



Editorial

Innovative digital marketing management in B2B markets



A B S T R A C T

This special issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* aims to develop useful knowledge and generate new insights into and applications of digital marketing in B2B markets. This special edition features 11 articles that cover topics related to digital marketing in a B2B context. This introductory paper briefly summarizes the themes of the special issue, introduces each of the eleven articles on innovative digital marketing management in B2B, and provides a rationale for the inclusion of each article.

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, scholars have extensively researched the role of digital marketing. However, extant research focuses mostly on the role and impact of digital marketing in the business-to-consumer (B2C) context (Leek, Canning, & Houghton, 2016). As for digital marketing strategies and execution in business-to-business (B2B) markets, research is scarce (Guesalaga, 2016). Yet it is critical to understand the different roles of digital marketing across the B2C and B2B marketing contexts, especially given the growing role of digital marketing in B2B markets. The rise of digital B2B marketing presents fertile research opportunities for theory development and applied research into the issues and challenges faced by practitioners seeking guidance for strategy development and tactical execution.

The purpose of this special issue is to provide a forum for research investigations into the essential role of digital marketing in B2B markets. The focal theme is the identification and understanding of successful digital B2B marketing strategies and practices. As we discuss the role of B2B digital marketing strategies, we focus on three major themes—B2B marketing strategies in a digital world, B2B relationship management in a digital world, and B2B platform management and analytics in a digital world. As digital technologies advance, it seems likely that digital marketing will become an integral part of a successful B2B marketing strategy. Following IMM's rigorous review process, reviewers selected 11 articles from a large number of high-quality submissions. We introduce below the articles according to topic covered in the special issue.

2. Key themes covered in the special issue

2.1. B2B marketing strategy in a digital world

If industrial consumers are to be offered more convenient and faster options to obtain industrial products and services, then digitalization is essential (Swani, Brown, & Milne, 2014). Digitalization has become prevalent in such B2B markets as manufacturing, inventory

management, transportation, logistics, and purchasing (Andersen, 2005; Obal & Lancioni, 2013). Indeed, new digital technologies have dramatically changed industrial consumer trends (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). In response to this trend, marketers have developed more effective and efficient digital B2B marketing strategies, creating greater value for industrial consumers. It is vital that researchers and practitioners examine the important role of digital B2B marketing strategies. For this reason, we put as a theme in this special issue B2B digital marketing strategy in a digital world.

2.1.1. Developing a digital marketing tool for ethnic ventures' mixed business model and market-shaping: A design scientific approach of web demographics

Suh and Chow (2021) propose a design-scientific approach to developing digital marketing solutions in the context of a mixed business model. They propose it as a market-shaping tool to mitigate the current problems associated with new ventures and fast-growing companies with their scalable business model. As they develop the context of ethnic ventures, the authors introduce the three proposed market-shaping solutions. The solutions are based on the widely accepted guidelines and sequences of activities in the design science research. A primary contribution of this research is its development the three stages of market shaping in the solution process for ethnic ventures. Those three stages are as follows: (1) acquisition and identification, (2) description and secondary clustering, and (3) conscription and network-targeting. This three-stage process of shaping a market, which is based on web demographics, illustrates the incremental progress achieved through the target-marketing process. In developing a scalable business model, this research contributes to our understanding of how to select the right target market, creating a value for the target market.

2.1.2. Hitting or missing the target: Resources and capabilities for alternative e-commerce pathways in the fashion industry

Gaudenzi, Mola, and Rossignoli (2021) examine how, in the fashion industry, firms succeed in implementing an e-commerce strategy and

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.01.016>

move from perceived needs to e-supply chain configurations. They investigate the links between antecedents, e-supply chain configuration resources, capabilities, and alternative paths of evolution. To address the links, the authors apply the perspective of Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities. With three relevant propositions, they set up a theoretical framework. Through 35 in-depth interviews (collected during the years 2011–2019), this study investigated four Italian companies in the fashion industry. The research results show that the alternative pathways of evolution are determined by two key resources (i.e., network structure and flows and service architecture) and four key capabilities (i.e., relationship governance capabilities, exploitation of information asymmetry, core logistics capabilities and e-CRM and digital capabilities).

2.1.3. A discursive framework of B2B brand legitimacy

In this research, [Gustafson and Pomirleanu \(2021\)](#) delineate the benefits for B2B brands to gain brand legitimacy within a hyper-connected ecosystem. The authors describe how B2B brands can build and use brand rhetoric in building legitimacy and among the benefits of possessing brand legitimacy are B2B brand reputation, awareness, and credibility. Motivated by the continual advancements in digital technologies for B2B brands, the authors utilize a rhetorical and discursive approach to build a framework of B2B brand legitimacy. They provide propositions and empirical guides to substantiate the proposed framework. This study contributes to the literature on B2B branding by explaining how the pathos, logos, and ethos of conversations around brands achieve meaning and are persuasive in a digital B2B world.

2.1.4. Understanding the role of service innovation behavior on business customer performance and loyalty

[Woo, Kim, and Wang \(2021\)](#) examine how, within the safety industry, the innovative behavior of a service provider can influence business customer performance and business customer loyalty. This study found that the innovative behavior of a service provider (i.e., customer-oriented, technology-oriented and co-creation-oriented) helped determine business customer performance and in turn, influence business customer loyalty (i.e., recommendation and re-contract intention). The results of multi-group analyses provide additional findings that a high level of safety involvement places an emphasis on technology-oriented innovative behavior while a low level of safety involvement focuses on customer-oriented innovative behavior. This study has important theoretical and managerial implications for service innovation for researchers as well as service providers.

2.2. B2B relationship management in a digital world

In today's digitalized environments, inter-firm relationships in its various forms (e.g., joint ventures, strategic alliances, public-private partnerships, and digital networks) are becoming increasingly important for firms to improve their competitive position in the B2B market ([Koch & Windsperger, 2017](#)). Digitalization and social media facilitate selecting partner firms and help the firms establish and manage relationship with the partner firms. Firms should have good networks to create a value for the final individual customer groups in the value chain. For firms to deliver products and/or services to a target market damage-free and on time it is imperative they engender a high level of relationship management with partner firms. The advent of digital technology facilitates firms to easily collaborate with partner firms, resulting in the firms achieving much more efficient and productive outcomes ([Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012](#)). In this trend, relationship management is essential for firms creating better performance in a B2B context. This is why we are putting as one of main themes in this special issue B2B relationship management in a digital world.

2.2.1. Study on the influencing of B2B parasocial relationship on repeat purchase intention in the online purchasing environment: An empirical study of B2B purchasing platform

[Yuan, Moon, Wang, Yu, and Kim \(2021\)](#) provide empirical support to the often conceptualized but not-yet-tested framework of parasocial relationship in B2B context. Based on the perspective of parasocial relationship and dual-process theory, this study constructs a model of cognitive and emotional influences on customer firms' behavior, and analyzes the influence of features of entrepreneur endorser and online purchasing platform on B2B parasocial relationship, and how this relationship can affect repeat purchase intention. Furthermore, this study examines the moderating role of trust in the relationship between B2B parasocial relationships and repeat purchase intention. Findings indicate that B2B parasocial relationships are positively impacted by perceived interactivity and trustworthiness of an entrepreneur endorser and the service and product quality of online purchasing platform. B2B parasocial relationship has a significant and positive impact on repeat purchase intention, while trust moderates the relationship between B2B parasocial relationship and repeat purchase intention.

2.2.2. Does corporate social responsibility matter even in the B2B market?: Effect of B2B CSR on customer trust

In this research, [Han and Lee \(2021\)](#) investigate how the quality of business relationships in the B2B market is influenced by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This study proposes the CSR model in a B2B context. The authors found two dimensions of corporate social responsibility in the B2B market. CSR has a positive effect on developing business relationships. It reveals that businesses that practice CSR activities experience a positive effect on perceived supply risk, corporate image, corporate reputation, social connectedness. At the same time, altruistic CSR activity has a positive effect on corporate image, corporate reputation, and social connectedness. Finally, factors of developing business relationship have a positive effect on trust. This study identified that CSR activities can be helpful in the relationship outcomes of the transactions between firms. Further, the authors emphasize that CSR derives B2B relationship performance. The major contribution of this study is to expand the previous CSR research into B2B marketing area. Business CSR and altruistic CSR are useful for improving the relationship performance in a B2B context. This study provides managerial implications as follows. Suppliers' ethical transaction management can help burnish a corporate image and reputation; at the economic level, buyers, by reducing perceived supply risk, play a positive role in relationship development. In addition, by increasing social connectedness, the solidarity between firms can be tightened through the psychological affection toward suppliers.

2.2.3. Social media-related tensions on business-to-business markets – Evidence from China

Using a dyadic perspective, [Luo, Tóth, Liu, and Yuan \(2021\)](#) argue the gap by focusing on tensions in buyer-supplier relationships that arise from social media use. The authors provide three important dualistic tensions—active engagement anticipated by suppliers versus passive monitoring practices of the buyers, increased transparency through business-to-business social media versus invisibility, and, third, tensions between local versus international business-to-business social media-engagement practices. Through 52 semi-structured in-depth interviews with senior managers of manufacturing firms in China, the authors found that a source of tension for suppliers is the passivity of buyers and that buyers are frustrated by high transparency and clashing international social media styles. By identifying characteristic tensions pertaining to business-to-business social media, this study contributes to research on the 'dark side' of business relationships as well as to literature on B2B social media engagement.

2.2.4. *Sharing is the name of the game: Exploring the role of social media communication practices on B2B customer relationships in the life sciences industry*

Rose, Fandel, Saraeva, and Dibley (2021) investigate the effect of vendor social media communication practices on trust and loyalty in B2B customer relationships. They provide a model to test how trust and loyalty in a B2B relationship are affected by their three hypothesized social media practices—social media shared beliefs, vendor-to-customer communication, and customer-to-customer communication. To test their model, the authors used quantitative data from 196 business customers of a U.S. life-sciences firm. The results show that all three social media practices have direct and positive effects upon trust and that trust mediates the relationship with loyalty, thus making such practices important to firms. Further, the relevance of shared beliefs about social media practices indicates that firms should be known not only for what they say in their social media messages, but also what they stand for in terms of why and how they use social media.

2.3. *B2B platform management and analytics in a digital world*

Digital marketing is evolving toward greater use of interactive platforms. This provides an opportunity for the creation of new paradigms of industrial customer behavior and greater understanding of digital B2B marketing activities in areas as diverse as customer service, experience management, advertising creativity and the discovery of new business opportunities. Digitalization has facilitated the major paradigm shift in B2B marketing by providing platforms that enable a firm to perform more strongly (Lee et al., 2012) and to enhance value co-creation in the B2B market (Nambisan, Lyytinen, Majchrzak, & Song, 2017). Firms can achieve value co-creation through digital platforms (Yoo, Boland, Lyytinen, & Majchrzak, 2012). It is thus important to identify the role of platforms in a B2B digital world. Platforms provide easy access to get useful information and knowledge between firms. Collecting intelligence and resources via platforms, firms can attain a competitive position of strength. Thus, as the last theme in this special issue, we put B2B platform management and analytics in a digital world.

2.3.1. *Buyer-supplier matching in online B2B marketplace: An empirical study of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)*

Yoon, Yoon, Nam, and Choi (2021) argue that buyer-supplier matching for SMEs in an online B2B marketplace is significantly related to quality signals embedded in the information presented on the platform. This study suggests that appropriately designed recommendation systems can increase the matching rate. The authors investigate the use of quality signals and recommendations to foster buyer-supplier matching in an online B2B marketplace of SMEs. Using both online and offline data, they demonstrate how important it is to manage a platform in B2B marketing so as to create a value for both buyers and suppliers. Using unique proprietary data from a leading B2B e-commerce platform, this study offers insights into how to design and manage an online platform in the B2B marketplace so that SMEs can yield more successful matches. This research highlights the importance of integrating online channel data with traditional offline channel data to accurately assess the drivers of buyer-supplier matching.

2.3.2. *Online content match-making in B2B markets: Application of neural content modeling*

To match the content B2B sellers are providing with the type that buyers are seeking, a neural content model is developed herein by Bikesh Upreti et al. (2021). The authors tested the model with two experiments using a dataset that combines cookie-based browsing data from 74 B2B seller companies over a period of fourteen months. In total, the data comprises 180 million browsing sessions (tracked via 11.44 million cookies from 34,170 buyer companies). This study found that the neural content modeling approach can be used to create B2B analytics that re-empower the sellers. Using a real-life dataset of buyer

behavior and sellers' marketing content, the authors demonstrate how sellers can utilize the data to enhance their operations. This research contributes to B2B content-marketing literature. It demonstrates how the behavioral data of a potential buyer firm together with the marketing content data of a seller firm can be used for content evaluation and matching purposes.

2.3.3. *Digital media optimization for B2B marketing*

Krings, Palmer, and Inversini (2021) seek to spread out the understanding of the holistic framework to examine, identify and arrange digital media in B2B. The framework is suitable for multiple industries and relevant to B2B marketing. The authors develop an assessment tool to identify and align marketing processes and digital media. They test a conceptual model by means of a cross-sectional survey of more than 530 practitioners. The authors identify the critical phases of the business-development process and define this function at the interface between marketing and sales. Further, they determine the platforms from numerous available digital media that are most suitable in these particular phases leading to increased business performance.

3. Conclusion

We anticipate that this special issue will provide momentum to B2B digital marketing. We believe that the 11 articles selected will resonate with digital B2B marketing management. The advent of digital technologies has raised essential issues to academia and practitioners with new opportunities and challenges. We believe that this special issue contributes to the academia and practice in the following ways. First, a majority of the extant research in digital marketing has considered the role of digital marketing in a B2C setup, yet such a setup differs in many ways from the B2B setup. This special issue contributes to identifying a different role for digital marketing in B2B markets and it serves as a springboard for developing new theories in B2B digital marketing management. Second, this special issue helps marketers find new digital marketing strategies, creating greater value for industrial consumers. Since this special issue covers a broad range of topics in B2B markets, it will support practitioners as they come up with an effective digital B2B marketing strategy. In conclusion, we thank the reviewers for their time and effort in evaluating and selecting papers. Also, we would like to thank the Associate Editors (Drs. Maja Arslanagić-Kalajdžić and Selma Kadić-Maglajlić) of the Special Issue in IMM. Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to the editorial office for their excellent support.

References

- Andersen, P. H. (2005). Relationship marketing and brand involvement of professionals through web-enhanced brand communities: The case of Coloplast. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 34(1), 39–51.
- Gaudenzi, B., Mola, L., & Rossignoli, C. (2021). Hitting or missing the target: Resources and capabilities for alternative e-commerce pathways in the fashion industry. *Industrial Marketing Management* (in press).
- Guesalaga, R. (2016). The use of social media in sales: Individual and organizational antecedents, and the role of customer engagement in social media. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 71–79.
- Gustafson, B., & Pomirleanu, N. (2021). A discursive framework of B2B brand legitimacy. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 22–31.
- Han, S. L., & Lee, J. W. (2021). Does corporate social responsibility matter even in the B2B market?: Effect of B2B CSR on customer trust. *Industrial Marketing Management* (in press).
- Koch, T., & Windsperger, J. (2017). Seeing through the network: Competitive advantage in the digital economy. *Journal of Organization Design*, 6(1), 6.
- Krings, W., Palmer, R., & Inversini, A. (2021). Digital media optimization for B2B marketing. *Industrial Marketing Management* (in press).
- Lee, S. M., Olson, D. L., & Trimi, S. (2012). Innovative collaboration for value creation. *Organizational Dynamics*, 41, 7–12.
- Leek, S., Canning, L., & Houghton, D. (2016). Revisiting the task media fit model in the era of web 2.0: Twitter use and interaction in the healthcare sector. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 25–32.
- Luo, J., Tóth, Z., Liu, M. J., & Yuan, R. (2021). Social media-related tensions on business-to-business markets-evidence from China. *Industrial Marketing Management* (in press).

- Nambisan, S., Lyytinen, K., Majchrzak, A., & Song, M. (2017). Digital innovation management: Reinventing innovation management research in a digital world. *MIS Quarterly*, 41(1).
- Obal, M., & Lancioni, R. A. (2013). Maximizing buyer–supplier relationships in the digital era: Concept and research agenda. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(6), 851–854.
- Quinton, S., & Wilson, D. (2016). Tensions and ties in social media networks: Towards a model of understanding business relationship development and business performance enhancement through the use of LinkedIn. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 15–24.
- Rose, S., Fandel, D., Saraeva, A., & Dibley, A. (2021). Sharing is the name of the game: Exploring the role of social media communication practices on B2B customer relationships in the life sciences industry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 52–62.
- Suh, T., & Chow, T. K. (2021). Developing a digital marketing tool for ethnic ventures' mixed business model and market-shaping: A design scientific approach of web demographics. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 10–21.
- Swani, K., Brown, B. P., & Milne, G. R. (2014). Should tweets differ for B2B and B2C? An analysis of fortune 500 companies' twitter communications. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 43(5), 873–881.
- Upreti, B., Huhtala, J. P., Tikkanen, H., Malo, P., Marvasti, N., Kaski, S., ... Mattila, P. (2021). Online content match-making in B2B markets: Application of neural content modeling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 32–40.
- Woo, H., Kim, S. J., & Wang, H. (2021). Understanding the role of service innovation behavior on business customer performance and loyalty. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 41–51.
- Yoo, Y., Boland, R., Lyytinen, K., & Majchrzak, A. (2012). Organizing for innovation in the digitized world. *Organization Science*, 23, 1398–1408.
- Yoon, Y., Yoon, Y., Nam, H., & Choi, J. (2021). Buyer-supplier matching in online B2B marketplace: An empirical study of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). *Industrial Marketing Management*, 93, 90–100.
- Yuan, C., Moon, H., Wang, S., Yu, X., & Kim, K. H. (2021). Study on the influencing of B2B parasocial relationship on repeat purchase intention in the online purchasing environment: An empirical study of B2B E-commerce platform. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 92, 101–110.

Kyung Hoon Kim^{a,*}, Hakil Moon^b

^a Changwon National University, 9 Sarimdong Changwon, Gyeongnam, Republic of Korea

^b Eastern Michigan University, Department of Marketing, College of Business, 300 West Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti, MI 48197, USA

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: stride@changwon.ac.kr (K.H. Kim), hmoon3@emich.edu (H. Moon).