ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN THE SUBSCRIPTION ERA: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW

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Abstract: *The paper analyzes the transition of organizations towards subscription-based business models, a transformation accelerated by digitalization and globalization. This model, focused on generating recurring revenues, has expanded from traditional digital services to physical products, as seen in the automotive industry through the "Hardware as-a-Service" concept. Although it ensures financial stability, companies face a hypercompetitive environment and the phenomenon of "subscription fatigue," defined as the financial and cognitive exhaustion of consumers. Locking pre-installed hardware features behind a subscription has generated massive resistance, being perceived as an artificial limitation on ownership rights. The research employs a mixed methodology. The bibliometric analysis highlights a spike in publications during the pandemic, reaching a literature saturation level in 2025. Complementarily, the qualitative analysis demonstrates that the B2B segment offers superior stability. In contrast, the B2C sector demands constant innovation but heavy profits from "passive retention," as customers fail to cancel unused services due to a lack of time. Ultimately, long-term success depends on delivering genuine value and avoiding abusive commercial practices that could alienate the audience.*

Keywords: subscription economy, subscription-based business model, recurring revenue, consumer behavior, customer retention, subscription fatigue, organizational performance.

JEL Classification: P360, Z130, J110, M210, M190.

1. Introduction

In the context of economic transformations accelerated by digitalization and globalization, subscription-based business models have become a central element in the strategies of modern organizations (Ofek and Konary, 2023). This type of model, characterized by the generation of recurring revenues and the building of long-term relationships with customers, has experienced significant expansion in recent decades, surpassing the traditional sphere of publications and integrating into various industries, such as technology, entertainment, telecommunications, or even the production of physical goods.

The growing interest in the subscription economy is driven both by its advantages for companies, namely, the stability of cash flows and the predictability of revenues, and by changes in consumer behavior, which favor continuous access over ownership. However, this transition is not without its challenges. Phenomena such as subscription fatigue, negative perceptions of recurring billing, or adaptation difficulties in certain industries highlight the complexity of implementing this business model (Tongue, 2024; Grand View Research, 2025).

This research addresses a notable gap in the Romanian academic environment regarding a subject that is increasingly prevalent in the local market, thereby contributing new perspectives to the specialized literature. The paper provides an integrated theoretical and empirical analysis of the evolution and impact of subscription-based businesses. The initial section establishes the conceptual foundations and recent trends of the subscription economy, detailing its expansion into physical products and the subsequent implications for consumer behavior. Following this, the empirical research is presented, comprising a bibliometric analysis utilizing Web of Science data and a qualitative study based on interviews with business professionals.

The main objective of the study is to highlight how this business model influences organizational performance and consumer perception, as well as to identify the primary strategic directions that companies can adopt to remain competitive in an increasingly saturated economic environment. Through this approach, the paper contributes to a better understanding of the subscription economy's dynamics and its implications for the contemporary business environment.

2. Subscription based businesses

The modern concept of subscription-based businesses originated between the 17th and 18th centuries in England. It began with the delivery of books and encyclopedias to the nobility, thus ensuring a guaranteed income for printing houses through their subscribers. Although initially isolated to the British Isles, its effects later propagated to other fields and industries, from which similar models were adopted by various companies, such as the colonial enterprises established by the British Empire or, in the late modern era, insurance companies (Clapp, 1931).

Throughout the 20th century and into present times, the subscription model has witnessed a continuous expansion from traditional newspapers to a diverse range of services, such as cable and satellite television, streaming platforms, digital and audiobooks, or telecommunications and internet services. This expansion has also targeted the B2B sector, including consulting firms, financial institutions, academic journals, and many others. All of these represent a diversity of business models that integrate, in one form or another, the subscription principle, that being the continuous provision of a service in exchange for recurring payment. The subscription-based business model is not an invention of modern companies, but rather a structural innovation that alters the logic of value creation and capture. Within this model, the customer pays a recurring fee at regular intervals to benefit from continuous access to a product or service (Nansubuga and Kowalkowski, 2024). It can be stated that this business model shifts the company's center of gravity from generating one-off transactions to building long-term relationships, with the goal of securing recurring revenues and maximizing the product's lifespan (Fader, 2012).

The 2022 Subscription Economy Index (SEI) report indicates a significant expansion of this field in terms of generated revenues and the number of users, specifying that *"(...) double-digit compound annual growth rates (CAGR) were recorded in the 2018–2021 period, remarkably high levels compared to industry standards"* (Zuora Subscribed Institute, 2022, p. 8). Furthermore, the global lockdown periods significantly accelerated the adoption of subscription-based services. Through the enforced restrictions, governments involuntarily stimulated consumer demand for recurring deliveries of fast-moving consumer goods, as well as for entertainment platforms (such as movies, TV series, and video games) meant to mitigate the effects of social isolation. Most of these solutions were integrated into subscription-based business models. The consolidation of these new consumption behaviors and their long-term maintenance are validated by the evolution of the SEI, three years after the end of the pandemic (Zuora Subscribed Institute, 2023).

In the United States of America, approximately 70% of companies in the retail sector (direct-to-consumer or D2C) already had some form of subscription model implemented for their customers (Ofek and Konary, 2023). According to Schuh et al. (2020a), organizations can no longer afford to remain static in the face of this new trend. They are forced to adapt to customer demands in order to remain competitive in a continuously changing market. At the same time, there is a heightened risk generated by the temptation of short-term orientation. Although companies must react to rapid market changes to survive in the short term, only a long-term vision will manage to ensure their profitability. More precisely, if firms aim for substantial revenue growth, they must expand their planning horizon, while being mindful of the risk of investing in mere passing trends. The business structures most affected by the aforementioned aspects may be those in the goods manufacturing industry, for which, according to Schuh et al. (2020b), continuous innovation over short time horizons represents a substantial obstacle.

3. Subscriptions for physical products

The expansion of the subscription economy beyond digital products to physical goods represents a paradigm shift in the management of contemporary organizations. This transition is based on the "Hardware as-a-Service" model, in which the physical product becomes merely a vehicle for delivering a continuous service. In the automotive industry, this phenomenon has been conceptualized as a mechanism through which vehicles owned by consumers are transformed into assets generating continuous rents for manufacturers, by restricting access to pre-installed functionalities (Shapiro and Forelle, 2024).

From an operational perspective, automakers install standardized hardware components on all vehicles on the assembly line to benefit from economies of scale. Subsequently, these components are locked behind a software paywall, forming the "Feature on Demand" model. The strategic goal of organizations is to generate recurring revenues throughout the physical product's lifespan, long after the initial point of sale (Richards, 2021).

The impact of these strategies on consumer perception is profoundly asymmetrical compared to digital subscriptions. Recent research in the automotive industry (Cox Automotive, 2022) shows major market resistance: according to the study, only 25% of car buyers would be willing to pay a monthly fee to unlock hardware features, which means that an overwhelming majority of 75% of consumers firmly reject this model for functions already physically integrated into the vehicle. Consumers perceive this model not as an addition of value, but as an artificial limitation of their property rights and autonomy (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Baxter et al., 2015). Furthermore, the automotive industry is facing the phenomenon of subscription fatigue, where the lack of price transparency and the sensation of "hidden fees" lead to a dramatic decrease in post-purchase satisfaction (Capgemini Research Institute, 2024).

Classic retention strategies fail in the case of physical products with locked features if they do not adhere to a basic rule of the subscription economy: recurring payment must equal recurring added value (Tzuo, 2018). When a manufacturer demands a subscription for a static feature, the consumer perceives the transaction as unfair, which leads to cancellation and the erosion of brand trust (Subscription Insider, 2025).

4. Subscription fatigue and consumer impact

After a decade of accelerated expansion, during which the subscription economy recorded substantial annual growth, the global market has reached a critical saturation point, marking the transition towards a hypercompetitive environment (Zuora Subscribed Institute, 2023). This saturation manifests through the development of recurring payment models in almost all economic sectors: from software and media to the automotive industry, fast-moving consumer goods, and retail. As barriers to entry have decreased, fierce competition has transformed a model initially perceived as innovative and highly convenient into a ubiquitous commercial norm, forcing consumers to navigate a landscape of often redundant offerings.

The cognitive and financial pressure on the consumer represents the direct impact of this saturation, which is conceptualized in the specialized literature under the term subscription fatigue. This represents a psychological and financial exhaustion generated by the need to manage a fragmented and increasingly expensive portfolio of recurring services. From a psychological perspective, consumers face a phenomenon of cognitive overload (Kim and Park, 2026). The constant effort to monitor, evaluate, and decode multiple pricing structures, terms updates, and renewal dates gradually negates the convenience and simplicity initially promised by the subscription model (Kadence International, 2024). A consequence of the expansion of this system is the emergence of companies specializing exclusively in monitoring users' subscription portfolios, with the objective of notifying them to cancel inactive services. A notable aspect is that these entities, in turn, utilize the same subscription-based business model to provide their own service.

The primary impact on consumers can be caused by the cumulative financial pressure that has radically transformed purchasing behavior. In the face of inflation and the accumulation of microtransactions (in-service transactions, most commonly found in video games), consumers have abandoned their state of inertia, adopting a hyper-selective attitude. Recent studies (GISKAA Research, 2024) show a paradigm shift: over a third of customers have actively canceled at least one recurring service in the past year, the main reason cited being the feeling of having too many subscriptions relative to their actual utility. This process of auditing and consolidating expenses has generated record churn rates, demonstrating that customer loyalty in saturated markets is extremely fragile.

The erosion of trust through billing without active use of the service causes a possible market saturation that has also altered the ethical evaluation consumers make of brands. When companies limit price transparency or employ tactics that complicate the cancellation process, consumers begin to perceive the subscription not as a value-creation tool, but as a *"digital trap"* that limits their autonomy (Ofek and Konary, 2023). Consequently, to regain the trust of overwhelmed consumers, organizations are forced to pivot from aggressive acquisition strategies to hybrid models that allow for real flexibility.

The transition to a subscription-based business model, operated in parallel with the traditional product-centric model, generates a fundamental transformation of the firm's financial structure. The organization migrates from a revenue logic based on one-off, immediate receipts specific to the classic transactional sales model, towards a model of continuous cash flows, distributed over the long term. From a profitability standpoint, this phenomenon prolongs the investment payback period, with the assets remaining on the company's balance sheet for the duration of the contract, until their monetization on the second-hand market. Although subscriptions ensure a steady stream of revenues, they expose the firm to new macroeconomic vulnerabilities; for example, rising interest rates can inflate the operational costs of these asset-intensive services, forcing tariff adjustments (Nansubuga and Kowalkowski, 2024).

5. Research methodology

To reinforce the importance of the arguments presented in the theoretical part of the paper, a bibliometric analysis was conducted with the aim of identifying the evolution of the volume of the publication within the specialized literature. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that bibliometric analyses can be used for various purposes, being among the most popular methods utilized in academic writing, through which a large volume of data can be processed (Ștefan et al., 2025; Bunea, 2021). For the analysis process, we opted to select the Web of Science (WoS) database, taking into account the vast volume of data offered by this platform and its rapid article indexing process.

In the advanced search, the following terms were used: "subscription business model*" OR "subscription*" OR "subscription-based*" OR "subscription economy*" OR "subscription service*" OR "subscription commerce*" OR "recurring revenue*" AND TS=("consumer behavior" OR "customer behavior" OR "customer loyalty" OR "customer retention" OR "consumer perception*" OR "customer satisfaction" OR "business performance" OR "firm performance" OR "profitability*" OR "competitive advantage"). Next, quotation marks were used to accurately identify the terms of interest, and an asterisk (acting as a wildcard) was added at the end of them to mark the term as relevant for the search engine. Additionally, the logical operator "AND" was used between the two core concepts to identify the connection between the terms, while "OR" was used to include synonymous terms, aiming to cover a broader search area. Following the search, 9,400 documents from all fields of study were obtained. To increase the accuracy of the result, a series of filters were applied to extract only the data of interest for the research: (1) Papers from the year 2026 were excluded, given that there is not yet a complete dataset for this year, so the final database included articles from the period 1977 - 2025. (2) A filter was applied to the WoS indexing categories, selecting only materials that fell into domains such as Economics and Business. Consequently, in the final stage, 981 scientific materials were downloaded and evaluated. In the second part of the analysis, we utilized the Biblioshiny software developed by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017). The data were analyzed to highlight the evolution of scientific materials over time, the most frequently used keywords, as well as the publication trends regarding the concepts addressed in this paper.

To support the results of the bibliometric analysis, we also opted for a qualitative analysis consisting of a series of nine interviews granted by individuals and specialists with experience in various business domains. The sample was established based on purposive sampling, including active respondents from both the academic environment and individuals employed in the professional field, such as managers and experts across various areas of activity. The sample brings together a total of nine participants.

The body of empirical data, resulting from the transcription of the interviews, was subjected to a rigorous analysis process using the LiGRE software (Logiciels Ex-l-tec, 2026), a dedicated environment for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS). From a methodological standpoint, the thematic coding technique was applied, an iterative procedure that involved breaking down units of meaning, conceptualizing them, and aggregating them into higher-level analytical categories.

The primary objective of combining bibliometric analysis with qualitative B2B interviews was to bridge theoretical literature with empirical market realities. This dual-method approach aimed to highlight perception of the B2B and B2C segments, evaluate the determinants of passive retention, and assess the acceptability of expanding subscription models into traditionally rigid sectors. By synthesizing the bibliometric mapping with the practical insights derived from the interviews, the analytical process culminated in the identification of four main strategic directions for organizational adaptation. These findings ultimately contribute to the validation of the formulated research hypotheses.

6. Results analysis

6.1. Bibliometric analysis

The evolution of the annual scientific production shown in Figure 1 was identified based on the terms used in the advanced search (such as "subscription" or "subscription business model"). It can be observed that the number of publications remained relatively constant until the beginning of the 21st century, at which point a gradual increase began. This positive trend can be directly correlated with technological advancement and the growing general interest in this business model. Furthermore, the impact generated by the COVID-19 pandemic is evident, with the 2019–2021 and 2022–2024 periods recording the most significant increases 43.8% and 52.3%, respectively compared to previous equivalent time frames.

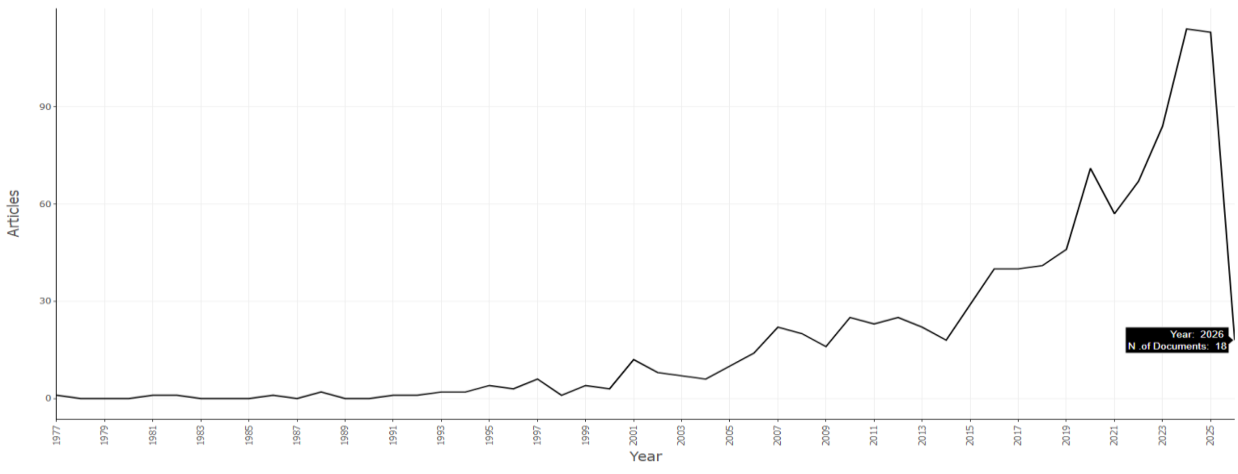

Fig. 1. Timeline evolution

Source: Author's own conceptualization

A thematic map was created through the Conceptual Structure analysis, which serves to visualize and classify the main research topics in the chosen field according to their importance and level of development. The thematic map is plotted along the Ox and Oy axes, where the Ox axis represents the degree of relevance, indicating the extent to which that theme interacts with other themes across the entire field. The Oy axis indicates the development degree of a theme and shows the strength of the internal links between the keywords within that cluster. The intersection of the two axes yields four quadrants: motor themes, which represent essential topics that are highly developed and extremely important to the research field; niche themes, which are well-developed and deeply studied topics, but with marginal importance for the rest of the field; emerging or declining themes, representing underdeveloped topics of low importance; and basic themes, which are general and highly important topics for the field, being connected to many other themes (Cobo et al., 2011). It should be noted that the size of the circles illustrated in Figure 2 represents the frequency of occurrence of the words included in the analyzed articles.

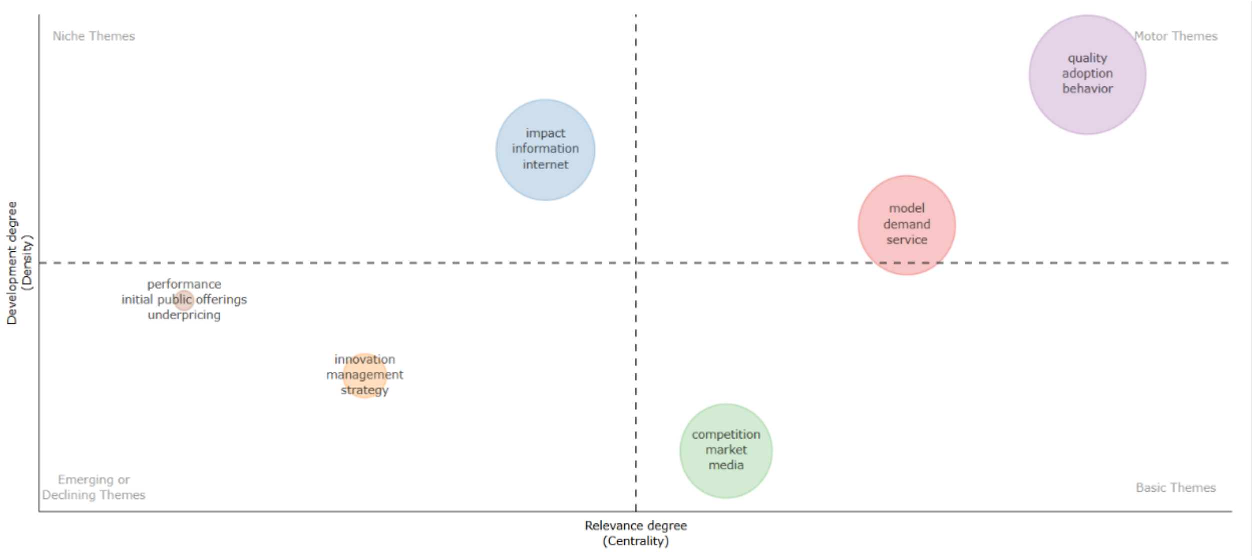

Fig. 2. Thematic Map

Source: Author's own conceptualization

The analysis of the thematic map illustrated in Figure 2 reveals the structure and dynamics of the subscription economic field, highlighting the importance and development stage of the various research directions incorporated into the specialized literature. In the motor themes quadrant, the concept cluster "quality, adoption, behavior" is clearly identified; this indicates that the study of consumer behavior and service quality are fundamental aspects, intensely researched and vitally connected to the rest of the field. Positioned at the boundary between motor and basic themes is the cluster "model, demand, service," suggesting that business models and demand analysis also constitute essential pillars of research. Basic themes, characterized by major relevance but lower internal development, are supported by the cluster "competition, market, media," confirming that market dynamics and the competitive environment form the general theoretical foundation upon which the other studies rest. On the other hand, in the niche themes quadrant, the cluster "impact, information, internet" stands out, a research area that is very well-defined and internally mature, but somewhat isolated from the core subjects of the field, most likely focusing on the specific effects of the digital environment. Finally, the emerging or declining themes area, located in the lower-left quadrant, groups concepts such as "innovation, management, strategy" and specific financial aspects ("performance, initial public offerings"). This illustrates areas of study with marginal importance within the overall literature currently analyzed, representing either nascent niches poised for development or subjects gradually losing publication interest because they are already well-established concepts.

Based on the data analyzed, an analysis was generated presenting the trend in the number of publications for the coming years, shown in Figure 3. This indicates that the maximum number of publications was reached in 2025 (113 new papers published), with growth prospects for the year 2026 as well. Additionally, the saturation degree of publications within the field's literature was calculated. Currently, the subject of study is in the maturity phase, reaching a saturation level of 63% in 2025, with continuous growth expected as the number of publications increases in subsequent years.

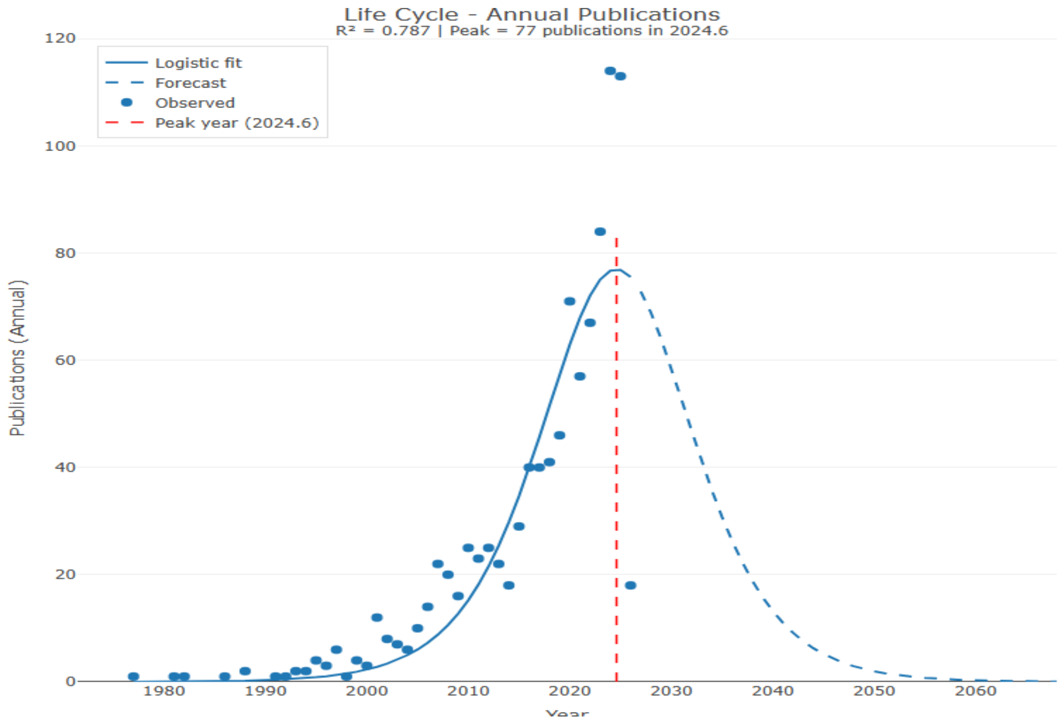

Fig. 3. Life Cycle

Source: Author's own conceptualization

The life cycle analysis of the publication of scientific materials uses a logistic growth model to track the dynamics of research topics over time. This approach allows for determining the current stage of a field, whether it is emergence, rapid growth, maturity, or decline phase, and predicting future trends. To calculate the saturation level, the following formula was used (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017):

$$P(t) = \frac{K}{1 + \exp(-b(t - t_0))} \tag{1}$$

In Equation 1, *P(t)* represents the cumulative number of publications at time *t*. The variable *K* indicates the saturation level, representing the maximum total number of publications that the subject will ever produce. The parameter *b* defines the growth rate, determining the steepness of the curve, while t_0 represents the inflection point, meaning the moment when the growth rate is at its maximum level. By deriving this function, the annual publication rate is obtained in the form of a bell-shaped curve, which reaches its peak at the inflection point and gradually decreases as the subject approaches the saturation level.

The model extracts four fundamental indicators to interpret these data. The saturation *K* estimates the final volume of the research; a value greater than 5,000 indicates a field of vast impact with long-term interest, whereas a value below 1,000 reflects a highly specialized niche topic. The peak year is the year in which the annual production reaches its maximum capacity. If this year lies in the future, the theme is still expanding and attracting attention, whereas if it belongs to the past, the subject has reached maturity or has already entered a decline. The annual peak represents the maximum number of publications expected for that peak year, illustrating the intensity of academic activity and the concentration of resources. Finally, the growth duration estimates the time expressed in years, elapsed from the emergence of the topic until the moment it reaches the near-saturation level (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).

6.2. Qualitative analysis

In the current economic context dominated by digitalization, the data extracted from the interviews and analyzed using the LiGRE application (Logiciels Ex-l-tec, 2026) show a high degree of openness towards the adoption of subscriptions, as presented in Figure 4. However, opinions are divided depending on the specificities of each industry. Based on graphical representation, four directions of action can be established from the respondents' perspective: *feasibility in the field of activity, B2B and B2C dynamics, selection and retention criteria, and personal consumption behavior.*

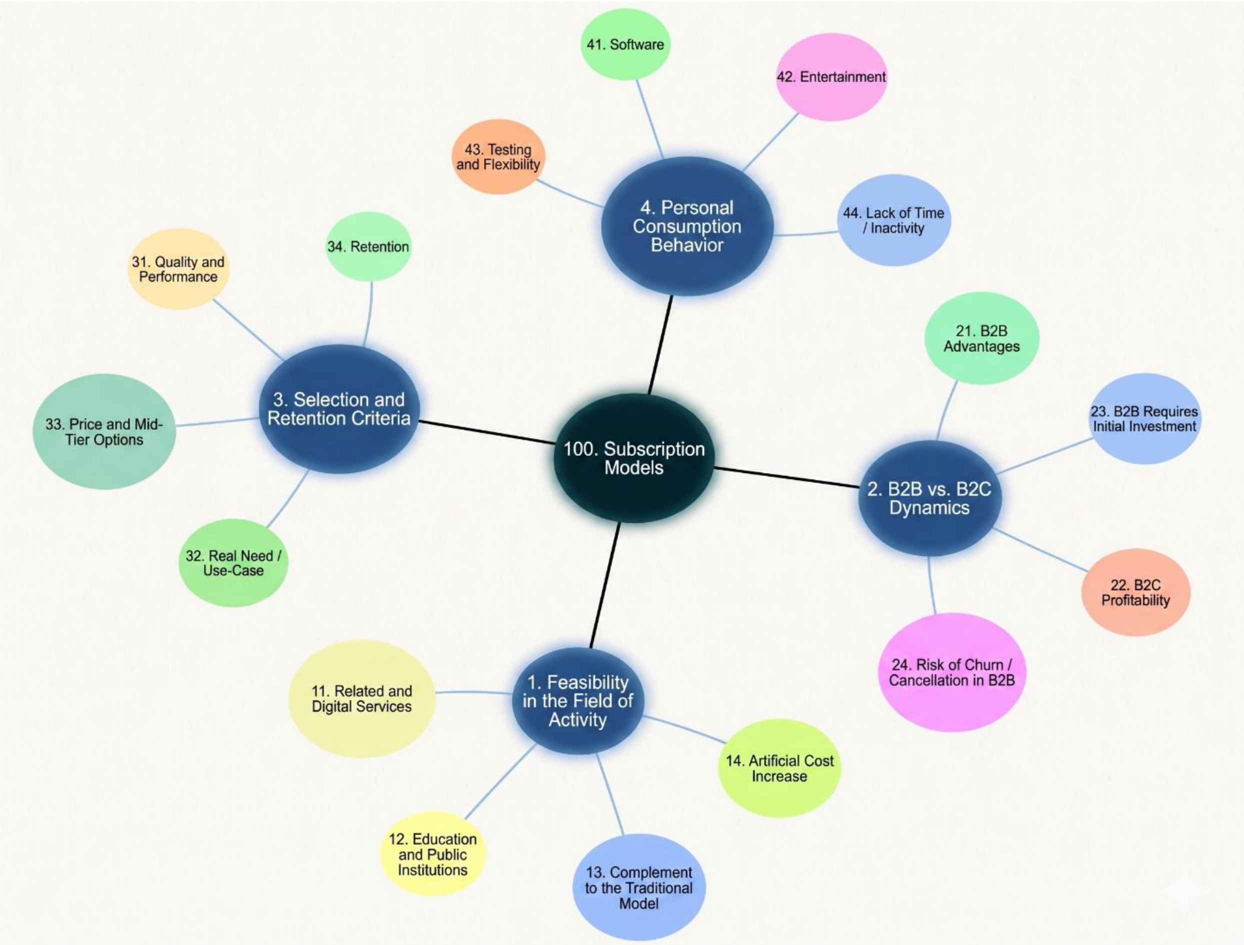

Fig. 4. Codification Tree

Source: Author's own conceptualization

Regarding feasibility within the field of activity, approximately 66.67% of the participants consider the transition to this type of business to be achievable, at least partially. They emphasized the utility of such solutions in facilitating access to various offerings, such as online educational platforms, supplementary infrastructure, or software tools. Furthermore, this approach is viewed as an excellent complementary strategy to balance the revenues of seasonal companies, helping to stabilize a firm's cash flow. On the other hand, a significant proportion of 33.33% of the respondents drew attention to the limitations within more rigid or traditionally regulated sectors. A clear example emerging from the responses is public state education, where the importance of the physical diploma surpasses mere access to information. From a managerial perspective, forcing such a system into an unprepared environment can provoke pushbacks from customers. They might feel that prices are artificially increasing without receiving valuable returns. Therefore, any company wishing to make this transition must carefully analyze the real advantages it offers.

Regarding B2B and B2C dynamics, over 77.78% of the participants observed major differences between the segment dedicated to other businesses and the one oriented towards the final customer. Specifically, the corporate environment is seen as the ideal and most stable setting for solutions based on strict utility. Companies prefer to rent resources to transform massive investments into current expenses. This decision ensures greater financial security. In this case, partner loyalty is achieved by integrating the service directly into their daily operations. Thus, cancellation becomes costly, and the contract is protected in the long term. In contrast, although the direct consumer market can yield higher profits mentioned by 33.33% of respondents as delivering superior long-term profitability, demand here is much more unstable. To maintain people's interest, brands are forced to continuously invest in innovation, updates, and improving the user experience. An essential factor for success in this area is passive customer retention. This concept describes the situation where individuals continue to pay monthly out of sheer inertia, convenience, or simply because they forget to cancel.

Within the selection and retention criteria, nearly 66.67% of individuals do not consider the current options to be excessive. Additionally, the fact that rival companies adopt the same system is not viewed as a major threat by 78% of the respondents. This attitude demonstrates that the modern public is much more mature. Consumers are willing to explore and try different platforms without remaining locked in a single company out of pure loyalty.

Regarding personal consumption behavior, the decision to keep a monthly-billed service does not necessarily depend on how the tariffs are structured. It all comes down to the real performance of the product and the extent to which it solves a concrete problem for that individual. When it comes to choices, the perceived value and quality are essential for 55.56% of users, being vastly more important than the price. People prioritize immediate utility and customization options. The final cost becomes a decisive factor only when competing alternatives offer a similar level of quality.

The analysis of personal habits demonstrates that companies must adapt the methods by which they retain their subscribers. The data show that an interviewed person has around three or four active accounts. This type of consumption is clearly dominated by digital platforms, with 44.44% of respondents preferring software solutions, and an identical percentage choosing the entertainment sector. These two industries have managed to successfully integrate their offered services into the public's daily routine, becoming veritable market standards. Noteworthy is the aforementioned phenomenon of passive account maintenance: approximately 80% of respondents who provided a clear answer on this subject admitted to paying monthly for certain services that they have not accessed at all for a considerable amount of time. The main reason they do not stop these transactions is not a lack of product satisfaction; rather, it relates to time poverty, an increasingly common trait of modern life. People postpone cancellation either because they lack the necessary energy to analyze their small expenses, or because they want to keep the door open in case, they need the respective platform later.

In a broader approach, truly effective retention strategies can no longer rely solely on the attempt to convince the customer to use the product on a daily basis. Companies must know how to construct a sense of long-term value, providing a feeling of security and belonging. Ultimately, success depends on a delicate balance between constant innovation, which justifies the recurring payment, and a profound understanding of the psychological and time-related barriers that influence the decisions of the contemporary consumer.

7. Discussions and conclusions

The introduction presented the current and prospective effects generated by the digitalization of subscriptions. The modern concept of subscription has become inseparable from the digital infrastructure, with traditional models being gradually replaced. However, the arguments presented in the research demonstrate that this field continues to hold major interest for both the business environment and consumers. It is observed that, from year to year, the number of publications analyzing this business model increases, and this phenomenon reflects an active economic interest in the B2B sector. Furthermore, an increased interest from the general public is noted, attracted by the convenience and benefits offered by access to platforms with diversified services at affordable costs.

Nevertheless, there is a need to also present the existence of divergent perspectives regarding the impact of this new business model. On the one hand, it is considered a beneficial system with no direct adverse effects, and its implementation is recommended in as many fields of activity as possible. On the other hand, the limitations of the model are beginning to become visible; potential intrusions into privacy and the exploitation of various human needs generate increasing concern and reluctance among users. Firstly, the bibliometric analysis supports the conclusions of authors such as Ofek and Konary (2023) or Nansubuga and Kowalkowski (2024), who highlight the accelerated expansion of the subscription economy in the context of digitalization. Thus, the quantitative results are consistent with the idea that the subscription model no longer represents an emerging innovation, but rather a consolidated economic standard. Secondly, the conclusions of the qualitative analysis validate theories regarding the structural differences between B2B and B2C markets. The specialized literature argues that the B2B segment offers greater stability due to the integration of services into companies' operational processes. This same idea is confirmed by over 77% of respondents, who believe that retaining loyalty in the corporate environment is easier to achieve due to high switching costs and functional dependence.

The subscription field has not yet reached its maximum potential, generating significant added value. However, similar to other successful business models, there is a risk of market oversaturation over time. Furthermore, there is a noticeable danger of service providers entering a comfort zone or even alienating consumers using abusive commercial practices. These tactics exploit the ease of using the system, leading to situations where consumers lose sight of the real utility of the services for which they pay on a recurring basis, and most often in advance. The concept of "subscription fatigue," analyzed in the specialized literature (Kim and Park, 2026; Kadence International, 2024), is strongly reflected in the participants' responses, which highlight a tendency to reduce the number of subscriptions and adopt a hyper-selective consumption behavior. Moreover, the phenomenon of "passive retention," theoretically described as a consequence of consumer inertia, is empirically confirmed, with approximately 80% of respondents admitting that they pay for unused services.

Ultimately, however, we are left with a question: whether the subscription-based system is much more beneficial and sustainable in the long term compared to outright purchasing, and whether constant consumption for a modest price can cover both the needs of the consumers and the expenses of the firms that provide it.

Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the authors hope that the paper contributes to enriching the specialized literature by presenting a detailed overview of the current state of research regarding the subscription economy, demonstrating, through the life cycle analysis of publications, that this field has reached the maturity phase but not the point of decline. Thus, the paper provides a solid analytical foundation for future academic investigations concerning the hyper-selective behavior of users and the impact of cognitive pressure in hypercompetitive markets.

At a practical and managerial level, the study's results highlight the imperative need for organizations to adapt their strategies according to the fundamental asymmetries between B2B and B2C markets. In the corporate environment, companies should focus on the deep integration of services into the daily operational workflows of their partners, transforming major investments into predictable current expenses to ensure long-term retention. In contrast, in the B2C segment, managers are warned about the risk of alienating consumers through non-transparent commercial practices or by exclusively exploiting their inertia. Particularly in traditional industries, such as the automotive sector, the attempt to generate recurring revenues by artificially limiting pre-installed hardware functions generates massive market resistance. Therefore, companies must pivot from aggressive acquisition strategies to constant innovation and flexible hybrid models, ensuring that the recurring payment reflects a real and proportional added value for the end-user.

Although the subscription economy encompasses a vast and rapidly evolving landscape, this research deliberately tried to narrow its scope to provide a more nuanced analysis of specific B2C sectors. By focusing primarily on prominent consumer-facing markets, namely, media services and the food industry, this study is able to deeply examine consumer behavior, dynamic retention, and market adaptability within highly competitive and visible domains.

Research limits

Regarding the limitations of the research, it must be noted that the analysis included a restricted number of articles published in early 2026, as the year had not yet concluded at the time of writing the paper. Another methodological limitation consisted of the small size of the sample interviewed, an aspect that the authors hope to expand upon in future research. Moreover, although the initial intention was to conduct a quantitative analysis on an extended sample of respondents to track the temporal evolution of subscription adoption, this could not be conducted due to time constraints.

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