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Towards Sustainable Organizations Through Purpose-driven and Customer-centric Strategies

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Abstract. This study explores how organizations can achieve sustainability through customer-centric and corporate purpose strategies. Using a systematic literature review and qualitative analysis of 101 selected documents from an initial 559, the study identifies key links between customer-centricity, corporate purpose, and sustainability outcomes. Findings show these strategies influence customer preferences, corporate culture, values, and organizational performance. The study emphasizes integrating sustainable practices into corporate strategies and aligning organizational values with customer expectations. Strengthening relationships with customers, employees, and stakeholders is essential to enhance long-term sustainability and achieve organizational resilience.

Keywords: Corporate purpose, Customer-centricity, Literature review, Sustainable organizations, Corporate social responsibility

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the integration of customer-centricity and corporate purpose as a strategic foundation for achieving organizational sustainability in the modern business landscape. The growing global concern for environmental preservation and social welfare has made sustainability not only a moral responsibility but also a key determinant of long-term organizational survival (Brundtland, 1987; Tseng, 2017). Sustainable organizations must balance economic, social, and environmental dimensions to create enduring value for stakeholders (Mayer, 2020). To remain relevant, companies are now expected to go beyond profit-making by positively contributing to the communities where they operate, maintaining public trust, and ensuring legitimacy to operate (Scherer et al., 2013).

In response to these societal expectations, organizations are increasingly adopting customer-centric approaches, which prioritize understanding and fulfilling customer needs while embedding sustainability values into business operations (Pardo-Jaramillo et al., 2025; Ünal et al., 2024). This sustainable customer-centricity aligns with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, integrating environmental, social, and economic objectives into corporate decision-making. Through personalized experiences and value-driven interactions, companies foster deeper trust and long-term relationships with their customers, thereby strengthening both sustainability outcomes and brand loyalty (Gaurav & Shainesh, 2016).

At the same time, corporate purpose serves as the moral and strategic “why” behind an organization’s existence, guiding decisions and inspiring employees toward a shared mission (Florez Jiménez et al., 2021). It embodies three dimensions identity, meaning, and mission—that

connect corporate goals with societal impact. When corporate purpose is internalized by all members of the organization, it cultivates a unified culture centered on integrity, commitment, and sustainability (Lleo et al., 2022). A strong purpose-driven culture not only motivates employees but also improves stakeholder engagement and organizational performance (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The synergy between customer-centricity and corporate purpose empowers organizations to innovate responsibly, attract socially conscious consumers, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Elkington, 2017; Glaveli, 2020). These interconnected strategies promote transparency, social responsibility, and ethical conduct values essential for modern organizations seeking long-term viability. Furthermore, the integration of both approaches helps firms meet global sustainability goals by aligning customer satisfaction with environmental and social stewardship (Mackey et al., 2007; Eccles & Serafeim, 2013).

Recognizing the limited empirical and conceptual research connecting these two constructs, this study aims to fill the gap by systematically analyzing literature on customer-centricity and corporate purpose. It identifies emerging trends, conceptual frameworks, and critical challenges in their application to sustainability. The research addresses four key questions:

- (RQ1) How can organizations leverage customer-centricity and corporate purpose to create sustainable organizations and foster long-term success?
- (RQ2) What conceptual categories emerge from the relationship between these concepts?
- (RQ3) How have they evolved over time?
- (RQ4) What are the primary methodologies, journals, and authors contributing to this field?

Ultimately, this paper contributes both theoretically and practically to sustainability discourse by offering an integrated framework where customer-centricity and corporate purpose serve as twin drivers of sustainable value creation. It provides actionable insights for leaders, marketers, and policymakers to design strategies that not only enhance customer satisfaction but also reinforce ethical responsibility, social impact, and environmental care—thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability and relevance of organizations in a rapidly changing global context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the interconnection between customer-centricity, corporate purpose, and sustainability, emphasizing their collective role in fostering long-term organizational success. Although prior studies have individually examined customer-centricity and corporate purpose, few have explicitly analyzed their direct relationship and implications for sustainability. Integrating customer-centricity into corporate purpose helps organizations create shared value—a concept introduced by Porter and Kramer (2011)—which enhances profitability and social responsibility simultaneously. Both customers and employees are identified as critical stakeholders capable of influencing corporate behavior and sustainability outcomes (Freeman, 2015; Edinger-Schons et al., 2020). Within this framework, corporate social responsibility (CSR) serves as a practical extension of corporate purpose, operationalizing ethical and environmental commitments (Carroll, 1999; Brosch, 2023). Embedding CSR principles into customer-centric strategies allows organizations to build trust, strengthen brand reputation, and align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), thus driving both economic and social sustainability.

The review traces the evolution of customer-centricity, beginning with Drucker's (1954) notion that "the customer determines what a business is." Early theories by Abbott (1955) and Levitt (1986) reframed business success as satisfying customer needs rather than merely selling products. In the 1990s, researchers like Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) developed the market orientation theory, establishing that market-centered firms outperform others. Later, Deshpandé et al. (1993) and Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995) emphasized understanding customers' motivations and personalizing their experiences. Modern scholars (Gulati, 2010; Day & Moorman, 2010) redefined customer-centricity as a cultural and organizational philosophy—not merely a marketing strategy—requiring cross-departmental collaboration, leadership commitment, and customer-based rewards (Kirca et al., 2005). Central to this concept are customer engagement (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013) and brand loyalty, which enhance long-term

relationships, satisfaction, and trust (Rather, 2019). The review also highlights that technology integration (Lyons, 2009), organizational transparency (Hughes, 2014), and sustainability orientation (Rehberg & Dreischmeier, 2013) are vital for embedding customer-centric values across all business levels.

Similarly, the concept of corporate purpose has evolved from a moral and philosophical standpoint toward a strategic management framework. Initially defined by Logan (1984) and Bartlett & Ghoshal (1994) as a firm's ethical commitment to its responsibilities beyond profit, it later came to represent a company's *raison d'être*—its reason for existence and contribution to society (Henderson & Van Den Steen, 2015). A strong corporate purpose integrates shared values, leadership, communication, and authenticity (Craig & Snook, 2014; Quinn & Thakor, 2018; Florez Jiménez et al., 2021). Purpose-driven firms demonstrate resilience, innovation, and long-term competitiveness (White et al., 2017), aligning with the Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1998) that balances social, environmental, and economic performance. Empirical evidence links corporate purpose to improved employee engagement, brand reputation, stakeholder trust, and financial results (Gartenberg et al., 2019; Fink, 2022).

In practice, leading companies like Unilever, Virgin Group, Heineken, and Ben & Jerry's illustrate how purpose-driven strategies can be embedded into daily operations to achieve authenticity and measurable impact (McKinsey & Company, 2020a). Collectively, this literature underscores that merging customer-centricity, corporate purpose, and CSR forms a synergistic foundation for sustainable organizations. This integration promotes ethical decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation, ensuring that profitability and sustainability coexist as complementary, rather than competing, objectives.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper conducts a systematic literature review to analyze the relationship between customer-centricity and corporate purpose, following established guidelines by Levy & Ellis (2006) and Xiao & Watson (2019). Using Scopus and Web of Science databases, the researchers applied comprehensive keyword searches and both backward and forward searches to ensure coverage. The process began with 569 documents, screened and refined through several stages—title, abstract, and introduction reviews—based on relevance, quality, and theoretical contribution. Ultimately, 101 high-quality studies were selected for full-text analysis. The tool VOSViewer was used to map keyword relationships and visualize thematic connections. This rigorous method provides a strong foundation for understanding the intersections between customer-centricity, corporate purpose, and sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After selecting 101 relevant papers, the study conducted a comprehensive analysis using several methods, including VOSviewer for visualizing document relationships, keyword ranking, topic summarization, and abstract synthesis. The VOSviewer results identified six main clusters: customer-centricity (green), corporate purpose (blue), organizational values (red), sustainability (purple), corporate culture (brown), and performance (yellow). Each cluster represents a thematic focus within the relationship between customer-centricity and corporate purpose under the sustainability framework.

Figures from the analysis illustrate how these clusters interconnect, revealing both existing relationships and emerging theoretical linkages between customer-centric and purpose-driven strategies. These relationships, referred to as "categories," highlight how organizations integrate customer-focused practices with a clear corporate purpose to enhance sustainable performance. The findings suggest that customer-centric initiatives—such as incorporating customer feedback into strategic decision-making—strengthen adaptability, organizational responsiveness, and overall sustainability by aligning business operations with ethical values and long-term societal goals.

Figure 1. Cluster Analysis

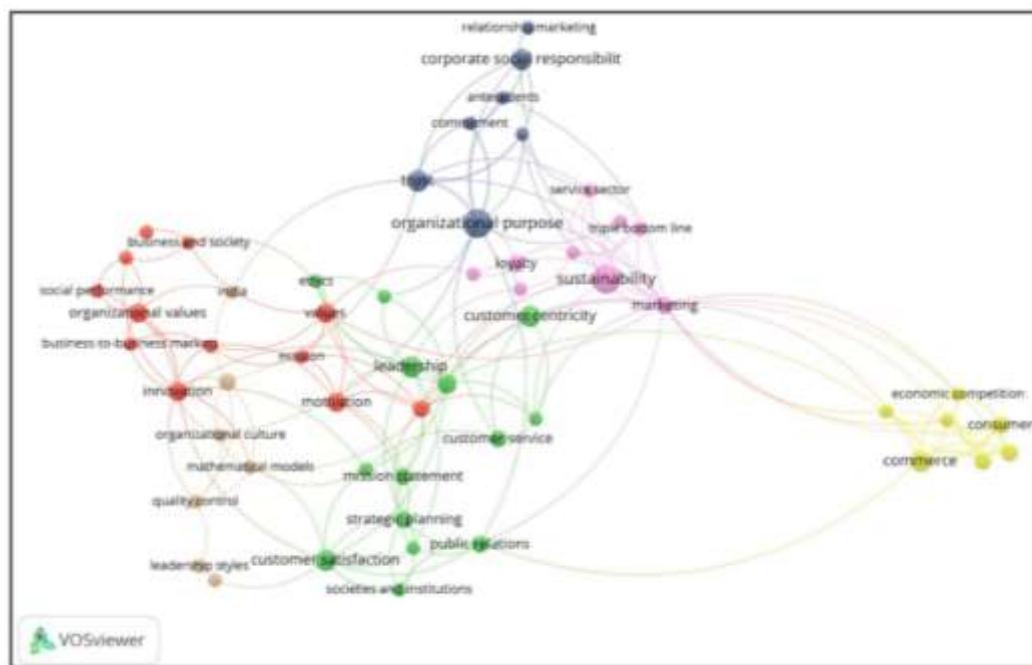
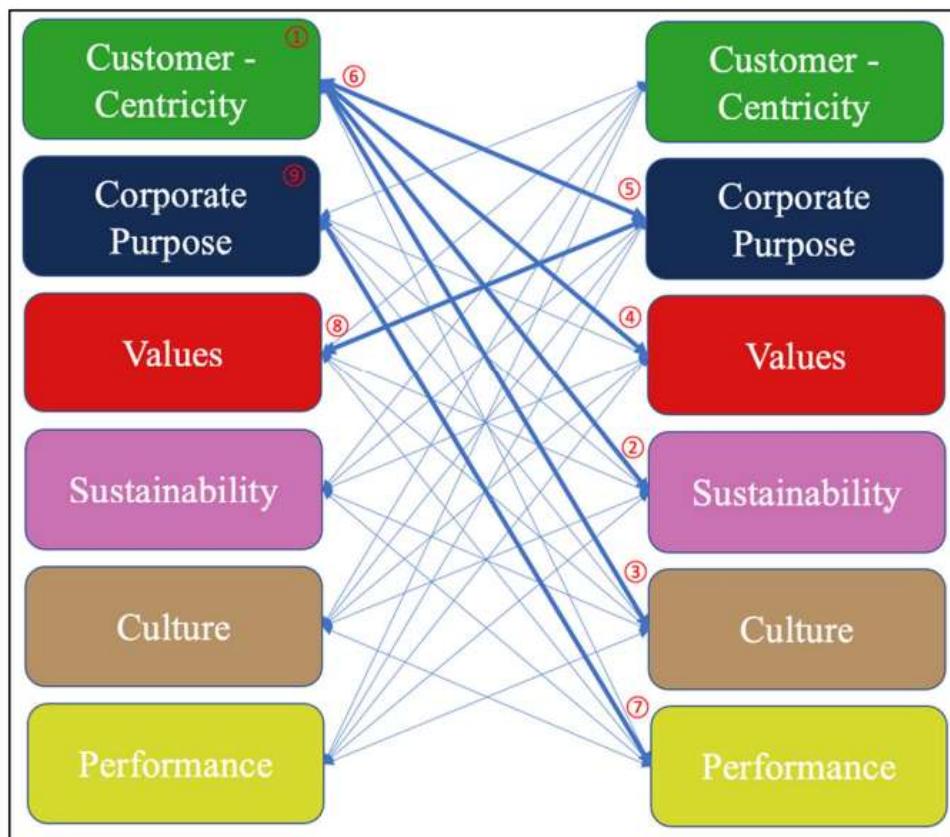


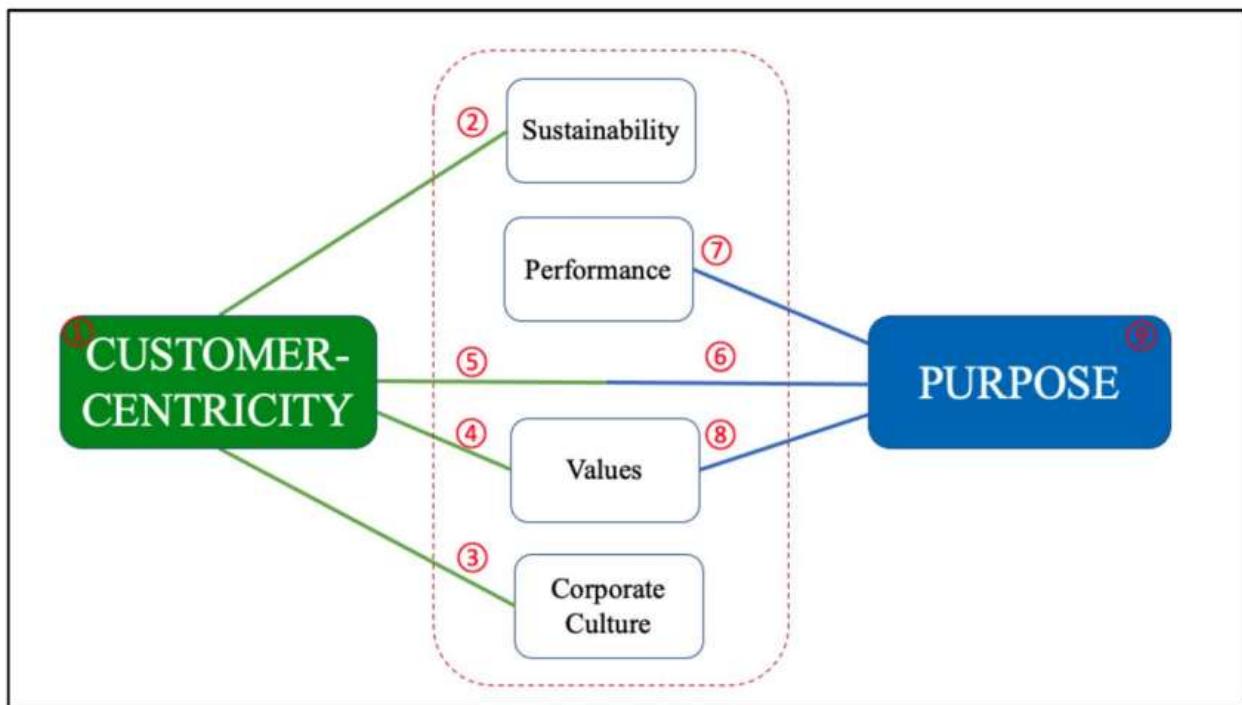
Figure 2. Cluster Analysis Relationship: Categories



This ensures that corporate strategies align with changing market demands and sustainability goals. This alignment supports a culture of sustainability that permeates all organizational levels, which is crucial for embedding sustainable practices into the core of strategic thinking and

decisionmaking. Furthermore, aligning corporate purpose with an organization's core values and mission fosters a culture where sustainable practices transcend procedural adherence to drive behavior and strategic decisions. Our study proposes an integrative framework of how customer-centricity and corporate purpose coalesce to foster aspects essential for organizational success. Figure 4 presents this framework, mapping nine distinct categories where customer-centricity and corporate purpose interact to enhance organizational success. Each category sheds light on how to operationalize these strategies to achieve an organization's broad-based goals. The classification of the literature in Appendix B explains how each category is supported by theory, grounding our model in extensive research. This approach meets stakeholders' demands for more responsible business practices and provides a strategic framework for achieving long-term success. The nine categories are: (1) customer-centricity, (2) customer-centricity and sustainability, (3) customer-centricity and corporate culture, (4) customer-centricity and values, (5) customer-centricity and corporate purpose, (6) corporate purpose and customer-centricity, (7) corporate purpose and performance, (8) corporate purpose and values, and (9) corporate purpose. We explore each of these categories below.

Figure 3. Summary chart about related topics that conform the customer-centricity and corporate purpose relationship



The findings presented in the previous sections underscore the significance of exploring how organizations can achieve sustainability through integrating customer-centricity and corporate purpose. These perspectives offer valuable insights for organizations to endure, fulfill their purpose, and prioritize people, ultimately leading to sustainable outcomes over time.

From the vantage point of customer-centricity, contributions can be drawn from various categories such as corporate culture and values. Regarding sustainability, avenues for exploration include sustainable innovation (Desouza et al., 2008), decision-making processes (Trim & Lee, 2008), mindful consumption (Sheth et al., 2011), adopting a long-term perspective (Lee et al., 2015), and applying the triple bottom line concept (Bhattarai et al., 2019; Park & Kim, 2016). Corporate culture can serve as a conduit for implementing techniques to align employees (Shah et al., 2006) and transcend geographical boundaries (Deshpandé et al., 2000). The dimension of values offers insights into trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), shared values (Barroso-Méndez et al., 2020; Gifford & Newmeyer, 2019; Roy & Shekhar, 2010; Theron et al., 2008), loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Yoo & Huh, 2015), and buyer-seller relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987). Contributions to corporate purpose can also be made by exploring the concept of "the job

to be done" (Christensen et al., 2005), internalizing the mission statement (David et al., 2016; Marimon et al., 2016), and investigating the social meaning of the organization (Eveland et al., 2018; Jayawarna et al., 2020).

Similarly, categories stemming from the corporate purpose perspective (Performance and Values) can contribute to establishing a relationship with customer-centricity. Within the realm of values, aspects such as loyalty (Collins & Saliba, 2020; Van Rekom et al., 2014), shared values (Porter & Kramer, 2011), mission implementation (Rey & Bastons, 2018), and leadership can enrich corporate purpose. When considering performance, the emphasis lies on facets such as financial security (Beisland et al., 2020; Donaldson & Walsh, 2015; Gartenberg et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2015), organizational adaptation (R. Henderson, 2007; Levine Daniel & Galasso, 2019), personal responsibility (Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Eldor, 2020), and the strategic dimension (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1994). Finally, mission statements (Alousque, 2019; Anitsal et al., 2013) and transformation tools (Quinn & Thakor, 2018) directly contribute to customer-centricity.

The proposed model advances the theoretical understanding of how the relationship between customer-centricity and corporate purpose influences organizational sustainability orientation. Specifically, customer-centricity has a positive impact on organizational sustainability by fostering greater stakeholder engagement, whereas corporate purpose acts as a mediator to positively influence the impact of customer-centricity on organizational values. Thus, anchoring corporate purpose in customer-centric initiatives yields benefits that go beyond improving financial performance by enhancing resilience in dynamic markets. Furthermore, synergies between customercentricity and corporate purpose would further enhance corporate culture by cross-functionally aligning and working for a common mission among the employees.

The influence of customer-centricity on sustainability outcomes is also positively moderated by corporate purpose through embedding the values of social and environmental concerns in customer perspectives. A clearly defined corporate purpose implies that customer-centricity increases customer and employee loyalty and trust, which positively impacts the company's sustainability. These kinds of organizations will be more capable of responding to the changing landscapes of both society and markets toward sustainability. By outlining these relationships, our model proposes theoretical propositions on how customer-centricity and corporate purpose together drive sustainable, value-oriented, resilient organizational practices, thereby laying a foundation for further empirical investigation in this area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper presents a systematic literature review examining the integration of customer-centricity and corporate purpose to promote organizational sustainability. From 559 documents reviewed, 101 were analyzed using a rigorous methodology, revealing a growing academic interest in linking these two concepts. The study identifies key intersections—such as sustainability, corporate culture, values, and performance and categorizes the literature into nine themes validated using VOSviewer. Findings highlight that integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles into customer-centric and purpose-driven strategies enhances ethical conduct, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable outcomes. Theoretically, this research advances understanding of how customer-centricity and corporate purpose interact, while practically, it offers guidance for organizations to align customer strategies with purpose-driven goals to build sustainable value. In marketing, such integration helps firms deliver superior customer experiences aligned with social and environmental responsibility strengthening brand loyalty and social impact. The paper concludes by noting research gaps, such as limited practitioner perspectives and causal analyses, suggesting future studies adopt diverse methodologies to validate and expand these insights.

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