

SDG editorial: improving life on planet earth – a call to action for service research to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs)

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Abstract

Purpose – This editorial aims to organise the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into seven ServCollab service research themes to provide a way forward for service research that improves human and planetary life.

Design/methodology/approach – A conceptual approach is used that draws on observations from the scholarly experience of the editors.

Findings – This editorial offers seven research themes for service researchers: services that enable the WELL-BEING of the human species; services that provide OPPORTUNITY for all humans; services that manage RESOURCES for all humans; ECONOMIC services for work and growth for all humans; services from INSTITUTIONS that offer fair and sustainable living for all humans; service ecosystems with the PLANET; and COLLABORATION services for sustainable development partnerships.

Practical implications – Service scholars are urged to pursue collaborative research that reduces suffering, improves well-being and enables well-becoming for the sustainability and prosperity of Planet Earth.

Originality/value – This editorial provides service scholars with a new framework synthesising the SDGs into research themes that help focus further service research.

Keywords Sustainability, Well-being, Sustainable development goals (SDGs), Circular economy, Transformative service research (TSR)

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

The need to “[...] improve the welfare of communities, nations, and the global ecosystem” (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2011, p. 2) has been an important service research topic ever since the introduction of transformative service research (TSR). Unfortunately, since 2011 conditions have significantly worsened. The ways that people interact socially, communicate, shop, play, travel, mate, date and learn have all experienced profound changes since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2022). In times of rapid transformation, we can find solace and solutions in the enduring wisdom of Indigenous peoples. We are increasingly seeing Indigenous wisdom opening new ways of knowing, being and doing (Raciti, 2023) with many opportunities for service research related to societal and environmental issues stemming

from this wisdom. Many of the commentaries in this special commentary series draw on Indigenous wisdom in proposing new frameworks for service research to contribute to improving people's lives and the planet.

We acknowledge that the TSR goal of transforming human well-being is lofty. Yet, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015, provides a foundation for highlighting how service industries may contribute to peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. It is time for TSR to move on from the “scurrying about” stage identified in Russell-Bennett *et al.* (2019) to the walking erect stage where TSR research earns high regard and respect because it is positively transforming human life on Planet Earth.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 UN Agenda are an urgent call for action for all countries to take action to improve human welfare by identifying initiatives that promote economic development and world peace. More specifically, the SDGs recognise that to successfully tackle global poverty and other issues facing people,

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/0887-6045.htm>



Journal of Services Marketing
38/2 (2024) 145–152
© Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 0887-6045]
[DOI 10.1108/JSM-11-2023-0425]

Received 17 November 2023

Revised 17 November 2023

Accepted 17 November 2023

nations must enact policies that enhance health and education, lessen inequality and spur economic growth while being mindful of the environment and its natural resources. Rather than consider the SDGs solely as initiatives among nations, this *Journal of Services Marketing's* (JSM) special issue features a series of commentaries that provide directions for how service researchers and service organisations may align their strategic actions with the SDGs to sustain and regenerate human and planetary service ecosystems. The need for service scholars and practitioners to work together has never been more important (Hollmann, 2023). Service scholars envision a better future through the SDGs and service organisations seek practical ways to achieve a better future. Aligning the vision and practice of a better future through services is a clarion call for the services field. In response to this need and in collaboration with ServCollab (a global human service nonprofit organisation), we have synthesised the 17 SDGs into a framework containing seven service research themes (see Figure 1):

1. services that enable the WELL-BEING of the human species (#1, #2 and #3);
2. services that provide OPPORTUNITY for all humans (#4, #5 and #10);
3. services that manage RESOURCES for all humans (#6, #7 and #12);
4. ECONOMIC services for work and growth for all humans (#8 and #9);
5. services from INSTITUTIONS that offer fair and sustainable living for all humans (#11 and #16);
6. service ecosystems with the PLANET (#13, #14 and #15); and
7. COLLABORATION services for sustainable development partnerships (#17).

As a collaboration between JSM and ServCollab, this special issue seeks to identify opportunities for service researchers to contribute to achieving these SDGs through seven research themes. All commentaries in this special issue were double blind peer reviewed through the JSM editorial processes. In the following sections, we explore the history of service research to understand why now is the right time for service researchers to work on solving global service problems. We then describe ServCollab's role for improving life on Planet Earth and propose a synthesis of the SDGs into seven service research themes. We finish this editorial with a call to action for all service researchers to conduct research devoted to improving life on Planet Earth.

Historical overview of service research

The service research field emerged when pioneering marketing scholars and management scholars from around the world began studying and trying to solve the service problems of customers and employees (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993; Fisk et al., 1993). Early service scholars were met with opposition by scholars who claimed that services were not important enough to deserve specialised research. However, the service research field rapidly gained traction and became a mainstream marketing subfield with university courses, textbooks, service research groups, service research centers, service conferences and service journals.

TSR (Anderson et al., 2013) introduced a higher purpose for service research beyond profit to improving human well-being (Alkire et al., 2023). ServCollab (www.servcollab.org) was

created on the foundations of TSR to expand and strengthen the logic of TSR. This has included recognising the complexity of human experience. People are more than their economic lives as customers and employees. People are more than their social lives as family and friends, too. This represents higher and harder goals than the early service research efforts to improve customer satisfaction or service quality. The only way for service researchers to serve the complexity of human needs is to engage with the higher goals of the UN's SDGs.

Improving life on Planet Earth – the role of ServCollab

ServCollab was introduced in a *Journal of Service Management* (Fisk et al., 2020) article that proposed elevating the human experience through service research collaborations. The article argued that current business research tends to focus on customer experiences and employee experiences, which neglects the full spectrum of human experience in public and private life. ServCollab believes in serving the needs of the whole human. In addition, each individual human has interwoven and interdependent experiences. People tend to bring the burdens or the blessings of their private experiences to the economic experiences of working or consuming. Of course, economic experiences can also affect private experience in positive or negative ways. Hence, the complexity of human experiences requires much more nuanced and sophisticated service research.

ServCollab has grouped its research endeavours into ServCollab research projects and ServCollab perspective articles. As there is a global refugee crisis, the first ServCollab research project (Boenigk et al., 2021) created a refugee service experience framework. The framework examined the micro, meso and macro levels of refugee service experiences. The framework also explored the characteristics of refugee service systems from, hostile to hospitable, and the range of refugee experiences, from suffering to well-being.

The first ServCollab perspective article (Fisk and Alkire, 2021) created the metaphor of “Service Ecosystem Health” as the means for reimagining service science. The metaphor was synthesised from five broad research threads: public health, syndemic theory, human ecology, ecosystem health and planetary health. Service ecosystem health was defined as “the interdependent state of private, public, and planetary well-being necessary for sustaining life” (p. 195).

In the second ServCollab research project, Fisk et al. (2023) introduced the digital inclusion concept to the service literature. To understand how to heal the digital divide, the article offers an empirical study of service inclusion practices and conceptual models of service inclusion practices and fostering digital inclusion. The second ServCollab perspective article (Alkire et al., 2023) was entitled “Enabling a Service Thinking Mindset: Practices for the Global Service Ecosystem”. The article proposed a service thinking mindset that is enabled by five practices: service empathy, service inclusion, service respect, service integrity and service courage.

This special JSM SDGs commentary series was created in collaboration with ServCollab and calls for service scholars to orient their research towards achieving the SDGs. ServCollab is also pleased to endorse Emerald Publishing's new impact article format, which is being gradually introduced across a variety of Emerald journals.

What every service scholar needs to know about the sustainable development goals

During the pandemic, the role of the UN in guiding the global response increased its visibility and the value of its intergovernmental organisation. While the UN is familiar to most service researchers, many may have a superficial understanding of the UN's history, purpose and goals. A brief overview is provided in this section.

The UN was created to maintain international peace and promote human rights. Founded in 1945 after the Second World War, the UN began with 51 countries and now comprises 193 member states (United Nations, 2023a). It is best known for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance. The UN has four main goals: being to keep peace throughout the world; to develop friendly relations between nations; to assist nations to work together to encourage human rights, help the poor and improve hunger, disease and literacy; and to operate as a centre (a community) to achieve these goals. The UN protects human rights through 80 different treaties and declarations, and its operations are governed by seven principles that all member nations: 1. have sovereign equality; 2. must fulfill their UN Charter obligations; 3. must try to settle disputes by peaceful means; 4. must avoid using force or threatening to use force; 5. shall give every assistance in UN action and refrain from giving assistance to states against which the UN is taking preventative or enforcement action; 6. encourage non-member states to act in accordance with the UN principles; and 7. that the UN is not authorised to interfere in the domestic affairs of member states (United Nations, 2023a).

In terms of structure, the General Assembly and Security Council are the better-known divisions officially referred to as UN Organs, with others including the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat and the International Court of Justice. Independent specialised

agencies that are linked to the UN via cooperative agreements include the World Health Organization, the International Monetary Fund and United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (United Nations, 2023a).

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development evolved from and expanded the 1992 Earth Summit Agenda 21 and the subsequent Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015). The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are interlinked challenges that were adopted in September 2015 by the UN General Assembly. There are 17 SDGs (see Figure 1) with 169 targets to guide efforts framed by five pillars – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership (United Nations, 2023b).

The overarching purpose of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to “transform our world”. The SDGs are a blueprint for action with a strong focus on implementation at global and local levels and via practical and positive actions by governments, for-profit and non-profit organisations, groups, communities and individuals. The SDGs apply to *all countries* unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which applied to developing countries only. The action focus is accompanied by an accountability process where countries demonstrate progress towards SDG targets. Ultimately, the SDGs are a call to action to address global challenges (United Nations, 2023b).

Service researchers need to be cautious when approaching the SDGs. It is important to recognise that the SDG signatories are voluntarily pursuing these goals, with each country determining their own national frameworks, and monitoring and reporting their progress (United Nations, 2023b). While each SDG can be viewed individually, the 17 SDGs are interdependent with some forming natural clusters. For example, in 2022, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (UNHLPF, 2022) reviewed global progress towards SDG4 Quality Education and identified salient interdependence with SDG5 Gender Equality. Service researchers from developed countries or those focusing on commercial, for-profit services may question the relevance of

Figure 1 The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs)



Source: United Nations (2023a)

the SDGs to their work or have concerns about how they situate their work in the SDGs. The SDGs are not someone else's problem. They are the shared problems of humanity.

The scope of the SDGs covers *all* countries, *all* services (whether economic or social services), *all* of humanity and *all* of the planet. Consequently, as service researchers, we *all* have the opportunity and responsibility to situate our research within the SDGs and to step up to the challenge of using our knowledge and skills for the greater good – to serve humanity and transform the world. It should be noted that this does not exclude commercial service organisations whose primary purpose is for profit. It is possible to do good and be profitable, these should not be mutually exclusive outcomes. Indeed commercial service organisations are an essential part of a better world. Service researchers should accept a great sense of urgency to advance the SDGs because the end date, 2030, is fast approaching. Together, as a services research community, we can make a difference.

Transforming lives through service collaboration

Service research has the power to change the world and to achieve the greater good by uplifting and transforming lives. To achieve this higher purpose, service researchers need to consider the bigger picture and how their work advances the agendas of global intergovernmental organisations such as the UN. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprises 17 interdependent SDGs calling for all countries and all people to take bold steps to address global challenges that are of critical importance for humanity and the planet so that no one is left behind (United Nations, 2023b). *JSM* is publishing this special commentary series that contains seven commentaries that address how service research can improve life on Planet Earth. We invite you, the service research community, to join the *JSM* and ServCollab in this effort. Together we can make a real difference.

ServCollab is a human services non-governmental organisation that focuses on “Serving Humanity Through

Collaboration”. These seven commentaries are a ServCollab initiative that aligns each commentary with ServCollab's mission “to serve humanity through research collaborations that catalyse reducing suffering, improving well-being, and enabling well-becoming”.

Seven research themes for serving humanity and the planet

At *JSM*, we strongly believe that the service research community is well-placed to be thought leaders and evidence producers for how service thinking can contribute to a better world. Service thinking is defined as “a just, mutualistic, and human-centered mindset for creating and regenerating service systems that meet the needs of people and the living planet” (Alkire *et al.*, 2023). When this mindset is applied to the SDGs by service scholars, the result is research that provides guidance and evidence for the contribution of services in reducing suffering and improving human well-being, sustainability and prosperity in households, markets, commons and the state. So how can service researchers achieve this outcome?

This SDG commentary series illuminates where existing service research aligns with the SDG goals and ServCollab's goals and sparks further research that aligns with ServCollab's synthesis of the UN's goals. In collaboration with ServCollab, the *JSM* editors synthesised the 17 SDGs into seven service research themes (see Figure 2) based on common focus and alignment across existing service research. The 20 authors of the commentaries represent diversity in gender, culture, theoretical perspective and service context expertise (Australia, Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Norway, the Netherlands, UK and USA). This diversity brings depth and insight to the seven service research themes.

The number seven has special significance in many cultures across time and location. Seven can mean perfection or completion of a set. Nature has given us seven visible colours in the rainbow; we organise and live our lives by the number seven

Figure 2 ServCollab SDG service research themes



Source: Authors

(days of the week); we have seven wonders of the ancient and modern world and in religion; those of the Judao-Christian tradition have seven days of creation. Thus, it seems fitting that there are seven service research themes:

1 Theme 1. Services that enable the WELL-BEING of the human species.

This theme consists of SDG #1 No poverty, SDG #2 Zero hunger and SDG #3 Good health and Well-being:

2 Theme 2. Services that provide OPPORTUNITY for all humans.

This theme consists of SDG #4 Quality education, #5 Gender equality and #10 Reduced inequalities:

3 Theme 3. Services that manage RESOURCES for all humans.

This theme consists of SDG #6 Clean water and sanitation, #7 Affordable and clean energy and #12 Responsible consumption and production:

4 Theme 4. ECONOMIC services for work and growth for all humans.

This theme consists of SDG #8 Decent work and economic growth and #9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure:

5 Theme 5. Services from INSTITUTIONS that offer fair and sustainable living for all humans.

This theme consists of SDG #11 Sustainable cities and communities and #16 Peace, justice and strong institutions:

6 Theme 6. Service ecosystems with the PLANET.

This theme consists of SDG #13 Climate action, #14 Life below water and #15 Life on land:

7 Theme 7. COLLABORATION services for sustainable development partnerships

This theme consists of SDG #17 Partnerships for the goals.

A call to action for service research to achieve the sustainable development goals

We offer these seven service research themes as an organising framework for how service research can improve life on Planet Earth. Each commentary in the series defines the service research theme, and provides an overview and critique of existing service research in the theme and calls for future research. All commentaries involved a literature search of keywords (see individual commentaries for the keywords) for the 17 goals across nine well-known service journals (*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *Journal of Service Management*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, *JSM*, *Service Business*, *Service Industries Journal*, *Services Marketing Quarterly* and *Service Science*).

Papers in this special commentary series

The first service research theme of *Services that enable the WELL-BEING of the human species* was addressed by Hammedi, Parkinson and Patricio who propose a theory of change that maps out the opportunities for advancing service research and provide guidance to move from individual to collective well-being. This theory outlines opportunities for advancing service research and guiding the transition to collective well-being through services to achieve the SDGs (1, 2 and 3) for protecting people by eradicating poverty and hunger and promoting good health and well-being for all. Recent service literature highlights essential conditions for developing

transformative services to address poverty, hunger and health, emphasising social protection, ample resources and activities promoting nutrition and food security. Collective well-being relies on sustainable service mechanisms within an integrated ecosystem, supported by policy, advocacy and collaborative partnerships. This commentary advocates a future service research agenda that fosters a fair, inclusive service ecosystem, leveraging partnerships to serve humanity, enable individuals and collectives and transform service systems for social, economic and environmental impact, aligning with the first three SDGs.

The second service research theme of *Services that provide OPPORTUNITY for all humans* was addressed by Raciti, Alkire and Beatson who identify patterns, establish interlinkages and then assemble a research agenda to guide service researchers for contributing to SDG 4 Quality education, SDG 5 Improvement of gender equality and SDG 10 Reduction of inequalities. They found that service research related to quality education, gender equality and reduced inequalities is patchy in that it is overdeveloped in some topics yet underdeveloped or silent in others. This commentary introduces the service opportunities framework to the service literature, which depicts:

- how quality education empowers in ways that can address gender equality, including the recognition of unpaid work and the elimination of discrimination and gender-based violence; and
- how quality education can reduce inequality by promoting social, economic and political inclusion.

The third service research theme of *Services that manage RESOURCES for all humans* is addressed by Russell-Bennett, Polonsky and Fisk who propose a regenerative service economy framework that applies to SDG 6 Clean water, SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy and SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production but could also apply to other SDGs. The framework draws on an Indigenous custodian mindset of the natural world responsibility, respect, reciprocity and relevance – where the practices of service thinking (inclusion, respect, courage, integrity and empathy) connect the regenerative service system (going beyond the goods-orientation of the circular economy) with the regenerative natural environment. This new framework recognises the symbiotic long-term nature of interactions between humankind and the physical and natural environment not just today but across generations.

The fourth service research theme of *ECONOMIC services for work and growth for all humans* is addressed by Subramony and Rosenbaum who identify two key difficulties plaguing today's service businesses. Firstly, they investigate whether service work is decent work (SDG 8). In other words, they discuss how governments and organisations could increase the dignity of service labour at the individual level by improving pay, working conditions and human development. Secondly, they examine service research contributions to SDG 9, industry, innovation and infrastructure by investigating how countries might stimulate economic growth through the development of service sectors. The connections between SDGs 8 and 9 are considerable. That is, industrialisation frequently depends on the modernisation of a country's service industries; but the impact of service employment on a local labour force is

frequently fraught with difficulties, such as low earnings and little prospects for advancement. As a result, Subramony and Rosenbaum recommend four strategies for service researchers, educators and practitioners to use to improve the state of service industries at the individual, organisational and national levels, including countries with less developed economies. Participatory action research, grassroots organising/advocacy, digital customer service and tackling workforce soft skills inadequacies are among these strategies.

The fifth service research theme of *Services from INSTITUTIONS that offer fair and sustainable living for all humans* was addressed by Gordon and Vink who problematise the neoliberal agenda shaping the service ecosystems related to sustainable cities and communities (SDG11) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). Drawing on a critical interrogation of the literature connected with the theme of services from institutions that offer fair and sustainable living for all humans, Gordon and Vink identify that a more critically constructive perspective in service research is required. Future service research should make visible the underlying assumptions of the research to reduce negative unintended consequences to inform truly transformative outcomes in practice. This commentary provides a novel, critically oriented research agenda that outlines constructive pathways for harnessing critique for transformative social change in services that results in fair and sustainable living for all.

The sixth service research theme, *Service ecosystems with the PLANET*, is addressed by Teixeira, Gallan and Wilson who propose a framework that integrates human and other life forms as co-creating actors, drawing on shared natural resources, to achieve mutualism, where each actor (human and non-human) benefits from the relationship. Considering that:

- all SDGs related to human goals are critically dependent on the SDGs concerning the natural environment (SDGs 13, 14 and 15);
- humanity is facing an environmental catastrophe; and
- service literature regarding these SDGs is nascent, and there is a need to correct human–natural actor interactions that are exploitative.

The authors' proposed framework mutualistically integrates human and non-human actors, challenging the human-centricity of service research and integrating contributions from other research communities studying the biosphere and geosphere. This commentary establishes a pathway to advance service research from a parasitic mindset towards commensalism and ultimately mutualistic value co-creation between human and non-human actors.

The seventh and final service research theme of *COLLABORATION services for sustainable development partnerships* is addressed by Fisk, Kabadayi, Sidaoui and Tsiotsou who have reframed the UN SDG meta goal SDG 17 of Partnerships as ServCollab's Service Research Theme 7 – Collaboration. They found no published service research that studied SDG 17 but noted that this presented major service research opportunities. They argued that collaboration across the other six service research themes (well-being, opportunity, resources, economic, institutions and planet) is essential for the future of humanity and that only the shared purpose of collaboration enables elevating the human experience. A

research agenda was proposed for collaborative communications, collaborative technologies and collaborative projects. The hope for achieving the UN SDGs rests on the ability of humanity to rise above provincial interests and to achieve the collaborative wisdom necessary to work together on the shared problems of humanity and Planet Earth.

Practical business implications of the seven service research themes

Because businesses are capable of being the most dynamic service organisations ever invented, it is important to consider the practical business implications of the seven service research themes in this set of commentaries. Service scholarship and service practice are two sides of the same coin with both needed for creating a better world through service. Service researchers are knowledge workers who should be creating new service research that envisions better futures. Service practitioners should enact this vision by taking tangible action. So, service scholars should engage with service practitioners and ensure that their research offers clear pathways and direction for practitioners (Hollmann, 2023). Service practitioners need to work more actively with scholars and be willing to engage with service research to develop and test new and more sustainable ways of serving while maintaining or even improving profitability customers. Tremendous service innovation opportunities await the service practitioners who adopt the SDG logic of these seven service research themes and regenerate their business practices and improve business success.

Adopting the compressed SDG lens of our seven service research themes offers new ways of addressing old problems for service practice. Service practitioners are often still grappling with the same problems as when the service field commenced in the late 20th century:

[...] how to manage customers, how to ensure customers receive what they want, how to measure customer outcomes, how to organize service operations, how to manage service staff and how to design service business models. (Hollmann, 2023, p. 3)

What if service scholars could address these persistent service problems with the insight that comes from our new service research themes framework and the frameworks in the seven commentaries? Service scholars could then aid service practitioners by answering such research questions as: how does providing decent work (SDG #8) for frontline service employees affect customer value and satisfaction? What are effective service recovery strategies for water or energy service failures (SDG #6 and #7)? How can customer loyalty be achieved for services that protect the environment (SDG #14 and #15)? How can service firms increase profitability through reduced inequalities (SDG #10)?

Most service scholars teach and research in business schools, which should provide extra motivation for helping service practitioners understand and create the future of service systems. This means that service scholars need to work more closely with service practitioners to align their vision with practical realities (Russell-Bennett and Rosenbaum, 2022), with the urgent needs that led the UN to create its SDGs, and with the seven service research themes. Without service scholars working hard to envision better service futures,

practitioners may be frustrated and stuck with the same service problems they have always experienced. Importantly, without service practitioner implementation of the service scholar's vision, service scholarship will remain a dream rather than a reality. So, let us all work together to reduce suffering, improve well-being and enable well-becoming through service for humanity and Planet Earth.

A way forward for service research to contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals

Achieving the UN SDGs requires transformational thinking and transformational action by humanity on behalf of humanity. However, encouraging this broadening of thinking requires more risk-taking in the service topics we seek to publish. As previously discussed, the global pandemic disrupted how services are delivered and consumed. As a result, the service marketing field's foundational theories and concepts are ripe for reconsideration. At the same time, nations are striving to reduce global poverty and other deprivations by promoting economic growth that does not damage the planet's fragile natural resources. This special commentary series seeks to inextricably connect service research to the entirety of the human condition by encouraging researchers to embrace TSR as the foundation for social and economic prosperity. Indeed, service research can address more than managerially relevant outcomes by including the role of services in reducing global inequities and enabling a better world for all life.

As we embark on this SDG journey as an agentic collective of service researchers, it is best to ensure that we do so with authenticity and due diligence. There is always the temptation to superficially map research to a seemingly relevant SDG and to do so post hoc (or posteriori) once the research is completed. We do not endorse this approach but rather encourage deep, authentic and a priori engagement with the SDGs and the Service Research SDG Themes presented in this editorial. Furthermore, service researchers are encouraged to make their SDG-related research visible by signalling their alignment in the abstract or via keywords [e.g. "Service Research Theme 2" or "quality education (SDG4)"].

In breaking new ground in this special commentary series, we anticipate not only the identification of gaps and silences in existing service literature, but also the identification of biases, such as the privileging of the human over the planet and the pressing need to expand the current boundaries of service research. The papers in this special issue are also likely to reveal the "Catch 22" of trying to tame a SDG wicked problem, leading to the emergence of unintended consequences and troublesome measurement and evaluation (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

In a similar vein, some of the commentaries in this special commentary series shed light on the role that service marketers have played in fostering or creating the wicked problems that we are currently trying to solve. The "dark side" of service occupations is that low-wage workers, many of whom are susceptible to financial hardship, predominate in these fields (Ross and Bateman, 2019). In addition, many service industries violate labour laws designed to protect and improve the welfare of a nation's workforce (United States Department of Labor, 2023). Indeed, in many ways, this will be a sobering special commentary series, as research uncovers the realities of

service industries that have both positive and negative impacts. Service research on the SDGs should adopt a critical perspective on the present and a constructive perspective on the future.

The title of this editorial began with the phrase "Improving Life on Planet Earth". The evolution of service research has made it possible for service researchers to understand the broad applicability of service research concepts to the profound problems of humanity. This editorial synthesised the 17 UN SDGs into seven ServCollab Service Research Themes. Notably, these seven service research themes are broad and enduring topics that will outlast the 2030 expiration of the UN SDGs. The urgency of this knowledge should compel the service research community to collaborate with service industries, governments, non-government organisations and communities to co-create SDG implementations.

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