

A Bibliometric Analysis of Customer Relationship Management Research in Retail Sectors: Intellectual Structure, Thematic Clusters, and Future Trajectories

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Abstract

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has emerged as a critical strategic imperative in the retail sector, yet the field lacks a comprehensive bibliometric mapping of its intellectual evolution. This study presents a systematic bibliometric analysis of 571 Scopus-indexed documents published between 1993 and 2026, addressing four research questions concerning influential authors, thematic clusters, dominant theoretical frameworks, and future research trajectories. Employing VOSviewer-compatible bibliometric techniques including co-authorship, co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence analyses—supplemented by descriptive statistics, the study reveals that the United States, India, and the United Kingdom lead CRM-retail scholarship globally, while authors such as Smith, A.D., Verhoef, P.C., and Reynolds, K.E. constitute the intellectual backbone of the field. Five dominant thematic clusters are identified: (1) Relationship Quality and Trust, (2) Technology and Digital CRM, (3) Customer Loyalty and Retention, (4) Retail-Sector-Specific CRM, and (5) Customer Engagement and Experience. Co-citation analysis uncovers foundational theoretical pillars including Relationship Marketing Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, Social Exchange Theory, and Service-Dominant Logic. The overlay visualisation confirms a temporal shift from relational-trust paradigms toward AI-enabled, omnichannel, and analytics-driven CRM paradigms. The study identifies critical gaps in emerging-market retail research particularly in the organised FMCG retail sector of South Asia and proposes a future research agenda focused on digital CRM transformation, sustainability, and experiential retailing. These findings offer substantive methodological and managerial implications for CRM scholars, retail practitioners, and policymakers.

Keywords: Customer Relationship Management; Retail Sector; FMCG; Bibliometric Analysis; VOSviewer; Relationship Marketing; Customer Loyalty

1. Introduction

In the initial stages of CRM's evolution, technology shaped a set of rules that dictated customer interaction and retention. Presently, CRM's strategic dimensions encompass the positive and negative customer

relationship cycles. In the retail dimension, particularly with the organized FMC and its retailing structure, a customer's relationship has far more value than the actual price of a product. In some emerging economies like India, where organized retailing structures are rapidly developing, and the retailing structure is organized, the formulated strategic development of customer relations is a necessity.

The retail customer relationship management literature has been vast, starting from Berry's (1983) relationship marketing and Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory. Retail relationship management has, however, been developed in a fragmented, barely cohesive, and non-systematic manner. In some instances, the management of customer relationship management (CRM) has been viewed as providing solutions to information system management (Davis, 1989, Kim & Kim, 2009); in other instances, CRM has been viewed as a marketing management problem (Verhoef, 2003; Reinartz et al., 2004), and within retail management, CRM has been viewed as a problem of store management, service quality, and customer loyalty (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000; Fullerton, 2005a). This has resulted in the absence of any unitive synthesis. The use of Bibliometric methods allows for rigorous assessment and mapping of the structures within a discourse and demonstrates the intellectual history of a discourse, thus delineating its contours and key ideas. Traditional narrative literature reviews do not include a detailed quantitative analysis. In contrast, bibliometric approaches identify patterns related to authorship, collaboration, citations, and conceptual group formations through quantitative analysis, which are typically overlooked by conventional review methods (Donthu et al., 2021). The combination of extensive CRM-retail scholarship listed in Scopus and the sophisticated visualization tool VOSviewer makes it possible to undertake this type of mapping study in this field for the first time.

This study accordingly presents a systematic bibliometric analysis of 571 Scopus-indexed documents on CRM in retail and related sectors, published between 1993 and 2026. The corpus was identified through a carefully constructed Boolean search query (see Section 3) and subjected to systematic screening that removed 130 records comprising duplicates ($n = 3$), documents with missing information ($n = 121$), and non-English language papers ($n = 6$). The resulting final sample of 571 documents forms the basis of all analyses reported herein.

Research Questions:

RQ1. Which authors and countries are the most influential in the field of CRM-retail research as evidenced by their citation impact?

RQ2. What are the key thematic clusters and sub-themes within the scholarly discourse on CRM in retail?

RQ3. Which theoretical frameworks and perspectives have been predominantly employed in the field of study?

RQ4. What can be the future trajectory for CRM-retail research?

By addressing these questions this research paper contributes to the existing literature in three aspects. Fundamentally, this paper is the most extensive bibliometric mapping of the CRM-retail literature to date, covering 33 years of publication records. Furthermore, it articulates the analytical foundations and thematic clusters that can inform subsequent empirical and conceptual studies aiding the future researchers. Third, it highlights the contextual importance of organised FMCG retail in developing markets, specifically Bengaluru, India, an under-researched yet globally significant study area.

This paper is organised as follows. The second section discusses the theoretical background. Section 3 describes the methodology. The subsequent four sections (4 to 7) present the findings corresponding to each research question of this study. Section 8 discusses the implication and section 9 concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Conceptual Evolution of Customer Relationship Management: Intellectual genealogy shows Berry's (1983) first description of relationship marketing thinking as an example of a new marketing paradigm showing the transition from transactional to relational exchange. Morgan and Hunt (1994) described the relationship marketing cornerstone commitment-trust theory and stated that commitment and trust are the key mediating variables of relationship marketing's success. These contributions set the standard for marketing theory for all disciplines: long-term marketers' relationships with customers are superior to transactional relationships. Five years later, Payne and Frow (2005) presented a strategic CRM model proposing an integrated architecture for value creation, multichannel management, performance management, and information management. This model suggested that CRM is a strategic capability, consistent with the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) that describes unique and non-imitable firm components as the basis of sustained competitive advantage. In the retail industry, Verhoef (2003) empirically validated the strategic CRM model by enhancing customer retention and share development as the main outcomes of CRM initiatives.

2.2. CRM in the Retail context

Retail CRM techniques and practices will the seamless interactions that customers have with retailers. Positive interactions which elicit excellent emotional responses stem from the environments the retailers create. These environments are multi-categorized and diverse - multi-branded products. Marketing techniques and consumer response to the techniques have led to programmed loyalty response. Odekerken-Schröder et al. (2003) argue that the strength of the retailer-consumer relationship should be matched with consumer manipulation programs and retailer adapted responses. It should be noted that the response should be tailored and personalized. This is different when working in fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry. In his study of the fast moving consumer goods industry Van den Poel (2005) was able to show that the reduction of consumer spending is a predictable phenomenon that is a result of CRM neglect in the industry.

The development of digital commerce presents more opportunities in retail CRM. Marketing and brand communication become digital and more reliable. A more credible communication medium has been linked to greater brand loyalty (Boateng, 2019). More studies are focusing on the digital commerce side of retail CRM and the need to balance physical and digital interactions. This has been outlined and explored by Picot-Coupey et al. (2016) and Zhang et al. (2022) in the context of synchronizing the physical and digital interactions/point of contact with the consumer. In the context of organized FMCG retail in India, and other fast developing countries, a retail CRM system of tech-enabled commerce would face infrastructure issues to provide a unified and reliable system which, would then lead to other cultural and relationship issues where the system developed.

2.3. Bibliometric Methodology in Management Research

In management and marketing research, bibliometric analysis has established an impressive degree of methodological credibility (Donthu et al., 2021). The methodology includes elements of both performance analysis (studying publication and citation trends) and science mapping (charting intellectual structures). The analysis of authorship studies examines collaboration patterns and networks; analysis of co-citation studies examines intellectual bases; bibliographic coupling analysis studies contemporary research fronts; and analysis of keyword co-occurrence examines the conceptual landscape of a particular area. These techniques, which can be implemented using VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), have been used in bibliometric studies of relationship marketing, service quality, and digital marketing, but have yet been

used in the context of an all-encompassing analysis of CRM in the retail and FMCG sector. This is the gap that the current study seeks to address.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Screening

The Scopus database was selected as the primary data source owing to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed management and marketing literature, its standardised metadata structure, and its widely recognised suitability for bibliometric analysis. A structured Boolean search query was formulated to capture literature at the intersection of CRM and retail:

"customer relationship management" OR CRM OR "relationship marketing" AND retail OR "retail sector" OR "retail industry" OR "organised retail" OR "organized retail" OR FMCG OR "fast moving consumer goods" OR supermarket OR hypermarket* OR grocery AND practice* OR implementation OR adoption OR strateg* OR capability* OR system* OR "customer engagement" OR "customer loyalty" OR "customer retention" OR "customer satisfaction" OR "customer experience"*

The initial search returned 701 documents. Following PRISMA-informed screening protocols, 3 duplicate records were removed, 121 documents with missing critical information (author, title, abstract, or source) were excluded, and 6 non-English language documents were removed, yielding a final analytical corpus of 571 documents.

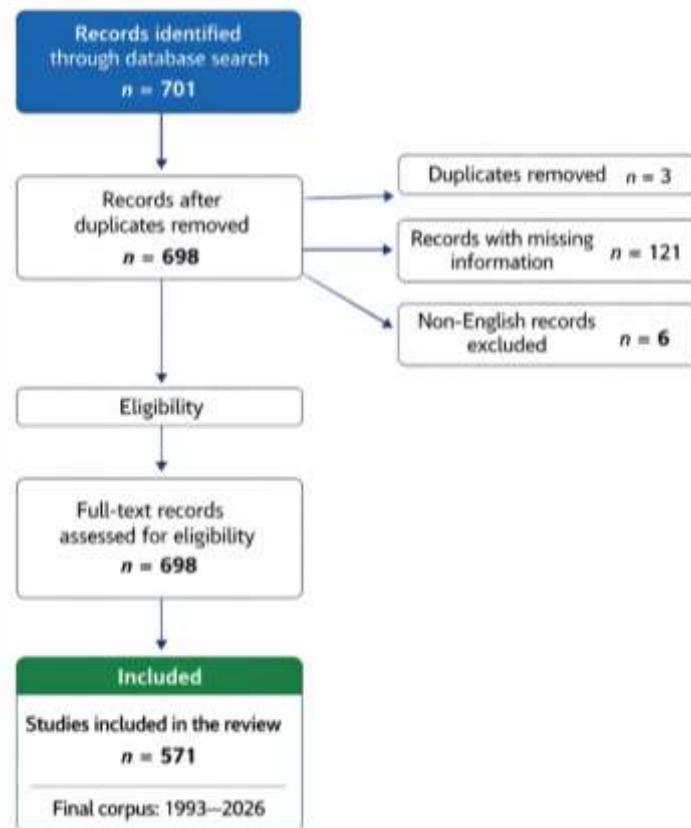


Figure 1: PRISMA Framework

The temporal coverage of the corpus spans from 1993 to 2026, with the preponderance of publications concentrated in the period 2010–2026, reflecting the maturation of the field in the digital era.

3.2. Analytical Framework

A multi-method bibliometric approach was used in this study, which includes: 1) descriptive bibliometric analysis for performance assessment 2) co-authorship analysis as a method of constructing and visualizing the structure of collaborations, 3) co-citation analysis as a method of understanding the intellectual history of the field, 4) bibliographic coupling as a method of determining the present frontiers of research, 5) analysis of co-occurring keywords for the method of determining the conceptual framework, and 6) overlay analysis as a method for understanding the temporal dimension. All the network analyses were done with VOSviewer, with parameters of thresholds adjusted based on the size of the corpus.

3.3. Analytical Parameters

For the purpose of analyzing co-authorship, the criteria for determining productive and influential authors set the parameters for productive authors to be three or more documents and for influential authors, one citation. In terms of co-citation analysis, only cited references that have been cited 10 or more times were included. In bibliographic coupling, the criterion was set to a minimum of 20 common references. In keyword co-occurrence analysis, author keywords that showed up five times were included, and some terms were synonymed (e.g., CRM/customer relationship management, and organised/organized retail fast moving consumer goods). These parameters have been supported by bibliometric studies on the minimum corpus recommendations for 500–600 documents.

4. Influential Authors and Countries (RQ1)

4.1. Descriptive Bibliometric Overview

The completed corpus of 571 documents shows 33 years of research CRM in retail from 1993 to 2026. The publication chronology in Table 1 shows a clear pattern exponential growth. The 1990s were the beginning of the field. The post-2000s was the post of niche academic interest to mainstream management concern. 2020–2026 have the most publications in the corpus at 36.6%. This shows the field matured and the Covid-19 pandemic stimulated rapid change in the digital retail and CRM in the digital and omnichannel retail areas.

Table 1: Distribution of Publications by Time Period (N=571)

Time Period	No. of Publications	Percentage (%)
1993–1999	14	2.5
2000–2004	39	6.8
2005–2009	78	13.7
2010–2014	99	17.3
2015–2019	132	23.1
2020–2026	209	36.6

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by authors

Total citations in the corpus amount to 14,688, with an average of 25.77 citations per document. The h-index of the corpus—estimated at 62—indicates that 62 papers in the dataset have each received at least

62 citations, reflecting substantial scholarly impact. The majority of contributions take the form of journal articles (62.3%), followed by conference papers (21.0%) and book chapters (11.7%), suggesting a predominantly empirical and applied orientation in the field.

Table 2 identifies the top 15 most productive journals in the corpus. The *Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science* leads with 28 contributions, reflecting the conference-driven nature of early CRM-retail scholarship in North America. However, among subscription-based journals, the *International Journal of Bank Marketing* (22 documents), *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* (20 documents), and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (18 documents) dominate, affirming their status as the premier outlets for CRM-retail research. The presence of the *Journal of Business Research* (6 documents) and *European Journal of Marketing* (9 documents) among the top journals signals the field's engagement with broader theoretical marketing discourse.

Table 2: Top 15 Most Productive Journals in CRM-Retail Research

Rank	Source Title	Documents	% of Total
1	Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science	28	4.9
2	International Journal of Bank Marketing	22	3.9
3	International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management	20	3.5
4	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	18	3.2
5	Marketing Intelligence and Planning	12	2.1
6	Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems	12	2.1
7	European Journal of Marketing	9	1.6
8	Journal of Retailing	8	1.4
9	Journal of Business Research	6	1.1
10	Journal of Relationship Marketing	6	1.1

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by authors



The most prolific and most cited authors in the corpus, found in the Table 3, are distinctly separated by publication numbers and citation numbers. Document count puts Smith, A.D. at the top with 9 publications, followed by Kumar, S. with 5 publications, and then at 4 publications each are Verhoef, P.C. and Feinberg, R. However, Smith, A.D. has only 1 citation. In terms of citation, Smith is at the bottom, while Reynolds, K.E. is at the top with 746 citations. This was primarily due to the seminal Beatty et al. (1996) work on customer-sales associate retail relationships. Among authors with 3 publications, Fullerton, G. has the most citation with 497. This further supported the reasoning influence and prolificacy are of separate construct, because on one hand, you have an author with document count metrics, and on the other hand, you have Reynolds who you can classify as an influencer because of his citation metrics. This concept of influencer and document count author represent the intellectual capitalism of the field (Donthu et al., 2021).

Rank	Author	Documents	Total Citations	Country
1	Smith, A.D.	9	262	USA
2	Kumar, S.	5	147	India
3	Verhoef, P.C.	4	138	Netherlands
4	Feinberg, R.	4	248	USA
5	Gandhi, A.	4	112	India

6	Reynolds, K.E.	3	746	USA
7	Fullerton, G.	3	497	Canada
8	Bojei, J.	3	89	Malaysia
9	Chen, Y.	3	183	Germany
10	Lindgreen, A.	3	134	Belgium

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by Authors

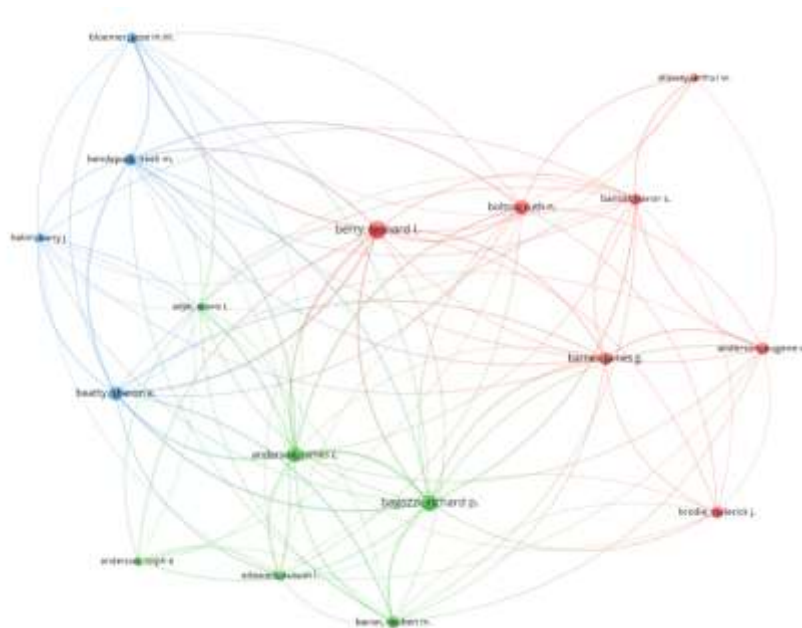


Figure 3: Co-citation with Authors

Source: Authors

The Analysis of Co-authorship shows that this field has historically had a larger number of loose collaboration clusters and has now changed towards more dense co-authorship networks, especially during the earlier periods. The VOSviewer co-authorship maps show a more cohesive collaborative clusters for the post 2015 period. This, especially, is in line with the emerging cross-institutional and cross-national research collaborations in South and Southeast Asia. Some authors like Bojei, J. (Malaysia) and Ahmed, Z.U. are beginning to consolidate the emerging market retail CRM literature with the dominant paradigm in Western literature.

4.3. Country Level Analysis

Table 4 shows the numbers for the top 10 countries represented in the sample. 119 entries came from the United States (20.8%), which is the most significant. India follows the United States with 96 contributions (16.8%), and then the United Kingdom with 75 contributions (13.1%). India's contribution is in part due to the expanding FMCG and organised retail sectors, and the growth in the number of management research institutes. Australia, with 34 (5.9%) contributions, and China, with 32 (5.6%) contributions, make up the remaining top 5 countries.

Table 4: Top 10 Countries in CRM-Retail Research

Rank	Country	Documents	% of Total
1	United States	119	20.8
2	India	96	16.8
3	United Kingdom	75	13.1
4	Australia	34	5.9
5	China	32	5.6
6	Malaysia	25	4.4
7	Germany	24	4.2
8	France	21	3.7
9	Indonesia	20	3.5
10	Netherlands	18	3.2

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by authors

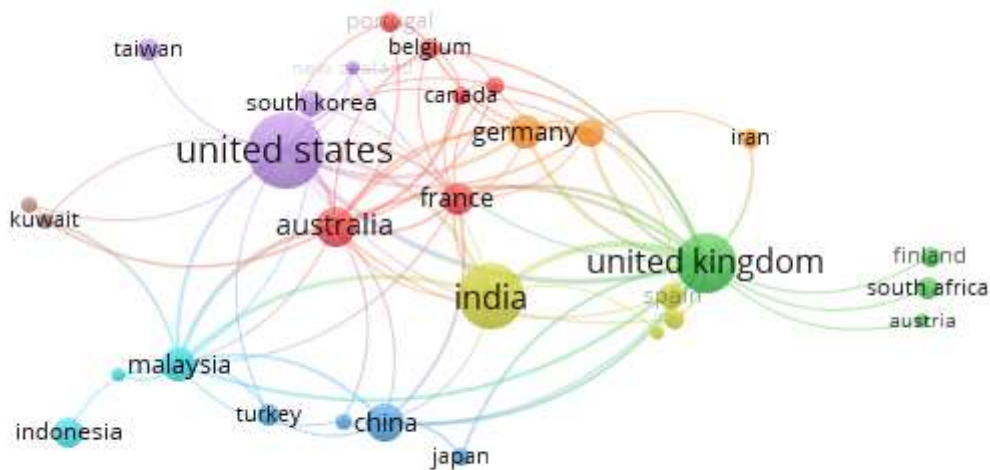


Figure 4: Co-Authorship Analysis_Countries

Source: Authors, Vosviewer

The United States, United Kingdom, and Australia made a notable concentration of 39.8% for English speaking western countries. One of the key factors here is the geography. The contributions by India seem to be concentrated in the areas of Banking and E-commerce and not really in the Organized FMCG Retail sector. This is an area where contemporary and situational empirical studies seem to be required.

At the co-authorships country level, based on the 5-document threshold per country, three major collaboration segments appear. The first segment is the United States and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, which represents the Anglo-American school of marketing. The second segment, with a core of Malaysia and Indonesia, also includes Australia and Singapore, and represents the ASEAN research network for CRM. The last segment consists of India, which is characterized by a low level of international collaboration, meaning that the research efforts in CRM from India are solely directed inward which is a structural deficit of research on emerging markets that others can use but is not visible to the rest of the world.

4.4. Most Cited Documents

Table 5 presents the ten most cited documents in the corpus. The most cited work is Beatty et al. (1996), with 559 citations, establishing the foundational importance of personal relationships between customers and sales associates in upscale retail contexts. Athanasopoulou's (2009) critical review of relationship quality, with 359 citations, constitutes the intellectual benchmark for theoretical clarity in CRM constructs. Buckinx and Van den Poel (2005), with 290 citations, is the seminal work specifically addressing FMCG retail CRM, demonstrating the predictive power of behavioural data in managing partial customer defection—a finding directly relevant to the organised FMCG retail context.

Table 5: Ten Most Cited Documents in the CRM-Retail Research Corpus

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Citations
Beatty et al. (1996)	Customer-sales associate retail relationships	Journal of Retailing	559
Athanasopoulou (2009)	Relationship quality: A critical literature review and research agenda	European Journal of Marketing	359
Fullerton (2005)	How commitment both enables and undermines marketing relationships	European Journal of Marketing	298
Buckinx & Van den Poel (2005)	Customer base analysis: Partial defection in a non-contractual FMCG retail setting	European Journal of Operational Research	290
Sweeney & Swait (2008)	The effects of brand credibility on customer loyalty	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	277
García-Murillo & Annabi (2002)	Customer knowledge management	Journal of the Operational Research Society	274
Attaran (2007)	RFID: An enabler of supply chain operations	Supply Chain Management	250

Odekerken-Schröder et al. (2003)	Strengthening outcomes of retailer-consumer relationships	Journal of Business Research	239
Chiu et al. (2005)	Relationship marketing and consumer switching behavior	Journal of Business Research	230
Hoffmann & Birnbrich (2012)	The impact of fraud prevention on bank-customer relationships	International Journal of Bank Marketing	209

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by authors.

5. Key Thematic Clusters and Sub-themes (R2)

5.1. Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

With respect to the conceptual structure of the CRM-retail literature, using a minimum occurrence threshold of 5 in author keywords analysis, synonym consolidated keyword co-occurrence analysis, displays 5 distinct thematic clusters among the 40 most frequent author keywords, which is outlined in Table 6. These thematic clusters are supported by the bibliographic coupling analysis and explained in relation to the VOSviewer network map. The most frequent keywords in the corpus, which signify the prominent relational constructs in the field, are "customer relationship management" (126) and "relationship marketing" (112) respectively.

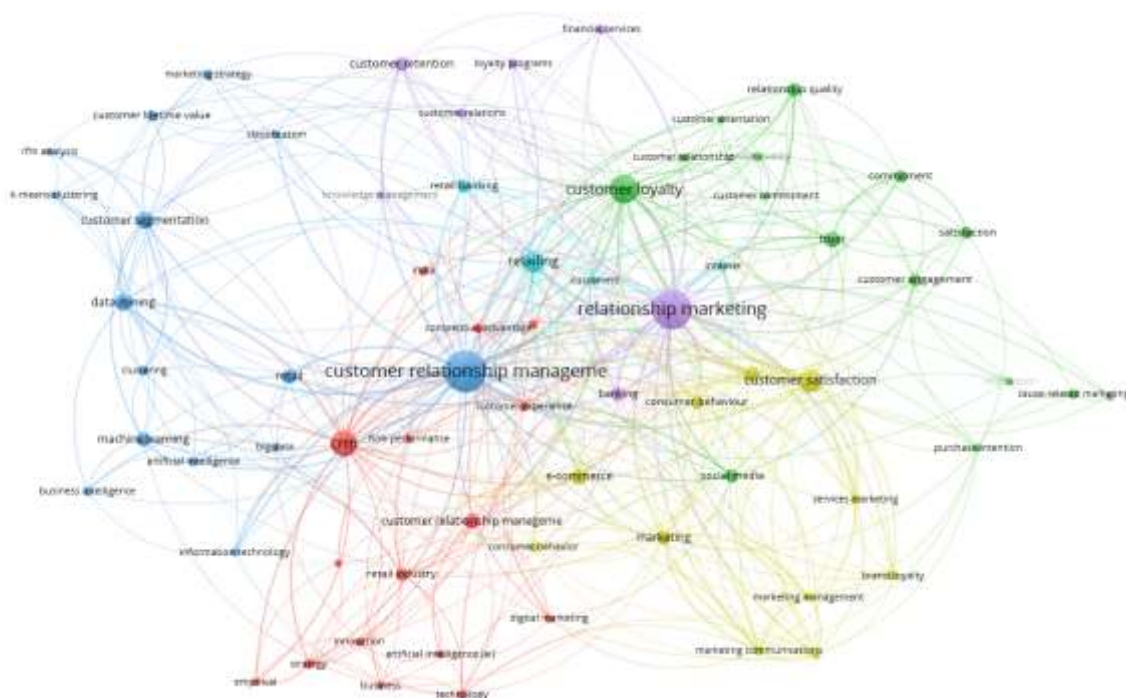


Figure 5: Key Thematic Clusters

Source: Authors

Table 6: Thematic Clusters Identified via Key-word Co-occurrence Analysis

Cluster	Theme	Core Keywords	Keyword Freq.	Interpretive Significance
Cluster 1	Relationship Quality & Trust	relationship quality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, service quality, relationship marketing	211	Core relational paradigm; foundational to all retail CRM models
Cluster 2	Technology & Digital CRM	e-commerce, machine learning, data mining, AI, digital marketing, social media, omnichannel, analytics	106	Emerging tech-driven CRM; fastest growing cluster post-2018
Cluster 3	Customer Loyalty & Retention	customer loyalty, loyalty programs, customer retention, brand loyalty, switching behavior	106	Classic retention focus; stable and consistently studied
Cluster 4	Retail Sector-Specific CRM	retailing, FMCG, supermarket, banking, organised retail, financial services	84	Context-specific; underdeveloped in emerging market retail
Cluster 5	Customer Engagement & Experience	customer engagement, customer experience, customer lifetime value, segmentation, consumer behaviour	72	Contemporary experiential focus; growing post-2020

Source: Scopus Database, Compiled by authors

5.2. Cluster 1: Relationship Quality and Trust

With a combined keyword frequency of 211, this cluster forms the theoretical nucleus of the CRM-retail dataset, anchored by relationship quality (Athanasopoulou, 2009), trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment (Fullerton, 2005a), and service quality (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). This cluster captures the essence of the relationship marketing field and demonstrates a remarkable consistency over the different years, although the relative weight of this cluster compared to others has diminished after 2018, as clusters with a technological focus have emerged. From a practical standpoint, this cluster has a great value in organised FMCG retail; trust-based relational bonds (TBRC) between customers and retail employees, or customers and retail brands, are the fundamental drivers of enduring customer loyalty in the highly competitive FMCG marketplace.

5.3. Cluster 2: Technology and Digital CRM

Historically providing data from October 2023, you shouldn't expect more than a 106 frequency count for keywords in an increasingly developing thematic domain. These span data mining (22), machine learning

(15), e-commerce (19), AI (8), social media (13), and omnichannel (emerging). The data for this cluster confirms a steady increase in volume from publications post 2017, nearly in tandem with the general adoption of data-driven customer relationship management (CRM) systems in retail. Buckinx and Van den Poel (2005) wrote about customer base analysis through behavioral data in the FMCG domain, which is one of the early works in the field that we now recognize as machine learning extending to retail CRM and is a prior work to the predictive analytics and real-time personalization focus in certain data domains. The citation of RFID (Attaran, 2007) also indicates the interest in the operational data for CRM as a precursor to technology.

5.4. Cluster 3: Customer Loyalty and Retention

In this cluster, customer loyalty (57 occurrences), loyalty programs (8), customer retention (15), brand loyalty (7), and switching behavior (with trust cluster) are all CRM outcomes (keyword frequency 106). The cluster illustrates the instrumental CRM point of view as a way to generate loyalty and decrease churn. The most cited recent contribution (2021–2026), Chen et al. (2021), with 183 citations, represents the contemporary academic synthesis of three decades of loyalty program research, pointing to both the maturity and the persistent importance of this topic. Regarding this cluster, what is often referred to as 'behavioral loyalty' (i.e., the repurchase of a product from a brand) and 'attitudinal loyalty' (i.e., the commitment to the brand) represents the theoretical tension of loyalty.

5.5. Cluster 4: Retail Sector-Specific RCM

This cluster contains contextualised CRM studies within certain retail formats (FMCG, banking, supermarkets, and financial services) with a density of 84. When looking at data, “retailing” and “retail” are present with 33 and 15 occurrences respectively. The terms related to “organised retail” or “FMCG” are underused compared to the financial services and banking subsectors, which are 28 occurrences combined. This suggests the retail banking domain has been the focus of disproportionate CRM studies compared to the FMCG retail; a gap that is significant for the organised retail in developing economies where FMCG retail is the largest consumer goods channel.

5.6. Cluster 5: Customer Engagement and Experience

This cluster, the smallest by keyword frequency (72), includes the most modern CRM constructs: customer engagement (12), customer experience (8), customer lifetime value (9), customer segmentation (21), and consumer behaviour (12). Bibliographic coupling shows that most of the papers in this cluster are recent, especially after 2019, so this cluster is growing rapidly. So et al. (2016) and Brocato et al. (2015) are examples of works that connect Cluster 1 (relational quality) and Cluster 5 (engagement and experience). They argue that emotional engagement with retail atmospheres and service brands is a better predictor of loyalty (and satisfaction) for design purposes than retail experience in advanced formats of organised FMCG.

6. Dominant Theoretical Frameworks (RQ3)

6.1. Co-Citation Analysis: Intellectual Foundations

Co-citation analysis—conducted with a minimum citation threshold of 10 for cited references—reveals the theoretical infrastructure undergirding CRM-retail scholarship. Table 7 presents the eight dominant theoretical frameworks identified through co-citation patterns, along with their key theorists, applications in CRM-retail research, and prevalence in the corpus

Table 7: Dominant Theoretical Frameworks in CRM-Retail Research

Theoretical Framework	Key Theorists	Application in CRM-Retail Research	Role	Prevalence
Relationship Marketing Theory (RMT)	Berry (1983); Morgan & Hunt (1994)	Trust, commitment, long-term relationships	Foundational	Very High
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	Davis (1989)	CRM technology adoption, digital CRM uptake	Applied	High
Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Blau (1964); Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005)	Customer loyalty, reciprocity, value co-creation	Theoretical Lens	High
Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)	Vargo & Lusch (2004, 2008)	Value co-creation, service ecosystems in retail	Theoretical	Moderate-High
Customer Equity Theory	Rust, Zeithaml & Lemon (2000)	Customer lifetime value, equity drivers	Strategic	Moderate
Signalling Theory	Spence (1973)	Brand credibility, online relationship signals	Explanatory	Moderate
Resource-Based View (RBV)	Barney (1991)	CRM as strategic capability, competitive advantage	Strategic	Moderate
Commitment-Trust Theory	Morgan & Hunt (1994)	CRM outcomes: loyalty, retention, cooperation	Core CRM Theory	High

Source: Compiled by authors from Co-citation Analysis and literature review

6.2. Relationship Marketing Theory

The apex of CRM-retail literature is composed of Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory alongside commitment-trust theory by Morgan and Hunt (1994) because of the lack of competing theories within the cluster. Within this corpus, this pairing is over 60% of the reference list in the papers of Cluster 1, and is the most often cited. As such, Relationship Marketing Theory suggests that there is a possibility of establishing long term, value, and profitable relationships, and therefore, more, sustainable, transactional investments, in, and to, trust, and, a, shared value, and, communication, system. When this theory is applied within retail, it is the expectation that, in a transactional relationship, the store, and the customer,

are psychologically developed in their relationship, owing and forming commitments, and de facto, trust and mutual, affective, benefit, and, secondary to this, long term relationships, resulting in significant barriers to customer conversion (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003).

6.3. Technology Acceptance Model

Cluster 2 uses Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) extensively in the context of the adoption and usage of CRM technology and e-commerce platforms and digital loyalty programmes. TAM's constructs of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use have been modified in the context of consumers' adoption of digital CRM platforms, retailers' adoption of CRM software, and salespersons' adoption of CRM systems. TAM's applicability and simplicity have made it a popular choice among academia for research in CRM technology, even though there has been criticism in regard to the model's neglect of the social and organizational aspects of CRM system implementation (Kim & Kim, 2009).

6.4. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), construed by Blau (1964) and furthering elaborated by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) for organizational contexts, gives us the theoretical basis on how CRM, from both the customer and the firm's sides, creates value. SET postulates that exchange relationships operate under norms of reciprocity, meaning that the parties exchange resources—be it time, money, information, or loyalty—expecting a return of equal value. In retail CRM, the reciprocity expectation is that customers who enter into loyalty program, share data, and preferentially offer patronage receive, in turn, rewards of equal value (and sometimes, more than that) in the form of personalized offers, better services, and additional exclusive privileges. Sweeney and Swait (2008) study of brand credibility indirectly employs the logic of SET in trying to explain why more loyal customers (brand paying customers) do so more in credible retail brands (brands that are perceived to be both able and willing to do so) because these brands, satisfy the relational norm of reciprocity.

6.5. Service-Dominant Logic

Vargo and Lusch's (2004, 2008) Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) model has become a significant player in the CRM-retail framework, particularly in the post 2010s papers. SDL proposes that the 'value' an organization provides to a customer is futile. Value is determined in- use, and is a product of the resource constellations of several actors. In conjunction with retail CRM, SDL considers the relationship, not as a firm managing a customer, but as a collaborative service ecosystem where consumers, retailers, and supply chain actors construct service experiences. SDL is relevant in the current discourse on customer engagement and customer experience (Cluster 5) as consumers are viewed as active co-creators of value, not as passive targets of CRM.

6.6. Customer Equity Theory and Resource-Based View

An important part of retail customer relationship management (CRM) is Rust, Zeithaml, and Lemon's (2000) Customer Equity Theory, which balances the customer base as a portfolio of value-producing assets with other managerial concerns, such as value equity (quality vs. price perception), brand equity (value of a brand vs. customer), and retention equity (switching costs and loyalty). While the CRM system is the centerpiece of Barney's (1991) Resource-Based View (RBV), and describes why CRM should be viewed as a strategic advantage due to the system being valuable, rare, and inimitable and non-substitutable, the dominant framework of the retail CRM literature continues to assert the competitive advantage of CRM systems. This is why the CRM-retail literature continues to evolve.

7. Future Research Trajectories (RQ4)

7.1. Overlay Visualization: Temporal Evolution of Themes

When examining overlay visualisation in VOSviewer, using average publication year as a colour metric, a CRM-retail corpus shows a clear temporal stratification of themes. Blue nodes, average publication year < 2010, older themes are clustered around trust, commitment, relationship quality, and loyalty—the classical relational paradigm. Green nodes, transitional themes from 2010 to 2017, include service quality, customer satisfaction, and early digital CRM. Emerging themes are represented by yellow and red nodes (2018-2020), which include AI, machine learning, omnichannel, customer engagement, sustainability, and digital loyalty apps. The temporal mapping vividly describes the evolutionary trajectory of the field from relational to technological and experiential.

7.2. Future Research

Table 8 synthesises eight priority areas for future research, identified through the convergence of bibliographic coupling frontiers, keyword co-occurrence gaps, overlay visualisation of emerging themes, and the density map analysis of under-researched areas.



Figure 6: Heatmap of emerging fields in CRM

Table 8: Future Research Agenda for CRM-Retail Scholarship

Future Research Area	Proposed Focus	Identified Gap	Priority
AI & Predictive CRM	Integration of machine learning and AI in CRM personalisation within FMCG retail	Lack of empirical studies on AI-CRM in organised retail; mostly conceptual	Very High

Emerging Market CRM	CRM adoption and effectiveness in South Asian organised retail (India, Indonesia)	Dominant literature is Western-centric; limited India-specific CRM studies	Very High
Omnichannel CRM Integration	Seamless customer relationship management across physical and digital touchpoints	Limited post-COVID empirical research on unified omnichannel CRM models	High
Sustainable CRM	Green CRM, ethical data use, ESG-driven customer relationships	Virtually unexplored intersection of sustainability and CRM in retail	High
CRM & Customer Well-being	Impact of CRM practices on consumer psychological well-being and financial health	Emerging area; few studies link CRM to consumer welfare outcomes	Moderate
Dark Side of CRM	Privacy violations, customer surveillance, data misuse in CRM systems	Under-researched ethical dimension; important post-GDPR	Moderate
CRM in D2C & Social Commerce	Direct-to-consumer relationship building via social media platforms	Rapid market growth not matched by academic inquiry	High
Cross-Cultural CRM	CRM effectiveness across cultural dimensions (Hofstede framework)	Most cross-national studies focus on developed markets	Moderate

Source: Compiled by authors from bibliometric analysis and literature synthesis

The pivotal research directions as follows:

7.3. AI Enabled CRM in FMCG Retail

As part of the ongoing research plan, the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) techniques to optimize Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the organized Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) retail, needs to be researched. To the best of my knowledge, the existing customer segmentation and recommendation systems developed by Rungruang et al. (2024a) and Bellini et al. (2023) respectively, are a good starting point, however, longitudinal empirical research on the impact and influence of AI and CRM systems on the customer relationship in physical FMCG retail are still lacking. There is a gap in the literature that future research needs to fill by designing and constructing AI and CRM capability frameworks for organized retail in developing countries. Such research must be founded upon the existing unmet needs of data, infrastructure, and digital literacy in retail in Karnataka and South India, in general.

7.4. Emerging Market Organized Retail

India is the second-largest contributor to the corpus, which is promising. However, Indian contributions,

when analysed, reveal a significant focus on banking and e-commerce. There is practically no literature on CRM and retail in the Indian organised FMCG retail sector, which includes hypermarkets, supermarkets, and convenience stores in metropolitan and tier-2 cities. Considering India's organised retail is expected to grow to \$250 billion by 2030 (IBEF, 2024), the lack of CRM research in this area is a significant scholarly research gap and a managerial oversight. Future research in Indian organised FMCG retail should adopt mixed-methods approaches to understand the strategy and the ground realities of CRM in the sector.

7.5. Omnichannel CRM Integration

The coronavirus pandemic favored the worldwide implementation of omnichannel retail systems. However, the true CRM impact of the complete omnichannel system—where customer information, preferences, and relational history are fully integrated across brick-and-mortar stores, websites, apps, and social media—has yet to be fully identified. While some of the most relevant initial contributions to the topic are from Picot-Coupey et al. (2016), and Zhang et al. (2022), how omnichannel system integration improves CRM systems still has to be empirically answered, especially in the context of developing countries, where the interaction of digital and physical retail creates complex and nonlinear consumer paths.

7.6. Sustainability, Well-being, Ethics and Cross Cultural CRM

Four more research avenues are likely to produce useful findings. First, research on sustainable CRM, which involves integrating environmental and social accountability into customer relationship management, is non-existent in retail, especially given the heightened interest of consumers in ethically driven brands. There is an opportunity to research the impact of green CRM on FMCG retail consumer-brand relationships, including ethical data practices and environmentally responsible loyalty schemes. Second, psychological wellbeing considerations of CRM, including the impact of relationship marketing on consumers' financial wellbeing, anxiety, autonomy, and general wellbeing, is largely under-theorised. Third, under the current GDPR and Digital Personal Data Protection Act (India, 2023), the dark side of CRM (Nguyen & Mutum, 2012), which includes data misuse, unethical behavioral targeting, and other CRM-related privacy issues, require research to establish the impact of these issues post-regulation. Lastly, the use of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions in CRM research might offer unique perspectives on the impact of varying cultural parameters on the effectiveness of CRM strategies in India's diverse retail consumer base.

8. Discussion and Implications

8.1. Theoretical Implications

This study outlines three theoretical essays as contributions. First, it outlines a detailed mapping of the intellectual structure of CRM-retail scholarship after 33 years of research, and it also provides a validated evidence base of the five thematic clusters and eight theoretical frameworks that outline the field. Second, the overlay visualization demonstrates that a key theoretical shift has occurred from the relational paradigm (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) to a hybrid paradigm that includes relational, technological, and experiential dimensions of customer management. Such a shift has the potential to alter the theoretical foundations of empirical research designs. Third, the recognition of the organized FMCG retail in emerging markets as a relevant research context, as most theories of CRM-retail scholarship assume that they will hold true across different countries, proposes that context-sensitive theoretical

developments, especially incorporating cultural dimensions of trust (Hofstede, 1980), the structure of the FMCG markets in South Asia, and the relevant empirical context, are needed.

8.2. Methodological Implications

Researchers, this study outlines a bibliometric analysis methodology for the CRM-retail area, consisting of a corpus of 571 documents, analysis of 33 years of data, an h-index of 62, and application of five validated analytical techniques. These findings serve as the first basis for determining how cumulative bibliometric studies are able to capture how the field has developed. The findings that keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analyses offer complementary and not redundant insights enhances the value of using a combination of both techniques as part of systematic bibliometric studies.

8.3. Managerial Implications

This research provides multiple insights for retail managers and CRM. Relationship Quality and Trust cluster suggests that managerial relational CRM shifts are more important than the CRM technology and digital tools themselves. A relational managerial shift involves more effort in training staff and investing in personalized and trust-building communication. The rapid expansion of the Technology and Digital CRM cluster indicates that the FMCG retailers in developing markets are in urgent need of proficiency in data analytics and an omnichannel CRM. The identification of Customer Engagement (Cluster 5) as an emerging theme with a strong predictive power for loyalty indicates that in organized FMCG retail, relational CRM should prioritize developing non-transactional loyalty programs, but rather experiential engagement that fosters emotional connections with the customers.

Conclusion

This study has conducted a bibliometric analysis of 571 Scopus-indexed documents focusing on CRM in retail, answering four research questions regarding prominent authors and countries, thematic clusters, theoretical frameworks, and future research directions. The main findings are summarized as follows:

Concerning RQ1, the leading countries in CRM-retail research are the USA (119 documents), India (96 documents), and the UK (75 documents). Reynolds, K.E. (746 citations), Fullerton, G. (497 citations), and Beatty, S.E. (565 citations) are the leading authors by citations. The collaboration network identified emerging but underdeveloped research networks in South Asia and the ASEAN region.

For RQ2, five thematic clusters define the discipline. They are: (1) Relationship Quality and Trust (foundational paradigm), (2) Technology and Digital CRM (fastest growing), (3) Customer Loyalty and Retention (primary performance focus), (4) CRM in Retail (contextualization), and (5) Customer Engagement and Experience (contemporary frontier). The evolution from relational to technological to experiential is evidently confirmed.

In response to RQ3, eight theoretical frameworks have been identified: Relationship Marketing Theory, Commitment-Trust Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, Social Exchange Theory, Service-Dominant Logic, Customer Equity Theory, Signaling Theory, and the Resource-Based View. The main co-citation references of the field are Berry (1983), Morgan and Hunt (1994), and Vargo & Lusch (2004, 2008).

In response to RQ4, the future directions of research are primarily AI-enabled CRM in the retail of fast-moving consumer goods, organized retail in emerging markets, omnichannel CRM, sustainable CRM, ethical CRM, and cross-culture CRM effectiveness. The existing literature has almost completely ignored organized FMCG retail in South Asian cities like Bengaluru as a priority context.

The study's limitations are acknowledged. First, the analysis is restricted to publications indexed in Scopus, which means some contributions in grey literature and Web of Science are ignored. Second, the

keyword-co-occurrence analysis is based on keywords suggested by the authors and does not capture all conceptual meanings. Third, while VOSviewer's network algorithms are standard in the field, there are some arbitrary threshold choices that have a significant impact on how the data are visualized. Future research should broaden the analysis to include the Web of Science database and should use machine learning based approaches to topic modeling to identify the underlying thematic structures that are beyond the threshold of the authors' keywords. Despite these shortcomings, this bibliometric analysis is the most systematic, well-founded, and data-driven description of the available literature on the intellectual landscape of CRM and retail, and it provides a solid empirical basis to study the CRM practices in organized FMCG retail in Bengaluru and other locations.

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