



Salesperson ambidexterity, firm capabilities, and value co-creation: Key factors in salespeople's innovative service behavior?

Ambidestreza del vendedor, capacidades de la empresa y co-creación de valor: ¿factores clave en el comportamiento innovador en servicio de los vendedores?

María Badenas-Boldó^a, Gloria Berenguer-Contri^{*}, Irene Gil-Saura^b

^a Universitat Jaume I, Department of Business Administration and Marketing, Castellón, Spain – mbadenas@uji.es – <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5261-3706>

^b Universitat de València, Research Institute on Social Welfare Policy (POLIBIENESTAR), Department of Marketing, Valencia 46022, Spain – irene.gil@uv.es – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5758-0806>

^{*} **Corresponding author:** Universitat de València, Institute of International Economics, Department of Marketing, C/ del Serpis 29. 46022, Valencia, Spain – gloria.berenguer@uv.es – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8063-6791>

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how a firm's innovation capability and marketing capability, as well as salespeople's ambidexterity in sales and service, influence value co-creation with customers and how this co-creation and ambidexterity directly impact innovative service behavior in salespeople. The paper contributes to the literature by addressing certain aspects that have been relatively unexplored to date. A quantitative study is carried out using a sample consists of 91 sales professionals from the United Kingdom and the United States of America, spanning both consumer (B2C) and industrial market (B2B) salespeople, providing a diverse perspective. Using partial least squares (PLS-SEM) methodology, the findings reveal that (a) value co-creation, driven by the firm's innovation capability and marketing capability, positively affects salespeople's innovative service behavior, and (b) the development of ambidextrous sales and service skills among frontline employees also fosters innovative behaviors in service in the sales team. Based on service-dominant logic, this research provides novel insights into how value co-creation serves as a driver of innovative service behavior in salespeople. It further extends previous research by considering sales and service ambidexterity as a key factor in driving this innovative behavior. These findings highlight the need to co-create value with customers and enhance salespeople's individual competencies to drive their innovative behavior in service within the current competitive and evolving market context.

Keywords: Salespeople's Innovative Service Behavior, Marketing Capability, Innovation Capability, Value Co-creation, Sales-Service Ambidexterity.

R E S U M E N

Este estudio examina cómo la capacidad de innovación y la capacidad de marketing de una empresa, junto con la ambidestreza de los vendedores en ventas y servicio, influyen en la co-creación de valor con los clientes, y cómo esta co-creación y las dimensiones de la ambidestreza impactan directamente en el comportamiento innovador en servicio de los vendedores. El trabajo contribuye a la literatura de ventas abordando aspectos relativamente inexplorados hasta la fecha. Se desarrolla un estudio cuantitativo utilizando una muestra de 91 vendedores de Reino Unido y USA, que abarcan tanto el mercado de consumo (B2C) como industrial (B2B), lo que proporciona una perspectiva diversa. Utilizando la metodología PLS-SEM, los hallazgos revelan que (a) la co-creación de valor, impulsada por las capacidades de innovación y marketing de la empresa, afecta positivamente el comportamiento innovador en servicios de los vendedores, y (b) el desarrollo de habilidades ambidiestras de ventas y servicio entre los empleados de primera línea también fomenta comportamientos innovadores en el equipo de ventas. Basada en la lógica del servicio dominante, esta investigación proporciona nuevos conocimientos sobre la co-creación de valor como motor del comportamiento innovador en servicio de los vendedores y amplía investigaciones previas al considerar la ambidestreza en ventas y servicio como un factor clave para impulsar este comportamiento innovador. Estos hallazgos destacan la necesidad de co-crear valor con los clientes y mejorar las competencias individuales de los vendedores para impulsar su comportamiento innovador en servicio dentro del actual contexto de mercado competitivo y en constante evolución.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento Innovador en Servicio de los Vendedores, Capacidad de Marketing, Capacidad de Innovación, Co-creación de Valor, Ambidestreza de Venta y Servicio.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a constantly evolving global landscape, the innovative behavior of organizational members is crucial for achieving and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Bani-Melhem *et al.*, 2018). Innovation emerges when individuals identify problems and develop ideas or solutions (Alqhaiwi *et al.*, 2023), which emphasizes the relevance of value co-creation as an important process for the seller to identify and respond to specific customer needs (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and thus improve their innovative behavior in providing services. In this context, the development of company's innovation and marketing capabilities generates the necessary conditions and business culture for workers in contact with customers to take on an active role in the development of initiatives that generate value *with* and not only *for* customers, facilitating company-customer engagement and interaction. On the one hand, effective management of innovation capability seeks to foster novel ideas and practices through shared and collaborative co-creation processes (Iddris, 2016). On the other hand, the company's marketing capability generates processes that help define, develop, communicate, and deliver value to customers through the combination, transformation, and deployment of its available resources (Bahadir *et al.*, 2008; Morgan *et al.*, 2022). In both capabilities, actively engaging customers creates opportunities for value co-creation by listening to their opinions and adapting offerings to meet their changing needs. In these processes, salespeople become a key resource for the company; as agents who channel market demands, they contribute to the development of innovation, especially through their innovative behavior in the services they themselves provide.

This collaborative salesperson-customer dynamic is even more necessary due to the current transformation of markets, which has caused certain traditional product and service development methods to become obsolete (Cooper & Sommer, 2018; Jörling *et al.*, 2019). Sales teams, acting as knowledge managers and key links in service ecosystems, can enhance and maintain relationships both within the company and with customers, thus strengthening strategic differentiation (Plouffe *et al.*, 2024). In this sense, service-based competition can represent a highly useful complementary response strategy to generate competitive advantages that are more difficult to imitate (Grawe *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, co-creation in the B2B environment and service management allows firms to strengthen their competitive capabilities by integrating and collaborating with various ecosystem actors, facilitating a differentiating and sustainable advantage (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2023). In the B2C domain, value co-creation, driven by consumers' need for differentiation, enables firms to connect deeply with individual customer needs, building a competitive advantage based on this connection and strengthening their market positioning (Sahi *et al.*, 2022).

In this regard, rethinking the approaches and processes used to nurture salespeople's innovative service behavior is a challenge in which co-creation plays a notable role. Witell *et al.* (2011, p. 89) state that co-creation for the purpose of innovation requires "customers who actively participate in the early phases of the [product] development process by contributing information about their own needs and/or suggesting ideas for future services that they would value being able to use." For

Gegužytė and Bagdonienė (2021), this participation of customers as co-creators in innovation improves the success rate of new services. By working closely with customers to design services tailored to their specific needs, salespeople can stand out in a saturated market by offering unique and highly relevant solutions. From this perspective, the information exchanges between customers and employees are positively linked to innovative behavior in employees engaged in services (Li & Hsu, 2018).

In this context, the sales force plays a crucial role in connecting with markets, as it identifies new customer needs and enables the company to adapt and co-create value through customized solutions (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2024). To achieve that necessary umbilical cord between the markets and the company, it is advisable to develop dynamic approaches in sales, and understand flexibility in sales approaches as a fundamental work tool. In this sense, sales-service (S-S) ambidexterity implies the dynamic ability of employees to perform both sales and service activities by integrating these dual roles (Mom *et al.*, 2009). A salesperson has S-S ambidexterity when they can find synergies between sales and service activities, and exploit these synergistic opportunities by reconfiguring resources accordingly (Shiue, *et al.*, 2021). Thanks to this flexibility, ambidextrous employees can better respond to customer expectations, generating authentic interactions that drive shared value (Tremblay, 2023). In this process, they share knowledge and collaborate with the customer because participation is the tool needed to create joint value (Hartmann *et al.*, 2018). Ahmad *et al.* (2022b) consider that salespeople involved in providing new customer services and generating cross-/up-selling opportunities will be able to generate a high level of innovative performance in services.

In light of these reflections, this research focuses on innovative service behavior in salespeople, seeking to provide knowledge on how to promote this phenomenon through both value co-creation and sales-service ambidexterity. Notably, the aim is to analyze the role of the dimensions (sales and services) of salesperson ambidexterity as drivers of value co-creation and innovative service behavior in their professional field, all with an understanding of the crucial role that the perception of the company's marketing and innovation capability will play so that the salesperson can carry out value co-creation.

This study follows recent research highlighting the importance of value co-creation and ambidexterity in salespeople's innovative service behavior. However, it contributes to the literature by addressing certain aspects that have been relatively unexplored to date. Specifically, while previous studies have focused on value co-creation as a driver of organizational performance (Alnakhli *et al.*, 2021; Erhardt *et al.*, 2019; Gegužytė & Bagdonienė, 2021; Inyang *et al.*, 2023; Melton & Hartline, 2015; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2024) or customer outcomes (Liu & Zhao, 2021; Plouffe *et al.*, 2024), this study introduces the role of value co-creation as a driver of innovative behavior, particularly among salespeople. It builds on the proposal by Saha *et al.* (2022), who recommended exploring the impact of co-creation on behavioral outcomes and highlighted the importance of investigating its role within innovative contexts. On the other hand, unlike studies that emphasize how the capabilities or characteristics of salespeople contribute to ambidexterity (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Batt-Rawden

et al., 2019; Hughes & Ogilvie, 2020), this study considers ambidexterity, specifically in sales and service, as a driving construct for salespeople's innovative service behavior. It is also aligned with Ahmad *et al.*'s (2022b) suggestion that future research consider both dimensions (service provision and cross-/up-selling) as exogenous constructs to examine their individual impact on salespeople's innovative service behavior. Furthermore, the inclusion of B2B and B2C environments in the sample offers a broader perspective that complements previous literature on S-S ambidexterity (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Ahmad *et al.*, 2022a; Ahmad *et al.*, 2022b; Ahmad *et al.*, 2022c).

This new model, based on service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), illustrates how the right context enhances value co-creation, while ambidexterity in sales and service enables salespeople to anticipate and adapt effectively to customer demands. It also examines how this co-creation and S-S ambidexterity directly influence the ability of salespeople to innovate in services.

Firstly, a literature review is carried out on the variables retained in the proposed theoretical model. The hypotheses are then contrasted using the partial least squares method (PLS-SEM). Finally, the conclusions, implications, and management recommendations derived from the results are defined.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Capabilities are considered the implementation of “know-how” when carrying out activities in the various company departments, such as innovation and marketing (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; Morgan *et al.*, 2009). Currently, companies are forced to implement business models that are sustainable and profitable, given that they operate in highly volatile and competitive markets. Innovation capability emerges as a crucial factor for business survival in these complex environments (Andrés *et al.*, 2015). For Romijn & Albaladejo (2002, p. 1054), innovation capability is related to “the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively absorb, master, and improve existing technologies, and create new ones.” This innovation capability, which refers to a company's ability to generate, accept, and implement new ideas, processes, products and also services, is an important instrument in improving and sustaining business development and income (Calantone *et al.*, 2002; Ngo & O'Cass, 2013). In terms of marketing capability, it refers to the ability of companies to use their resources with the purpose of offering specific value to their target audience to achieve the desired goal (Martin & Javalgi, 2016). A series of integrative processes designed to apply the company's collective knowledge, skills, and resources to market-related needs allows the company to add value to its products and services and meet competitive demands (O'Cass & Weerawardena, 2010).

As companies continue to develop their marketing and innovation capabilities, the relevance of value co-creation seems to be growing in response to the evolving environment we are currently experiencing. Explaining value co-creation is a challenge, given the polysemy of the concept; it is reflected in three research streams (Särkkä, 2011) that emphasize experiential aspects (e.g., Barile & Polese, 2010; Songailiene *et al.*, 2011), relational aspects

(e.g., Nenonen & Storbacka, 2010; Vargo, 2011), or both (e.g., Merz *et al.*, 2009; Ojasalo, 2010; Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). In this research, we uphold the concept of value co-creation that emphasizes the collaborative process between organizations and customers and that generates unique value for both internal and external stakeholders of the company (Erhardt *et al.*, 2019) —value that does not reside in the products or services offered but in the experience itself (Berenguer *et al.*, 2020). Value co-creation can involve collaboration with the entire network or ecosystem of agents in the company's environment, both suppliers and customers (Kaartemo *et al.*, 2017). In this way, the value creation process is generated between all the actors involved within a service ecosystem (Hein *et al.*, 2019) in a reciprocal process where value is delivered when all the parties involved assume their roles and fulfill their responsibilities (Williams & Aitken, 2011).

Organizations that prioritize and encourage innovation naturally tend toward co-creating value with their partners and customers, given that innovation and collaboration are intrinsically related (Kim & Chai, 2017). A company's innovation capability not only contributes towards a more sustainable value proposition, but also positions it to generate value in collaboration with various actors in the business ecosystem, such as supply chain partners and customers (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Leveraging innovation capabilities drives value creation by providing knowledge, competencies, and insights into new ideas (Yousaf *et al.*, 2022). In this way, innovativeness enhances value co-creation by enabling firms to adapt dynamically, involving customers as active participants in service improvement and resilience (Lopez *et al.*, 2024), thus consolidating stronger and longer-lasting relationships. From the service-dominant (S-D) logic perspective, innovation favors the exchange of information and knowledge between employees and customers, driving collaboration for value co-creation (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Innovation capability (IC) is positively associated with value co-creation (VCC).

However, a company's success derives not only from the creation of value for its customers through the development of new and relevant goods and services, but also from its marketing methods (Lee & Hsieh, 2010). When a company provides salespeople with industry and market information, it helps the sales team quickly identify potential customers (Liu & Zhao, 2021), which facilitates value co-creation. A strong marketing capability strengthens relationships with customers and allows companies to anticipate changes in their preferences, suggesting an ability to adapt and respond quickly to market demands (O'Cass & Sok, 2014). From the perspective of service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), marketing should be considered as a set of processes and resources with which the company seeks to co-create value. Considering that this approach works, it can be observed that marketing capability plays a fundamental role in the joint co-creation of value between salesperson-customer in the contemporary market, and based on these reflections and previous research, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Marketing capability (MC) is positively associated with value co-creation (VCC).

Furthermore, this value co-creation approach fosters an environment in which the customer actively participates in the development and customization of services, providing feedback that can increase the radicalness and innovative performance of these services (Melton & Hartline, 2015). In this process, the salesperson plays a key role in gathering customer insights (Alnakhli *et al.*, 2021) and integrating them into their own innovative service behavior. Innovative behavior differs from innovation because it focuses on the individual level as the unit of analysis (Alzghoul *et al.*, 2024). The direct interaction of salespeople with customers allows them to actively contribute to value co-creation, thereby developing a strong innovative behavior in service (Li & Hsu, 2018). Based on these reflections, hypothesis 3 is proposed:

H3: Value co-creation (VCC) is positively associated with salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB).

In this context of collaboration, developing the skills of employees, specifically salespeople, to be able to analyze and understand the context of customer interactions is imperative for companies that seek to differentiate themselves from their competitors by improving and creating new services. From time to time, companies have assigned specific responsibilities to front-line employees, whether in services or sales roles. However, the boundaries between sales and services, while once distinct, have become increasingly blurred (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2020). Service activities are understood as those focused on satisfying customer needs, such as addressing comments and resolving complaints, while sales activities focus on offering products and services, initiating new transactions or renewing existing ones (Ahmad *et al.*, 2022a).

Increasing competition in the business environment and rising customer expectations have meant that the ambidextrous sales approach, in which salespeople are simultaneously responsible for selling (cross-selling) and servicing the customer (providing customer service), has become the norm in today's sales organisations (Temerak *et al.*, 2024). This phenomenon has motivated further research on ambidexterity in sales and services, both in business practice and in academia (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2020). This emerging research draws on the contextual ambidexterity literature to argue that a salesperson's two key activities (services and sales) can be maximized simultaneously by seeking and exploiting synergies between the two (Shiue *et al.*, 2021). In this study, the sales service ambidexterity scale proposed by Jasmand *et al.* (2012) is used. It is composed of two dimensions: customer service provision, which refers to "the activities carried out with the objective of helping customers satisfy their needs through the portfolios of products or services they already consume" (p. 22), and cross-/up-selling, which refers to "activities aimed at modifying (that is, expanding or replacing parts of) the current portfolios of products or services consumed by customers, based on their needs not met by said current portfolios" (p. 22).

Studies have recently been carried out on how the combination of sales and service activities has the potential to generate greater value for both buyers and sellers by reducing or even mitigating the disconnect between the objectives of the supplier and the buyer (Hughes & Ogilvie, 2020). Simplifying interactions be-

tween sellers and customers is essential to co-creating value and preventing a lack of coordination from harming customer service (Plouffe *et al.*, 2024). Sales and service ambidexterity allows salespeople to personalize their approaches, generating a sense of collaboration that strengthens the customer-salesperson relationship and promotes a positive experience, leading to a greater willingness of customers to engage in value co-creation (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024). These results lead to hypotheses H4 and H5:

H4: Customer service provision (CSP) on the part of the salesperson is positively associated with value co-creation (VCC).

H5: Cross-/Up-selling (CUS) is positively associated with value co-creation (VCC).

Previous research has also revealed other formulas through which salespeople can develop their innovative service behavior. Ahmad (2022b) demonstrated in B2B salespeople that, when they balance both sales generation and service requirements, they can offer innovative solutions to meet their customers' needs. Delving into this relationship, Nijssen *et al.* (2017) consider that this type of ambidexterity is essential to achieve a wide variety of innovations and therefore impact innovative behavior in salespeople's services. As a result of these investigations, hypotheses H6 and H7 can be formulated:

H6: Customer service provision (CSP) is positively associated with salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB).

H7: Cross-/Up-selling (CUS) is positively associated with salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB).

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model.

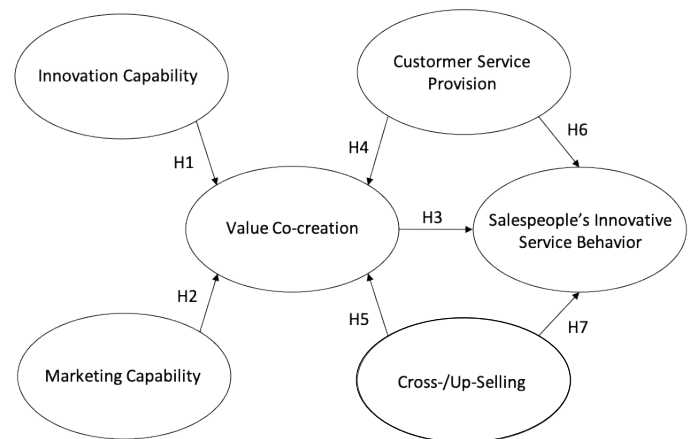


Figure 1
Theoretical Model

Source: Own elaboration.

3. METHODOLOGY

A leading multinational company in construction and decoration materials was selected as the focus of this study. The family-owned company is recognized for the high quality and innovative design of its products, offering interior and exterior solutions with ceramic coatings and bathroom and kitchen fittings and accessories. Its outstanding innovation capability is

evident in the constant development of cutting-edge solutions and products that become trends in both consumer (B2C) and organizational (B2B) markets. Committed to research and development, it has created advanced technologies and designs that have revolutionized the industry and have been widely acclaimed for their originality and quality, positioning the company as a benchmark in innovation in its sector. In this research we focus exclusively on analyzing the salespeople it employs in two of its international markets (United States and United Kingdom). The choice of these markets is due to their strategic importance and their receptivity to innovation in the construction and decoration materials sector, which allows the study of sellers' performance and their ability to generate innovation in their relationships with customers. The exclusive focus on the company's salespeople is because they are the key players in the direct interface with customers in both consumer and organizational

markets. These salespeople play a critical role not only in selling products, but also in developing their innovative behavior to offer service-solutions for customers.

In this work, a quantitative approach is used by means of a self-administered ad hoc survey via the Internet; the questionnaire was sent to the entire population through a link in the company's digital newsletter that reached the salesperson's e-mail. The link led recipients to a LimeSurvey server through which the questionnaire was accessed, preceded by a letter written by the company. The structured questionnaire is made up of scales adapted from the literature (Table 1) to which are added a series of questions that allow the characterization of the sample made up of salespeople from both the United States and the United Kingdom. The items of each construct were evaluated using Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Table 1
Scales

Construct	Dimensions	Number of Items	Original Scales by Authors
Innovation Capability (IC)	Unidimensional	4 items	Wang & Ahmed (2004)
Marketing Capability (MC)	Unidimensional	4 items	Morgan <i>et al.</i> , (2009); Ngo & O'Casey (2012)
Value Co-Creation (VCC)	Unidimensional	6 items	Claro & Claro (2010)
Sales-Service Ambidexterity	Customer Service Provision (CSP) Cross-/Up-Selling (CUS)	6 items 6 items	Jasmand <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Salespeople's Innovative Service Behavior (SISB)	Unidimensional	6 items	Luoh <i>et al.</i> (2014); Ahmad <i>et al.</i> , (2022b)

Source: Own elaboration.

The population consisted of 348 company salespeople in both countries. The field work was carried out from 16 June to 16 July 2023. An effective sample of 91 salespeople was obtained, which implies an overall response rate of 26.15%.

As shown in Table 2, there is a balanced distribution between the percentage of men (46.15%) and women (46.15%) participants. The age of the respondents is very diverse, but the majority are over 31 years old (81.3%). Regarding the level of education, one in two participants (51.64%) have a bachelor's or postgraduate studies degree and their experience as a salesperson throughout their working life exceeds 11 years in the majority of cases (65.1%). Over half (54.94%) do not have more than five years of experience in the company. There is a balance between the number of employees dedicated to B2C sales (49.45%) and the number of sales representatives assigned to B2B sales (50.54%).

Table 2
Sample Characteristics

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Man	42	46.15%
Woman	42	46.15%
Prefer not to answer	7	7.69%
Age		
20-25 years	5	5.49%

Variables	N	%
Age		
26-30 years	10	10.98%
31-35 years	15	16.48%
36-40 years	16	17.58%
41-45 years	17	18.68%
46-50 years	12	13.18%
50+ years	14	15.38%
N/A	2	2.19%
Educational level completed		
Primary school	1	1.09%
Secondary school	13	14.28%
CertHE	11	12.08%
DipHE	14	15.38%
Foundation degree	5	5.49%
Bachelor's degree	41	45.05%
Postgraduate studies	6	6.59%
Experience as a salesperson		
1-5 years	13	14.28%
6-10 years	18	19.78%
11-15 years	19	20.87%
16-20 years	17	18.68%
21-25 years	13	14.28%
25+ years	11	12.08%

Variables	N	%
Experience as a salesperson in the company		
1-5 years	50	54.94%
6-10 years	12	13.18%
11-15 years	12	13.18%
16-20 years	12	13.18%
21-25 years	4	4.39%
25+ years	1	1.09%
Geographical location		
United Kingdom	40	43.95%
United States	51	56.04%
Group of salespeople		
B2B salesperson	46	50.54%
B2C salesperson	45	49.45%

Source: Own elaboration.

The theoretical model was tested using the partial least square method (PLS-SEM) and SmartPLS4 software (Ringle, et al., 2022).

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The evaluation of the measurement model recommended the elimination of indicators that were much lower than the reference value (0.70), although two from the value co-creation and service innovation scale were retained (0.696 and 0.687 respectively) due to their proximity to the reference value and to preserve the content validity of the scales, taking into account the significance of both loadings. The rest of the reflective indicators showed adequate values of internal consistency and composite reliability. Convergent validity is adequate with values greater than 0.5 in all cases, which implies that each compound explains at least 50% of the variance of the assigned indicators. All this allows us to confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument (Table 3).

Table 3
Measurement Instrument of the Structural Model: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Factor	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Innovation Capability (IC)	IC_1 During the past five years, our firm has developed many new management approaches for our customers.	0.758**	0.800	0.870	0.627
	IC_2 Key executives of our firm are willing to take risks to seize and explore "chancy" growth opportunities in market.	0.839**			
	IC_3 Our firm's research & development department or product development resources are adequate to handle the development needs of new products and services.	0.719**			
	IC_4 Our firm is willing to try new ways of doing things and seek unusual, novel solutions for our customers.	0.844**			
Marketing Capability (MC)	MC_1 Our firm's incorporation of customer needs into marketing of products and services has been better than that of competitors.	0.889**	0.920	0.943	0.806
	MC_2 Our firm's implementation of marketing activities has been better than that of competitors.	0.918**			
	MC_3 Our firm's advertising management and creative skills are better in comparison with our competitors.	0.923**			
	MC_4 Our firm has stronger public relation skills than our competitors.	0.859**			
Value Co-creation (VCC)	VCC_1 Customers actively participate in the process of new product development of our company.	0.753**	0.874	0.905	0.615
	VCC_2 Our company shares long-term plans of our products with customers.	0.837**			
	VCC_3 Customers and our company deal with problems that arise in the course of the relationship together.	0.780**			
	VCC_4 In most aspects of the relationship with the buyers, the responsibility for getting things done is shared.	0.771**			
	VCC_5 Our company is flexible in response to changes in the relationship with our customers.	0.857**			
	VCC_6 When some unexpected situation arises, customers and our company can work out a new deal.	0.696**			

Factor	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Customer Service Provision (CSP)	CSP_4 I usually listen attentively to customers in order to take appropriate action to handle their concerns regarding their products.	0.882**	0.838	0.903	0.756
	CSP_5 I usually pay attention to the customers' questions about their products to answer them correctly.	0.882**			
	CSP_6 Making sure that I fully understand the reason why the customers contact me allows me to better help them with their questions and concerns regarding their products.	0.844**			
Cross-/Up-Selling (CUS)	CUS_8 I usually gather as much customer information as possible to offer a suitable product to customers.	0.742**	0.824	0.884	0.656
	CUS_10 I usually ask questions to assess whether the customers would be willing to buy an additional product.	0.829**			
	CUS_11 I rarely neglect a good opportunity to advise customers of a product which they could benefit from.	0.828**			
	CUS_12 I usually offer an additional product which meets the customers' needs best.	0.837**			
Salespeople's Innovative Service Behavior (SISB)	SISB_2 While working in the sales department, I try to propose my own creative ideas and convince customers.	0.833**	0.788	0.863	0.614
	SISB_3 While working in the sales department, I seek new service techniques, methods or techniques.	0.816**			
	SISB_4 While working in the sales department, I provide a suitable innovative plan to the customers.	0.789*			
	SISB_6 Overall, I consider myself a creative member of my team in this sales department.	0.687**			

Note: *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding discriminant validity, it was verified that the cross-loadings were never greater than the loadings of the construct itself (Hair et al., 2017). In the application of the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than the estimated correlation between the factors. Likewise, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) shows that all values are less than 0.90 (critical value for related constructs). Therefore, with these results, it can be concluded that the instrument has discriminant validity (Table 4).

	IC	MC	VCC	CSP	CUS	SISB
IC	0.791	0.829	0.662	0.127	0.302	0.358
MC	0.716	0.897	0.664	0.112	0.292	0.310
VCC	0.576	0.621	0.784	0.086	0.326	0.358
CSP	0.075	0.099	0.053	0.869	0.759	0.615
CUS	0.251	0.263	0.282	0.624	0.809	0.704
SISB	0.287	0.263	0.293	0.502	0.571	0.783

Note: The values on the diagonal are the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE). Below the diagonal: correlations between factors. Above the diagonal: HTMT ratio. The terms IC, MC, VCC, CSP, CUS and SISB refer to the variables innovation capability, marketing capability, value co-creation, customer service provision, cross-/up-selling and salespeople's innovative service behavior, respectively.

Source: Own elaboration.

Once the conditions of the measurement model were validated, the significance of the structural relationships was analyzed through the bootstrapping algorithm in order to contrast the hypotheses. Based on the results obtained (see Table 5), it can be stated that the model, initially supported at a theoretical level, finds statistical support in five of the seven proposed hypotheses.

Table 5
Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationships	Results	Path coefficient	T-value	Structural VIF
H1	IC->VCC	Confirmed	0.247*	1.807	2.079
H2	MC->VCC	Confirmed	0.406**	3.122	2.083
H3	VCC->SISB	Confirmed	0.180*	1.878	1.116
H4	CSP->VCC	Not confirmed	-0.125	1.176	1.659
H5	CUS->VCC	Not confirmed	0.191	1.545	1.780
H6	CSP->SISB	Confirmed	0.275*	2.656	1.684
H7	CUS->SISB	Confirmed	0.348*	2.633	1.824

Note: VIF = Variance inflation factors.

VcC R² = 0.442; Q² = 0.254. SIC R² = 0.390; Q² = 0.303. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. SRMR = 0.077.

The terms IC, MC, VCC, CSP, CUS and SISB refer to the variables innovation capability, marketing capability, value co-creation, customer service provision, cross-/up-selling and salesperson service innovative behavior, respectively.

Source: Own elaboration.

The results show that both innovation capability (IC) and marketing capability (MC) can significantly predict value co-creation (VCC), which confirms hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2. Specifically, while the relationship between innovation capability (IC) and value co-creation (VCC) is significant, with a path coefficient of 0.247, the relationship between marketing capability (MC) and value co-creation (VCC) is stronger and exerts a greater influence, reflected by a higher path coefficient of 0.406.

It can also be seen that the perception of value co-creation (VCC) significantly impacts salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB) confirming hypothesis 3. Regarding the factors that come from sales-service ambidexterity, both customer service provision (CSP) and cross-/up-selling (CUS) significantly predict salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB), but not value co-creation (VCC). In this way, hypotheses 6 and 7 are confirmed but hypotheses 4 and 5 are rejected.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this study was on how firm capabilities and ambidexterity of salespeople influence value co-creation, and, in turn, how this value co-creation and ambidexterity affect salespeople's innovative behavior in service delivery. An attempt has been made to draw conclusions to identify practices and strategies that contribute to innovative service behavior.

The relationship between innovation capability (IC) and value co-creation (VCC) is significant. As Kim and Chai (2017) point out, innovation and collaboration are intrinsically related, indicating that companies that prioritize innovation are more likely to co-create value with their customers. This not only helps maintain a more sustainable value proposition, but also places the company in a position to generate value in collaboration with various actors in the business ecosystem, such as supply chain partners and customers (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). Our results are thus in line with other research works (Lopez *et al.*, 2024).

In parallel, the relationship between marketing capability (MC) and value co-creation (VCC) is stronger and has more influence compared to innovation capability. Therefore, this capability emerges as an indispensable element in strengthening relationships with customers and anticipating market demands (Liu & Zhao, 2021). Integrative marketing processes thus not only add value to products and services, but also facilitate the identification of potential customers and the joint creation of value (O'Cass & Sok, 2014). Furthermore, marketing capability is also reaffirmed as a tool for adaptation and rapid response to changes in market preferences, emphasizing its crucial role in generating competitive value propositions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The importance of both innovation and marketing capability in value co-creation is therefore validated, but marketing capability appears to have a stronger influence, based on our results. As a whole, the development of both capabilities by the company is the necessary impetus for co-creation with customers, which in turn affects salespeople's innovative service behavior. This axis of significant relationships reveals the importance of the business context so that salespeople can develop innovative initiatives in their respective professional fields.

A second axis, which complements the first, emerges from salesperson ambidexterity, and is an essential factor in the promotion of innovative behavior in service. On the one hand, customer service provision (CSP) and cross-/up-selling (CUS) were expected to be positively associated with value co-creation (VCC) (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Plouffe *et al.*, 2024). However, the results do not confirm these expectations. It could be that the relationship between CSP/CUS and VCC is more complex than originally assumed. The sample size used in the study may also play a role; the actual effects may not be large enough to be detected accurately. Furthermore, the relationships between variables may vary depending on the specific context of the study, such as industry, customer type, or company strategy (Mason & Perreault, 1991). In this particular context, customer service provision and cross-/up-selling may not have a direct impact on value co-creation.

On the other hand, a positive and significant association was found between customer service provision (CSP), cross-/up-selling (CUS), and salespeople's innovative service behavior (SISB) (Ahmad, 2022b; Nijssen *et al.*, 2017). Improving understanding of the context of customer interactions can foster the ways in which salespeople can offer innovative solutions to meet their needs (Ahmad *et al.*, 2022b). It is the ambidextrous roles that have a stronger relationship with the innovative behavior in service initiatives developed by salespeople. Thus, the latter not only depends on the strategy and the favorable context that stimulates the company, but also on the ambidextrous profile of its salespeople, meaning that these characteristics are as important as the co-creation itself. These findings emphasize the importance of developing ambidextrous skills in frontline employees to enhance their ability to innovate in services and differentiate in a competitive business environment (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Hughes & Ogilvie, 2020; Liu & Zhao, 2021; Temerak *et al.*, 2024).

In conclusion, this study reveals a first axis, in which the fundamental importance of innovation and marketing in the generation of business value is highlighted, especially in the context of value co-creation with customers. It can be observed that marketing capability has a significant influence on value co-creation. There is also a second axis, which complements the first; although a direct relationship between the provision of customer services and cross-/up-selling with value co-creation is not confirmed, it reveals that both are positively associated with innovation capability in salesforce services, thus underlining the importance of developing ambidextrous skills in frontline employees to improve their innovative behavior in service and differentiation in a competitive business environment.

Regarding the practical implications from a business perspective, this research encourages reflection on the crucial role that salespeople play in the development of innovative practices when providing the customer with a service, since ambidexterity in sales and services has the power to boost the salespeople's innovative service behavior. To customers, salespeople are the face of the company and their ability to understand customer needs and effectively communicate the value of products or services is essential. Furthermore, collaboration between salespeople and customers benefits the process of innovating in service provision, which highlights the importance of sellers' active partici-

pation in value co-creation. All of this occurs within a business context propelled by the organization's innovation and marketing capabilities, which generate the appropriate environment so that salespeople are not only responsible for driving sales but also play an integral role in generating value for the company through the co-creation of value with customers.

Although most of the objectives of this study were confirmed, there are limitations that suggest areas for future research. Firstly, instead of focusing on a single company, repeating the study with different companies in the same sector could help to corroborate or refute these findings. Even though studies with similar sample sizes have been conducted (Amyx *et al.*, 2016; Fallah *et al.*, 2018), additional studies are required to replicate these results using larger and more representative samples. Furthermore, the use of the same source of information to measure both antecedent and consequence variables increases the risk of common method variance (CMV), which could influence the results, and therefore, it will be necessary to consider it in the design of future studies to reach more reliable conclusions. Moreover, although a sample composed of two different countries was used, comparing the results with samples of other nationalities could reveal variations in behavior. Additionally, testing the model by comparing B2B and B2C environments could determine whether the variables have similar impacts in both relational contexts.

In addition, to complement the findings, a second study could be conducted, potentially employing a qualitative approach or, alternatively, experimental methods to provide stronger evidence for the findings. Future research could also explore the longitudinal effects of these variables to examine changes over time. Another avenue could involve studying industry-specific impacts to see if certain sectors display unique patterns in innovation and co-creation. Finally, analyzing the role of digital tools in facilitating ambidexterity and co-creation may reveal how technology enhances or moderates these relationships.

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