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Public Service Co-Production and Outcomes: Conceptual Review and Evidence-Based Research Agenda

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Abstract

Public service co-production has emerged as a prominent paradigm in contemporary public administration as governments increasingly adopt collaborative approaches to addressing complex societal challenges. However, existing scholarship remains fragmented, frequently emphasizing isolated dimensions such as citizen participation, governance mechanisms, or implementation practices, while comprehensive syntheses integrating conceptual development, theoretical foundations, operational processes, governance challenges, and future research directions remain limited. This study aimed to develop an integrated conceptual understanding of public service co-production and formulate an evidence-based research agenda through a qualitative conceptual review. The study employed document analysis and thematic content analysis, using *The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes*, comprising 36 chapters authored by leading scholars in the field, as the primary data source. Data were collected through systematic document examination and analyzed through thematic coding and interpretative synthesis. Seven major themes emerged: the conceptual spectrum of co-production, public value outcomes, the Four Co's operational cycle, implementation and leadership,

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governance challenges, citizen inclusion and motivation, and future research directions. The findings indicate that co-production has evolved into a multidimensional governance paradigm centered on collaborative public value creation through active interaction among governments, citizens, communities, and other stakeholders. This study contributes to public administration scholarship by consolidating fragmented perspectives into an integrated conceptual framework and proposing a research agenda for advancing theoretical and empirical inquiry. Practically, the findings offer guidance for policymakers and public managers in designing more inclusive, collaborative, and citizen-centered public service systems. Future research should undertake comparative empirical studies across policy sectors and governance contexts while examining the implications of digital transformation and artificial intelligence for public service co-production.

Keywords: Collaborative Governance; Conceptual Review; Public Service Co-Production; Public Service Logic; Public Value

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, public service delivery has undergone a profound transformation in response to increasingly complex societal challenges, including demographic change, digital transformation, fiscal constraints, environmental sustainability, and growing public expectations for responsive and inclusive governance. Traditional state-centered models of public administration, in which governments are viewed as the sole producers of public services, are increasingly considered insufficient to address these multidimensional challenges. Contemporary public governance therefore emphasizes collaborative approaches that recognize citizens, civil society organizations, private actors, and communities as active partners in creating public value rather than passive recipients of government services. Within this context, public service co-production has emerged as one of the most influential paradigms in public administration because it promotes the active involvement of citizens throughout the planning, design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of public services (Cepiku et al., 2022; Osborne et al., 2016; Verschuere et al., 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the relevance of co-production by demonstrating that effective responses to public crises depend not only on government capacity but also on the willingness and ability of citizens to participate in collective action, community resilience, and mutual support (Andriani et al., 2022).

The growing prominence of co-production has also been accompanied by significant academic attention. Since its introduction by the Bloomington School of Political Economy led by Elinor Ostrom during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the concept has evolved from a relatively narrow discussion concerning citizen participation in service delivery into a broader governance framework encompassing collaborative value creation, democratic participation, public innovation, and public service ecosystems (Khine et al., 2021). More recently, co-production has become closely associated with emerging perspectives such as Public Service Logic, collaborative governance, public value management, and network governance, all of which emphasize reciprocal relationships between governments and citizens. This conceptual evolution reflects a fundamental shift in public administration from hierarchical service provision toward more participatory, relational, and citizen-centered governance systems.

Despite its growing popularity, the co-production literature remains conceptually fragmented. Different scholars employ diverse definitions, theoretical perspectives, and analytical frameworks to explain co-production, resulting in inconsistencies regarding its conceptual boundaries, operational processes, and expected outcomes. While some researchers conceptualize co-production primarily as citizen participation in service delivery, others interpret it as a broader mechanism for collaborative governance and public value creation. Similarly, empirical findings concerning the outcomes of co-production remain inconclusive. Existing studies report positive impacts on service quality, efficiency, user satisfaction, public trust, innovation, and social capital, yet these outcomes often depend on institutional settings, organizational capacity, leadership, policy design, and citizen capability. Such conceptual diversity and empirical inconsistency create challenges for both scholars seeking theoretical clarity and practitioners attempting to implement effective co-production initiatives across different public service contexts.

Previous studies have substantially contributed to understanding co-production from multiple perspectives. Early theoretical work by Ostrom established the foundational concept of citizen involvement in producing public services, while subsequent studies expanded the discussion to include collaborative governance and public value creation. Nordin et al. (2023) systematically reviewed empirical evidence regarding factors influencing citizen participation in co-production, identifying organizational, governmental, and citizen-related determinants that affect implementation success. Lee et al. (2024) clarified the conceptual distinction between co-production and related concepts such as co-creation and

citizen participation. Sarantidis (2024) further advanced the literature by positioning co-production within the Public Service Logic framework, emphasizing that value is created through interactions among multiple actors rather than produced solely by public organizations. More recently, The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes (McMullin, 2024) consolidated multidisciplinary perspectives by integrating theoretical developments, practical experiences, governance approaches, implementation strategies, and empirical evidence from diverse policy sectors. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that co-production has become a mature and rapidly expanding field within contemporary public administration (Ramadhan & Juwono, 2021).

Nevertheless, important gaps remain within the existing literature. Many previous reviews focus primarily on specific dimensions of co-production, such as conceptual definitions, citizen participation, implementation barriers, governance mechanisms, or empirical case studies, without providing an integrated synthesis that connects the historical evolution of the concept, multidisciplinary theoretical foundations, operational processes, implementation challenges, and public service outcomes within a single analytical framework (Mardianti et al., 2022). Furthermore, although recent studies have significantly expanded following the COVID-19 pandemic, relatively few conceptual reviews have synthesized this growing body of evidence to formulate a comprehensive evidence-based research agenda capable of guiding future theoretical development and empirical investigation. Existing reviews also provide limited discussion regarding how the operational stages of co-production can be systematically linked with public service outcomes and future governance challenges in increasingly complex policy environments (Mozin et al., 2026).

To address these limitations, this article offers a comprehensive conceptual review of public service co-production by integrating the evolution of the concept, its multidisciplinary theoretical foundations, the Four Co's operational model, implementation challenges, and empirical evidence concerning public service outcomes (Hajar & Arma, 2024). Rather than merely summarizing previous studies, this review critically synthesizes existing scholarship to identify conceptual convergence, unresolved debates, and emerging research opportunities. The principal scholarly contribution of this article lies in the development of an evidence-based research agenda that provides strategic directions for future co-production research while simultaneously offering an integrated conceptual framework capable of supporting both academic inquiry and practical implementation. By combining theoretical analysis with recent empirical evidence, this study contributes to

strengthening conceptual clarity and advancing knowledge concerning collaborative public governance.

Accordingly, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of public service co-production and its outcomes through a critical synthesis of contemporary literature. Specifically, the study examines the conceptual evolution of co-production, explores the multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives underpinning the concept, explains the Four Co's operational model as a framework for understanding co-production processes, analyzes the principal challenges and enabling factors influencing successful implementation, and formulates an evidence-based research agenda to support future theoretical and empirical development. Through these objectives, the article seeks to enrich public administration scholarship while providing practical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen citizen-centered public service delivery in increasingly complex governance environments.

Theoretical Framework

The Evolution of the Co-Production Concept

Co-production in public services refers to the active involvement of service users and communities in the process of creating publicly desired services and outcomes. Co-production is a process in which citizens contribute both through voice and action in designing, delivering, and evaluating public services, with the aim of creating greater public value (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2021).

The history of the development of the concept of co-production cannot be separated from the evolution of the paradigm of public administration. Co-production starts from an economic analysis of regular producers and consumer producers in the context of public goods, then develops into a more complex model of public governance involving various actors at various stages of the service cycle (Saputra et al., 2025). This journey is not linear as Brudney expressed, "Sometimes the wrong train can take us to the right place".

From the perspective of New Public Governance (NPG) and New Public Service (NPS), co-production is seen not as just a management tool, but as a transformative approach that restructures the relationship between the state and citizens. Strokosch and Osborne (2016) place co-production within the framework of Public Service Logic (PSL), which identifies five domains of value creation or destruction through public service delivery short-

term satisfaction, long-term impact (outcomes), lifetime experience, capacity building, and public value (Osborne et al., 2022).

The Roots of Co-Production Discipline

Co-production has rich multidisciplinary roots. From the perspective of political science, explores how the Bloomington School of Political Economy, derived from Ostrom's Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, developed the concept of co-production in response to the limitations of conventional economic analysis that strictly separates producers and consumers (Rahmadhani et al., 2025).

In the realm of political economy, collective co-production can be understood as an arrangement arising from voluntary cooperation, in which individuals act privately and voluntarily as citizens to contribute to the services provided collectively (Jackson, 2021). This analysis goes beyond neoclassical welfare economics that sharply distinguishes between public and private goods, and shows how consumers can supplement public service offerings with their own resources.

Behavioral psychology adds a crucial dimension by showing that co-production operates in a context where the human mind does not work solely rationally (Suminar et al., 2025). Most behaviors are controlled by parts of the brain that are intuitive and associative, so cognitive biases can inhibit inclusive participation. An inclusion approach nudges of non-intrusive behavioral interventions is proposed as a way to mitigate bias and encourage more inclusive co-production.

Four Co's Model

Loeffler and Bovaird (2020) operationalizing co-production through a Four Kos model that covers the entire public service cycle. Ko- Co-commissioning is the involvement of citizens in determining what services are needed and how public resources are allocated. The form includes participatory budgeting, community-based planning, and personalization of services through individual budgets.

Co-design is where residents and service users are involved in designing better services, including Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD), co-design of public spaces with local communities, and co-design of social innovations at the environmental level. Co-delivery is that citizens actively contribute to the implementation of services, including

project co-implementation, co-management of public facilities, peer support, co-influence of behavior change, and joint actions to improve outcomes.

Co-assessment is that citizens participate in evaluating and supervising the quality of services, both through digital technology and through audit, inspection, and supervision mechanisms. The co-assessment wheel was developed by involving the stages of co-focusing, co-directing, co-detection, co-judgment, and co-effectiveness (McKenna, 2021).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative conceptual review using qualitative content analysis to synthesize and critically interpret contemporary knowledge on public service co-production. Rather than generating new empirical data, the study sought to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding by systematically examining authoritative scholarly sources (Aprila et al., 2026). This approach is appropriate for identifying key concepts, theoretical developments, analytical frameworks, and emerging research directions within an established body of literature (Aprila et al., 2023; Aprila & Dwiharyadi, 2026; Creswell, 2014). The overall methodological framework adopted in this study is presented in Figure 1.

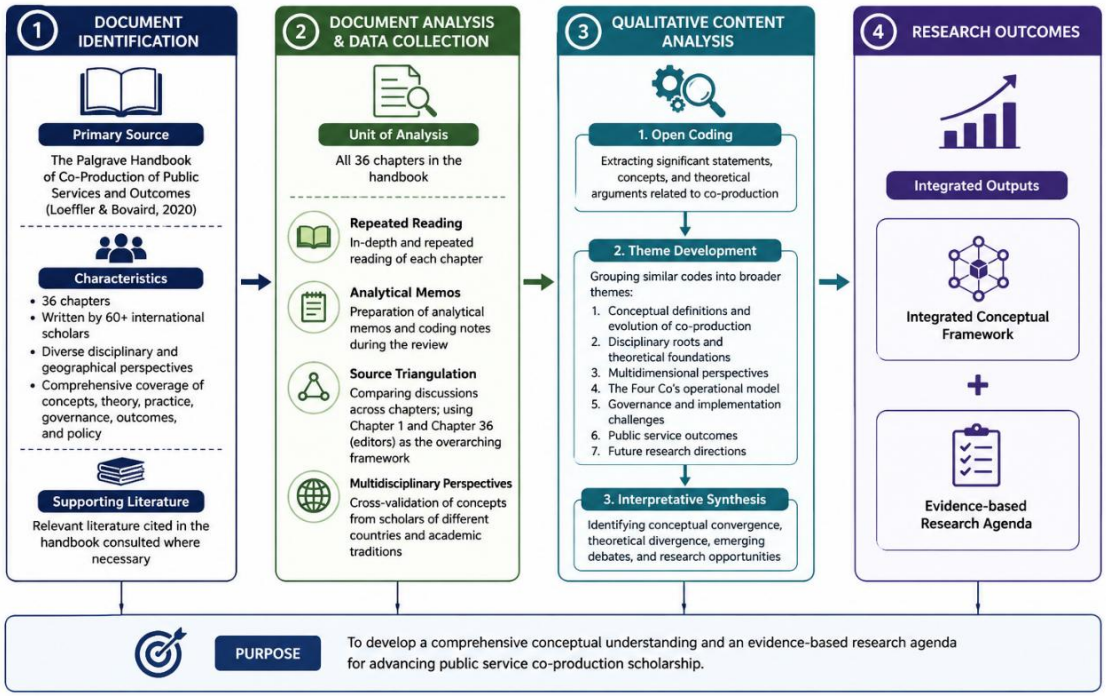


Figure 1. Methodological Framework of the Conceptual Review

Source: Developed by the authors (2026).

The research was designed as a document analysis focusing primarily on The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2020). The handbook was selected purposively because it represents one of the most comprehensive references in the field, comprising 36 chapters written by more than 60 internationally recognized scholars from diverse disciplinary and geographical backgrounds. The volume integrates conceptual discussions, theoretical perspectives, empirical experiences, governance approaches, and policy implications, thereby providing a comprehensive foundation for examining the evolution, implementation, and outcomes of public service co-production. To enrich conceptual interpretation and contextualize key arguments, relevant supporting literature cited throughout the handbook was also consulted where necessary.

The unit of analysis consisted of all 36 chapters contained in the handbook. A purposive sampling strategy was employed because each chapter addresses essential dimensions of public service co-production, including conceptual development, theoretical foundations, governance arrangements, implementation practices, public service outcomes, and future research opportunities. Consequently, the entire handbook was treated as the primary documentary dataset to ensure comprehensive coverage of the subject rather than relying on selected chapters only.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the methodological process comprised four interconnected stages. The first stage involved document identification, in which the handbook served as the primary source, complemented by supporting literature referenced within the volume. The second stage consisted of document analysis and data collection, where each chapter was examined through repeated and in-depth reading. During this process, analytical memos and coding notes were prepared to organize emerging concepts systematically. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing discussions across multiple chapters, while Chapter 1 and Chapter 36, authored by the editors, were used as the overarching conceptual framework for interpreting the handbook. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary perspectives represented by contributors from different countries and academic traditions enabled cross-validation of major concepts and interpretations.

The third stage involved qualitative thematic content analysis. Initially, open coding was performed to identify significant concepts, theoretical arguments, and key statements

related to public service co-production. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader analytical themes, namely: (1) conceptual definitions and evolution of co-production; (2) disciplinary roots and theoretical foundations; (3) multidimensional perspectives; (4) the Four Co's operational model; (5) governance and implementation challenges; (6) public service outcomes; and (7) future research directions. Finally, the themes were synthesized through an interpretative process to identify conceptual convergence, theoretical divergence, emerging debates, and research opportunities.

The final stage produced two principal outputs: an integrated conceptual framework that synthesizes the current state of knowledge on public service co-production and an evidence-based research agenda highlighting theoretical gaps and future directions for scholarship. By integrating systematic document analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive and transparent basis for advancing conceptual understanding of public service co-production.

RESULTS

Overview of the Thematic Analysis

The qualitative content analysis of all 36 chapters in The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes generated seven overarching themes that collectively explain the conceptual development, operational processes, implementation characteristics, governance issues, and future directions of public service co-production. These themes emerged through an iterative coding process and constitute the analytical framework used to organize and interpret the findings of this study.

Table 1. Major Themes Identified from the Qualitative Content Analysis

Theme	Main Findings
Definition and Conceptual Spectrum	Diverse definitions with a shared emphasis on active citizen participation. Two dominant conceptual orientations were identified: inside-out co-production and outside-in co-production.
Public Value Outcomes	Four dimensions of public value were consistently identified: improved public service outcomes, cost-effectiveness, enhanced system resilience, and strengthened principles of good governance.
The Four Co's Operational Cycle	Four operational stages of co-production were identified, namely co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery, and co-assessment.
Implementation and Leadership	Relational leadership, organizational capability, mutual trust, institutional support, and collaborative relationships were identified as major factors supporting successful implementation.

Theme	Main Findings
Governance Challenges	Accountability, transparency, stakeholder representation, conflict management, and digital governance emerged as recurring governance challenges.
Inclusion and Citizen Motivation	Citizen motivation, civic responsibility, community commitment, and unequal participation among vulnerable groups were identified as important implementation issues.
Future Research Directions	Future research priorities include digital transformation, artificial intelligence, public value measurement, comparative studies, and the development of comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

As summarized in Table 1, the seven themes encompass the entire continuum of public service co-production, ranging from conceptual foundations to future research priorities. Rather than representing isolated categories, these themes form an interconnected framework that explains how co-production is conceptualized, implemented, governed, and translated into public value.

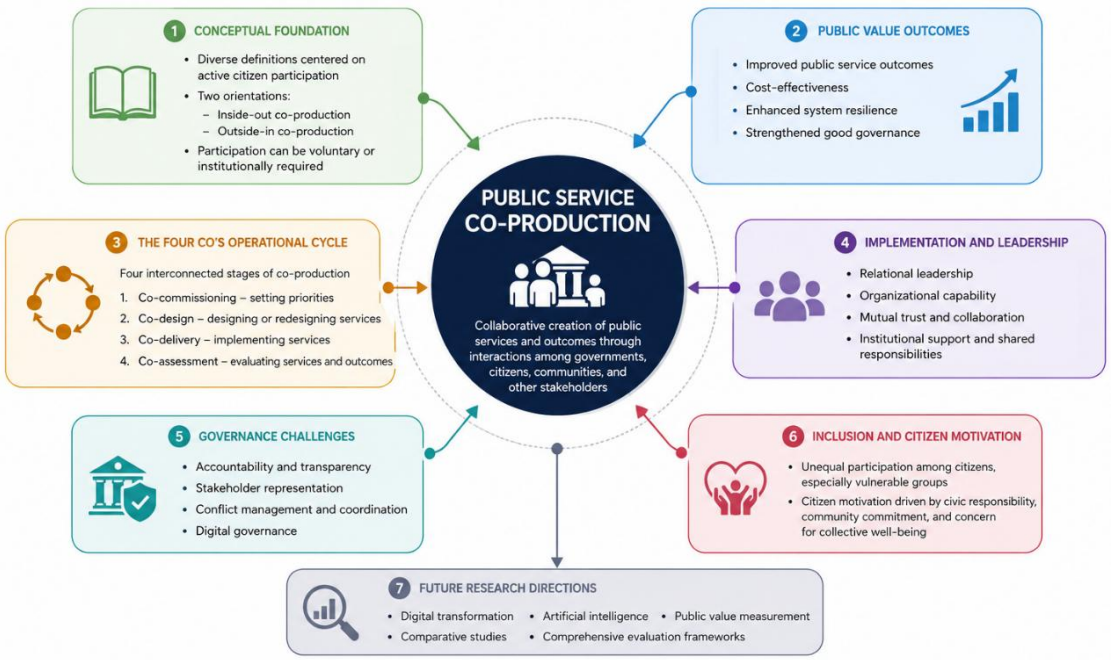


Figure 2. Integrated Thematic Framework of Public Service Co-production

Figure 2 presents the integrated thematic framework derived from the qualitative content analysis. The framework illustrates that public service co-production is grounded in its conceptual foundations and operationalized through the Four Co's cycle of co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery, and co-assessment. Successful implementation depends on organizational leadership and collaborative governance, while citizen inclusion and motivation influence participation throughout the process. Together, these interacting

dimensions contribute to multidimensional public value outcomes and simultaneously highlight emerging priorities for future research.

Definition and Conceptual Spectrum of Co-Production

The analysis identified considerable diversity in the conceptualization of co-production across the handbook. Although contributors adopted different definitions reflecting their disciplinary backgrounds and research contexts, all chapters consistently emphasized active citizen participation as the defining characteristic of co-production. No universally accepted definition was identified, indicating that the concept continues to evolve across disciplines and policy settings.

Two dominant conceptual orientations emerged from the coding process. The first is the inside-out orientation, which emphasizes citizen participation within public services initiated and managed by government organizations. The second is the outside-in orientation, which focuses on governmental support for initiatives originating from citizens and community organizations. These orientations represent complementary approaches to organizing collaborative relationships between public institutions and service users.

The analysis also revealed variation in the nature of citizen participation. While voluntary participation predominates across the literature, several contributors recognize compulsory or institutionally required participation within specific administrative settings, suggesting that co-production may be operationalized differently according to institutional contexts.

Public Value Outcomes

Public value emerged as the most frequently identified outcome of co-production throughout the handbook. Four principal dimensions of public value were consistently discussed across multiple chapters: improved public service outcomes, greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery, enhanced resilience of public service systems, and strengthened principles of good governance.

The analysis further demonstrates that these outcomes are discussed across diverse policy sectors, including healthcare, social services, environmental management, disaster resilience, criminal justice, education, and local government. This finding indicates that co-

production is applied across a wide range of public service settings rather than being limited to a particular policy domain.

The Four Co's Operational Cycle

The qualitative analysis consistently identified four interconnected stages that characterize the operational process of public service co-production. The first stage, co-commissioning, concerns citizen involvement in determining service priorities, allocating public resources, and planning public services. Two principal forms were identified: individual participation through personal budgeting and collective participation through participatory budgeting initiatives (Andriani, 2023; Leoni et al., 2024; Perwita et al., 2022).

The second stage, co-design, involves collaboration between citizens, professionals, and public organizations during the design or redesign of public services. Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD) in healthcare was the most frequently discussed example identified in the analyzed chapters.

The third stage, co-delivery, refers to citizen participation during service implementation. Six forms of co-delivery were identified, namely project implementation, co-management of public facilities, peer support, behaviour-change initiatives, collaborative service improvement, and collective action aimed at achieving broader public outcomes.

The fourth stage, co-assessment, focuses on citizen involvement in evaluating public services and public outcomes. The analysis identified increasing use of digital technologies, online platforms, and community-based feedback systems to facilitate collaborative performance assessment.

Implementation and Leadership

Implementation-related findings indicate that effective co-production requires organizational environments that facilitate collaboration among multiple actors. Across the analyzed chapters, relational leadership emerged as the most frequently discussed leadership approach supporting collaborative governance.

The analysis further identified several recurring organizational conditions associated with successful implementation, including mutual trust, communication, organizational flexibility, institutional support, shared responsibilities, and continuous interaction between public professionals and citizens. These implementation characteristics appeared consistently across different policy sectors represented in the handbook.

Governance Challenges and Citizen Inclusion

The content analysis identified several governance challenges that recur throughout the co-production literature. Accountability, transparency, stakeholder representation, conflict management, and coordination among multiple actors were the most frequently reported governance concerns.

Citizen inclusion also emerged as an important analytical theme. The findings indicate that participation opportunities are not distributed equally among citizens, with vulnerable groups often facing greater barriers to participation. In addition, citizen motivation was described through several recurring dimensions, including civic responsibility, community commitment, willingness to contribute to public welfare, and concern for collective well-being.

Digital technology appeared as another recurring governance issue. Multiple chapters discussed the growing use of information and communication technologies to facilitate citizen participation, data collection, online collaboration, and performance assessment.

Future Research Directions

The final theme identified through the qualitative content analysis concerns future directions for co-production research. Across the handbook, contributors consistently highlighted several emerging priorities for future scholarship, including the evaluation of long-term public service outcomes, integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into collaborative governance, comparative international research, improved measurement of public value, and development of more comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that public service co-production has evolved into a multidimensional field encompassing conceptual development, operational practice, organizational implementation, governance, digital transformation, and public value creation. The seven themes generated through the thematic analysis provide the empirical foundation for the interpretative discussion presented in the subsequent section.

DISCUSSION

The integrated thematic framework presented in Figure 2 suggests that public service co-production should no longer be understood merely as a mechanism for encouraging

citizen participation in public service delivery. Instead, the findings indicate that co-production has evolved into a multidimensional governance paradigm in which conceptual foundations, collaborative processes, organizational capacity, governance arrangements, citizen inclusion, and technological innovation interact to create public value (Aprila & Dwiharyadi, 2026; Hajar & Arma, 2024). Rather than representing independent dimensions, these components are mutually reinforcing and collectively shape the effectiveness of collaborative governance. This integrated perspective extends previous conceptualizations that have frequently examined these dimensions separately and provides a more holistic understanding of co-production within contemporary public administration.

One of the principal contributions of this review is the recognition that the absence of a universally accepted definition does not indicate conceptual inconsistency but rather reflects the adaptive nature of co-production across different institutional settings and policy domains. The coexistence of the inside-out and outside-in orientations demonstrates that co-production has gradually evolved from a service delivery approach into a broader governance philosophy (Aji, 2020). While the inside-out perspective focuses on improving existing public services through citizen involvement, the outside-in perspective emphasizes citizens and communities as initiators of public problem-solving. This conceptual evolution supports the argument of Strokosch and Osborne (2022) that co-production is fundamentally a relational process through which governments and citizens jointly create value rather than a managerial instrument implemented solely by public organizations. Consequently, the diversity of conceptual perspectives should be viewed as evidence of theoretical maturity rather than fragmentation.

The findings further position public value as the central outcome of contemporary co-production. Across the analyzed literature, public value consistently encompasses improvements in service quality, cost-effectiveness, system resilience, and good governance. This multidimensional interpretation reinforces the principles of Public Service Logic, which argues that value emerges through interactions among multiple actors instead of being produced exclusively by government institutions (Osborne et al., 2016). Importantly, the present review demonstrates that these dimensions should not be evaluated independently because improvements in efficiency alone may not necessarily generate broader societal benefits if they are not accompanied by enhanced accountability, resilience, and citizen trust. The framework therefore suggests that public value constitutes the cumulative outcome of

successful collaboration throughout the co-production process rather than the result of isolated organizational performance.

Another significant implication concerns the Four Co's operational cycle identified throughout the thematic analysis. Earlier studies often associated co-production primarily with citizen involvement during service delivery. However, the synthesized evidence indicates that collaborative relationships can be established throughout the entire public service cycle, including agenda setting and resource allocation (co-commissioning), collaborative service design (co-design), implementation (co-delivery), and evaluation (co-assessment). This broader interpretation shifts the understanding of co-production from a discrete participatory activity to a continuous governance process in which citizens contribute to planning, implementation, and learning. Consequently, the Four Co's should be understood not only as operational stages but also as an integrated governance framework capable of institutionalizing collaboration between governments and society across the policy cycle.

The framework also highlights that meaningful co-production depends upon organizational and institutional capacities that enable sustained collaboration. The recurring importance of relational leadership, mutual trust, organizational flexibility, institutional support, and collaborative communication indicates that citizen participation alone is insufficient to achieve successful co-production (Osborne et al., 2016). Instead, governments must cultivate organizational environments capable of facilitating reciprocal relationships among public professionals, communities, and other stakeholders. These findings reinforce relational leadership theory, which emphasizes distributed leadership and shared responsibility within collaborative governance networks. At the same time, the review demonstrates that governance challenges including accountability, transparency, stakeholder representation, and conflict management remain significant constraints that may undermine collaborative initiatives if appropriate institutional arrangements are not established. Effective co-production therefore requires governance systems that simultaneously encourage participation and safeguard legitimacy, fairness, and public accountability.

Citizen inclusion emerged as another critical dimension of the integrated framework. Although co-production is widely promoted as an inclusive governance approach, the synthesized evidence reveals persistent inequalities in participation opportunities among different social groups. Vulnerable populations frequently encounter barriers related to

information, institutional access, resources, and social capital, potentially limiting their capacity to participate effectively in collaborative governance (Novita et al., 2026). This finding suggests that inclusive co-production cannot be achieved simply by providing opportunities for participation. Rather, governments must actively reduce structural barriers and design participation mechanisms that accommodate diverse community needs. From this perspective, inclusion becomes both a normative objective and a practical prerequisite for generating equitable public value outcomes.

The review further demonstrates the growing significance of digital transformation in shaping contemporary co-production. Digital platforms, online collaboration, and data-driven decision-making increasingly expand opportunities for citizen engagement beyond traditional face-to-face interactions. At the same time, digitalization introduces new governance challenges concerning data quality, privacy, algorithmic transparency, and ethical accountability. These findings suggest that digital technologies should not be viewed merely as administrative tools but as governance infrastructures capable of reshaping relationships between governments and citizens. Consequently, future scholarship should pay greater attention to the intersection of co-production, digital governance, and artificial intelligence to better understand how technological innovation influences collaborative public value creation.

Taken together, the integrated thematic framework contributes theoretically by synthesizing previously fragmented discussions into a coherent conceptual model linking conceptual evolution, collaborative processes, organizational conditions, governance mechanisms, citizen inclusion, public value, and future research priorities. Rather than treating these dimensions as separate streams of inquiry, the present review demonstrates their interdependence within a single collaborative governance ecosystem. This synthesis advances the co-production literature by providing a more comprehensive explanation of how public value is generated through interactions among governments, citizens, communities, and other societal actors.

The findings also offer several practical implications for policymakers and public managers. First, co-production initiatives should involve citizens throughout the entire public service cycle rather than restricting participation to service implementation. Second, public organizations should strengthen relational leadership, institutional trust, and collaborative capacity to support sustainable partnerships with citizens and communities.

Third, governance arrangements should emphasize accountability, transparency, and inclusive participation to ensure that collaborative processes generate equitable public value. Finally, governments should leverage digital technologies not only to improve administrative efficiency but also to expand meaningful citizen engagement through accessible, transparent, and participatory digital platforms.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this review. The analysis primarily relied on *The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes* as the principal documentary source. Although the handbook represents one of the most comprehensive references available, reliance on a single edited volume may limit the diversity of perspectives captured from the rapidly expanding co-production literature. Furthermore, as a conceptual review, this study synthesizes theoretical and documentary evidence rather than evaluating empirical effectiveness across specific policy sectors or institutional contexts. Future research could strengthen the evidence base by incorporating more recent journal publications, comparative international case studies, bibliometric analyses, and empirical investigations examining how different governance arrangements influence public value creation. Longitudinal and mixed-method research would also provide valuable insights into the sustainability of co-production initiatives and the evolving role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence within collaborative governance.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive conceptual synthesis of public service co-production by examining the evolution of the concept, its theoretical foundations, operational processes, governance dimensions, and future research directions through qualitative content analysis of The Palgrave Handbook of Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes. The findings demonstrate that co-production has evolved from a concept primarily associated with citizen participation in public service delivery into a multidimensional governance paradigm emphasizing collaborative public value creation. The thematic analysis identified seven interrelated themes encompassing the conceptual spectrum of co-production, public value outcomes, the Four Co's operational cycle, implementation and leadership, governance challenges, citizen inclusion, and future research priorities. Collectively, these findings indicate that effective co-production requires active collaboration

among governments, citizens, communities, and other stakeholders throughout the entire public service cycle rather than limiting participation to service implementation alone.

This study contributes to the public administration literature in several ways. Theoretically, it integrates fragmented discussions of co-production into a coherent conceptual framework linking conceptual development, public value, operational mechanisms, organizational conditions, governance arrangements, and citizen participation. By synthesizing these dimensions within a single analytical perspective, the study strengthens conceptual clarity regarding the role of co-production in contemporary collaborative governance. Methodologically, the thematic content analysis demonstrates how qualitative conceptual review can be employed to organize and synthesize complex multidisciplinary literature into a systematic evidence-based framework. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers and public managers by highlighting the importance of relational leadership, inclusive citizen engagement, institutional trust, and effective governance arrangements in strengthening collaborative public service delivery and public value creation.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on a single authoritative handbook as the primary source of analysis and by its conceptual rather than empirical focus. Accordingly, future research should broaden the evidence base by incorporating recent journal publications from multiple databases, conducting comparative analyses across countries and policy sectors, and examining the empirical relationships between co-production practices and public service outcomes. Further studies may also investigate the role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and data-driven governance in transforming co-production processes, as well as develop more robust measurement frameworks for evaluating public value creation. Such efforts will strengthen the theoretical development and practical application of co-production within increasingly complex public governance systems.

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