

# Chapter 1

## Retail Customer Engagement: A Systematic Mapping Study

**Andrea Moretta Tartaglione**

*University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy*

**Giuseppe Granata**

*University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Italy*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Customer engagement is one of the most debated topics in marketing literature. The great interest of the scientific community resulted in a large amount of research on this topic making it difficult for scholars to understand how to really contribute to advance the research. Based on these considerations, this chapter aims to provide an overview of the research findings and trends of previous studies to guide the researcher to the most influential works, results, and issues that need more insights. In particular, this chapter offers a literature review on customer engagement and retail customer engagement using bibliometric analysis and scientific mapping study. Results show the most productive authors, most cited publications, most frequent words, and clusters of related words. The analysis provides a description of the state of the art of retail customer engagement and suggests future research directions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last decades, the marketing literature has evolved towards an increasing consideration of customers in business strategies: progressively focusing on their satisfaction, loyalty, involvement, commitment and value co-creation, and leading to the blurring of boundaries between companies and customers (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014).

Several marketing studies have shown that a sustainable competitive advantage depends on the company's ability to maintain, sustain and nurture its customer base (Anderson, Fornell & Mazvanchery, 2004; Gruca & Rego, 2005; Rego, Billett & Morgan, 2009) stimulating behaviors that go beyond mere repurchase behaviors (van Doorn et al., 2010).

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The concept of customer engagement aggregates the multiple ways customer behaviors beyond transactions may influence the firm (Brodie et al., 2011; Leeflang, 2011).

According to the Marketing Science Institute (2010), customer engagement is a fundamental research area for a better understanding of consumer behaviors in complex and interactive environments such as the current ones. For these reasons, customer engagement studies have spread widely in the marketing literature. However, there is still no shared definition of the term, nor shared recognition of its dimensions or differences with other similar relational terms, including “participation”, “commitment” and “involvement”. The most recurrent definition in marketing studies is that of van Doorn et al. (2010), who defined customer engagement as customer’s behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.

With regard to its dimensions, part of the literature attributes to customer engagement a behavioral dimension, while other authors a cognitive / emotive dimension. Some scholars, instead, define it as a multidimensional concept that includes both behavioral and cognitive aspects.

There is still a lot of confusion about the meaning of customer engagement, its dimensions, the behaviors or psychological states that characterize it, the effects it produces on a company performance, especially in the retail sector where studies are still lacking. It is therefore difficult for scholars to understand how to really contribute to advance the research on this topic. Based on these considerations, this chapter aims to provide an overview of the research findings and trends of previous studies to guide the researcher to the most influential works, results and issues that need more insights. In particular, this chapter offers a review of the literature on customer engagement in general and in the retail sector specifically, using bibliometric analysis and scientific mapping study.

A synthesis of the results of past research is fundamental to the progress of a particular field of research. The most used methods for summarizing previous results are the qualitative approach of literature review and the quantitative meta-analysis approach (Schmidt, 2008). However, these methods have some limitations such as the lack of methodological rigor that often exposes the analysis to the researcher’s prejudices (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003). The bibliometric methods, instead, introduce a systematic, transparent and reproducible review process and have the advantage of directing the reader immediately to the most influential works identified through objective and quantitative indicators (Moretta Tartaglione et al., 2019). Bibliometric methods have spread widely with the online introduction of databases containing citation data (e.g. Thomson Reuters Web of Science, WOS) and the development of software that facilitate the conduct of bibliometric analysis (e.g. BibExcel).

In recent years, scientific mapping has been introduced in the field of bibliometric methods to monitor the cognitive structure of a scientific field and its evolution (Noyons, Moed, & van Raan, 1999). Examining the correlations between the various works, in terms of words, authors, fields (Small, 1999), scientific mapping aims to show the structural and dynamic aspects of scientific research (Börner, Chen, & Boyack, 2003; Morris & Van Der Veer Martens, 2008; Noyons, Moed & Luwel, 1999).

Several authors emphasize the usefulness of these methods in the quantitative and objective organization of information within a scientific field (Albort-Morant & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016; Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Palacios-Marqués, 2016) as well as in the analysis of the relevance of the various research topics within a domain and their relationships (Chen & Xiao, 2016).

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