketing practices that consider the environmental impact of the products and services they offer. Through a customer-centric sustainability approach, companies can ensure that environmental sustainability is an integral part of their business strategy, considering environmental aspects in every decision they make. As technology improves in collecting and analyzing customer data, the way we think about putting customers first (customer centricity) needs to change. Researchers have a great responsibility to explore new and important aspects of customer centricity. These insights can be invaluable to businesses and the entire marketing field. Our discussion in the previous section only provides a general overview of the concept of customer centricity in various contexts following the development of research trends that have occurred in the last ten years. There is a need and opportunity to conduct in-depth research focusing on the various contexts and definitions that have been discussed in this article. For example, an interesting issue that needs to be explored is customer centric sustainability in the context of various corporate environments. In addition, this study has several limitations, such as limitations in data collection methods because the data used only come from secondary data sources. Further research can add primary data sources such as interview results or surveys with informants to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Thus, the relationship between customer centric sustainability and sustainable economics can be understood more deeply and applied more effectively in the company's business strategy.

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