Towards conceptualizing reverse service supply chains

Purpose
– Recognizing the heterogeneity of services, this paper aims to clarify the characteristics of forward and the corresponding reverse supply chains of different services.

Design/methodology/approach
– The paper develops a two-dimensional typology matrix, representing four main clusters of services according to the degree of input standardization and the degree of output tangibility. Based on this matrix, this paper develops a typology and parsimonious conceptual models illustrating the characteristics of forward and the corresponding reverse supply chains of each cluster of services.

Findings
– The four main clusters of service supply chains have different characteristics. This provides the basis for the identification, presentation and explanation of the different characteristics of their corresponding reverse service supply chains.

Research limitations/implications
– The findings of this research can help future researchers to analyse, map and model forward and reverse service supply chains, and to identify potential research gaps in the area.

Practical implications
– The findings of the research can help managers of service firms to gain better visibility of their forward and reverse supply chains, and refine their business models to help extend their reverse/closed-loop activities.
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Furthermore, the findings can help managers to better optimize their service operations to reduce service gaps and potentially secure new value-adding opportunities.

Originality/value
– This paper is the first, to the authors’ knowledge, to conceptualize the basic structure of the forward and reverse service supply chains while dealing with the high level of heterogeneity of services.

Keywords:
Service, SCM, Service supply chain, Forward supply chain, Reverse supply chain

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