



The relationship between service innovation and performance: a bibliometric analysis and research agenda proposal

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Abstract

Interest in the theme of service innovation has a direct impact on the increase of studies on the subject in organizational research, especially in the sense of understanding the performance of innovations and how they contribute to better firm performance. In this context, the main purpose of this article is to present the scenario of studies that address the concepts of innovation in services and performance in conjunction with organizational research. For this, a bibliometric study was carried out with journals of administration with impact factors greater than or equal to 0.8. The analysis of 61 publications showed that the articles – in most part – were empirical, cross-sectional, and quantitative, with data collection source based on questionnaires and data analysis with inferential statistics. The *Service Industries Journal* and the *Journal of Business Research* published the most literature on the subject, and three universities in Taiwan had the highest number of articles published by authors linked to them. The studies mainly focus on clusters, the theme of strategy, and issues such as market orientation, performance, management, and product development. Having analyzed the references, the diversity found allows for the affirmation that there is no consolidated theoretical framework being used by the articles. Future research agendas are proposed, highlighting the need for investigations that consider the customer in the relationship between service innovation and performance, as well as longitudinal and mixed studies that triangulate data collection sources.

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Introduction

For many years, studies on innovation were concentrated on the manufacturing industry and the process of technological appropriation by these industries (Drejer, 2004). However, this perspective has begun to change – especially in recent decades – with the development and expansion of services, which now have a strong economic and social impact, making it a sector with great potential to be exploited in organizational research (Kon, 2004).

Along with the great strategic importance assumed by the theme of innovation in services, there has been an increased

interest in research that seeks to understand the relationship between investments in innovation and performance of these innovations. Such interest converges with the fact that the economic order in which organizations operate entails a significant remodeling of competition, which leverages and influences the reciprocal discovery and exploitation of new opportunities, the ability to create innovative value propositions (and bring them to success), and the capability to mobilize and manage global resources (Hagen, Denicolai, & Zucchella, 2014), issues that all affect the performance of organizations.

In this context, we note that service innovation and performance are concepts that have the potential to be worked and exploited jointly, in order to better understand the advances that have occurred in services and the impacts of these processes in an increasingly competitive and dynamic economic context, which has numerous growth opportunities. Based on this assumption, this article examines academic research of administration in order to study the relationship between service innovation and performance. To accomplish this, we analyzed

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61 articles published in administration journals with impact factors greater than or equal to 0.8. We opted for the use of bibliometrics, which is a reliable way to handle state-of-the-art literature, besides being a tool for scientific and technological assessment (Andrighi, Hoffmann, & Andrade, 2011).

In general, the main results indicate that the analyzed articles focus on the sub-themes of strategy, issues of market orientation, performance management, and product development. It was also noted that there is no consolidated theoretical body being referenced, given the great diversity of authors being cited in the works. In regards to future research agendas, there is a need for studies with a greater focus on the customer and longitudinal studies that use mixed methods and triangulate data collection sources. The intention of this article, therefore, is to provide a general view, bibliographic sources, and other possibilities that deepen the relationship between service innovation and performance for those researchers who have an interest in the subject, as well as to give an overview of how this relationship is being studied in administration research.

This paper is organized into five parts, including this introduction. The theoretical framework presents discussion on the literature, which analyzes service innovation in a synthesized manner. The third section presents the methodology used while the fourth section presents the results of this analysis, where the main findings are verified and future study proposals of the examined works are exposed. Finally, the fifth section presents final remarks.

Theoretical framework

Innovation in services has received great attention in organizational studies due to its impact on society, especially with regard to the direct influence on the creation of jobs and social and economic development (Faiz, Gallouj, & Sanson, 2007). Services are activities that have very particular characteristics that distinguish them from goods produced in the manufacturing industry, since the products generated are not perfectly formatted and encoded, each transaction and result is unique, there is simultaneity between supply and consumption, they do not have a well-defined supply and demand, and have a variety of qualitative aspects involved in their production (Kon, 2004; Sundbo & Gallouj, 1998). Considering the nature of services and the importance of innovation processes that take place in this sector, it is possible to understand why production in the area has been dedicated to bringing theoretical and empirical perspectives to the theme.

The literature on innovative services is divided into three main theoretical approaches (Gallouj & Savona, 2009; Howells, 2010): (a) technologist – the main driving force of service innovation comes from environments external to the organization, with service innovation being seen as a consequence of technological diffusion in the service industry; (b) based on services – the purpose is to distinguish innovation in services, focusing on the peculiarities of a service and its innovation process (differentiating them from manufacturing), and checking how these peculiarities may lead to new conceptualizations of the innovation process in services; (c) the integrative approach – which

is based on the existence of similarities between manufacturing and services, a form that recognizes a set of interrelated activities, offering a unique analysis model that is able to propose a broader view of innovation, which includes its tangible/intangible and technological/non-technological aspects.

Barras (1986) was one of the first researchers who tried to explain the dynamics of service innovation through the reverse product cycle model. By conducting case studies in banking, insurance, and accounting sectors, the author found that, from the diffusion of new technologies – especially of information technology (IT) – services follow an innovation trajectory in an opposite manner to the product life cycle, characterized by successive phases of incremental innovation, radical innovation, and product innovation. Despite the importance of the study by Barras (1986) – considering that it was one of the theories that paved the way for explaining the process of innovation in services – the author's model received criticism since it emphasized the dissemination of technological innovations more than the process of service innovation, a technical view that did not consider the non-technological forms of service innovation (Gallouj, 1997).

In this sense, the plethora research developed that follows the trend of explaining innovations through a fundamentally technical perspective is not enough to understand service innovations. In search of circumventing this bias, the integrative approach highlights innovation and can go beyond technological aspects, with a single analysis model that considers goods and services within the same analytical perspective (Gallouj & Sanson, 2007).

After understanding the context in which service innovation emerged – as well as the research that has been developed for it – it is possible to appreciate the potential that the subject has in the realization of research that involves numerous organizations, whether public or private. In this context, one of the concepts that has taken prominence in studies that address the theme of innovation in services is performance. According to Prajogo (2006), the need to find sources of competitive advantage in the service sector – especially when understanding innovation as a source of competitive advantage (and its implications for performance) – has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers.

The concept of performance in relation to the service innovation construct can be studied from various perspectives. With more micro aspects, some research has sought to understand service innovation performance implemented in organizations (Chong & Zhou, 2014; Hsueh, Lin, & Li, 2010; Kang & Kang, 2014; Kirner, Kinkel, & Jaeger, 2009). In a more macro view, other studies have focused on the impact of service innovation on firm performance as a whole (Lin, 2013; McDermott & Prajogo, 2012; Melton & Hartline, 2013; Ordanini & Rubera, 2010). In the latter perspective, innovation is seen as a powerful explanatory factor of the performance differences between firms (Fagerberg, 2005).

Several reasons may explain the increased interest in research seeking to address the interfaces between service innovation and performance. Economic growth in the service sector and its importance in societal development has allowed service innovation to be seen as a new factor for the advancement of the economy (Barcet, 2010; Gallouj, 2007). In this sense, the

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