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Application of social media in B2B marketing: A systematic literature review & Wayforward for the future Research

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SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW:

Application of social media in B2B marketing: A systematic literature review

Abstract:

Social media technologies have changed the way we communicate and relate to each other. Collaboratively created environments allow users to immerse themselves in the world of digital communication. The B2B sector has much to gain (along with the B2C sector) from such environments while handling clients. Prospective clients find that using Social media technologies adds to the customer experience by way of responsiveness on the one hand, and companies see social media followers display more brand loyalty. The first step is to plan the review. The second stage is conducting the study, which involves the data synthesis step. The third step includes reports and recommendations necessary for future research in the area. Although B2B has lagged in social media coverage than B2C, it still counts as an upcoming field for achieving both short-term and long-term goals of the B2B industry. The objectives of this study are the role of social media users in the B2B industry. The researcher is interested in improving the existing literature for social media usage in B2B marketing. To know the stage of social media marketing in the case of B2B marketing, whether it is at the beginning stage or an improved stage in day-to-day social media usage. To compare B2B and B2C in social media use and their application in their campaigns and daily promotions. To know how B2B firms use social media to maintain the relationship.

Keywords:

B2B marketing, social media, Social media usage, Social media communications, B2B strategic planning, Social Media Applications

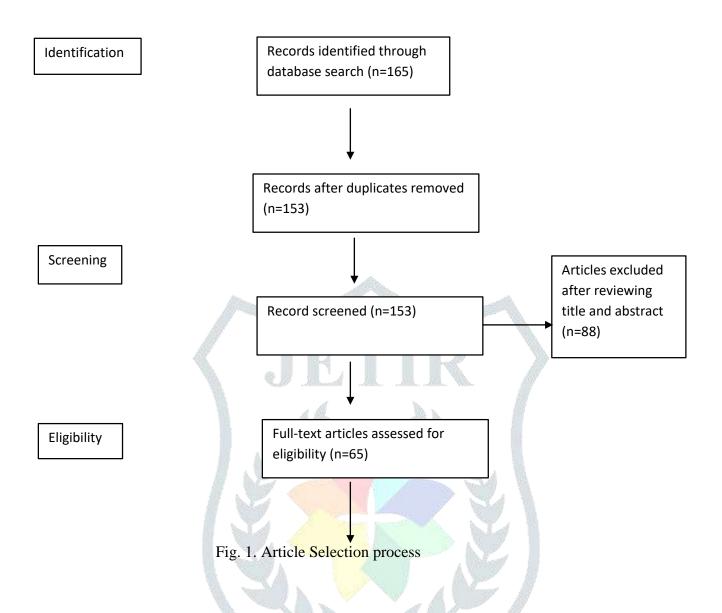
Introduction:

This study mainly emphasizes the theoretical contribution to B2B marketing, especially the use of social media. It is wholly related to the systematic literature review of Social media use and its application in B2B marketing. This literature review covered 65 papers from the year 2010 to 2021 In this study, we have identified the following problems relating to B2B social media marketing which are, 1) there is not enough theoretical contribution in B2B as such as the B2C, 2) there are no proper comparative studies regarding the social media usage in B2B and B2C, and 3) Most of the studies are emphasising on the knowledge and insights about the B2B. The increased importance of B2B relationships with the help of social media has led the researchers to know the complete literature review. This SLR mainly focuses on the following research objectives:

- 1) To know the role of social media users in the B2B industry.
- 2) The researcher is improving the existing literature for social media usage in B2B marketing.
- 3) To know the state of social media marketing in B2B marketing, whether it is at the introduction or growth stage.
- 4) To show the comparison between the B2B and B2C in the usage of social media in their campaigns day-to-day promotions.
- 5) To know how B2B firms are using social media for maintaining the relationship.

Methodology:

The researcher carried out an SLR in this study following a six-stage process (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). These are: planning the review (statement of the research questions (2.1) and proposition of inclusion and exclusion criteria (2.2)), execution of review (selection of databases (2.3) and subsequent execution of search string (2.4)) and reporting of the review (quality assessment (2.5), data abstraction (2.6) and next presentation of the evaluation of the studies (section 3 and section 4)). This study covers these steps following the guidelines proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003).



2.1 Research questions:

The current study aims to answer three main research questions (RQ).

- RQ1. Why is social media marketing considered to be at a blooming stage in B2B?.
- RQ2. How do B2B firms use the channels for developing and maintaining relationships?.
- RQ3. How B2B is different from B2C in the application of Social media to its marketing activities?

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This study utilized different inclusion and exclusion criteria, which are described below.

2.2.1. Inclusion criteria

This study utilized six different inclusion criteria:

a) studies should focus on social media marketing in B2B, b) studies published during 2011–2019, 3) studies published in English language, 4) only peer-reviewed journal articles, 5) social media marketing in B2B were empirically measured, 6) title, abstract, keywords and, sometimes, introduction were examined to evaluate if the focus was on social media marketing in B2B.

2.2.2. Exclusion criteria

This study utilized four exclusion criteria: a) relevance, b) review, conference papers, and thesis dissertations were ignored, c) duplicate studies, and d) studies before 2011 as this study covers the post-L Ramos et al. (2010) study period.

2.3. Databases

First, published journal articles on B2B social media marketing were identified, and several databases were used to cover as a wide range of publications as possible. The following databases were used: GOOGLE Scholar, EBSCO, Emerald, WOS, Routledge as well as Scopus. The researcher has chosen these databases because of their popularity, and more B2B journals were published.

2.4. Review protocol and outcomes

The researcher has used the following keywords in the review search: "social media", "Application of Social Media", "B2B", "business-to-business marketing," "industrial marketing," and "relationship management" and PUBLICATION YEAR after 2010. The above iterative search resulted in 165 studies through database search and nothing through forward and backward search. Textbook chapters and conference papers were included in the search, and duplicates were eliminated, resulting in a total number of 153 papers. Phase two consisted of going through the keywords and reading the abstracts of the selected studies. A total of 65 research articles were selected for further analysis. Although all these 65 studies have been considered for the B2B social media marketing, only 56 studies were found to have empirically measured. The article selection process has been explained in Fig. 1.

2.5. Quality evaluation (QE)

In this phase, the quality of the study was assessed. In the empirical studies, the rigour of the research method was analyzed, and in conceptual papers, the conceptual development, as well as the analysis, was looked at.

2.6 Data abstraction and synthesis

In this phase, data were synthesized. Thus, each article was read through and added either in the "social media marketing in B2B", "relationship marketing," or "employee engagement" category. The reason for choosing these three categories is because of the emergence of these three key thematic areas in the initial analysis of the systematic literature review

Literature review: Review of studies:

In this section, we review existing papers for insights and information regarding the topic, along with the findings from each paper. One-quarter of Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are using social media online for marketing; benefits of social media marketing include increased awareness and brand recognition online. The main barriers to this approach are the lack of relevance and lack of metrics (Michaelidou et al., 2011). The use of social media positively affects service behaviour and influences a greater value for customers as well as for salespeople; consistent support is necessary for successful implementation; although measurements are difficult to make, managers must encourage the salesperson to accept social media (Agnihotri et al., 2012). The six phases of sales are understanding the customer, approaching the customer, needs discovery, presentation, and close and follow-up (Andzulis et al., 2012). SM is a soft vehicle for brand management and relationship management rather than a hard-sell vehicle (Brennan and Croft, 2012). SM is applied for grasping a new customer base rather than enhancing existing relationships (Jarvinen et al., 2012). Salespeople who use social media get higher levels of overall sales performance (Schultz et al., 2012). Social media affects information exchange and social media the most (Sood and Pattison 2012). B2B practitioners use media targeted at professionals (Moore et al. 2013); Social media use positively contributes to brand performance (Rapp et al.2013). The inclusion of emotional sentiments in Facebook posts is a particularly beneficial social media strategy for B2B and service marketers (Swani et al., 2013). Social media adoption is heavily influenced by competitors (Akashraj and Pushpa, 2014). Top management is a major influencer in social media adoption (Dahnil et al., 2014). Content marketing requires a cultural change from "selling" to "helping" (Holliman and Rowley, 2014)

Although social media use is promising enough, social media success measurement in terms of numbers of users or fans does not by itself lead to an improvement in efficiency (Martinez-Nunez and Perez-Aguiar 2014). B2B tweets include more emotional than functional appeals (Swani et al., 2014). Two main barriers to social media implementation include difficulty in identifying the target audience and unfair competition (Holliman and Rowley 2014). Qualitative data finds six system design features matter for acceptance of social media-based marketing: (1) information sharing, (2) internal communication, (3) customer feedback and dialogue, (4) content control, (5) system integrity concerns, and (6) internal data security (Paluch et al. 2015). Social media is not seen as a two-way communication channel capable of serving relationship building

but as a channel to broadcast and drive sales (Taiminen and Karjaluoto 2015). B2B firms who do not use social media might face pressures from customers who wish to interact via the channels (Siamagka et al.,2015). Social media is helpful in maintaining and strengthening inter-relations among stakeholders (Ananda et al., 2016). The connection between social media objectives and the firms' marketing objectives are not backed up by metrics

The connection between social media objectives and the firms' marketing objectives is not backed up by metrics (Choi and Thoeni 2016). Through focussed targeting of B2b customers, many sales leads can be created (Jarvinen and Taiminen 2016). The general perception of the B2B marketer to social media strongly influences intentions to use Social media (Lacka and Chong, 2016).B2B marketers' perception of social media sites' usefulness strongly influences intentions to use social media (Lacka and Chong, 2016). Social responsiveness emerges as the main strategic area that companies can utilize social media for (Toker et al. 2016). Co-innovation activities with customers offer benefits (Wang et al. 2016). R&D initiatives benefit significantly from social media interaction (Chirumalla et al., 2017). SM is an enabler of competitive intelligence collection and adaptive selling (Itani et al., 2017). Prudent use is simpler to grasp and measure, while social media's strategic use is more complex to measure (Salo 2017). B2B content has a higher liking rate but a lower commenting rate than B2C. (Swani et al., 2017). According to Buratti et al., (2018) "There are three types of social media users in the B2B industry: pioneers (developing innovative dialogues), followers (bridging the gap between competitors), and sceptical firms (relying on traditional tools for interaction)"; SM can be used to find out new market patterns and tastes of the customers, monitor competitors, and seek out new business partners (Drummond et al. 2018). Customer segmentation is necessary for effective social media use in B2B marketing (Lashgari et al., 2018). In both B2B and B2C are being rated similar by the customer like the parameters customer satisfaction, value for the money, And their intention to buy, But different on some parameters like brand loyalty, Trust in Company which were assessed by using different surveys by marketers at different customer points (Y.K.Dwived et al., 2021). S.Cartwright et al., (2021) present an SLR study that mainly focused on the strategic use of social media and found that the successful implementation of SM in the B2B context mostly depends on the three elements: Sales facilitation, Integrated communication and employee engagement with customers.

Findings:

- 1. More research has been done on only practical applications in B2B social media usage.
- 2. There is no proper theory base for social media use in B2B marketing.
- 3. The stage of usage of social media is more in the introduction stage, as when compared to the B2C.
- 4. Researchers were mostly focusing on quantitative studies, and the researchers have used the positivist approach of the epistemology and objective view of the world.

- 5. The relationship among the B2B firms mainly focuses on sales only, but not for the long-term relationship.
- 6. SM works in the same way for both contexts except for some parameters.

Implications:

This research has both theoretical and practical implications of the marketer's practices in the field of B2B marketing. Almost all the papers which we have considered for the study are mainly concentrating on the practical problems and solutions for immediate problems that are being faced by the B2B industry. The earlier papers are contributing less towards the development of the theory.

Research gaps:

The research gaps being identified are as follows:

- 1. Most of the studies are being done in developed economies only; there is a gap or opportunity to do in the developing economies.
- 2. There is no proper comprehensive literature on social media use in the field of B2B marketing.
- 3. There is no proper comparative research between B2B and B2C domains in the case of usage of social media.
- 4. There is scope for qualitative research for building proper theories in the field of B2B social media marketing.

Limitations and Future Research, and Conclusion:

Limitations of this study are researcher has considered only the papers from the journal of industrial marketing for the literature reviews. Further, there is scope for proposing new theories and models relating to social media use in the field of B2B marketing. All the present studies are done in the developed nations like the USA, UK, etc. but not in the emerging nations. Future researchers can focus on emerging nations. Social media marketing got popular in the usage for communicating in B2B industry (Lacka & Chong, 2016), but it is still in the blooming stage, it requires more research for social media usage in B2B marketing for the further Application (Brennan & Croft, 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011). There is a lot of research is being conducted on the theories of SM application in the B2C but not in B2B, as the basic features of B2B marketing are different from the B2C marketing (Gronroos, 1994, 1996; Gummesson, 1987), and automatically, there will be an assumption that users of social media channels will also be different from B2C and B2B. (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). Even though there are sufficient research and theories in the B2C domain, marketers do not know how to implement those theories applicable to B2C to B2B (Brennan &

Croft, 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Siamagka et al., 2015). It is found that B2B marketers are unaware of the applications of SM to their marketing purposes, even though there are emerging technologies, and it needs more search to build a clear understanding of social media application in the field of B2B marketing (Jussila et al., 2014; Salo, 2017; Siamagka et al., 2015). As the study is new to the researchers, they mostly focus on short-term applications rather than long-term applications of social media channels (Salo, 2017). Despite this being a simpler route for understanding and measuring social media, there is a need for a more strategic research approach to understand the true value of social media as a marketing tool. The review shows that conceptually savvy research on B2B social media marketing is still developing and lacks a solid theoretical foundation, thus drawing largely on quantitative research. Due to this limited conceptual foundation, social media in B2B marketing would benefit from more exploratory research, which will help build a strong theoretical base for social media use in B2B marketing.

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