

Transformative service research for human well-being: contextual challenges, place-based framework and SDGs

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Abstract

Purpose – The transformative service research (TSR) literature is continually expanding its scope across various academic streams. One of the key factors is prioritizing both individual and societal well-being. The purpose of this paper is to map TSR development and its alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by considering place-specificities to understand factors, barriers and strategies that enhance individual well-being.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used the systematic literature review approach, adhering to PRISMA guidelines. The Scopus and Web of Science databases were used to scrutinize, categorize and briefly synthesize 164 peer-reviewed journal articles, aiming to identify key domains, factors, barriers and strategies for advancing well-being in various places and meet the Agenda 2030.

Findings – The study proposes an integrated, place-sensitive framework that maps the interconnections between service entities, consumer entities and individual well-being outcomes across urban and rural contexts. It shows that in TSR, well-being is contextually embedded: rural contexts emphasize emotional, cultural and eudaimonic aspects of individual well-being, while urban settings prioritize the economic, social and infrastructural dimensions. The framework advances the TSR debate by aligning TSR concepts and domains with the SDGs. The findings indicate that TSR tends to prioritize certain SDGs while overlooking others, with a predominant focus on individual well-being, and this is also the case in different places. Finally, this review summarizes the key knowledge gaps into a clear and actionable future research agenda to guide research on SDGs related to service research.

Practical implications – This review highlights key research limitations and synthesizes these gaps into a practical future research agenda. This agenda is organized into four main categories: multilevel societal change, ensuring equity, environmental resilience and institutional dynamics, which directly address overlooked areas in the literature. This clear roadmap provides immediate practical value by guiding researchers, policymakers and practitioners toward targeted interventions needed to promote effective and sustainable transformative services.

Originality/value – This research contributes to the literature by examining the key domains of TSR literature through the place-based lens and the SDGs and Agenda 2030 policy framework. It offers a novel perspective on how and whether service research contributes to the transformative power of services in diverse social contexts.

Keywords Transformative service research, Well-being, Sustainability, Place-based approach, Agenda 2030, Sustainable development goals

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Amid growing global concern for sustainable development and social equity, services are increasingly recognized as catalysts for addressing societal needs and enhancing human well-being. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for context-sensitive interventions that improve quality of life, reduce inequalities and foster inclusive communities. Fulfilling this ambitious goal, it is essential to adopt a research approach that critically examines and encourages the social change potential inherent in service systems. However, traditional service research has primarily focused on firm-level outcomes such as efficiency, satisfaction and loyalty (Vargo and

Lusch, 2008), often neglecting the broader social impacts of services. In response, transformative service research (TSR) has emerged to explore how service systems can improve individual and community well-being across diverse socio-spatial contexts

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(Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017). It emphasizes uplifting changes through service innovations that meet human needs, reduce harm and promote empowerment. The core concern of TSR is not merely the economic value of the service, but its potential to generate positive well-being outcomes in everyday life, especially among underserved populations.

TSR has emerged as a multidisciplinary paradigm focused on designing and critically evaluating service systems that enable improvements in individual, community and societal well-being (Anderson and Ostrom, 2011; Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2019). Focusing on social change as a mechanism to enhance both individual and community well-being, TSR underscores the role of services in promoting not only personal development but also inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies (Anderson and Xue, 2022; Previte and Robertson, 2019). This body of research spans diverse sectors, transportation, tourism, health care and finance, and increasingly engages with global challenges such as the refugee crisis, with a particular emphasis on fulfilling basic human needs and improving their well-being (Ungaro *et al.*, 2021; Nasr and Fisk, 2019).

To support these ambitions, foundational frameworks have been developed to guide the design and evaluation of transformative services. These include Anderson *et al.*'s (2013) framework on the role of service entities in enhancing well-being, the transformative value creation via service communications (TVCS) framework (Tsotsou and Diehl, 2022) and the transformative supply chain (TSC) model (Mody, 2023; Tansakul *et al.*, 2023), each illustrating how TSR principles can integrate sustainable practices into organizational transformation.

Although the scholarly discourse is growing, there remains a limited understanding of how TSR discussion differs across various contexts, and how and if TSR, aiming at developing more resilient and sustainable societies, aligns with the SDGs. TSR's applications span multiple domains (Santos *et al.*, 2023); however, their implementation remains highly contingent upon contextual factors. The success of transformative services depends on how they are adapted to different places – specificities where community dynamics shape both service delivery and well-being outcomes (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017; Krisjanous *et al.*, 2023). There is an increasing call to explore these variations and tailor transformative service solutions to meet place-specific needs (Ho and Shirahada, 2021). However, it is unclear how TSR addressed this point.

As underlined by Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999), servicescapes can take very different forms depending on their socio-spatial setting. Their distinction between “non-places,” which dominate urban environments, and “common places,” which are more typical of rural ones, highlights how the nature of service spaces reflects underlying social and spatial dynamics. This perspective underscores the importance of capturing the emotional, symbolic and evaluative bonds through which people experience and value their service environments (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Integrating these insights, the urban–rural lens becomes a useful analytical device to examine how place-based characteristics shape the uneven transformative potential of services.

TSR also holds promise as a strategic framework for supporting the Agenda 2030, a term we use to refer jointly to the SDGs and the European Union's New Political Agenda (NPA) 2030 (Voulvoulis *et al.*, 2022). These global agendas

underscore the importance of services in accelerating sustainability transitions and building resilient communities. While a growing body of service literature has begun to explore connections with the SDGs (such as Fisk *et al.*, 2024; Hammedi *et al.*, 2024; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2024a; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2024b), limited attention has been paid to the intersection between TSR and Agenda 2030 in a systematic and context-sensitive manner. Addressing and understanding this intersection is crucial for advancing the role of services in sustainability transitions and informing policy and practice across diverse socioeconomic and geographic contexts.

This study examines how transformative services promote sustainable well-being in different places. It addresses three research questions (RQs):

- RQ1. What theoretical and sector domains does TSR research focus on?
- RQ2. How is TSR characterized in different living contexts (rural versus urban) in terms of barriers and strategies to enhance individual, community and societal well-being?
- RQ3. How is TSR aligned with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs?

By engaging these questions, the study deepens insight into the contextual nature of transformative services and their role in advancing equity, sustainability and systemic change across diverse socioeconomic settings. A key purpose of conducting an SLR is to establish a future research agenda. We transform existing limitations and unexplored areas into a prioritized, structured plan that provides a foundation for future theoretical and empirical studies.

2. Conceptual background

2.1 Transformative service research

TSR has gained prominence as a field dedicated to enhancing individual and collective well-being through service design, delivery and systemic innovation (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Anderson and Xue, 2022). Grounded in the idea that services can be vehicles for social progress, TSR emphasizes outcomes such as equity, empowerment and improved quality of life, particularly for socially or economically marginalized populations (Johns and Davey, 2019; Boenigk *et al.*, 2021).

Previous TSR reviews have primarily focused on application domains, value co-creation processes or actor-specific experiences (e.g. Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Fisk *et al.*, 2018; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2019; Ungaro *et al.*, 2024). Some of the TSR reviews have concentrated on specific sectors, e.g. health care (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2022), aging (Rahman *et al.*, 2024), refugees (Subramanian *et al.*, 2022) or populations, e.g. Muslim consumers (Islam *et al.*, 2023), drug-using youth (Riedel *et al.*, 2023) or offer conceptual syntheses of themes such as co-creation (Landry and Furrer, 2023), robotic services (Barbosa *et al.*, 2024) or user collaboration (Weaver *et al.*, 2025). While these reviews have deepened the field's understanding of discrete service domains, and significant progress has been made in leveraging services to address complex societal challenges, much of the extant literature has

focused on contexts where service infrastructures are more advanced and institutional capacities more robust (Jain and Rohrer, 2022).

This bias has been highlighted by recent critiques that question the epistemological foundations of TSR, particularly its alignment with technocratic and market-centric paradigms, which may overlook local knowledge and lived experiences (Weaver et al., 2025). In response, scholars have advocated for more reflexive, co-produced and pluralistic approaches that value indigenous knowledge systems, democratic engagement and inclusive methods (Horcea-Milcu et al., 2024; Gordon and Vink, 2024). This aligns with broader movements in service research that advocate sustainability, inclusiveness and alignment with the SDGs (Russell-Bennett et al., 2024a). However, explicit connections between TSR findings and global policy agendas such as the SDGs remain limited.

2.2 Place-based perspective on transformative service research

To advance these debates, it is essential to consider how TSR accounts for diverse contexts and locations. A place-based perspective emphasizes the contextual and cultural specificities in which services are designed, delivered and experienced. Rather than treating services as universally transferable, this perspective recognizes that well-being, sustainability and inclusiveness are co-constructed in relation to local environments, histories and communities (Barca et al., 2012; Friedmann, 2010). A place-based perspective highlights the importance of geographical, cultural and socioeconomic contexts in shaping human experiences and institutional responses (Loor et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2023).

In service research, adopting a place-based perspective underscores the unique traits, needs and values (Reed et al., 2017) of specific locations and communities in the processes of designing, delivering and evaluating services (Marsh et al., 2017). Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) demonstrate that servicescapes can take very different forms depending on their socio-spatial setting. They contrast “non-places,” such as malls, airports or chain hotels, which dominate many urban environments and foster anonymity, with “common places,” such as local shops, pubs or wash-houses, which often persist in rural and small-community contexts and nurture everyday interaction and communal identity. This distinction suggests that understanding transformative services through a place-based lens might provide detailed insights into how well-being outcomes are unevenly produced and experienced across communities (Finsterwalder et al., 2024).

Rosenbaum et al. (2007) have already called for deeper investigation into “person–place relationships to develop a transformative service research paradigm [and examine] how service establishments, intangible exchanges, and humanistic and social elements within servicescapes promote consumer welfare” (p. 55). Their later work (Rosenbaum et al., 2017) builds on this by emphasizing that servicescapes are not neutral backdrops but relational spaces where transformation is emergent, co-constructed and embedded in place-based dynamics.

Nevertheless, many TSR applications still view transformation as a bounded, individual outcome (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Previte and Robertson, 2019), rather than an ongoing, systemic process rooted in place and practice

(Mody, 2023; Rosenbaum et al., 2017; Weaver et al., 2025). Krisjanous et al. (2023) offer a compelling critique and expansion of TSR through the lens of “place.” Their work highlights how servicescapes are not merely backdrops but active, cocurated components of the service experience, capable of fostering well-being through the dynamic integration of resources. This view challenges the predominantly abstract and symbolic treatment of service contexts in much of TSR. This place-based perspective highlights that transformative outcomes depend not only on design or delivery, but also on systemic conditions (Ghosh et al., 2021), including who participates in the service design, how power is distributed and how local contexts are engaged.

2.3 Service research and sustainable development goals

The United Nations’ SDGs, adopted in 2015, present a call to action to ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The 193 UN member states have accepted the challenge, and it comprises 17 goals [1] and 169 associated targets. The SDGs are a universal framework of deeply interconnected, multidimensional development aims, spanning economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability (UN, 2015). The scope is broad, and the risk of trade-offs among goals, in addition to synergies, is also significant. Researchers have developed several sets of indicators and have monitored the rise and fall of synergies and trade-offs across goals over time (Kroll et al., 2019). So, while the SDGs have become a prominent framework across policy and development discourse, their integration into business, marketing and service research is comparatively recent (Gordon and Vink, 2024; Russell-Bennett et al., 2024b; Catahan, 2024).

Recent advances in service research demonstrate both conceptual frameworks and applied pathways for aligning with the SDGs. Russell-Bennett et al. (2024b) synthesized the 17 SDGs into seven service research themes, offering service scholars a structured agenda for impactful engagement with sustainability challenges. This perspective positions TSR as a catalyst for improving life on planet Earth by situating research in direct relation to “private, public and planetary well-being” (Fisk and Alkire, 2021, 195). Recently, service research facilitates and proposes service ecosystems that leverage partnerships and transform the service systems in line with the SDGs to benefit humanity and empower individuals (Russell-Bennett et al., 2024a).

At the same time, Gordon and Vink (2024) caution that service research has an orientation that often leads to addressing SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), thereby reproducing neoliberal logics of marketization and privatization. They argue that critically constructive approaches are required to interrogate these assumptions, expose structural inequities and enable truly transformative institutional services.

Nonetheless, the research area of TSR has emerged as a promising lens for engaging with the SDGs, offering both conceptual and practical pathways to contribute to human well-being (Anderson et al., 2013; Ostrom et al., 2015). As emphasized in the first part of this work, transformative services aim to create uplifting changes and improvements in the well-being of individuals and communities (Anderson et al., 2013).

Initially focused on health, financial literacy and social inclusion, TSR has recently broadened its scope to encompass systemic impacts, including environmental sustainability and equity, aligning well with the ambitions of the SDGs (Russell-Bennett et al., 2024a, 2024b; Subramony and Rosenbaum, 2024). In recent years, literature has emphasized the importance of transformative thinking and action in service research to help achieve sustainability goals by addressing global challenges and promoting sustainable development for all humanity (Fisk et al., 2024; Russell-Bennett et al., 2024a). In this debate, scholars emphasize the importance of service researchers authentically engaging with the SDGs and aligning their research with the SDGs themes to address global discrimination and improve the world for all.

3. Methodology

The study used a systematic literature review (SLR), which helps in understanding a particular construct (Elg et al., 2020). Systematic reviews are particularly valuable in emerging or rapidly developing fields, as they help structure the literature and identify conceptual boundaries (Snyder, 2019). We adopted a systematic review methodology to investigate and synthesize the multidisciplinary literature on TSR. Given TSR's diverse disciplinary influences, particularly its intersections with the SDGs, this approach allowed us to identify theoretical and practical limitations, integrate varying definitions and conceptual frameworks and map prominent thematic research streams (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015; Fisk et al., 2018). For this purpose, we followed the scientific method [e.g. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)] to ensure transparency and rigor (Paul and Criado, 2020). Consistent with previous studies (Goyal and Kumar, 2020; Landry and Furrer, 2023; Marzi et al., 2024), this method systematically evaluated and analyzed the existing literature to explain key factors in the conception, design and implementation of transformative services.

We used inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure conceptual and objective alignment with the scope of TSR. The details are provided in the PRISMA Chart (see Figure 1), following the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) to ensure a rigorous and unbiased synthesis of prior research on TSR. Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) were used for their reliability and extensive coverage (Caputo and Kargina, 2022). Using Boolean operators, we used search strings such as "Transformative service*" AND "Wellbeing*" OR "Well-being*" to identify studies within the domains of business, management and accounting. This approach intentionally focused the review on TSR-related literature, thereby excluding a broader body of research on well-being and SDGs outside the TSR domain. However, our primary goal is to map the development of TSR literature and how its development aligns with SDGs, also by applying a place-based lens.

The inclusion criteria restricted the sample to peer-reviewed, English-language journal articles accessible through these databases and published up to November 2024. An initial pool of 577 studies was refined to 336 through deduplication, with 172 excluded due to irrelevance or type, leaving a final sample of 164 articles. The selected studies underwent manual content analysis, revealing insights into the interplay between service

and consumer entities on well-being and identifying research gaps for future exploration. We discussed various research domains, factors and barriers to achieving social change in both urban and rural settings within the context of TSR. We conducted a two-stage study of 164 peer-reviewed articles to determine the essential research domains, factors and challenges in TSR. First, we used R's Biblioshiny package to map the cooccurrence, theme clusters and citation patterns. This allowed us to identify broader structural tendencies in the TSR literature. In the second stage, we used a rigorous manual content analysis of the article abstracts and full texts to interpret and validate the computational patterns. This iterative strategy enabled us to synthesize findings and identify essential themes, as well as the key variables and persistent hurdles to TSR research.

4. Results and discussion

The descriptive bibliometric analysis of the retrieved studies offers insight into the evolving research landscape of TSR. The earliest contribution dates to 2010 (Ostrom et al., 2015), with a notable growth in scholarly attention over the past decade. Publication output steadily increased, peaking between 2020 and 2022 with 41, 49 and 45 articles, respectively, reflecting a period of heightened academic engagement with TSR. The *Journal of Services Marketing* emerged as the leading outlet, publishing 79 articles, followed by *The Service Industries Journal* (30 articles), the *Journal of Service Management* (29 articles) and the *Journal of Service Research* (25 articles). In terms of geographical authorship, the majority of corresponding authors were affiliated with institutions in the USA (110 articles), Australia (73 articles), the UK (43 articles) and New Zealand (29 articles).

TSR is not merely a theoretical framework but a field that provides practical pathways for service providers to create transformative value. TSR literature reveals that TSR encompasses several key domains, concepts, frameworks and theories that collectively contribute to the field of service research. Prior studies have discussed TSR from various angles, highlighting its practical implications.

4.1 The theoretical and industry domains of transformative service research

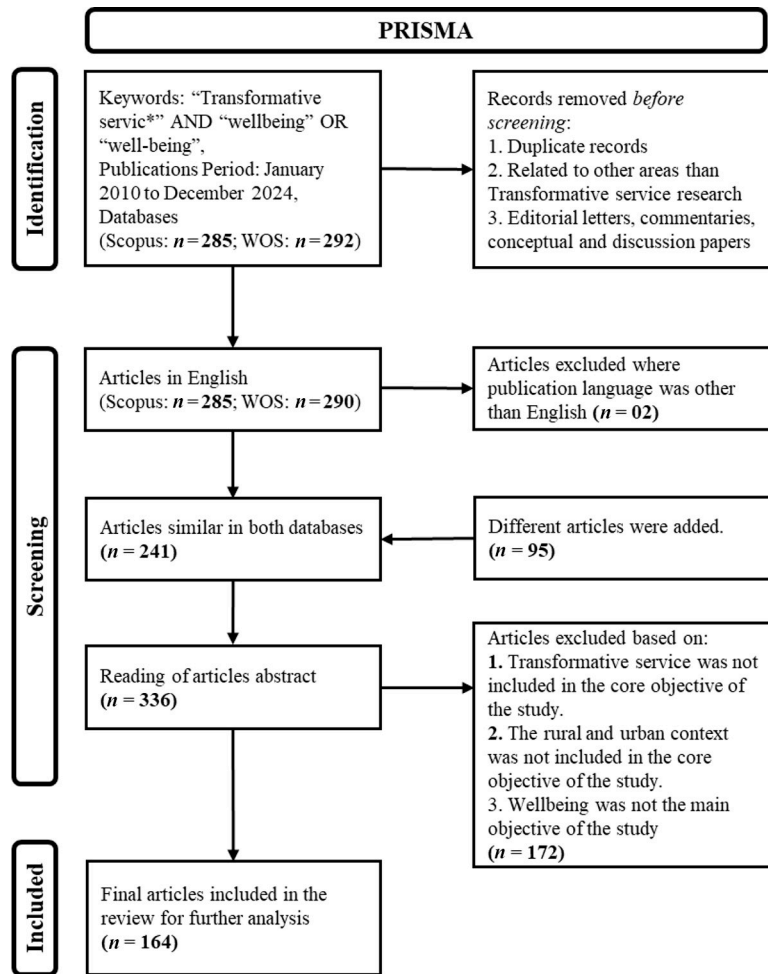
To answer *RQ1*, we first identify key industry and theoretical domains that define the TSR landscape.

4.1.1 The industry domains of transformative service research

Based on our systematic review, the literature on TSR investigates the transformative power of services in terms of customer engagement, co-creation activities and enabling infrastructures, primarily in social services, as shown in Table 1. Across various fields, TSR frameworks consistently promote service innovation that enhances human-centered and mainly individual well-being.

Social services emerge as the most explored domain, with studies highlighting their capacity to promote individual and collective well-being through structured interventions (Anderson et al., 2013; Hepi et al., 2017). It appeared to be one of the primary vehicles for improving the well-being of individuals with limited access to services. TSR seeks to guide researchers and practitioners in developing strategies that not only address immediate social needs but also promote long-term

Figure 1 PRISMA chart



Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 1 Domains in TSR literature

Sr. No.	Domain	No. of articles	Examples
1	Social	86	Anderson <i>et al.</i> (2013); Hepi <i>et al.</i> (2017)
2	Health care	29	Danaher <i>et al.</i> (2024); Kim and Yang (2023)
3	Financial	20	Mahdzan <i>et al.</i> (2023); Montford <i>et al.</i> (2019)
4	Tourism and hospitality	19	Buhalis <i>et al.</i> (2020); Gupta and Priyanka (2024)

Source(s): Authors’ own work

societal well-being. This two-fold focus on individual and collective well-being highlights the role of services in enabling significant social change through the TSR frameworks. In this context, Previte and Robertson (2019) emphasize that TSR aims at enhancing social change and societal transformation by recognizing the potential of service organizations to contribute to a thriving society.

Papers focusing on the health-care and financial sectors have highlighted the significance of a participant-centered approach as well (Black and Gallan, 2015; Ungaro *et al.*, 2024). Mulcahy *et al.* (2021) emphasize the role of co-creation behaviors in prosocial transformative services, such as blood donation. This kind of service meets the needs of both service providers and service recipients, while cultivating a sense of community and mutual support. This dual perspective drives the methodological approach as well, being participant-centered (Azzari and Baker, 2020) and longitudinal to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformative power of these services over time (Dodds *et al.*, 2018).

In the tourism and hospitality domain, transformative services focus on needs-based mechanisms, such as self-esteem, autonomy, meaningfulness and relatedness (Wu *et al.*, 2024). The conception of transformative hospitality services (THS) expands this domain by considering ecosystemic and culturally embedded service experience aimed at enhancing the well-being of all stakeholders, including employees, consumers, communities and broader societal and environmental benefits (Gallan *et al.*, 2021; Galeone and Sebastiani, 2021). Within this framework, cultural perspectives and mutual networks are

identified as key transformative factors that impact individual and collective well-being in hospitality organizations, emphasizing the influence of cultural differences on well-being from both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives (Galeone and Sebastiani, 2021).

4.1.2 The theoretical landscape of transformative service research

In exploring how TSR is theorized across diverse service contexts, we found that a wide range of theories have been applied, reflecting a rich but fragmented theoretical landscape (Weaver et al., 2025). These theories are organized into six thematic domains, as presented in Table 2. The domains emerged from a review of conceptual and empirical contributions in the TSR literature, allowing us to inductively group 34 theories into coherent clusters. Table 2 presents these groupings, each illustrated with representative theories and references, underscoring TSR’s interdisciplinary nature. Among them are foundational frameworks such as service-dominant logic, self-determination theory and consumer culture theory, as well as emerging perspectives, including social systems theory, ethical theories and attention restoration theory. While this theoretical breadth highlights the interdisciplinary evolution of TSR and its capacity to address place-based and well-being-related challenges, it also reveals a

tendency for theory to be used descriptively, with limited integration into research design or interpretation.

4.2 Barriers inhibit the implementation of transformative service research for enhancing well-being

Despite improvements in TSR, there are notable challenges in implementing the three main components outlined in various TSR frameworks to achieve the desired outcomes. Drawing on these three key TSR components, participant-centered approaches, technology-enabled services and an ecosystemic view, we categorize and synthesize the barriers and challenges, identifying specific characteristics.

4.2.1 Barriers to participant-centered approaches

TSR highlights the importance of constructive engagement with individuals and communities. However, research scholars point out ongoing barriers to establishing and maintaining this engagement. Among the several barriers, insufficient staff capacity, lack of skill and a mismatch between services and participants’ real needs appear to be the most important ones (Evans et al., 2013; Carson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2013). Finsterwalder et al. (2017) stress that creating transformative experiences in social services demands deep understanding and trust, which are often challenging to develop. Furthermore, cultural asymmetries such as power distance, differing

Table 2 Theories used in the TSR literature

Sr. No.	Thematic domain	Theories	Examples
1	Service and value creation theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Theory of value co-creation Practice theory Engagement theory Gamification theory 	Obaze (2019); Ellway (2014); Finsterwalder et al. (2017); Tanouri et al. (2024)
2	Psychological and motivational theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-determination theory Flow theory Self-efficacy theory Control value theory Conservation of resource theory Regulatory focus theory Self-congruence theory Compensation theory Transformation theory 	Rejikumar et al. (2022); Wyllie et al. (2019); Kinoshita et al. (2023); Siahtiri et al. (2024); Zainol et al. (2024); Wilson-Nash et al. (2023); Neuhofer (2024)
3	Sociological and cultural theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer culture theory (CCT) Social conflict theory Figured worlds theory Intergroup contact theory Convention theory Social systems theory Institutional theory Social capital theory Inclusion theory 	Siebert et al. (2020); Al-Abdin and Kearney (2018); Anderson et al. (2025); Gross et al. (2021); Varman et al. (2022); Bakrim and Fritzsche (2025); Gokalp Aras et al. (2021); Cheung et al. (2017); Klaus et al. (2024)
4	Ethical, political and critical theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical theories Statistical discrimination theory Agenda-setting theory Rational choice theory Source credibility theory 	Tsiotsou et al. (2024); Meshram and Venkatraman (2022); Tsiotsou and Diehl (2022); Islam et al. (2020); Chen et al. (2023)
5	Organizational and work-related theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Job demands–resources (JD-R) theory Activity theory Psychological theory Attachment theory Resource exchange theory Social exchange theory 	Willems et al. (2023); Hepi et al. (2017); Barnes et al. (2021); Su et al. (2022); Rosenbaum et al. (2017); Ho and Shirahada (2021)
6	Environmental and experiential theories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Attention restoration theory 	Friman et al. (2020)

Source(s): Authors’ own work

expectations and values can reduce customer participation and hinder well-being outcomes (Cheok *et al.*, 2013; Galeone and Sebastiani, 2021; Xie *et al.*, 2020). These barriers make it particularly challenging to study and serve underserved consumers and their contexts effectively (Dodds *et al.*, 2022).

4.2.2 Barriers to technology-enabled services

The potential of technology-enabled TSR is impeded by infrastructural and strategic limitations. Anderson and Ostrom (2015) found that integrating digital tools with legacy systems often proves costly and complex. Moreover, digital solutions require ongoing updates and adaptations, as many quickly become outdated and obsolete (Breidbach *et al.*, 2020; Fisk *et al.*, 2023; Soto Setzke *et al.*, 2023; Zaki, 2019), and many organizations often face difficulties in ensuring compatibility and maintaining seamless operations during the transition.

4.2.3 Barriers to ecosystemic view

From an ecosystemic perspective, prior studies have highlighted the interdependence among key actors, including individuals, organizations, institutions and communities, within a service system (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Fisk *et al.*, 2018). Although it supports systemic transformation, implementing an ecosystemic approach in TSR faces several barriers. First, disintegration among different stakeholders is a common barrier, along with misaligned objectives and poor coordination across sectors that hinder collaborative efforts (Black and Gallan, 2015; Champion and Bonoli, 2011; Dodds *et al.*, 2022). Second, constraints at the institutional and policy levels, such as rigid governance, inconsistent regulations and bureaucratic inertia, often limit innovation and responsiveness (Hjelmar, 2021; Weaver *et al.*, 2025). Third, power imbalances between service providers, institutions and marginalized communities hinder fair participation and collaboration (Cheok *et al.*, 2013; Galeone and Sebastiani, 2021). These challenges differ in relation to the place-based specificities, where communities and resources are organized differently (Asmit *et al.*, 2024; Han *et al.*, 2022; Kroh, 2021; Merenkova *et al.*, 2019). Across different contexts, the absence of a shared vision among ecosystem actors significantly hampers the potential to achieve long-term, collective well-being outcomes (Taillard *et al.*, 2016). Addressing these barriers is crucial for TSR to advance beyond individual change and achieve its transformative goals at the community and societal levels.

4.3 Bringing change through transformative service research: contextual enablers and barriers

Following the call by Rosenbaum *et al.* (2017) and Krisjanous *et al.* (2023), we explore how barriers and strategies to enhance well-being unfold across different living contexts. To address RQ2, we mapped key enablers and barriers across two different geographical and socioeconomic settings, urban and rural.

We acknowledge that the distinction between “urban” and “rural” is not absolute. As Beynon, Crawley and Munday (2016) demonstrate, both are multidimensional constructs shaped by settlement size, population density, accessibility, service provision and socioeconomic dynamics. This means that places may exhibit elements of both urban and rural, and their opportunities or challenges cannot be reduced to a simple binary. Our use of the urban–rural distinction is therefore

heuristic: it provides an analytical device to assess how TSR investigated place-based characteristics.

Our choice is based on two primary concepts: the Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) view on “non-places” dominating urban environments and “common places” located mainly in rural ones, and the work of Belanche *et al.* (2021). The latter study is critical as its empirical evidence shows that while cognitive awareness of belonging is similar across contexts, rural residents exhibit a stronger affective and evaluative identification with their communities than urban dwellers.

These elements underscore that urban–rural distinctions capture more than demographic or geographic variation; they reflect the emotional, symbolic and evaluative bonds through which people experience and value their service environments. Integrating these insights, the urban–rural lens becomes a useful way to map how places intersect to shape the uneven transformative potential of services.

TSR has mainly overlooked place-based factors, despite some papers underlining that context-specific services are more likely to support individual and collective well-being effectively (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2007, 2017; Dodds *et al.*, 2022). The differences in the adoption of transformative services between urban and rural communities are evident in the acceptance levels and influencing factors, highlighting the need for tailored approaches to promote the adoption of TSR in different settings.

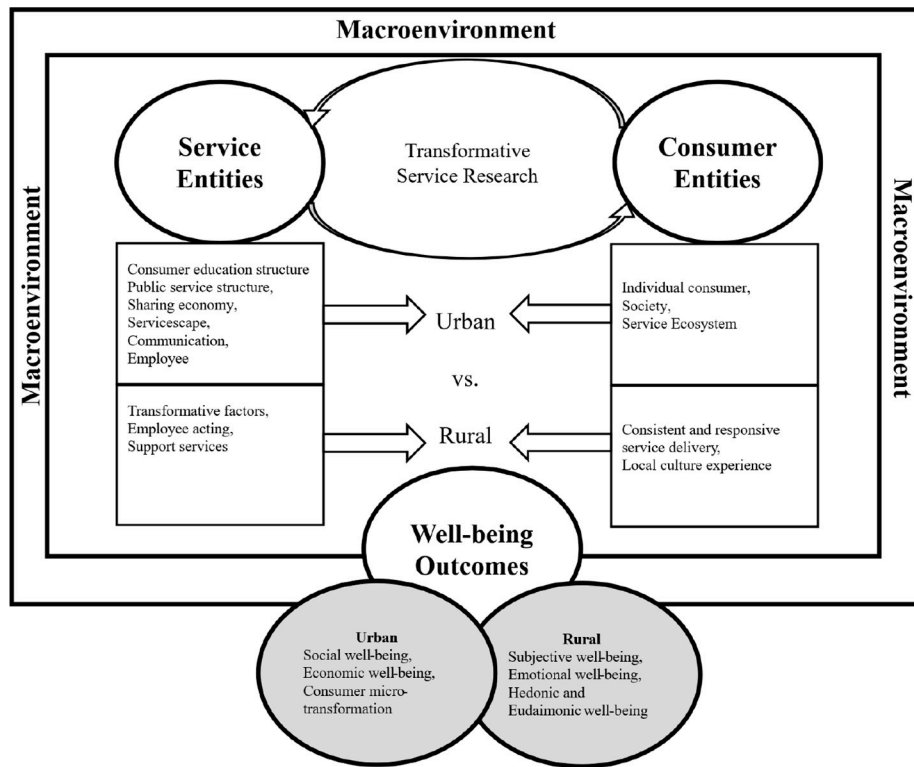
4.3.1 Transformative service delivery framework

Based on the insights gleaned from the literature, we propose an integrated framework for transformative service delivery, emphasizing the interconnectivity of service entities, consumer entities and well-being outcomes across different service macro-environments (see Figure 2). This framework synthesizes the core themes emerging from an SLR, focusing on how TSR examines urban and rural areas. It highlights the need for place-sensitive service strategies, recognizing that transformative service design must adapt to the unique socio-spatial realities. Ultimately, this framework provides a scalable and comparative lens for exploring how TSR can be leveraged across diverse living contexts. It contributes to a place-based research agenda by positioning well-being not as a universal outcome, but as an emergent product of relational, institutional and material conditions unique to rural and urban settings.

In urban contexts, service entities encompass themes such as consumer education in which scholars focused on distance learning programs, vocational training (Nehls, 2021) and initiatives to improve school infrastructure (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017), communication and employee management. Urban service entities are typically characterized by advanced infrastructures, digital integration and a focus on efficiency across the health care, finance, mobility and retail sectors (Patrício *et al.*, 2020; Kamran and Uusitalo, 2024; Sarno *et al.*, 2025; Vural *et al.*, 2024). By contrast, in rural contexts, the leading service entity themes are related to transformative factors, workers’ organizations, support services and community-level delivery, often through mobile clinics, distance education and microfinance initiatives (Gokalp Aras *et al.*, 2021; Rahman and Nie, 2011; Ofori-Okyere *et al.*, 2023).

The themes for consumer entities, in urban context, studies highlight segmented consumer groups, young professionals,

Figure 2 Integrated framework for transformative service delivery in urban and rural contexts



Source(s): Authors' own work

middle-income families and high-net-worth individuals with differentiated service expectations (Wilson-Nash *et al.*, 2023; Livingston *et al.*, 2022; Mehmood *et al.*, 2024). While in rural context, literature emphasizes service quality, trust in consistent services, the role of farmers and aging populations and the importance of culturally resonant service design (Huang and Lin, 2021; Ho and Shirahada, 2021; Güzel *et al.*, 2021). In local cultural experience in rural areas, people are more connected to their culture than those in urban areas. In rural areas, transformative services are more relevant at the societal level because of closer community connections.

Finally, the framework's lower section illustrates how well-being outcomes vary across different places. Urban well-being is typically measured through social and economic lenses, including service efficiency, accessibility and microlevel transformations of consumer behavior (Nehls, 2021; Soetan *et al.*, 2024). By contrast, rural well-being is characterized by more subjective and emotional dimensions, including eudaimonic flourishing, cultural belonging, social cohesion and psychological resilience (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2019; Huang and Lin, 2021). These distinctions reinforce the argument that transformative services must be contextually embedded with strategies that reflect the lived realities of service users and the capabilities of service providers in each environment.

By aligning transformative service initiatives with local realities, context-sensitive TSR can actively contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly those related to equity, health, sustainable communities and inclusive innovation. This

sets the foundation for the following section, which examines the intersections between TSR and the Agenda 2030 policy framework.

4.4 Transformative service research and its contribution to the 2030 new political agenda

To address RQ3, we found that scholars have identified critical gaps in service research, particularly the privileging of human needs over environmental concerns, and have called for expanding the boundaries of service research to align with the SDGs (Gordon and Vink, 2024; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2024b). Recent TSR literature reflects this shift by emphasizing co-creation, well-being and environmental sustainability, along with the effects of crises on well-being (Anderson and Xue, 2022; Machin *et al.*, 2022).

To give a sense of the variety of topics covered by TSR regarding the social, economic and environmental issues outlined in the Agenda 2030, we have investigated the seven different ServCollab SDG service research themes proposed by Russell-Bennett *et al.* (2024b) and extended it to place-based priorities (see Table 3). We recognized that in TSR, some of the themes appear simultaneously. Therefore, in what follows, we describe the six themes in the other six macro categories.

4.4.1 Well-being and opportunity for all humans (Themes 1 and 2)

Aligned with Themes 1 and 2 (human well-being and services that arrange opportunities for all humans), TSR emphasizes outcomes for marginalized populations. Scholars have examined the potential of service research to support fair and

Table 3 TSR SDGs meso-themes with a place-based perspective

ServCollab theme	SDG	TSR meso-theme	Urban	Rural
1. Well-being of the human species	SDG2 (zero hunger)	1. Well-being and opportunity for all humans		Subjective well-being Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being Emotional well-being
	SDG3 (good health and well-being)			
	SDG1 (no poverty)			
2. Opportunity for all humans	SDG10 (reduced inequalities)	2. Services for opportunity and resource equity		
	SDG10 (reduced inequalities)			
	SDG5 (gender equality)			
	SDG4 (quality Education)			
3. Resources for all humans	SDG12 (responsible consumption and production)		Consumer micro-transformation	
	SDG7 (affordable and clean energy)			
	SDG6 (clean water and sanitation)			
4. Economic services for work and growth for all humans	SDG8 (decent work and economic growth)	3. Economic and social development	Economic well-being	
	SDG9 (industry, innovation, and Infrastructure)			
5. Institutions for fair and sustainability for all	SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities)		Social well-being	
	SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)			
6. Service ecosystems with the planet	SDG13 (climate action)			
	SDG14 (life below water)			
	SDG15 (life on land)			
7. Collaboration services for sustainable	SDG17 (partnerships for the goals)	4. Multilevel societal change through activism and partnerships		

Source(s): Authors' own work

sustainable living, often critiquing the neoliberal market reform agenda that prioritizes efficiency and privatization in service ecosystem design (Gordon and Vink, 2024). This underscores the need for alternative assumptions in service research that enable more inclusive and socially conscious outcomes. This includes engagement with resource-constrained population groups, such as refugees, where inclusive services reduce discrimination, support mental and emotional health (Nasr and Fisk, 2019) and reduce discrimination (Russell-Bennett et al., 2019; Cheung and McColl-Kennedy, 2019), thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health) and SDG 10 (Reduce Inequalities).

4.4.2 Services for opportunity and resource equity (Themes 2 and 3)
TSR advances equitable access to opportunities and resource management through innovation, digital tools and social activism. The role of activism and systems thinking in enabling service transformation is aligned with Theme 2 (services that arrange opportunities for all humans) and Theme 3 (resource management for all humans). Activist service strategies challenge dominant market logics and enable bottom-up change that can influence corporate behavior and catalyze sustainable change (Cheung and McColl-Kennedy, 2019; Keränen and Olkkonen, 2022). These contributions open space for critical and normative discussions within TSR, responding to the call for systems-level transformation in line with the SDG 4, SDG 5 and SDG 10 (Gordon and Vink, 2024; Voulvoulis et al., 2022). Nadda et al. (2023) extend this logic by demonstrating how emerging digital technologies, such as AI, IoT and blockchain, can facilitate service innovation, promote responsible consumption and enhance resource efficiency. Thereby, contributions address SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) by supporting urban consumer transformation and reducing inequalities.

4.4.3 Economic and social development (Themes 4 and 5)

TSR also aligns with Theme 4 and 5 by redirecting service innovation toward inclusive economic growth. Scholars have shown that service innovation can be leveraged to implement SDGs in specific industries (Calabrese et al., 2018). Service quality and ecosystem research also contribute to urban sustainability by embedding transformative practices in city systems (Sebhatu et al., 2021), aligning with Theme 5 (nurturing equity and sustainability for all). These studies highlight connections to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

4.4.4 Multilevel societal change through activism and partnerships (Theme 7)

TSR is equipped to address complex societal problems through strategies like internal and external activism (Keränen and Olkkonen, 2022; Previte and Robertson, 2019), promoting social innovation and service redesign across ecosystems. These actions exemplify the increasing focus on applying service research to produce knowledge and drive and maintain multilevel societal change, aligning with the Agenda 2030 goals and SDG 17 (partnerships), as captured in Theme 7.

4.4.5 Sustainable development goals and place-based human-centric well-being

Place-based well-being outcomes (see Figure 2) closely mirror key SDGs. In the urban context, social well-being aligns strongly with SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), as urban design, accessibility and social cohesion are central to building inclusive and resilient communities. Economic well-being in cities is closely tied to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), highlighting the crucial role of urban areas in generating employment opportunities and enhancing living

standards. Furthermore, studies of consumer micro-transformation demonstrate how shifts in individual behavior drive progress toward SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). In rural contexts, individual well-being is more closely linked to SDG 3 (good health and well-being), which is fostered by close-knit, supportive communities that enhance mental health and life satisfaction. However, rural emotional well-being can also be affected by social exclusion or limited access to services, making SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) highly salient. The dual emphasis on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being stresses rural concerns about material scarcity and personal development, primarily related to SDG 1 (no poverty) but also relevant to SDG 4 (quality education) through autonomy and self-actualization.

Considering these initial contributions in TSR, transformative services can generate synergies across multiple SDGs, due to their broad scope. For instance, “Education-focused services” (SDG 4) could simultaneously improve “gender equality” (SDG 5), enhance “employment opportunities” (SDG 8) and promote “responsible consumption” (SDG 12). In parallel, “Health services” (SDG 3) provide the following social inclusion rights and principles, which can mitigate “poverty” (SDG 1) and improve “economic productivity” (SDG 8), while promoting “reduced inequalities” (SDG 10). Finally, “Digital financial services” could enhance “access to finance” (SDG 9) and “smallholder productivity” in agriculture (SDG 2), while reducing gender and geographic disparities between rural and urban areas. In this way, transformative services can foster synergies rather than trade-offs, creating positive feedback loops across multiple interconnected goals. At the same time, TSR must contend with trade-offs. For example, digital health or social services may improve health-care access (SDG 3), yet risk deepening “digital divides” (SDG 10) if not equitably deployed. Similarly, services aimed at economic empowerment (SDG 8) may lead to increased “resource consumption” or “carbon emissions” (SDG 13) if environmental sustainability is not embedded into the service design. As [Russell-Bennett et al. \(2024a, 2024b\)](#) emphasize, achieving Agenda 2030 requires service research to also engage with *planetary SDGs* such as 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land), since human-focused progress cannot be sustained without ecological resilience. Likewise, [Gordon and Vink \(2024\)](#) emphasize that overlooking structural and institutional dynamics risks perpetuating inequities rather than transforming them.

5. Future research agenda

Based on the previous results, we propose a structured future research agenda (see [Table 4](#)), organized into four categories that mirror the gaps identified in [Table 3](#).

5.1 Multilevel societal change based on place-specificities

Studies should explore how TSR initiatives can be integrated into community-level codesign processes, particularly in different living contexts. TSR continues to evolve by focusing on co-creation and well-being, underserved consumers and inclusion in service ecosystems ([Anderson and Xue, 2022](#)). Although TSR is evolving mainly through case studies, and many place-based specificities can be captured through a meta-analysis, more research is needed to understand the contextual

factors that influence the adoption of TSR. TSR faces significant challenges in both urban and rural contexts, including limited research on underserved groups and insufficient urban transformative capacity. In rural areas, barriers related to small market opportunities challenge the market-driven principles of many services. To address these issues, TSR can draw on community engagement, research capacity-building and digital transformation strategies tailored to local strengths and needs.

5.2 Ensuring equity: digital and sustainability transitions

In the meso theme “services for opportunity and resource equity,” there is a need for frameworks that incorporate digital equity into transformative service models to prevent existing disparities from deepening. Technological innovation presents a prime opportunity to enhance TSR and support equity. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence and blockchain can boost service delivery, making it more inclusive and accessible. For example, telemedicine and community-based service-learning initiatives can help bridge gaps in health care and education for underserved populations. Among essential public goods are energy and water services. Technological innovation holds the potential to expand fair access and reduce exploitation in its provision. At the same time, important questions arise about how service ecosystems can leverage digital equity to enhance transparency and accountability in the delivery of these services.

Moreover, within this theme, the circular economy (CE) represents an emerging focus in TSR ([Sönnichsen et al., 2024](#)). However, how can CE principles embed regenerative principles, moving beyond the goods-orientation? Moreover, how can CE principles be operationalized within TSR to enhance well-being in line with SDG 12 consistently? These are still open questions in the TSR debate.

5.3 Environmental resilience and human–planet relations

TRS reveals a significant lack of study examining service ecosystems in relation to our planet. Future work should evaluate the role of transformative services in enhancing resilience to environmental and climate stressors.

As highlighted in recent service scholarship, human-focused goals are critically dependent on the health of planetary ecosystems ([Russell-Bennett et al., 2024b](#)). Without conserving marine and terrestrial resources, the preconditions for any form of human flourishing cannot be sustained. Exploring how various forms of storytelling, co-creation and participatory design can facilitate the integration of ecological perspectives into service innovation presents a compelling avenue for future research. Building on this, future research must also explore the new value propositions that emerge when nonhuman actors (species, habitats and ecosystems) are formally recognized as stakeholders in service design.

5.4 Institutions as a barrier or a driver for effective transformative services

The effectiveness of transformative services is often contingent upon the institutional environments in which they are embedded ([Johns and Davey, 2019](#)). Institutions, both formal (laws,

Table 4 Future research agenda

TSR meso-theme	Key research area	Potential research question
4. Multilevel societal change through activism and partnerships	Multilevel societal change based on place specificities	1. How can TSR initiatives be integrated into community-led service co-design in different places? 2. Who are key social figures that can help in promoting TSR initiatives? 3. How can TSR distinguish between service availability and actual community need?
	2. Services for opportunity and resource equity	
	Digital equity in TSR models	1. What frameworks can ensure digital transformation in TSR that does not reinforce systemic inequities? 2. Are technologies increasing digital inequalities within different living contexts?
	Equity in the supply of energy and water	1. How can digital tools be designed to prevent exploitation or monopolistic practices in the delivery of essential public goods? 2. How can transformative services ensure that technological innovations in energy and water provision do not deepen existing inequalities?
	Circular economy in TSR	1. How can CE principles embed regenerative principles moving beyond the goods-orientation? 2. How can CE principles be operationalized within TSR to enhance well-being consistently with SDG 12?
	6. Service ecosystems with the planet	1. What are the forms of storytelling, co-creation or participatory design processes that might enable the inclusion of ecological voices in service innovation? 2. What are the new value propositions that can emerge when nonhuman actors (species, habitats, ecosystems) are recognized as stakeholders in service design? 3. What role can TSR play in advancing service-led responses to climate and environmental stress?
	5. Institutions for fair and sustainability for all	1. How do differing institutional environments shape the effectiveness of TSR strategies? 2. What are the formal and informal institutions enabling TSR initiatives to reach their goals? 3. Can TSR meaningfully address power asymmetries in service systems, and if so, how?

Source(s): Authors' own work

regulations, governance structures) and informal (norms, cultural practices, social networks), can act either as barriers or enablers of change. While some institutional contexts provide fertile ground for inclusive, participatory service innovations, others may reinforce exclusion, inequality or inertia.

A central challenge lies in understanding how differing institutional environments shape the effectiveness of TSR strategies across contexts. In this regard, it becomes crucial to identify the formal and informal institutions that enable TSR initiatives to reach their goals. How do governance structures, community networks or professional associations contribute to, or undermine, the scaling and sustainability of transformative services?

Moreover, there is the issue of power asymmetries. Service systems are not neutral; underlying hierarchies and interests shape them. Can TSR meaningfully address these asymmetries, for instance, by amplifying marginalized voices, redistributing resources or fostering inclusive participation in service design and delivery? Addressing this question not only extends TSR's relevance to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) but also pushes the field toward a deeper engagement with the political dimensions of service ecosystems.

6. Implications and limitations

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the TSR field, incorporating theoretical, sectoral, place-based and

sustainability perspectives. Our analysis reveals that TSR encompasses various theoretical frameworks, including service-dominant logic, well-being theory and systems thinking, while spanning a diverse range of sectors, including health, education, financial services, tourism and environmental services. These domains collectively position TSR as an interdisciplinary field capable of addressing complex societal issues, with a strong focus on improving individual, community and systemic well-being. We also found that while TSR frameworks highlight participant-centered approaches, technology-enabled services and ecosystem thinking, significant barriers still exist, and these barriers differ in various places. These variations, influenced by geographical and socioeconomic factors, underscore the need for strategies that are sensitive to local contexts, addressing specific constraints while leveraging local strengths to amplify the transformative power of services.

By providing an answer to *RQ3*, this literature review identified TSR contributions to seven research themes that align with multiple SDGs. Many studies focus on one or two SDGs (e.g. SDG 3, SDG 8 and SDG 13), without considering how services might concurrently impact multiple goals, or how trade-offs are addressed. TSR advances human well-being (SDGs 1, 3, 10), promotes equitable access to opportunities and resources (SDG 12) and fosters inclusive economic growth (SDGs 8, 9, 11). It also encourages multilevel societal change through activism and partnerships (SDG 17). Overall, TSR

shows strong potential to serve as a catalyst for inclusive, fair and sustainable societal change. Achieving this potential requires connecting theoretical progress with practical, place-based and system-level actions that bring together social, economic and environmental goals. TSR can go beyond solving isolated problems and work toward creating interconnected well-being outcomes for individuals, communities and ecosystems, aligning both with the spirit and practical needs of Agenda 2030. The task for service researchers and practitioners is to anticipate trade-offs in the well-being outcomes, leverage local strengths and co-create service ecosystems that foster positive feedback loops across interconnected goals.

This review advances TSR theory by mapping its fragmented yet diverse theoretical foundations into six thematic domains spanning service/value creation, psychological/motivational, sociocultural, ethical/political, organizational and environmental perspectives. While this breadth underscores TSR's interdisciplinary evolution and adaptability across sectors, our findings reveal that theories are often used descriptively, without being deeply integrated into the research design or explanatory mechanisms. By linking TSR research to sectoral contexts (e.g. health care, hospitality, finance, social services) and living environments (urban vs rural), this study shows how different theoretical lenses privilege specific well-being dimensions, such as self-determination theory's fit for autonomy-focused interventions, or consumer culture theory's strength in exploring cultural and place-based determinants.

Aligning TSR themes with the SDGs, it is important to acknowledge that TSR has so far tended to prioritize human-centered SDGs, while giving less explicit attention to SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land). Thus, advancing TSR's transformative agenda requires moving beyond anthropocentric framings and embracing research on how services interact with natural systems, including the protection of biodiversity, regeneration of ecosystems and prevention of exploitative human–nature relationships.

6.2 Managerial implications

For practitioners, the findings provide clear guidance on designing context-sensitive and transformative interventions. In rural contexts, participant-centered approaches should be combined with capacity-building and trust-enhancing strategies to overcome infrastructural and socioeconomic barriers. In urban settings, emphasis should be placed on integrating technology-enabled solutions with inclusive service design to bridge participation gaps. A place-based perspective underscores that these interventions cannot be “one size fits all,” but must be anchored in the social, cultural and ecological specificities of each locality. For example, rural “common places” may sustain community identity and informal support networks, while urban “non-places” may require intentional efforts to foster belonging and inclusion.

Importantly, as [Russell-Bennett et al. \(2024a, 2024b\)](#) highlight, service research must also integrate *planetary SDGs* into their design, particularly SDGs 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land), because without resilient ecosystems, human well-being cannot be sustained. Likewise, [Gordon and Vink \(2024\)](#) remind us that institutional contexts are shaped by political and economic structures that can either enable or constrain transformation, making it critical for practitioners to

adopt reflexive, place-aware approaches that question taken-for-granted assumptions. The alignment of TSR with specific SDGs provides a roadmap for service organizations and policymakers to target interventions toward measurable societal outcomes, such as reducing inequalities (SDG 10), fostering sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) and promoting health and well-being (SDG 3). By implementing these practices into organizational strategies, service providers can simultaneously enhance individual well-being and contribute to systemic social change.

6.3 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the scope of the study was limited to selected databases, keywords and inclusion criteria, which may have excluded relevant TSR studies published in non-indexed or regional outlets. Moreover, the Boolean search strings were designed around the explicit term “transformative service research” and related well-being expressions within business, management and accounting domains. While this ensured focus on the TSR domain, it inevitably excluded broader literatures that contributes to well-being and SDG-related issues but are not explicitly labeled as TSR. Acknowledging this gap is important, as there is extensive research outside services, particularly in adjacent fields, that address transformative aims without using the TSR terminology. Reviewing and integrating such work represents a critical future research opportunity. Second, the analysis relied on the interpretations of published findings, meaning that nuances and contextual details available in primary data were inaccessible. Third, although the review covered a broad temporal and sectoral range, the rapidly evolving nature of TSR, particularly in technology-enabled services, means that emerging trends and theories may not yet be fully represented. Finally, our analysis drew on the urban–rural distinction to map barriers and enablers of transformative services across different living contexts. Following [Rosenbaum et al. \(2007\)](#) and [Krisjanous et al. \(2023\)](#), we adopted this lens to explore how place-based factors influence well-being. While useful as a heuristic, the distinction between “urban” and “rural” is not absolute. As [Beynon, Crawley and Munday \(2016\)](#) note, both are multidimensional constructs shaped by size, density, accessibility and socioeconomic dynamics; places often exhibit elements of both. Future research should therefore move beyond this binary and investigate more nuanced, hybrid or transitional geographies, capturing how infrastructures, servicescapes and place identity intersect to shape the uneven transformative potential of services across diverse contexts.

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Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT by OpenAI to improve language clarity, coherence and flow in the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors

reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Note

[1.] For reference, the 17 SDGs are:

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

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