

# Strategic use of social media within business-to-business (B2B) marketing: A systematic literature review

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## ABSTRACT

Social media are increasingly becoming a valuable tool for Business-to-Business (B2B) organizations. However, social media research in B2B lacks a comprehensive overview from a strategic perspective, with most research to date having been focused on the tactical use of social media platforms, that is to say, in describing specific tools to implement a strategy. In the present systematic literature review we address this deficiency. Our findings reveal that prior B2B research predominately investigated social media as short-term tactics with context-specific limitations. Our thematic analysis extends beyond these boundaries and extracts from the literature three relationship-orientated themes in social media, namely their use as a tool for: 1) sales-facilitation, 2) integrated communication, and 3) employee engagement. These three themes are distinct yet interdependent and are each necessary if organizations are to develop a competitive advantage within the social media environment. The descriptive statistics and thematic analysis in the study present a set of five key findings that reflect the research gaps presently in the literature and thus highlight significant future research directions. The study also highlights the utility for organizations to employ social media in a strategic manner rather than simply as a tactical tool.

## 1. Introduction

While social media are extensively explored in business-to-consumer (B2C) sectors, corresponding research within the business-to-business (B2B) context remains relatively sparse (Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, & Yau, 2019; Ogilvie, Agnihotri, Rapp, & Trainor, 2018; Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015). On one hand, B2C social media marketing focuses on the interactions of organizations with consumers and consumers' interactions with each other (Kaplan, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The use of social media by B2B organizations emphasizes complex interactions with multiple internal and external stakeholders, such as customers, employees and even competitors (Singaraju, Nguyen, Niininen, & Sullivan-Mort, 2016). Our perspective views customers as external stakeholders and employees as internal stakeholders. Despite the present inadequate understanding of social media in B2B, social media use can nonetheless improve organizational and individual performance by applying the intellectual capital (e.g., know-how and expertise) of employees to develop and sustain valuable relationships with customers (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018; Kwahk & Park, 2016). Aiming to articulate and document current

understanding of social media use by B2B organizations, we now present a systematic literature review (SLR).

Social media marketing has been defined as the “utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders” (Tuten & Solomon, 2014, p. 21). More specifically, B2B social media, also known as corporate social media, are viewed as “web-based platforms that allow workers to: 1) communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; 2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; 3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and 4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited, and sorted by anyone else in the organization at a time of their choosing (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013, p. 2). Under the umbrella of corporate social media, B2B organizations employ both external social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and Twitter) and internal platforms (e.g., Microsoft Yammer and Facebook Workplace) in their marketing activities (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018; Leek, Canning, & Houghton, 2016). Together, these platforms allow organizations to share content and interact with each

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other and to promote an online presence of the organization and its employees (Pitt, Plangger, Botha, Kietzmann, & Pitt, 2019).

Recent research suggests that there is a profound and largely unexploited potential for the better use of social media in B2B marketing (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Drummond, O'Toole, & McGrath, 2020; Jussila, Kärkkäinen, & Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Quinton & Wilson, 2016), which could be exploited to obtain competitive advantage through enhancing the efficiency of organizational processes, capturing individual expertise, and managing fast-paced innovation (Archer-Brown, Marder, Calvard, & Kowalski, 2018; Karampela, Lacka, & McLean, 2020). In other words, social media platforms can allow organizations to improve their communication competency by promoting employees' expertise and driving engagement through these innovative technologies. In the B2C domain, considerable research reveals that firms are successfully employing social media brand pages to engage directly with consumers and develop sustainable relationships, thereby increasing sales and raising brand awareness (Gao & Feng, 2016; Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski, & Christodoulides, 2018). In contrast, strategic social media research within the B2B domain remains limited and fragmented (Salo, 2017).

Previous work shows that strategic management entails some 75% personal and 25% impersonal factors (Powell, 2014). Similarly, managing social media strategies is very much dependent on human activities that are “conducted by people, through people, and for people” (Powell, 2014, p. 201). Organizations aim to keep their competitors off-balance and raise entry barriers, resulting in the exclusion of new entrants from the market (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Thus, organizations' social media strategies need to be better oriented towards effectiveness if they are to achieve the desired competitive advantage in the market. However, competitive advantage cannot be achieved without applying tactical approaches that are interrelated and co-dependent on an organization's wider strategy. It remains the case today that a successful strategy within the social media environment consists of three tactical relationship marketing elements: “1) Seek direct contact with customers and other stakeholders, 2) Build a database covering the necessary information about customers and other actors, and 3) Develop a customer-oriented service system” (Grönroos, 1996, p. 5). Moreover, developing a social media strategy takes advantage of the knowledge, expertise, and know-how of employees, whereas a tactical approach is more concerned with implementing social media platforms (Starbuck, 1992). In other words, the strategy and tactics developed in higher-level planning are synonymous with the specific steps required to implement the plan (Glover, Hartley, & Patti, 1989; Parente & Strausbaugh-Hutchinson, 2014; Teece et al., 1997).

A large body of research shows that the greatest challenge faced by B2B organizations regarding social media is a prevailing lack of knowledge about how to effectively implement the available platforms as a strategic tool, and how best to embed such a tool within a holistic marketing strategy (Chirumalla, Oghazi, & Parida, 2018; Liu, 2019; Siamagka et al., 2015). Therefore, in response to the important call for further strategic social media research arising from academic and practical observations, these research results echo the call of Salo (2017) to investigate the strategic use of social media within B2B organizations. In that study, Salo addresses seven themes, but other recent literature has mainly developed around his theme #2, namely “buyer-seller relationships and business networks”, which reflects a strategic perspective. Salo's 2007 SLR consisted of 40 research articles. In contrast, our SLR consists of 69 articles, including 29 that were part of Salo's earlier sample, with exclusion of 11 articles based on our stringent inclusion criteria. All articles included in the present SLR focus on the strategic use of social media within the B2B domain. Thus, considering the recent advances in this topic, we aim to present a contemporary review that explores the strategic implementation of the platforms.

Our approach differs from prior attempts to synthesize existing literature in that we view social media as a strategic tool in the overall marketing strategy of organizations. ‘Strategic’ use of social media

represents the overarching plan and set of goals for social media use by B2B organizations, whereas ‘tactical’ use of the various platforms entails specific actions and steps that organizations undertake to accomplish their strategy (LaForge, Ingram, & Cravens, 2009; Webster, 1992). Furthermore, the overarching strategy defines long-term objectives and goals of the organizations and how they are to be achieved. On the hand, tactics (otherwise known as ‘initiatives’), are generally more concrete in nature and focus on short-term outcomes that involve specific plans, organizational resources, and best practice activities (LaForge et al., 2009; Lam, Yeung, Lo, & Cheng, 2019). We distinguish between the effectiveness-oriented strategic use of social media (e.g., broadcasting the expertise of the organization) from its adoption-oriented tactical use (e.g., developing valuable content on a specific platform), which has not been investigated in previous studies. Moreover, we analyze the articles that are more strategic in nature and determine gaps within current research. More specifically, instead of dealing with “whether” (e.g., the necessity of social media in B2B marketing) and “why” questions (e.g., comparative advantages of social media in B2B marketing), our perspective provides strategic guidelines for B2B organizations by addressing the “how” question, namely how best to strategically utilize social media to achieve the overall business excellence. B2B research emphasizes the theoretical perspectives of relationship marketing (Gummesson, 2017; Sheth, 2017). After depicting this theoretical perspective of relationship marketing, we proceed to shed new light on the opportunities for acquiring, developing, and sustaining profitable relationships with both internal and external stakeholders that are afforded by social media, thus aiming towards contextualization and modernization of B2B marketing theories in an information age (Gummesson, 2017; Sheth, 2017).

Given the uncoordinated and unstructured nature of previous B2B social media research (Ogilvie et al., 2018; Pascucci, Ancillai, & Cardinali, 2018), we aim in this SLR to synthesize the existing literature to develop an integrated understanding of the topic, which shall provide strategic guidelines for practice and identify future research avenues. Furthermore, the identification of key themes enables us to discuss vital research priorities within social media B2B marketing (Raddats, Kowalkowski, Benedettini, Burton, & Gebauer, 2019). In consideration of this background, the objectives of this review are threefold:

- 1) To provide a holistic view of existing social media research carried out within B2B marketing.
- 2) To advance the understanding of strategic social media use in B2B marketing.
- 3) To identify knowledge gaps and propose research directions indicated by our analysis of current literature.

The remainder of the paper consists of five further sections. In [Section 2](#), we provide an overview of our methodology, which follows the process set out by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003). The comprehensive literature synthesis in the SLR encompasses 69 articles, published between 2011 and 2019, thus capturing the academic literature investigating the utilization of social media within B2B marketing (see appendix). In [Section 3](#) we present a range of descriptive statistics about the field, while in [Section 4](#) we identify three relationship-oriented themes in the literature, wherein social media serves as tools for sales-facilitation, integrated communication, and employee engagement. This triad of themes emerged from investigating articles that focus on the strategic use of the social media platforms in developing and sustaining relationships with customers and other stakeholders. The discussion in [Section 5](#) demonstrates how this SLR builds upon and contributes to the previous literature stream, sets out future research directions, and discusses implications for practical application. Finally, [Section 6](#) provides conclusions and a statement of limitations.

## 2. Methodology

To ensure a thorough synthesis of this rapidly growing field, we adopted the three-stage process proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003); namely, planning, conducting and reporting the review. We chose to adopt a systematic approach, aiming to “provide collective insights through theoretical synthesis into the fields and sub-fields” (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 220). The process applied in our review was similar to that followed by Raddats et al. (2019) and Johnsen, Miemczyk, and Howard (2017), thus endeavoring to move the field forward (Barczak, 2017). Furthermore, through carrying out a systematic review we ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and complete coverage of the body of academic literature (Tranfield et al., 2003). In stage one, we first identify the need for a review of literature in the field of B2B social media marketing, and set out the study design (Tranfield et al., 2003).

In the second stage, we conducted the literature search for published peer-reviewed journal articles investigating social media within the B2B context in four main databases, comprising EBSCO, Emerald, Elsevier, and Scopus. The keyword selection was guided by our research objectives, casting a broad net to obtain a holistic overview of existing research carried out in B2B social media marketing (Suppatvech, Godsell, & Day, 2019). We choose broad keywords in recognition of the limited knowledge about strategic social media marketing within the B2B context (Foltean et al., 2019; Iankova et al., 2019; Pitt et al., 2019). Therefore, we made a Boolean search combining the main keywords “B2B” and “social media” in two keyword sets: B2B (including “business-to-business”, “B2B”, “industrial marketing”) and social media (including “social media” and “Web 2.0”) (Salo, 2017). To further ensure the detection of relevant articles, we conducted the search in the title, keywords, and abstract components (Johnsen et al., 2017). Although any keyword-based selection is inevitably apt to miss some articles, our protocol-based search ensured efficiency (Tranfield et al., 2003), as well as effectiveness by portraying in-depth knowledge of the key concepts and their interrelationships (Watson, 2015).

The review begins in 2011, the publication year of the first article about social media within the B2B domain (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). In the interest of quality control, we excluded articles published in journals not meeting the minimum ranking threshold 1\* (“meets normal scholarly standards”). The AJG ranking is widely used as a reference for journal quality and research rigor that is based on internationally renowned editorial expertise as well as citation statistics (Johnsen et al., 2017). Previous SLRs by Raddats et al. (2019) and Johnsen et al. (2017) also used the AJG to identify suitable journals from which to draw material for their samples.

The initial search yielded 187 hits, among which were some book chapters and conference proceedings. After eliminating duplicates from the sample, and removing book chapters and conference articles, 82 articles remained. Thereafter, two researchers independently reviewed the abstracts and screened the remaining articles based on our inclusion and exclusion criteria (Suppatvech et al., 2019). At this stage, any articles that predominantly investigated digital platforms other than social media, such as corporate websites, e-business and e-commerce platforms, were excluded from the review. For example, if a paper focused on B2B e-commerce social media marketing strategies, it fit the selection criteria. However, if the paper focused on B2B e-commerce, but only briefly touched upon social media, it was excluded. The advent of e-commerce has certainly changed how organizations purchase from each other (Wilson, Daniel, & Davies, 2008), but we are more concerned here with the way social media have changed the way organizations engage, communicate, and collaborate with each other. Thus, e-commerce platforms are generally limited to writing reviews or other transactional processes, but do not support active value co-creation and development of loyal relationships between users and organizations, in the manner exemplified by social media. Furthermore, we excluded research focusing exclusively on consumers' use of social media or the B2C domain, unless it considered the B2B and B2C domains from a

comparative perspective. Finally, we included articles that focused more on the strategic use of social media rather than the tactical use. Specifically, the SLR included articles that investigated the effectiveness-oriented strategic use of social media (e.g., broadcasting the expertise of the organization), and excluded articles that investigated the adoption-oriented tactical use of the platforms (e.g., developing valuable content on a specific platform). In order to circumvent subjectivity regarding our inclusion and exclusion criteria (Tranfield et al., 2003), two researchers in the study team made a joint final decision in cases in which the abstract's content was ambiguous. After filtering the original 82 articles, the 69 that met our search criteria were used for further analysis.

In stage three, data on the evaluation, reporting and dissemination of the selected articles occurs (Tranfield et al., 2003). First, data about the articles were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and the articles themselves were stored in the Mendeley database. The spreadsheet listed the title, authors, journal, and publication date, in addition to the methodology, theory, and main results of each article. After inputting this information, we applied a systematic approach to identify the common themes occurring throughout the sample (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis applied in our review was similar to that followed by Raddats et al. (2019) and the two researchers collaboratively settled upon the themes after independently reading the articles. To this end, the researchers each considered the key findings of an article and identified its main theme. Next, the identified themes were discussed by the two researchers, and their adoption, connection and revision emerged by consensus (Reid & Plank, 2000). Three themes emerged during this process, which represent the main topics in the SLR, based on the degree of consensus shared between articles (Tranfield et al., 2003). These three themes position social media as a tool for: 1) a *sales-facilitation*, supporting the sales function to develop relationships with buyers; 2) *integrated communication*, demonstrating how content is created and maintained when engaging with target audiences; and 3) *employee engagement*, exploring how to create value for the employer through developing relationships with employees.

Whilst the triad of themes is characterized as being distinct, inevitably some minor overlaps occurred. For instance, all three themes concentrate to some extent on relationships, because this is at the core of B2B marketing. Nevertheless, it is important to thematize these relational exchanges according to the different types of interaction and communication on social media. Our division of the data into three themes means that each theme requires its own separate review and analysis (Section 4).

## 3. Publication activities in the field – Descriptive analysis

In line with Tranfield et al. (2003), we present a descriptive analysis of the research. Table 1 shows the most highly cited articles for each theme (Google Scholar). Over half of these articles (8/15) were published in the journal *Industrial Marketing Management*, among which one article (Michaelidou et al., 2011) received around 23% of all citations for the top 15 articles, indicating the high impact of this one study.

In terms of the rate of publication about our chosen topic, Fig. 1 shows a clear increase in the number of publications during the review period. Prior to 2014 no more than four articles were published per year, but there was a sudden increase between 2014 and 2015, which signals the increasing academic attention placed on social media in the B2B domain (Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014; Wiersema, 2013). The highest number of articles was published in 2019, showing the burgeoning importance of this topic.

Although the 69 articles analyzed in this review were published in 16 separate journals, they are mainly appearing within two journals. Table 2 shows that the majority of articles (38/69; 54%) appeared in *Industrial Marketing Management*, followed by 11/69 (16%) in the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. Thus, almost three-quarters of the aggregate articles were published in just two journals specializing in B2B

**Table 1**  
Most cited articles in each theme (top 5 articles).

Theme	Reference	Citations in Google Scholar <sup>a</sup>	Methodology	Results
Sales-facilitation tool	Andzulis, J., Panagopoulos, N. G., & Rapp, A. (2012). A Review of Social Media and Implications for the Sales Process. <i>Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management</i> , 32(3), 305–316.	472	Conceptual	The role of social media in the sales process; identification and illustration of four phases in the sales process when adopting social media (understanding the customer, approaching the customer, needs discovery, presentation, close, follow up).
	Agnihotri, R., Dingus, R., Hu, M. Y., & Krush, M. T. (2016). Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 53, 172–180.	427	Quantitative methods	Social media use facilitates salespersons' information communication, thereby enhancing the responsiveness. Both information communication and responsiveness positive influence customer satisfaction.
	Agnihotri, R., Kothandaraman, P., Kashyap, R., & Singh, R. (2012). Bringing "Social" into Sales: The Impact of Salespeople's Social Media Use on Service Behaviors and Value Creation. <i>Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management</i> , 32(3), 333–348.	314	Conceptual	Salespeople's social media use positively affects service behavior that influence. Social media creates value for customers as well as for salespeople. Constant support for successful implementation is required. Firms need to be clear about their goals and objectives, they need to measure their efforts, and outcomes of social media.
	Brennan, R., & Croft, R. (2012). The use of social media in B2B marketing and branding: An exploratory study. <i>Journal of Customer Behavior</i> , 11(2), 101–115.	201	Quantitative methods	Adoption of social media is not universal. Social media pioneers aim to position themselves as thought leaders. B2B social media applications are content marketing, market research, business networking and sales prospecting. Social media is not a hard-sell vehicle.
	Iankova, S., Davies, I., Archer-Brown, C., Marder, B., & Yau, A. (2019). A comparison of social media marketing between B2B, B2C and mixed business models. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 81, 169–179.	105	Quantitative methods	Social media usage within B2C domain is distinct compared to that in B2B. B2B uses social media more for acquisition-oriented purposes and B2C relationship-oriented purposes.
Integrated communications tool	Michaelidou, N., Siamagka, N. T., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). Usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing: An exploratory investigation of small and medium B2B brands. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 40(7), 1153–1159.	1162	Quantitative methods	Social media is used for attracting new customers and most significant barrier is lack of perceived relevance of SNSs; SNS are not monitored. Benefit of SNSs is increased awareness and communication of brand online.
	Trainor, K. J., Andzulis, J., Rapp, A., & Agnihotri, R. (2014). Social media technology usage and customer relationship performance: A capabilities-based examination of social CRM. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 67(6), 1201–1208.	683	Quantitative methods	Organizations that have high use of social media in conjunction with CRM systems have greater social CRM capabilities; Firms that use social media without CRM systems miss an opportunity to increase performance.
	Rapp, A., Beitelspacher, L. S., Grewal, D., & Hughes, D. E. (2013). Understanding social media effects across seller, retailer, and consumer interactions. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i> , 41(5), 547–566.	507	Mixed methods	Social media positively influences brand performance, retailer performance, and consumer–retailer loyalty; supplier social media usage influences retailer social media use, which then influences customer social media use and is moderated by brand reputation and service ambidexterity.
	Holliman, G., & Rowley, J. (2014). Business to business digital content marketing: marketers' perceptions of best practice. <i>Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing</i> , 8(4), 269–293.	401	Qualitative methods	B2B organizations need to take "publishing" approach; Valuable content is described as being useful, relevant, compelling and timely; Content marketing requires a cultural change from "selling" to "helping".
	Jussila, J. J., Kärkkäinen, H., & Aramo-Immonen, H. (2014). Social media utilization in business-to-business relationships of technology industry firms. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> , 30, 606–613.	263	Quantitative methods	Social media is used mostly for internal purposes and testing the channels before using them externally. There is a need for formal and informal training. Barriers towards adoption are general reluctance, other more important priorities, and not being able to measure or assess benefits of social media.
Employee Engagement tool	Järvinen, J., & Taiminen, H. (2015). Harnessing marketing automation for B2B content marketing. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 54, 164–175.	254	Qualitative methods	Content must target the customer needs rather than promotion in order to be successful. Content can be developed through collaboration between employees. Content marketing strategies can be integrated within sales activities.
	Huotari, L., Ulkuniemi, P., Saraniemi, S., & Mäläskä, M. (2015). Analysis of content creation in social media by B2B companies. <i>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</i> , 30(6), 761–770.	136	Qualitative methods	B2B company can influence content creation in social media directly by participating in discussions and removing content through corporate user accounts. They can control employee social media behavior by training employees to create desired content.
	Wang, Y., Hsiao, S., Yang, Z., & Hajli, N. (2016). The impact of sellers' social influence on the co-creation of innovation with customers and brand awareness in online communities. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 54, 56–70.	96	Quantitative methods	Co-innovation activities attract potential customers and make them aware of the business brand. Sellers' social identity and social comparison are key facilitators for developing a series of co-innovation activities.
	Lipiäinen, H. S. M., & Karjaluoto, H. (2015). Industrial branding in the digital age. <i>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</i> , 30(6), 733–741.	75	Qualitative methods	Strong customer orientation in the digital age is viewed significant. Employees are seen as acting as brand ambassadors who drive social media success.
	Eggers, F., Hatak, I., Kraus, S., & Niemand, T. (2017). Technologies That Support Marketing and Market Development in SMEs—Evidence from Social Networks. <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> , 55(2), 270–302.	47	Quantitative methods	Social network usage is not directly related to SME growth. However, the channels mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SME.

<sup>a</sup> Cumulative number of citations as of October 2020.

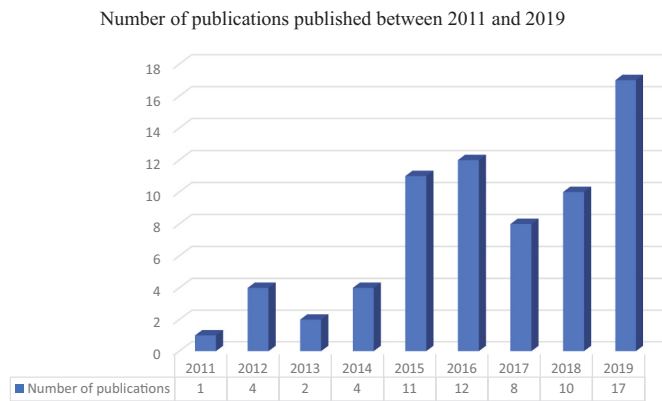


Fig. 1. Numbers of articles published between 2011 and 2019.

**Table 2**  
List of journals and number of articles.

Journal	AJG Ranking (2018)	SJR Indicator (2019) <sup>a</sup>	No. of articles
Industrial Marketing Management	3	2.084 (Q1)	38
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	2	0.685 (Q2)	11
Journal of Business Research	3	1.871 (Q1)	3
European Business Review	2	0.599 (Q2)	2
Journal of Customer Behavior	1	N/A	2
Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	2	1.045 (Q1)	2
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	1	0.762 (Q2)	2
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	4	5.309 (Q1)	1
Computers in Human Behavior	3	2.173 (Q1)	1
Journal of Small Business Management	3	1.561 (Q1)	1
Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	2	1.243 (Q1)	1
Journal of Marketing Management	2	1.156 (Q1)	1
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	2	0.723 (Q2)	1
Journal of Marketing Communications	1	0.978 (Q2)	1
Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce	1	0.718 (Q2)	1
The TQM Journal	1	N/A	1

<sup>a</sup> SCIMAGO Journal and Country Rank (SJR), Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 represent the top 25%, the 25 to 50% group, the 50 to 75% and the 75 to 100% journals in the subject group respectively.

marketing, which are indeed the only journals that had published more than ten articles on B2B social media marketing. This suggests that B2B researchers have already recognized the significance of social media in B2B marketing and direct their research accordingly. It is also noteworthy that two influential papers from the Special Issue in *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012; Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012) contributed to the increase in publications. Of the 16 journals that have published articles meeting our criteria, only five journals are rated as 3\* and above in *Academic Journal Guide* (AJG) (2018). Therefore, to further assess the quality of these journals, in Table 2 we provide the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) indicator to highlight the impact of each (Centobelli, Cerchione, & Ertz, 2020). Of 16 journals listed in the AJG, 14 are also listed in the SJR. Thus, Fig. 2 shows that 66/69 (96%) of the sampled articles were published in the SJR-listed journals. More specifically, 47/69 (71%) of the articles ( $N = 47$ ) were published in the SJR journals belonging to the Q1 group (i.e., the top 25% of journals for the relevant literature stream). Meanwhile, 19/69 (29%) of the papers were

published in the SJR Q2 journals (i.e., top 25–50% journals of the relevant literature stream). The AJG ranking and SJR indicators, therefore, validate the high-quality of the sampled articles, which doubtless reflects the fact that B2B social media research, despite its recent onset, is attracting consideration from a wide range of journals across different literature streams.

### 3.1. Finding #1

The descriptive analysis shows that publication of B2B social media research is a recent but fast-growing trend, with papers mainly being published in a small set of journals specializing in B2B marketing. Moreover, this result shows that awareness of the implications of social media to B2B organizations remains low in the wider marketing context.

Of the 69 selected academic articles, 12 (17%) were conceptual and 57 (83%) empirical studies (see Fig. 3). Among the 57 empirical studies, 34 (60%) used quantitative research methods, 16 (28%) used qualitative methods, and 7 (12%) employed mixed research methods. In other words, most of the research to date is quantitative, with surveys being the most commonly used research method. The relatively large proportion of conceptual articles demonstrates the immaturity of the field.

The appendix lists the articles cited in this review and specifies the theoretical perspectives that they adopted. We note that 28/69 (41%) articles in the sample employed practice-focused or grounded theory approaches without specifying any theoretical perspectives. The remaining 41 articles that did employ a theoretical perspective fall into four categories. The first of these focuses on the decision to adopt social media, often using behavioral theories (e.g., Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior) to explain the general motivations of social media adoption. Alternately, articles in this category may adopt social psychological theories (e.g., Social Identity Theory and Social Comparison Theory) to highlight the drivers and barriers that individuals/organizations encounter when facing the decision to adopt social media. The second category encompasses a stream of research that sees social media as a valuable technology and emphasizes the technological functionality of the available platforms. Such studies often adopt technology-related theories (e.g., Technology Acceptance Model and Task-Technology Fit Model) to examine the effectiveness of social media use in the B2B setting. The third category includes articles that focus on the significance of relationships in B2B marketing and highlight the connectiveness of social media in the digital world. Such studies often emphasize the “connections”, “bonds”, “ties” and “networks” between different parties through relationship-oriented theoretical lenses, such as Social Capital Theory, Social Network Theory and Relationship Marketing Theory. Finally, the fourth category entails research that takes a strategy or management perspective and proposes that the use of social media influences resource acquisition, generation, and mobilization within B2B firms, thereby influencing their performance. Here, theories focusing on the resource and capability base of the corporation (e.g., Resource-based View, Resource Advantage Theory and Dynamic Capability Theory) are often employed. Articles in this fourth category often highlight organizational orientations (e.g., E-Marketing orientation and Innovation Orientation) showing how culture and environment shape the effectiveness of a B2B organization's social media use.

While reviewing the sampled academic articles, we also identified the “voice” of social media use in each study. The “voice” refers to the communication channel broadcasting to the social media audience (e.g., corporate, salesperson, or other employee). This is an important consideration because different channels of “voice” indicate differences in the social media dynamics (e.g., communicating, relationship maintaining and selling activities). For example, the salesperson's channel may well be used for selling activities. Fig. 4 illustrates the “voices” that we identified in the sample. Among the sample, 39/69 (56%) of the articles investigated social media use that involves only the corporate “voice” (e.g., using a corporate social media account to communicate with customers and other stakeholders). 16% of the selected articles

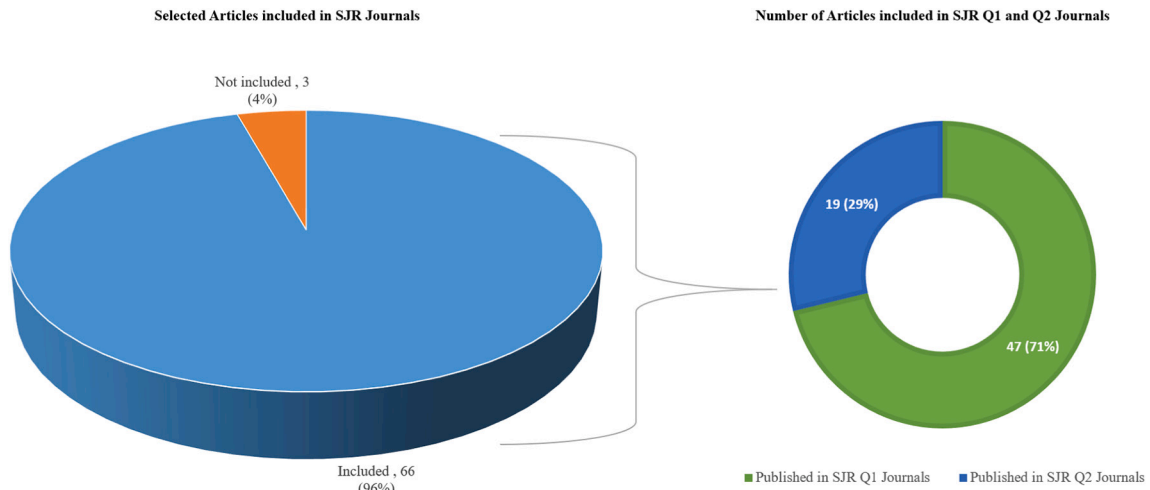


Fig. 2. Articles published in journals listed in the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR).

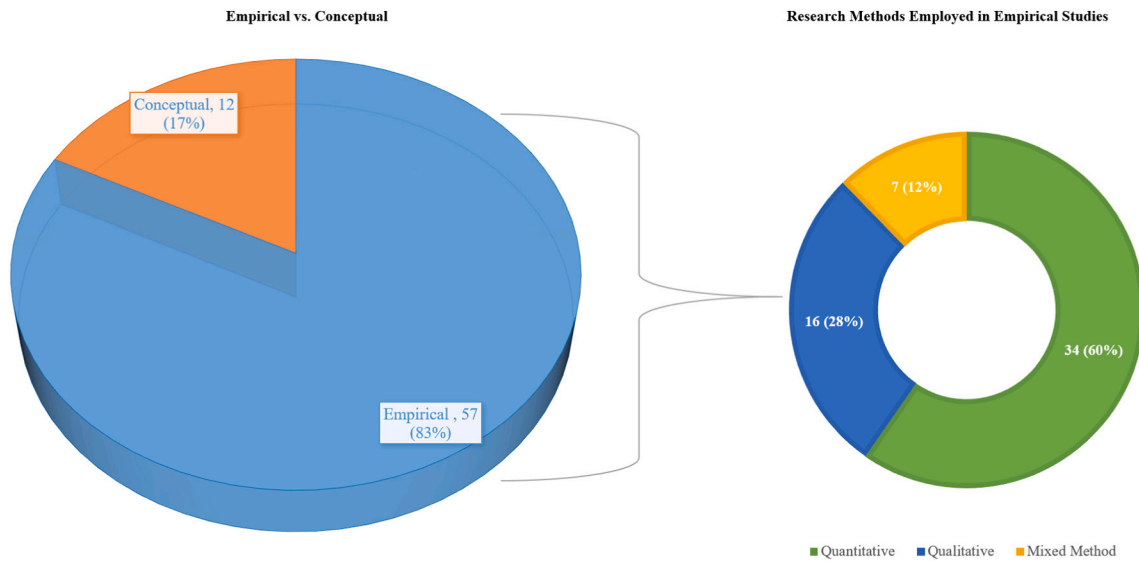


Fig. 3. Overview of research methods used.

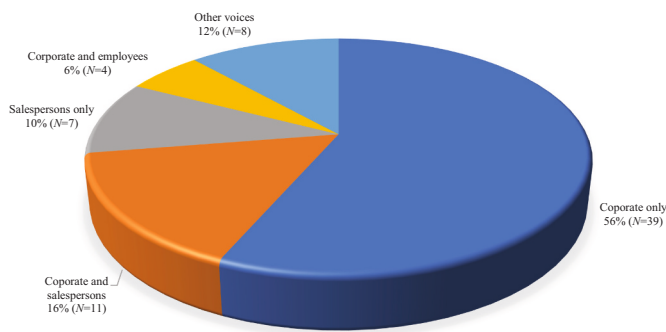


Fig. 4. The voices of social media use in selected articles.

focus both on corporate and salesperson “voices”, while 10% specifically examined the use by the sales forces of social media. Other employees also play important roles in social media use, as shown in the 6% of articles focusing on the composite “voices” of the corporation and its employees. In addition to the mainstream voices, a small number of studies (12%) took a different perspective and explored the other voices

that are involved in social media marketing for B2B firms, such as those of buyers (Diba, Vella, & Abratt, 2019), competitors (Choi & Thoeni, 2016), independent content creators (Liu, 2019), and multiple stakeholders (i.e., customer, supplier and partner enterprises) (Brinkman, Gabriel, & Paravati, 2020). This perspective highlights the interactivity of social media marketing channels.

In terms of the social media platforms that were the research topics in our sample, Table 3 shows that the majority of the articles (77%) viewed

Table 3  
Social media platforms researched in the sample.

Platform(s)	Frequency	Percentage
General social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn)	53	76.8
Twitter	5	7.2
Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)	3	4.3
LinkedIn	2	2.9
Glassdoor	2	2.9
Corporate blogs	2	2.9
Facebook	1	1.5
Lookbook.nu	1	1.5
Total	69	100.0

social media in broad terms that include various types of platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn). Under the social media umbrella, three articles (4%) investigated social networking sites (e.g., social media sites with a fundamental function in social networking) and two articles (3%) investigated corporate blogs (i.e., blogs employed by the firms) as the specific types of social media used by B2B marketers. Among studies that focused on a single platform, Twitter was the most often researched platform (5/69; 7.2%). Meanwhile, the B2B social media platforms LinkedIn and Glassdoor were the focus of two articles each.

Acknowledging the research context is important to provide insights into the worldwide development of the social media use in B2B marketing. Fig. 5 demonstrates the most frequently researched countries where the field work was conducted. Among the countries that have been considered by more than one study in the sample, the USA is the most commonly occurring context ( $n = 9$ ), followed by Finland ( $n = 7$ ) and the UK ( $n = 7$ ). Other developed countries such as France ( $n = 2$ ) and Australia ( $n = 3$ ) have also attracted particular attention in our sample of articles. Notably, there has also been some attention paid to this topic in developing countries such as China ( $n = 4$ ) and India ( $n = 2$ ). This implies that recognition of the utility of social media in B2B sectors has become a global trend.

### 3.2. Finding #2

The current state of research is notably quantitative in nature (34/69 articles: 49%), based on surveys and secondary data. Although quantitative research methods often give important insight, it is vital to also carry out in-depth qualitative research to uncover unanticipated aspects and narratives of industry professionals. In other words, to gain a nuanced understanding of strategic social media marketing, qualitative research studies alone can provide “unique, memorable, socially important and theoretically meaningful contributions to scholarly discourse and organisational life” (Rynes & Gephart, 2004, p. 461). In addition to the different methods employed, B2B social media marketing research remains fragmented because most articles focus on single “voice”, single context, and undefined social media platforms. The scope of the research, thus, needs to be broadened and based on appropriate theoretical perspectives. Indeed, theory development is one of the most profound challenges now faced in B2B social media research (Andersson & Wikström, 2017; Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). Relationship marketing theories such as the Industrial Marketing and Management Group's interaction model (Håkansson, Ford, Gadde, Snehota, & Waluszewski, 2009), customer engagement (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011), and network-based relationship marketing (Moller & Halinen, 2000) could provide frameworks to strengthen strategic social media research within the B2B context.

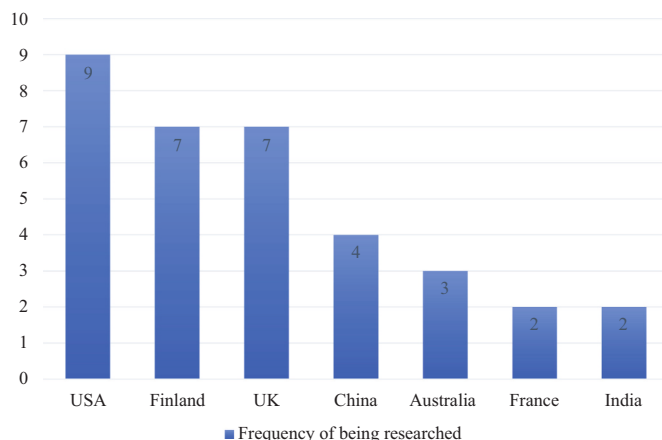


Fig. 5. Most frequently researched contexts in selected articles.

## 4. Thematic review

This section presents the three themes that were identified in the sample of articles and highlights the contributions within each theme: (4.1) social media as a tool for sales-facilitation, (4.2) integrated communication, and (4.3) employee engagement. Each subsection concludes with a discussion about the main findings. While each section primarily uses articles that were identified as part of the theme, inevitably there are some overlaps calling for the inclusion of articles from other themes.

### 4.1. Social media as a sales-facilitation tool

Sales processes in the B2B domain are changing due to the impact of social media, thus moving away from dyadic face-to-face relationships towards more multi-actor online relationships (Jensen & Helles, 2017; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). According to Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap and Singh (2012, p. 234), social media within sales is defined as “any social interaction enhancing technology that can be deployed by sales professionals to generate content (e.g., blogs, microblogs, Wiki articles) and develop networks (e.g., social networks, online communities)”. Furthermore, research by Cortez, Gilliland, and Johnston (2019) suggests that the sale starts even before the salesperson initiates contact, because of the penetration of the Internet and social media platforms. The organization's own social media acts as a knowledge-sharing platform, perhaps consisting of casual and friendly product/service approaches to make a favorable impression among actual and potential customers. Meanwhile, in the long run social media use in sales activities facilitate the transition of digitalized customer relationship management system (Brinkman et al., 2020; Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu & Krush, 2016).

Social selling within B2B social media is also growing in popularity, although research into this phenomenon remains embryonic and fragmented (Ancillai, Terho, Cardinali, & Pascucci, 2019; Lam et al., 2019). Social selling entails the utilization of social media platforms for: 1) understanding, 2) connecting with, and 3) engaging influencers, prospects and existing customers at relevant customer purchasing journey touchpoints for building valuable business relationships (Ancillai et al., 2019). Thus, organizations are starting to use social media to leverage relationships with customers during various sales and marketing processes (Lam et al., 2019). Content planning and development between sales and marketing of social media posts are consequently of key importance, if they are to result in increased efficiency (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Specifically, applying behavioral targeting and personalizing content within social media marketing helps to generate sales leads. Social media, thus, provides sales employees with an opportunity to connect with customers, provide customized information and establish interpersonal relationships, all of which could influence customers' buying decisions (Zhang & Li, 2019). In the long run, successful social selling enables B2B firms to build stronger brand awareness and establish their online reputation among current and potential customers (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016).

Social media platforms are changing the way organizations carry out their marketing activities and are increasingly seen as a sales facilitation tool through the building of peer-to-peer relationships and placing their focus on reciprocal network development (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016; Song, Lee, & Khanna, 2016). In other words, engagement and interaction between salespeople and customers via social media platforms may lead to increased inter-organizational trust and commitment (Agnihotri et al., 2016). Other research shows that aligning social media sales activities (e.g., contacting potential customers through LinkedIn) with marketing activities (e.g., generating online data to support sales activities) can result in a successful consultative selling approach through the development of a customer-focused strategic orientation (Guesalaga, 2016; LaForge et al., 2009). In other words, by analyzing social media behaviors, marketing can generate insights about potential customers,

who can be then approached or targeted by the sales team. Furthermore, the greater the competence and knowledge of organizations concerning social media, the more successful the implementation of the platforms (Guesalaga, 2016).

Relational exchanges are a key to the success of B2B organizations, and previous research consistently shows that organizational commitment towards social media propagates to higher levels of commitment from sales employees (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010; Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Thus, the more committed the organization to implementing social media from a corporate perspective and to provide training and support, the higher the commitment of the sales employees. Thus, if incorporated correctly into a wider sales strategy, professional social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter (i.e., externally focused platforms) and Microsoft Yammer and Facebook Workplace (i.e., internally focused platforms) manifestly create value for businesses (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018; Iankova et al., 2019). These social networking sites give increasing opportunities to develop new bonds and/or maintain existing relationships and enable sales professionals to self-select online communities with which they wish to engage (Quinton & Wilson, 2016), thereby driving greater market efficiency and empowering the salesforce (Pagani & Pardo, 2017).

Research by Agnihotri et al. (2012) further studying the impact of humanizing social media showed that being present and active on social media enables salespeople to better execute their service behaviors and create value for their customers and themselves. The framework in that study shows that content and network enablers (e.g., blogs, microblogs, vlogs, collaborative Wiki articles and microsites, and content communities) can help the salesperson to build trust, share information, and support customers, thus, potentially leading to value creation. Therefore, B2B practitioners require a more refined targeting strategy to support their sales strategy by using specific professional social media sites to connect with other practitioners. This practice is different to that for B2C organizations, which tend to employ as many social media platforms as possible to reach their customers (Brinkman et al., 2020). Additionally, use of social media enables sales employees to reach a wider network of potential customers at a lower cost (Kwahk & Park, 2016; Thakur & AlSaleh, 2018). For instance, research by Lacoste (2016) shows that sales and key account managers who use social media can expand their business networks.

Connecting on social media platforms on behalf of organizations is seen as the first step towards building an interpersonal tie between the salesperson and the customer (e.g., the procurement manager). Interestingly, however, once a connection with the customer is established on social media, professionals tend to move to more traditional face-to-face communication (e.g., business meetings, client visits) (Lacoste, 2016). The reason behind this move lies in the nature of the relationship, which is more complex and diverse in the B2B domain. For example, confidential information may be disseminated as well as gathered and may thus not be sharable online (Ford, 1980; Håkansson & Shenota, 1995). Similarly, research by Iankova et al. (2019) shows that B2B organizations use social media platforms more for initial relationship acquisition and transaction facilitation, rather than for relationship-maintaining purposes, such as retention, advocacy, and engagement. This contention is supported by Murphy and Sashi (2018), who find that digital communication has a stronger association with impersonal relationships in comparison to traditional methods of B2B communication, with social media being mainly used at the initial stages of a relationship. Once the sale is underway and the relationship has become more established, face-to-face engagement is more likely to take place than online engagement (Murphy & Sashi, 2018).

#### 4.1.1. Finding #3

A significant body of literature points out several benefits of incorporating social media within the sales function. Through their collaboration with the marketing department, sales employees connect and engage with potential customers and expand their online networks (e.g.,

through social selling). The main finding of this theme shows that B2B organizations use social media for acquiring customers rather than for maintaining relationships with existing customers. Furthermore, the sales activities are initiated from customers' consumption of social media content and the progress towards a many-to-many type of relationship. Sales employees can then reach a wider target audience and develop many-to-many interactions without geographical boundaries, which was hardly possible prior to the development of social media. Salesforces acting on behalf of their organizations can build initial connections with potential customers, aiming to 'humanize' their organization and improve sales efficiency by generating leads and hopefully converting them into customers.

#### 4.2. Social media as an integrated communication tool

In today's digitalized landscape, it is becoming increasingly important to develop B2B social media communication approaches that allow organizations and individuals to create, share and discuss content online (Haenlein & Libai, 2017; Kietzmann et al., 2011). This theme highlights the interactivity of social media and underlines the significance of content development in eliciting interactions and fostering relationships. Placing such emphasis on relationship maintenance through social media content differs from a strategy in which social media are mainly used as a connection builder in sales activities (see the previous theme). Research by Leek, Houghton, and Canning (2019) showed that the type of content created from social media use (e.g., information sharing, problem-solving and public relations) influences the level of engagement (e.g., 'likes' indicate what type of content is preferred, and 'comments' indicate what posts are engaging). More specifically, the authors showed that the "tweet function and linguistic style can impact the reception of company messages" (Leek et al., 2019, p. 127). The tweet function on Twitter reveals the level of engagement of the social media platform (e.g., number of likes, retweets, and comments), and their linguistic style refers to the different types of content of the tweets (e.g., problem solving, information sharing, and public relations).

Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) showed that designing social media content to solve customers' problems is more effective than simply using the media to promote the organization. Thus, publishing content that is timely and valuable can generate online engagement, interaction, and collaboration, ultimately resulting in enduring and consolidated business relationships. Furthermore, Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2015) established that the performance of social media depends on their content, organizations' preferred processes, and the context. Since content development is of vital importance, it calls for a well-thought-out strategic approach (e.g., corporate accounts) as well as engagement at the individual/employee level (e.g., personal accounts) (Ancillai et al., 2019). Thus, the content needs to promote collaboration and engagement between the organization/employees and customers, rather than simply to focus on the immediate goals of selling products and services. Meanwhile, such collaboration and engagement also facilitate the focal firm's innovation (Katona & Sarvary, 2014; Lashgari, Sutton-Brady, Solberg Søilen, & Ulfvengren, 2018) and co-creation (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, & Mäläskä, 2015; Singaraju et al., 2016) with its customers and other stakeholders.

As an example of social media serving as an integrated communications tool, Volvo's Live Test series campaign is considered to be "the most creative, stand-out B2B campaign of all time" (Taylor, 2018, p. 175). The most famous YouTube video of the series was the *Epic Split* (Volvo Trucks, 2012), which showed the actor Jean-Claude Van Damme doing a split between two Volvo trucks whilst the vehicles were reversing on a motorway. The video truly captured the viewers' attention, whilst demonstrating the capabilities of Volvo's trucks, thus appealing greatly to potential and current customers. The results of the video campaign were astonishing by the standards of a B2B sector, achieving over 100 million views between 2012 and 2014, and 8 million shares on YouTube (Iankova et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018). Additionally,



the video won the Cannes Lions Creative Marketer of the Year award in 2014 (Taylor, 2018). This gives a clear example of how B2B content (content marketing) can facilitate communication between customers and showcase the expertise of the organization. Content marketing can be considered a part of social media selling (Ancillai et al., 2019; Holliman & Rowley, 2014), and such approaches enable organizations to facilitate beneficial social interactions with customers (Lam et al., 2019). Thus, the aim of creating valuable content is to leverage relationships and create engagement within the broader social system (Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola, & Conduit, 2019; Hartmann, Wieland, & Vargo, 2018).

Furthermore, research by Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, and Jayawardhena (2012) shows that, if they are to develop an effective social media communications strategy, organizations need to set business objectives, establish measurement tools or metrics of success, and determine barriers impeding effective implementation of the plan. Barriers to social media implementation commonly include unfamiliarity with a platform, the uncertainty about a platform's effectiveness, and confusion due to the overwhelming number of available platforms (Järvinen et al., 2012; Valos, Polonsky, Mavondo, & Lipscomb, 2015). Although most organizations believe that social media are mainly used for attracting new customers (see the previous theme), its interactive nature also allows stakeholders (e.g., suppliers) to 'touch base' with each other stakeholders who are isolated by geographic separation and thus unable easily to translate an online relationship into a completely face-to-face connection (Brinkman et al., 2020; Drummond, McGrath, & O'Toole, 2018).

Engagement is a process that takes time to develop and may not always result in immediate returns. Therefore, having an ongoing engagement enables stakeholders to develop more sustained relationships and build stronger loyalty with the focal organization, which customers may also prioritize when business opportunities arise (Drummond et al., 2020; Jussila et al., 2014; Murphy & Sashi, 2018). Furthermore, research predating the social media era shows that the engagement and maintenance of relationships results in loyal customers and repeat patronage (Dick & Basu, 1994; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Thus, organizations should not view managing loyalty simply as an instrument for managing sales and profits (Reinartz & Kumar, 2002), but rather should aim to develop long-term relationships with loyal customers (Gummesson, 1987; Håkansson & Shenota, 1995). Social media platforms have become vital tools for this kind of committed engagement, allowing valuable connections and interactions between suppliers and customers (Steward, Narus, & Roehm, 2018). Therefore, to obtain long-term relationships with loyal customers as well as ensuring profitability, engagement via social media requires strategic adoption and implementation over the long-term.

After an initial phase of grappling with barriers, the focus switches to considering the impact of various types of content creation, such as personal and emotional content linked to corporate branding (Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, & Donthu, 2017; Swani, Milne, & Miller, 2019), value-adding content for thought leadership (Thakur & AlSaleh, 2018), and timely themed content for customer engagement (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). More precisely, research by Swani et al. (2019) showed that B2B organizations are now strategically using more emotionally laden content that includes corporate brand names as links and cues. If it is to be effective, social media content should be valuable, useful, relevant, compelling, and timely in nature, having broad appeal to the targeted stakeholders (Chen, Wei, & Rice, 2020; Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Thus, effective social media content should appeal across the spectrum of stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and others.

Content creation and follow-up interactions, especially with customers, are seen as vital strategic aspects within a social media communication strategy. However, how these goals are best achieved was not explored until recently. Research by Thakur and AlSaleh (2018) showed that corporate blogging on social media platforms leads to

benefits both for the content creator (e.g., the employee) and for his/her organization. In their view, the B2B organizations' representatives on social media are developing their work brands and additionally generating high levels of engagement for their organization through thought leadership content initiatives. Thus, Thakur and AlSaleh (2018) see social media as an interactive platform that allows organizations to disseminate strategic content and target specific audiences.

#### 4.2.1. Finding #4

The literature reviewed in this theme shows that content creation and dissemination on social media now play a significant role within B2B communication strategies. In particular, the content must be well formulated if it is to create value for the stakeholder (e.g., employees, customers, suppliers), rather than simply promoting the organization. Thus, the increasing connectivity and social interaction among actors in B2B social media is gaining academic interest, but research on this topic remains embryonic and limited in scope (Ancillai et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2019). Specifically, the linguistic style of corporate content influences customers' reactions to the content and their level of engagement with it. Studies show that including a 'personal spin' such as personal or emotional content can have positive outcomes during online interactions. Whereas early phases of social media research focused on the barriers to implementation, more recent research focusses on specific communication approaches, such as corporate branding (Swani et al., 2017; Swani et al., 2019), demonstration of thought leadership (Thakur & AlSaleh, 2018), and interactions with customers (Drummond et al., 2020; Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

#### 4.3. Social media as an employee engagement tool

Research on employee engagement is well established within the B2B context in an offline environment (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kahn, 1990; Kahn, 1992; Saks, 2006). However, our review reveals that social media are now playing an increasingly important part in employee engagement in the online environment. In this scenario, the engaged employees extend beyond sales or marketing personnel to include other people in the organization, such as in finance and R&D. For instance, an organization's engineering department might create valuable and specific content to be promoted by the marketing department to: a) create engagement and collaboration, b) generate leads, and c) incorporate value-adding content from a broader swath of employees, which targets current and potential customers. All employees are, therefore, vital internal stakeholders in the organization, and each stakeholder can contribute towards social media marketing, irrespective of their primary job description. Employees are clearly the main asset for the development and sustainability of relationships with customers (Ford, 1980; Ng & Vargo, 2018). Therefore, organizations must manage employee engagement and participation on social media to obtain positive impacts on organizational and individual performance (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Kwahk & Park, 2016; Thakur & AlSaleh, 2018). Meanwhile, employing social media in improving the effectiveness of internal marketing develops the voice alignment between the firm and the employees. Such alignment contributes to the consistency and cohesiveness of the communication when employees communicate with external stakeholders on social media (Cartwright et al., 2021; Korzynski, Mazurek, & Haenlein, 2020). In the long term, employee engagement allows the firm to stay connected and develop emotional bonds with employees, thereby improving the employee retention (Pitt et al., 2019). Considering the prospective employees and future recruitment, social media employee engagement allows the B2B firm to better brand itself as an employer and continuously attract new talents (Korzynski et al., 2020; Kumar & Möller, 2018).

Employee engagement comprises employees' satisfaction, identification, commitment, loyalty, and performance (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Macey & Schneider, 2008), which is a vital aspect in creating a competitive advantage within a social media environment (Pitt et al.,

2019). More specifically, research by Barry and Gironda (2019) shows that disseminating expert content on social media (e.g., employee advocate programs) enables employees to be seen as ‘go-to advisors’, which in turn brings more business opportunities and creates customer engagement. According to Pitt et al. (2019), unlike the top-down organizational use of social media accounts, allowing employees to use their social media accounts to engage frequently with potential and existing customers reaches a much wider audience. Social media then becomes a ‘source of market intelligence’, enabling employees to portray their know-how and product/service-specific expertise. When organizations encourage their employees to participate on social media, they are often rewarded by better organizational performance, through embracing ‘groundbreaking business solutions’ by continuously engaging with key customers and sharing useful content (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Chen et al., 2020). In the long term, such approach empowers the employees and forms a stronger sense of belonging within the community (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Li et al., 2018).

From an external perspective, engaged employees are likely to strengthen further their organization's connections with suppliers and customers by developing corporate branding content, and by simultaneously widening their online connections (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Brennan & Croft, 2012; Swani et al., 2019). Thus, by engaging in social media and developing valuable content, employees can reach wider audiences online than was previously possible in a traditional offline marketing landscape. From an internal perspective, employees who share their knowledge with co-workers magnify their own creativity (Chen et al., 2020). Thus, knowledge-sharing on social media platforms facilitates effective engagement and discussion of ideas among employees, resulting in enhanced employee creativity (Chen et al., 2020; Leonardi, 2014). Organizations that are responsive and proactive on social media, and that deliver strong and consistent internal and external online communication, are often successfully positioned in the market (Lipiäinen & Karjaluo, 2015; Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Chen, 2015). A clear social media strategy must be cognizant of the needs of the target audience. Once in place through selection of optimally appropriate platforms, content marketing and dissemination of tasks, the interactive nature of the platforms motivates employees to maintain relationships more successfully by engaging with customers and co-workers online (Cartwright et al., 2021; Guesalaga, 2016; Lacka & Chong, 2016).

Research shows that employees can act as brand ambassadors on social media, which allows them better to understand and accommodate customers' wishes and needs. Employees' endorsement helps their employers to develop a favorable brand identity and project a positive brand image in the online environment (Drummond et al., 2020; Lipiäinen & Karjaluo, 2015), while simultaneously endorsing their know-how and expertise (Barry & Gironda, 2019). Similarly, research by Wang, Hsiao, Yang, and Hajli (2016) shows that employees who participate and engage in social media bring an increased corporate brand awareness to potential customers, while this awareness, in turn, boosts potential customers' trust in the brand.

Online employee engagement positively affects customer engagement, and therefore, employees' attitudes, sufficient knowledge of and participation in social media are key differentiating factors in the effectiveness of B2B organizations' employee-led customer engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Lashgari et al., 2018). Engaging employees in social media can potentially lead to enhanced organizational profitability and competitiveness (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). Moreover, a higher level of connectedness and positive attitude of employees results in higher engagement and more committed relationships (between the employee and the customer) (Quinton & Wilson, 2016).

#### 4.3.1. Finding #5

Social media provide a new platform that shapes internal and external communication and allows employees to demonstrate their citizenship and expertise by endorsing and supporting their employer brand. This also leads to higher levels of engagement with customers,

which positively affects the development of valuable stakeholder relationships. Moreover, higher engagement levels of employees on social media platforms enable organizations to develop competitive advantage and profitability. Finally, employees engaged in social media portray their expertise and know-how and simultaneously position the organization and themselves as thought leaders.

## 5. Discussion

This SLR presents three crucial themes within this field, namely that social media are a tool for: 1) a sales-facilitation, 2) integrated communication, and 3) employee engagement. All three themes are interconnected, meaning that their successful implementation is dependent on continuous interplay and coordination. New business opportunities often arise from an organization's content marketing strategies and from the positive image developed by employees' own endorsement of their company brand. This ultimately results in a successful positioning of the organization and engagement with a wider business audience. Furthermore, increased business opportunities derived from social media also motivate employees' social media presence and drive creative interactions among co-workers. Meanwhile, aiming to grow a one-off purchase into a more sustainable relationship, B2B organizations can interactively communicate with various stakeholders through content creation, discussion, and collaboration. Such integrated communication facilitates the participation of both internal (e.g., employees) and external (e.g., former, current, and prospective customers) stakeholders. Consequently, the three main functions of strategic social media use are interdependent, such that the higher the alignment of social media strategy (e.g., within sales, communication strategies, and engaging employees), the higher the business excellence achieved.

In consideration of the emergent and interdependent themes, we integrated the existing research into a holistic conceptual framework showcasing the use of social media within the B2B context (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 illustrates the three emergent themes (#1 – Sales facilitation; #2 – Integrated Communication tool; #3 – Employee engagement) and their integrations within a B2B social media strategy. The contribution of this new conceptual framework is encapsulated by the interconnected and interdependent nature of the emerging themes and the portrayal of positive outcomes for B2B organizations pursuing these themes. Organizations that specifically target their customers mainly use social media as a sales facilitation tool (theme #1). In addition, organizations that target their customers and other stakeholders may implement social media as an integrated communication tool (e.g., thought leadership) (theme #2). Adopting social media within B2B organizations metamorphoses dyadic relationships into multi-actor relationships, where knowledge is continuously shared within the network. The focal point of the organization that ensures competitive advantage is placed on the employees, whether in sales, marketing, or elsewhere in the organization (e.g., engineering or operations) (theme #3). The focal firm and employees develop the aligned voice through employee engagement, which ensures the consistency of social media communication between the corporate voice and the employee voice. Through the thematic analysis, in the long run, adopting a strategic social media approach in sales activities, communication and employee engagement results in key outcomes for the focal firm: 1) Brand awareness and reputation (Hutchins & Rodriguez, 2018; Rapp et al., 2013; Swani et al., 2014), 2) Digitalized customer relationship management (Brinkman et al., 2020; Trainor et al., 2014; Agnihotri et al., 2016), 3) Co-creation and innovation opportunities (Kumar, Sharma, Vatavwala, & Kumar, 2020; Quinton & Wilson, 2016), 4) Talent acquisition and retention (Osburg et al., 2018; Kaur, Sharma, Kaur, & Sharma, 2015), and 5) Employee empowerment and sense of belonging (Barry & Gironda, 2019; Li et al., 2018; Swani et al., 2017). Through generating a corporate voice and personal voice types of content, organizations ensure further internal and external engagement. However, only if all activities across various

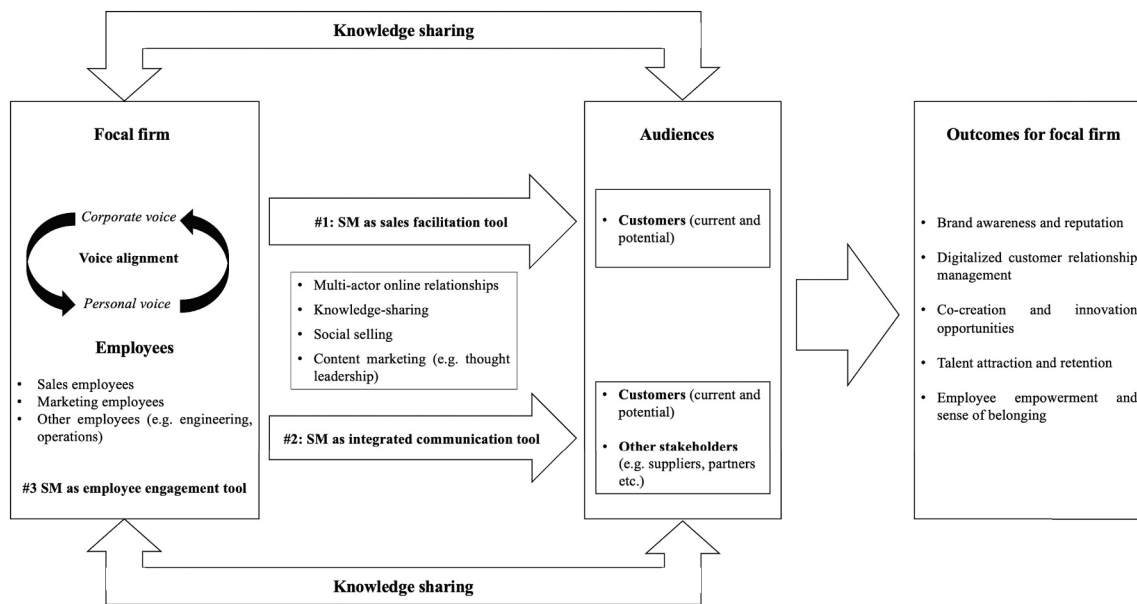


Fig. 6. Conceptual framework.

departments and their employees are aligned, can a competitive advantage within the social media environment be achieved. Furthermore, by engaging employees in the development of a social media strategy, they feel empowered and obtain a stronger sense of belonging. Thus, through the collaborative creation of content, organizations can enjoy content-oriented competitive and cooperative advantages.

### 5.1. Academic contribution and future research directions

#### 5.1.1. Limited strategic social media research in B2B contexts

As illustrated by finding #1, compared to B2C contexts, where social media research is common, social media use in B2B contexts is only now attracting increasing academic attention, although still not being widely acknowledged in the broader academic community. This is no doubt because marketing practices are often developed more slowly in B2B organizations than in B2C organizations, as changes in B2B practices require greater inter-institutional efforts. In addition, scholars with limited B2B marketing knowledge tend inappropriately to implement B2C business models into B2B contexts (Lankova et al., 2019). As B2C social media research reaches greater maturity, the differences between B2B and B2C approaches become increasingly recognized. Thus, we suggest that marketing scholars should: 1) learn from their B2C counterparts and test successful approaches within B2B sectors and 2) explore the differences in social media use across different industries. Meanwhile, comparative research about social media use between B2B and B2C markets is needed to highlight common practice as well as context-specific activities. Finally, very limited research focusses on the antecedents of strategic social media adoption, with so far only two studies determining the barriers and challenges experienced within B2B organizations (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Jussila et al., 2014). Considering the fast development of social media and the new challenges continuously faced by organizations, future research needs to investigate the antecedents of strategic social media marketing.

#### 5.1.2. Lack of theory development in B2B social media marketing

Finding #2 shows that, despite a wide range of methods used to investigate social media in the B2B domain, there remains a clear preference for quantitative research. Although the studies in the SLR provide valuable insights into the necessity and efficiency of social media use in B2B contexts, there is a clear need for more in-depth qualitative investigations. Meanwhile, many studies lack a theoretical

lens. Considering the still embryonic stage of the development of strategic social media, future research should focus more on ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ questions concerning strategy (e.g., customer engagement, relationship development and maintenance and sales activities), thereby developing theories within the domain of social media marketing specifically applicable in a B2B setting. In line with Swani et al. (2017), we suggest that more exploratory studies are required to expand the current state of theory within social media. Theory-building requires a nuanced understanding of B2B organizations’ social media activities. More precisely, the “voice” and online platforms studied in the existing B2B social media research remain overgeneralized and fail to acknowledge the differences in the dynamics and interacting mechanisms on different social media platforms. Future research should embrace the diversity of available platforms and highlight the interactions elicited by different “voices”, thereby providing more platform-specific insights. In contrast, that the preponderance of research was obtained within a few geographic regions limits the global generalizability of the insights (Drummond et al., 2018). As a result, future research should investigate social media within different B2B industries across different cultures and contexts.

#### 5.1.3. Benefits of social media within the sales function

Finding #3 shows that the use of social media platforms within B2B sales organizations has been widely investigated, stimulating a changing and evolving nature of sales processes and functions (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017; Ogilvie et al., 2018). Relationships are established and nurtured through communication and engagement on social media, and as a result, can positively impact customer satisfaction (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Liu & Bakici, 2019). Nevertheless, B2B organizations still appear to view with some scepticism social media that support a sales function, due to their lack of strategic direction with respect to social media and consequent difficulty in capitalizing upon the platforms (e.g., to achieve a return on the investment [ROI]) (Lashgari et al., 2018). Despite growing research about the benefits of social media within sales, limited knowledge remains as to how and why buyer-seller relationships start in an online environment and then later move to an offline environment.

Social media helps B2B organizations to identify new business opportunities and accumulate both professional networks and interpersonal relationships (Guesalaga, 2016; Murphy & Sashi, 2018). However, to date, no published research has investigated how social media can be utilized after the relationship has developed, thus, replacing (or

supplementing) face-to-face engagement. For example, LinkedIn's Social Selling Index (SSI) shows that social media can further develop existing relationships, potentially even replacing face-to-face engagements. Future research, therefore, requires an in-depth investigation of organizations' social media use and requires a developmental framework and managerial approaches that incorporate social media as a strategic tool throughout the relationship cycle. More specifically, research should further investigate the role of social selling within a social media environment (Ancillai et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2019). Research shows that the more engaged the salesperson is online, the higher the trust and commitment from the buyer (Agnihotri et al., 2012). Future research, therefore, could investigate online behavior of sales employees on various platforms within different industries and address inquiries such as: 1) How can salesforces proactively seek and identify new business opportunities on social media (e.g., through LinkedIn's SSI or similar tools)?, and 2) How should sales employees respond to social media enquiries best to secure sales?

Despite the progressive role of social media within sales, the literature still reports persistently low engagement by sales employees (Bill, Feurer, & Klarmann, 2020). This demonstrates a clear gap in the understanding of how buyer-seller relationships are formed using these media and the benefits they provide for sales employees. Moreover, although social media does offer opportunities to acquire new customers, research also suggests that floating promotional content on social media can be off-putting for customers. Future research should therefore, investigate what type of selling-related narratives (e.g., social media content) can best help sales employees to win new business without being perceived as too promotional. To gain a more strategic view, researchers need to investigate organizations' social media strategies that involve different platforms, both external social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and Twitter) and internal platforms (e.g., Microsoft Yammer and Facebook Workplace), and their effect on sales (e.g., paid, earned, and owned) (Vieira, de Almeida, Agnihotri, & Arunachalam, 2019). Therefore, new research should investigate how sales can implement social media to: 1) Reach potential customers (e.g., from the personal "voice" perspective), 2) Maintain valuable relationships with current customers, especially through Key Account Management (KAM), and 3) Generate economic advantage for the business overall.

#### 5.1.4. The value of content creation on social media platforms

Finding #4 highlights the significance of content within social media strategies. Research in this category shows that the more valuable and beneficial (e.g., thought leadership) the content, the higher the engagement on social media platforms. Thus, building and developing relationships is a strategic priority in B2B organizations, and, indeed, interacting on social media platforms has been suggested as a first step in creating customer engagement (Lacoste, 2016). Moreover, social selling that consists of content marketing is a matter of growing interest within academia that requires further investigation (Ancillai et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2019). Social media is transforming B2B organizations that are moving away from traditional face-to-face communication to a collaborative economy and sociality among actors (Brodie et al., 2019). Future research, therefore, should focus on B2B content marketing and its role for leveraging relationships and understanding engagement.

Future research needs to distinguish between corporate content (e.g., company generated content) posted through the organization's platform, and personal content (e.g., employee generated content) posted on personal profiles. More specifically, to enhance generalizability, future research should investigate the effects of different types of social media content, including linguistic styles (e.g., tone of the content), content functionality (e.g., promotional vs. non-promotional) and strategic focus (e.g., information focused vs. problem-solving focused vs. public relations focused), across various sectors. Furthermore, to gain theoretical and practical insights, it is vital to study the 'dark side' of social media as well. For instance, high employee engagement on social media might

have negative impacts, such as emotional exhaustion and a detrimental effect on work-life balance (Tang, Ren, Chadee, & Yuan, 2019), perhaps leading to depression and anxiety (Coyne, Rogers, Zurcher, Stockdale, & Booth, 2020). Moreover, excessive social media requests could reduce the quality of the content and result in a lack of unfeigned engagement and responsiveness of the employee (Agnihotri et al., 2016).

Investigating the 'dark side' of the platforms would allow industry professionals to understand and better cope with the potentially negative aspects of social media. More precisely, although an organization can create positive content to facilitate business excellence, social media allows other parties to create and share content that might be against the organizations' interests. Unlike the B2C domain, which places specific emphasis on the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), more particularly negative eWOM, B2B research to date focuses only on the positive content of social media (Liu, Jayawardhena, Osburg & Babu, 2019; Liu, Jayawardhena, Dibb, & Ranaweera, 2019; Steward et al., 2018). The impact of negative content and its strategic management remain unexplored. Future research should, therefore, investigate the potential negative outcomes of social media content in B2B marketing.

B2B relationships are complex, consisting of various key players. Therefore, additional research is required to understand better audience-oriented content creation and how such content affects online relationships with specific actors (e.g., suppliers, government, customer, and end-users). Moreover, developing valuable and long-term relationships can take much longer in B2B markets, where most activities are carried out 'behind the scenes', in contrast to the B2C single-purchase relationships (Grönroos, 1996; Gummesson, 1987). Although some research shows that personal content (e.g., emotional in nature) is more successful in comparison to promotional content, limited research exists about the nature and implementation of content activities in the B2B domain, and the tactics and strategies on social media that contribute towards relationship development. For example, this calls for investigating the content visible on different public platforms, content visible only for closed groups, and content targeting different stakeholders. Additionally, customer engagement develops across different stages, and the customers' expectations evolve across these stages. Therefore, future research should analyze different types of content throughout the customer engagement (CE) cycle.

#### 5.1.5. Employee engagement on social media platforms

Finding #5 highlights the importance of employee engagement on social media platforms. Unlike the personal use of social media by employees, strategic employee engagement on social media requires employees' identifications to be associated with the organization, thereby acting as brand ambassadors and "go-to-advisors" for their organizations (Kumar et al., 2020; Liu & Bakici, 2019). Results of research, therefore, strongly suggest that organizations should develop policies that encourage employee participation on social media, thus, facilitating the sharing of external and internal knowledge (Chen et al., 2020). In essence, employee engagement on social media should reflect and amplify the effort of internal marketing in external communication, thereby improving the image of the organization and establishing a positive impression among customers and other stakeholders (e.g., co-workers, suppliers) in the online environment. Future research, therefore, needs to develop strategic guidelines for B2B organizations to enhance employees' online presence and facilitate their contribution to meaningful engagement on social media (e.g., developing employee owned content).

Internal marketing focuses on employees and is often seen as an inter-departmental practice. Through such a lens, future research could explore the way that social media can be used better to engage employees. In this respect, organizations need to consider how best to manage social media, through the marketing department, internal collaborations between different departments, or through an external agency. Furthermore, engaging with employees on social media is sometimes seen as digital human resource management (HRM) (Osburg,

Yoganathan, Bartikowski, Liu, & Strack, 2018). Future research should investigate how the engagement of employees through social media could result in more favorable HRM outcomes, such as improved employees' sense of belonging, advocacy towards their employers, and staff retention. Additionally, organizations could disseminate strategic information (e.g., desired organizational behaviors, the strategic plan and corporate vision) to their employees and/or prospective applicants through social media, with employees sharing such information within their network and acting as corporate advocates. Employees' endorsement of their employer is often seen as a more informal yet persuasive approach (Osburg et al., 2018). Although organizations could benefit from the employees' representation on social media, the reality is that the presence and engagement of employees using social media remain low (Korzynski et al., 2020). Future research needs to scrutinize the barriers that prevent strategic employee engagement and the tensions between organizations and employees who use their private social media platforms for work purposes, and then propose strategies to motivate employees to engage more with social media.

Table 4 summarizes the study's five main findings, aligned to gaps in current research and proposed future research directions (Table 4).

## 6. Conclusion

Social media have emerged as proven and successful marketing tools in the B2C context (Lacka & Chong, 2016; Liu, Jayawardhena, Osburg, Yoganathan & Cartwright, 2021), but it remains to be established what role they can play in the B2B context (Iankova et al., 2019; Ogilvie et al., 2018). Pioneering B2B scholars have enlightened academics and practitioners about the significance of social media, although, to date, a comprehensive understanding of strategic social media use in B2B marketing is still lacking. This SLR aimed: 1) to provide a holistic view of existing social media research carried out within B2B marketing; 2) to advance the understanding of strategic social media use in B2B marketing; and 3) to determine knowledge gaps and propose research directions determined by the analysis of current literature. The paper's findings align to these aims and provides a thematic account of three themes arising from strategic social media use that develop and sustain relationships between organizations and their customers together with other stakeholders.

The SLR identified 69 relevant articles, the composite of which reveals that social media are revolutionizing B2B marketing through their use as a strategic tool in sales facilitation, integrated communication, and employee engagement. A comparable review by Salo (2017) considered only the 40 articles then available, categorizing them into seven themes. However, these themes were present at a tactical, rather than strategic level with the exception of Salo's (2017) theme #2 (buyer-seller relationships and business networks). Our SLR explores the literature in this specific strategic B2B area. Moreover, we highlight compelling future research directions that could help researchers and practitioners to understand the challenges in need of clarification in B2B social media marketing.

The article presents managerial implications (Section 5) by providing managers with a context to review potential strategic routes for implementing social media platforms within their organizations. By reviewing and systematizing the literature and determining strategic social media approaches, our study can enable organizations to develop an appropriate strategy for meeting their objectives. In general, it is the responsibility of organizations to ensure that: 1) Sales employees utilize social media successfully (e.g., developing buyer-seller relationships), 2) Employees create and disseminate the most appropriate content, and 3) Employees are involved with the social media strategy. Although social media marketing may remain somewhat mysterious for B2B managers, this research presents clear directions about how they might incorporate their employees within social media marketing (either sales or general

**Table 4**

Main research gaps and related future research directions.

Findings	Research Gap	Future research direction
Finding #1	Limited strategic social media research in B2B marketing	Recognize the differences between B2B and B2C market settings and examine the common practices as well as the context-specific activities in social media use between both settings.
Finding #2	Lack of qualitative research and theory-building work	Carry out in-depth qualitative research and develop a nuanced understanding of different social media platforms and interacting mechanisms across different contexts in order to develop appropriate theories within B2B social media marketing.
Finding #3	Benefits of social media within the sales function	Carry out research in order to understand how social media supports B2B sales activities. Investigate how sales employees engage with potential and current customers on social media.
Finding #4	The value of content creation on social media platforms	Investigate how various types of content are developed on B2B social media and the impact of negative content (i.e., the dark side of social media). Additionally, evaluate the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), particularly negative eWOM.
Finding #5	Employee engagement on social media platforms	Investigate how employees are engaged in both social media strategy development and maintenance, and how their contribution is managed and monitored. Barriers preventing engagement and motivational factors require further investigation.

employee engagement) and how to develop valuable content. Ideally, organizations should reach a consensus about which platforms to implement, set out a strategic content plan, and understand how relationships should be managed online.

We note several limitations of this research. First, the SLR mainly considers marketing journals, although social media receives attention in other fields, such as operations management and information systems. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the topic in different disciplines, so that insights garnered from other domains can be broadly implemented. Thus, future reviews could also investigate contributions from other fields such as operations management, information systems, supply chain and HRM. Second, as with most SLRs, the selection of articles may have a subjective aspect. To alleviate this vulnerability, we only included articles from the AJG and selected them for inclusion based on their strategic social media approach. Third, our thematic categories and how they were developed might also be criticized. However, we endeavored to thoroughly explain our selection process in a transparent, step-by-step manner, to minimize selection bias. Although other researchers may disagree with aspects of our themes and future avenues for research, our study unequivocally demonstrates that B2B social media research is still in a growth and differentiation phase and lacks strategic direction. Despite a rapid recent increase in publications and special issue calls, there are many opportune research avenues within the social media field that require further investigation.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A

Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
Agnihotri et al. (2012)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Technology-fit theory	N/A	Conceptual	Salespeople's social media use positively affects service behavior. Social media creates value for customers as well as for salespeople. Constant support for successful implementation is required. Organizations need to be clear about their goals and objectives, they need to measure their efforts, and outcomes of social media.
Agnihotri et al. (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	N/A	Quantitative method: questionnaire collected from 111 B2B salesperson	Social media use facilitates salespersons' information communication, thereby enhancing the responsiveness. Both information communication and responsiveness positively influence customer satisfaction.
Agnihotri et al. (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Task technology fit theory	India	Quantitative methods: survey with 162 salespeople	Sales-based CRM technology has a positive influence on salesperson service behaviors (SSBs) and that salespeople using CRM technology in conjunction with social media are more likely to exhibit higher levels of SSBs than their counterparts with low social media technology use.
Ancillai et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Grounded theory	N/A	Qualitative method: interview with 21 social selling thought leaders and 13 salespersons	More research is required about social media usage at individual sales level. Social media is used for engagement, connection and prospecting.
Andzulis et al. (2012)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Unspecified	NA	Conceptual	The role of social media in the sales process; identification and illustration of four phases in the sales process when adopting social media (understanding the customer, approaching the customer, needs discovery, presentation, close, follow up).
Barry and Gironda (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Grounded theory	N/A	Quantitative methods: Survey of 171 consultants	Adoption of social media and development of content is significant within B2B. Employees can influence purchase decisions through thought leadership content.
Bocconcelli et al. (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	Italy	Qualitative methods: single case study with 8 interviews from the Mechanical company (Gamma)	Social media is seen as a significant resource in SMEs' sales process. Additionally, the channels are seen as a resource that is interacting with other SME resources.
Brennan and Croft (2012)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	UK, high-technology sector	Quantitative methods: content analysis of 10 B2B firms	Adoption of social media is not universal. Social media pioneers aim to position themselves as thought leaders. B2B social media applications are content marketing, market research, business networking and sales prospecting. Social media is not a hard-sell vehicle.
Brink (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Multiple stakeholders	Unspecified	Denmark, SMEs	Qualitative methods: 4 case studies (B2B SMEs in Denmark, 3 network meetings and 4 interviews) supplemented by an action research approach	Management of social media application in the B2B SME context involves collaboration for the enhancement of business for the involved participants; The main challenges are management of the antecedent leadership approaches and the antecedent business model integration of local business processes and reasons for that are lack of resources, e.g., time and leadership.
Buratti et al. (2018)	Social networking sites	Corporate	Unspecified	Asia, Europe, Middle East and North America, 60 B2B	Quantitative methods: 60 B2B online presence & use of social media	Social media effects the entire marketing process within B2B. There are three types of

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
	(Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.)			service organizations: shipping companies and ocean carriers		organizations adopting social media: pioneers (developing innovative dialogues), followers (bridging the gap between competitors), and sceptical firms (relying on traditional tools for interaction).
Chirumalla et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	NA	Qualitative methods: 2 case studies in manufacturing companies	This paper investigates social media in marketing and R&D interface. The authors show the adoption process of social media engagement strategy and divide the process into 3 phases: coordination, cooperation, and coproduction.
Choi and Thoeni (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and competitor	Unspecified	USA, various industries	Qualitative methods: interviews in 14 companies with 17 employees	Social media is not receiving attention compared to more traditional functions. Linkage between social media objectives and the firms' marketing objectives are often weak and rarely supported by established and measured objectives.
Cortez et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Elaboration Likelihood Model and B2B communications model	N/A	Conceptual	The effectiveness of B2B advertising is influenced by six factors: (1) social media, (2) creativity and emotional appeals, (3) national culture, (4) brand equity and credibility, (5) ad experience social context, and (6) competing messages.
Diba et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Buyer	Unspecified	N/A	Conceptual	This paper explores how B2B firms use social media to influence buying process and identifies the relation between each stage of the buying process in B2B firms and the corresponding functional blocks of social media (e.g., identity, conversation, sharing presence, relationship, reputation and groups).
Drummond et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	Ireland, craft brewing and artisan food sectors	Mixed methods: multi-method case study approach - content analysis of the case participants' social media platforms and interviews with 8 entrepreneurs	Through social media collaborative activities are facilitated effectively and collaborative relationships strengthened. Social media can be used to uncover new market trends, monitor competitors and seek out new business partners.
Duncan et al. (2019)	Glassdoor.com	Employee	Unspecified	N/A	Quantitative method: textual content analysis (LIWC) of posts from Glassdoor over 30 of the top 200 business-to-business brands on Brandwatch	This paper explores what makes employees to rate B2B brands differently on social media. Content associated with low ranking is usually long and less analytical. Content associated with high ranking has more authenticity and displays higher tone and more positive emotions
Eggers et al. (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Organizational orientation	Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, and the German-speaking part of Switzerland	Quantitative methods: survey of 411 firms	Social network usage is not directly related to SME growth. However, the channels mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SME.
Foltean et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Institutional theory and capabilities theory	Romania	Quantitative method: online survey of 149 top managers	Customer coercive pressure and competitor mimetic pressure have positive impact on SMT use and the firm performance, while such effects varying according to the size of the firm, its innovativeness, the sector and the market where the firm operates. CRM capabilities only indirectly mediate the relationship between SMT use and firm performance.
			Interactional theory	USA, various industries		

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
Guesalaga (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson			Quantitative methods: survey of 220 salespeople	Organizational competence and organizational commitment with social media are key determinants of social media usage in sales, as well as individual commitment.
Habibi et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Electronic marketing orientation (EMO)	N/A	Conceptual	Managers need to remain up to date with their social media content. They need to monitor social media activities. Firms should encourage employees to participate in social media internally.
Hollebeek (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Service-Dominance Logic and resource-based view	N/A	Conceptual	The model considers business customer actors and how social media is used for relationship purposes. The paper develops an integrative S-D logic-/RBV-informed model of BCE (business customer engagement).
Holliman and Rowley (2014)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	B2B branding theory	USA, UK and France, B2B service and manufacturing companies	Qualitative methods: 14 key informant interviews	B2B organizations need to take “publishing” approach; Valuable content is described as being useful, relevant, compelling and timely; Content marketing requires a cultural change from “selling” to “helping”.
Hsiao et al. (2019)	Lookbook.nu	Independent content creator	Accessibility-diagnostic theory	Global/online	Quantitative: OLS regression analysis of coded posts from Lookboo.nu	This study investigates social media’s branding effect on fashion small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The presence of large national brands has a positive spill over effect on the popularity of private labels in fashion social media and ultimately influences sales of private label products.
Huotari et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and employees	Unspecified	Finland	Qualitative methods: semi- structured expert interviews with 4 B2B marketers who use social media in their work	B2B company can influence content creation in social media directly by participating in discussions and removing content through corporate user accounts. They can control employee social media behavior by training employees to create desired content.
Hutchins and Rodriguez (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Emotional intelligence	N/A	Conceptual	Emotions and soft skills contribute towards brand awareness. B2B online communication is limited and fragmented. However, building a strong online brand is seen as competitive advantage.
Iankova et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Relationship marketing theory	UK and USA, B2B firms	Quantitative method: 449 surveys from B2B firms, B2C firms and firms with mixed business models	Social media usage within B2C domain is distinct compared to B2B. B2B uses social media more for acquisition-oriented purposes and B2C relationship-oriented purposes.
Itani et al. (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Theory of reasoned action and information processing theory	India	Quantitative methods: survey of 120 salespersons	Social media is used for collecting competitive intelligence and increasing adaptive selling. However, not many firms use the channels. The value of social media use is reflected through behaviours, rather than impacting performance directly.
Järvinen and Taiminen (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Performance measurement processes and metrics	Finland	Qualitative methods: Single case study with 14 interviews within 3 companies	Content must target the customer needs rather than promoting products and services to be successful. Content can be developed through collaboration between employees. Content marketing strategies can be integrated within sales activities.
Juntunen et al. (2019)	Twitter	Corporate	Hierarchy-of-effects (HoE) theory	Global/online	Quantitative: ANOVA and post hoc analysis of coded two sets of tweets of the worlds’ ten leading B2B brands	This paper integrates B2B social media and advertising research. The findings indicate companies use objectives, strategies and tactics

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
Jussila et al. (2014)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	Finland	Quantitative methods: survey of 125 SMEs	that relate to creating awareness, knowledge and trust, interest, and liking in the majority of their most and least engaging tweets, and express preference, conviction and purchase aspects much less. Social media is used mostly for internal purposes and testing the channels before using them externally. There is a need for formal and informal training. Barriers towards adoption are general reluctance, other more important priorities, and not being able to measure or assess benefits of social media.
Karjaluoto et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	Finland	Qualitative methods: 6 case studies with 61 interviews	Digital marketing channels are used for 3 purposes: 1. maintaining communication with existing customers, 2. providing support to the selling process, 3. building general awareness among stakeholders.
Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Customer	Technology Acceptance Model and social identity theory	Finland, IT service companies' customers	Quantitative methods: survey of 82 companies	Private social media usage has the most significant relationship with the social media business use. Organizational culture does not have a significant impact on business social media behavior because of lacking guidelines, policies and corporate mindset.
Kumar et al. (2020)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	N/A	N/A	Conceptual: bibliometric analysis	Digitally mediated B2B marketing literature is classified into 4 subject clusters—a framework for digitally mediated B2B marketing, the digital B2B marketplace, value creation through digital marketing, and the use of social media for B2B marketing. 4 shifts emerge: the emergence of Internet research and business-to-business technology; the evolution of e-commerce; the focus on social media; and the broadening of research. The research trend of B2B marketing has become more social media centered since 2010s.
Lacka and Chong (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Technology acceptance model and attributes of system acceptability	China, various industries	Quantitative methods: survey of 181 B2B marketing professionals	Marketers' perception of the usefulness, usability and utility of social media sites drive their adoption and use in the B2B sector; B2B marketers' perception of social media sites' usefulness strongly influences intentions to use social media.
Lacoste (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	France, various industries	Qualitative methods: Interviews with 20 key account managers	Virtual social networking, such as LinkedIn, is the first step toward more personal and physical relationships. This is seen as the initial step towards a connection. Social media is a tool for building personal or professional reputations, and to increase influence within the industry.
Lashgari et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Grounded theory	N/A	Qualitative research methods: 11 multiple case studies	Factors driving B2B social media adoption are content (depth and diversity), corresponding social media platform, structure of social media channels, role of moderators, information accessibility approaches (public vs gated content) and online communities.
Leek et al. (2016)	Twitter	Corporate	Task media fit model and media richness theory	N/A	Quantitative methods: content analysis of tweets (189 tweets over 10-days period, 493	The response of the individual varies based on the embedded link on Twitter. B2B

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
Leek et al. (2019)	Twitter	Corporate	Unspecified	Global/online	tweets over 16-day prior, 848 tweets over 49-day period in 4 companies) Quantitative methods: 838 tweets of 4 B2B companies	professionals use different embedded media on Twitter. Company type of content and tweet function influence the level of engagement. The engagement levels vary based on the content type.
Li et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and employees	Empowerment theory	China	Qualitative research methods: case study, 13 semi-structured interviews from the case company	Digital technologies promote employees to become Institutional Adaptor, Brand Performer, and Brand Champions by improving an organization's operational optimality, better sensing and responding capability, and ambidexterity.
Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Digital Branding Model	Finland, energy sector	Qualitative methods: single case study with 5 interviews	Strong customer orientation in the digital age is viewed significant. Employees are seen as acting as brand ambassadors who drive social media success.
Liu (2019)	Twitter	Corporate and independent content creator	N/A	Global/online	Quantitative: big data analysis of stock data and brand-related tweets, including 8 years (2009-2017) of daily stock information of S&P 500 firms from Yahoo Finance and 84 million brand tweets of UGC from Twitter and built a detailed database of 20.3 million Twitter accounts.	UGC has stronger impact on B2C firms' stock performance, compared to B2B firms. Negative WOM has significant impact on stock performance, while positive WOM has no impact.
Martins et al. (2016)	Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	Portugal, Spain, UK, Mexico, and Thailand, private companies, Iberian public administration IT managers, and Iberian academics	Mixed methods: Delphi study was designed and executed through the inclusion of 25 experts in the IT/IS area	Determinants with the most influence on the SNS adoption process at firm level; active involvement of top management, the alignment of the SNS plan with the firm's business plan, the existence of competitive pressures, and the use of SNS for gaining competitive advantages are the determinants with the most influence on technology adoption by firm.
Mehmet and Clarke (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Expansion theory and metafictional theory	Australia	Quantitative methods: semantic approach is exemplified using a Fairtrade Australia B2B case study demonstrating how marketing conversations can be mapped and analyzed	The paper uses Social Semiotic Multimodal (SSMM) framework that attempts to address shortfalls in theory and method conceptualization of social media communications.
Michaelidou et al. (2011)	Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	UK, various industry sectors	Quantitative methods: survey of 102 SMEs	Social media is used for attracting new customers and the most significant barrier is lack of perceived relevance of SNSs; SNS are not monitored. Benefits of SNSs are increased awareness and communication of brands online.
Murphy and Sashi (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Communication-based model of relationship marketing, model of communication for marketing channels, collaborative communication and control model, media richness theory, media synchronicity theory and Lasswell's model of communication	N/A	Quantitative methods: survey with 328 B2B business owners or managers in commercial printing and graphic design industry	Personal communication is the most appropriate way to communicate for reciprocal feedback and social interaction. Digital communication is as effective as personal communication when social interaction and immediate feedback are less important.
Nath et al. (2010)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	N/A	Technology acceptance model	N/A	Quantitative method: 357 completed surveys	Richness, reliability and relevancy of social media content can strengthen business relationships. Information quality needs to have high standard and requires continuous dissemination.
Nguyen et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g.,	Corporate	Experiential learning theory, social capital theory and resource-based view	China, SMEs from different industries	Quantitative methods: survey of 357 companies	Responsiveness and proactiveness of the organization positively affect social media

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	Facebook, Twitter etc.)					marketing. Knowledge acquisition and market orientation through social media also affects brand innovation.
Nunan et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	N/A	Conceptual	The conceptual paper proposes a research agenda that identifies various sets of new directions for investigating social media within the sales process.
Ogilvie et al. (2018)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Unspecified	USA	Quantitative: First survey with 375 respondents from B2B firms and second survey with 181 salespersons from an energy solutions company	If training is not provided within the firm in regard to social media, results will not be positive. Allocation of the resources that are necessary to properly implement social media technology strategies are significant for success.
Pagani and Pardo (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	N/A	Qualitative methods: 10 semi-structured interviews with B2B marketing professionals and 8 semi-structured interviews with digital solution companies	Identification of different types of changes caused by digitalization by applying the Actors-Resources-Activities Model: activity-links-centered type of digitalization, resource-ties-centered type of digitalization, actor-bonds-centered type of digitalization.
Pitt et al. (2019)	Glassdoor	Corporate and employees	Theory of word choice and verbal tone	Global/online	Quantitative: content analysis of online reviews from top and bottom ranked B2B companies on Glassdoor	This is a conceptual paper looking at engagement of stakeholders other than customers. Top ranked B2B brands engagement varies compared to low ranked brands.
Quinton and Wilson (2016)	LinkedIn	Corporate	Network and trust formation, exchanges, sharing vs. Reciprocity	Australia, Asia, Europe, and USA, wine industry	Mixed methods: netnography of 554 LinkedIn groups and 12 interviews with industry experts	Development to of 4 stage model where social media networks contribute to business performance enhancement. Social media networks support network creation, development of relationships that create value, and enhance business performance.
Rapp et al. (2013)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Contagion theory	USA, Retailing sector	Mixed methods	Social media positively influences brand performance, retailer performance, and consumer-retailer loyalty; supplier social media usage influences retailer social media use, which then influences customer social media use and is moderated by brand reputation and service ambidexterity.
Salo (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	N/A	Conceptual	Current research has been focusing on the tactical use of social media, rather than a more strategic use. Tactical use is simpler to grasp and measure while the strategic use of social media is more complex to measure.
Siamagka et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Technology acceptance model and resource-based theory	UK	Mixed methods: Survey of 105 companies and 9 interviews	Perceived usefulness and organizational innovativeness are the key drivers for the adoption of social media. Pressure from key stakeholders may influence social media adoption. B2B firms who do not use the channels might face pressures from customers who would like to interact via the channels.
Singaraju et al. (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Resource-based view (RBV), resource advantage theory and instrumental theory	N/A	Conceptual	Social media is a channel for information sharing. Social media facilitates higher order resource formations through the active participation of non-intermediary actors (e.g., customers and firms).
Sivarajah et al. (2019)	General social media sites (e.g.,	Corporate	Triple bottom line theory	UK		Big data, social media analytics and web analytics can facilitate B2B sustainability.

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
	Facebook, Twitter etc.)				Qualitative method: interview with 9 sustainability and technology management managers from large companies	Sentiment and Social network analysis, Text mining and Topic modelling techniques influence B2B sustainability by guiding the strategic operation and marketing related activities.
Sood and Pattison (2012)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and salesperson	Unspecified	N/A	Conceptual	Elements of the IMP model are influenced by social media. Information exchange and social exchange are altered the most by social media.
Swani et al. (2014)	Facebook	Corporate	Social network theory	N/A	Quantitative methods: content analysis of 1143 Facebook posts of 193 companies	B2B Facebook account posts are more effective if they include corporate brand names and avoid “hard sell” or explicitly commercial statements; Including emotional sentiments in Facebook posts is a particularly effective social media strategy for B2B and service marketers.
Swani et al. (2014)	Twitter	Corporate	Social media communications theory	N/A	Quantitative methods: content analysis of 289 companies (7000 tweets)	B2B tweets include more emotional than functional appeals, and corporate brand messages. If emotional content is used, customer engagement increases and strengthens brand relationships in B2B; Twitter is not used as a selling tool in B2B and B2C; B2B tweets have a higher percentage of links and cues for information search.
Swani et al. (2017)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Psychological motivation theory	N/A	Quantitative methods: content analysis of 214 Facebook brand pages of Fortune 500 companies (1-week period, 1467 messages analyzed)	B2B social media content that contains brand messages have higher number of likes compared to B2C. Employees express their identities with the brand name and hence like the posts. However, there is lack of motivation to comment as this requires time. If the content has functional appeal, the engagement is higher.
Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	Finland, SMEs	Mixed methods: semi-structured theme interviews in SMEs among 16 managers and 421 survey respondents in Central Finland	Online visibility is seen as the most important aspect of social media. Digital tools are not widely adopted, and social media is not seen as a two-way communication channel. Adoption of digital tools differs greatly according to company size. Barriers to social media adoption are lack of resources such as knowledge and time.
Thakur and AlSaleh (2018)	Corporate blogs	Corporate	Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior	USA and Kuwait	Quantitative: Cross-cultural surveys, USA (N=335) and Kuwait (n=221)	Corporate bloggers’ attitude, corporate bloggers’ subjective norm, and corporate bloggers’ perceived behavioral control are positively related to corporate bloggers’ commitment to the blog. The employee’s perceived behavioral control leads to corporate bloggers’ commitment to blog.
Toker et al. (2016)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate	Unspecified	Turkey, SMEs	Quantitative methods: survey of 310 Turkish small and medium enterprises	Social media is an emerging channel with an internal and external communication focus; Social customer relations, social stakeholder communication, social intelligence, and social responsiveness emerge as the main strategic areas that companies can utilize social media for.
Trainor et al. (2014)	General social media sites (e.g.,	Corporate	Resource-based view (RBV) and the capabilities-based perspective	USA, different industries	Quantitative methods: Survey of 308 top-management team members (187 B2B companies)	Organizations that have high use of social media in conjunction with CRM systems have greater social CRM capabilities; Organizations

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Authors	Platform	Voice	Theory - updated	Context	Methodology	Results
Valos et al. (2015)	Facebook, Twitter etc.) General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and employees	Organizational orientation	Australia, services, manufacturing and IT sectors	Mixed methods: Literature review, conceptual development, and 27 interviews	that use social media without CRM systems miss an opportunity to increase performance. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Co-innovation activities attract potential customers and make them aware of the business brand. Sellers' social identity and social comparison are key facilitators for developing a series of co-innovation activities. Social media usage influences the customer loyalty through trust (ability, integrity and benevolence) and purchase risks.
Valos et al. (2015)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Corporate and employees	Organizational orientation	Australia, services, manufacturing and IT sectors	Mixed methods: Literature review, conceptual development, and 27 interviews	that use social media without CRM systems miss an opportunity to increase performance. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Co-innovation activities attract potential customers and make them aware of the business brand. Sellers' social identity and social comparison are key facilitators for developing a series of co-innovation activities. Social media usage influences the customer loyalty through trust (ability, integrity and benevolence) and purchase risks.
Wang et al. (2016)	LinkedIn	Corporate	Social identity theory, social comparison theory and social influence theory	N/A	Quantitative method: online survey of 190 B2B firms' representatives from four online communities discussing Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) related issues in LinkedIn	that use social media without CRM systems miss an opportunity to increase performance. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Co-innovation activities attract potential customers and make them aware of the business brand. Sellers' social identity and social comparison are key facilitators for developing a series of co-innovation activities. Social media usage influences the customer loyalty through trust (ability, integrity and benevolence) and purchase risks.
Zhang and Li (2019)	General social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.)	Salesperson	Trust theory	China	Quantitative method: online questionnaire collected from 130 B2B salesperson	that use social media without CRM systems miss an opportunity to increase performance. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Employees can influence content creation on social media through direct and indirect activities. External communication strategies are not interlinked with internal strategies. Co-innovation activities attract potential customers and make them aware of the business brand. Sellers' social identity and social comparison are key facilitators for developing a series of co-innovation activities. Social media usage influences the customer loyalty through trust (ability, integrity and benevolence) and purchase risks.

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