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SERVICES MARKETING WITHIN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS CONTEXT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 1996 – 2014 PERIOD

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to conduct a content analysis of services marketing within business-to-business context that were published between years 1996-2014. A qualitative approach was used and content analysis was conducted on 71 articles from 24 journals in this study. Firstly, thematic investigation was conducted, and then coding process was completed. According to the results of content analysis, top research topics are determined based on services marketing and business-to-business context. The findings of the study also showed the least studied topics and shed light on new research areas to the researchers in the field of services marketing and business-to-business.

Keywords: Services Marketing, Business-to-Business, Content Analysis

1. Introduction

Services marketing emerged in 1970s as a distinct field of marketing with its own models and characteristics (Gronross, 1994). Especially the studies of Nordic school contributed for theory generation. Studies of Vargo and Lusch (2004) shed light on the emergence of new dominant logic for marketing which became the well-known phenomenon as “the service-dominant (S-D) logic” that focuses on the customer as the fundamental premise of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Chernetska, 2017). They also highlighted the importance of services and changed marketing’s attention to S-D logic. Webster (1991) stated that people –as one of the 7Ps of services marketing – play a central role in services marketing and needed for interaction, in order to build relationship. Also, it is the source of differentiation among service suppliers.

During 1990s the main discussion in the field of marketing was based on the revised definition of marketing and the suggestions were based on “new paradigm” that was referred to *relationship marketing* (Lusch, 2007). Gronroos (1994) highlighted relationship marketing as a paradigm shift and an underlying paradigm especially in services marketing and modern industrial marketing. In one of his statements, Gronross (1994) addressed the importance of long-term relationship building and movement from exchange to transaction, and toward building value-laden relationships and marketing networks. The research of Coviello *et al.* (1997) defined three distinct categories of relationship marketing: database marketing, interaction marketing, and network marketing.

Schneider (2000) mentioned that the success of services marketing in the marketplace based on the conceptual paradigm shift –services are different from goods, but also emphasized that there is a need for new directions. Lovelock and Gummerson (2004) claimed that four characteristics of services –intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability – as the core paradigm of services marketing which differs from goods. Also Jaganjac (2016) emphasized that service is an intangible offering and has nonownership.

On the other hand, 1970s and early 1980s, the marketing theory which should be generalizable, concerned mainly on business-to-consumer (B2C) market transactions in physical goods and addressed business-to-business (B2B) marketing as a special case (Lovelock and Gummerson, 2004). When compared to B2C, B2B is more complex with its important features such as; a more rationalized buying process, long-term relationships, more complex services, larger amounts of money, involvement of more people and procedures in the process, more joint efforts between buyer and seller, and more custom designed services (Cooper and Jackson, 1988).

After reviewing the literature, it is obvious that most of the studies involved services marketing apart from business-to-business. Kunz and Hogreve's (2011) study can be accepted as unique with its services marketing and business-to-business services content. Also, it is determined that strategy based studies in marketing literature are mostly based on good-dominant view, rather than services. Another important issue is, despite being one of the elements of services marketing mix people was also disregarded by the researchers in the field. There are few attempts to integrate information technologies (IT) in services marketing, whereas it is the most important phenomenon recently. Also, studies in the services marketing and business-to-business context lack of management science approach despite the emphasis of Webster (1991) that there is a need of management science approach for problem solving in services marketing.

As a response to these gaps in the literature, this study aims to investigate the role and contributions of services marketing and business-to-business to marketing literature over time. Two specific research questions are addressed in the study: (1) What are the methodological characteristics of studies in terms of their nature, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis? (2) What are the thematic characteristics of these studies? Besides these research questions, the study also aims to highlight the gaps in the marketing literature and provide new areas to the researchers for exploration.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 starts with the explanation of the methodology and the content analysis process. In this section, investigation method of the articles, their profiles will be identified. Then in section 3, findings of the study named as the methodological characteristics will be represented. A categorization made under research design as follows; nature of the study, data collection, sampling design, data analysis, unit of analysis, and statistical analysis. After the categorization and its explanation, finally the thematic characteristics are also represented in tabulated form. This part also explains how themes and sub-themes are generated, and also explain the coding process.

2. Methodology

This study includes all articles regarding its keywords “services marketing” and “business-to-business” through years 1996-2014. These keywords retrieved from 9 electronic databases, and journals that were selected according to the Academic Journal Quality Guide version 4 of the Association of Business School (ABS). Base on the selection process, 71 articles out of 118 remained for content analysis from 24 leading journals. The elimination of the articles started with reading all the articles. Since the study was focused on “services marketing” and “business-to-business”, articles including only consumer were excluded.

Seventy-one articles included in the study that are shown in Table 1 consist of the following characteristics; all were published in business context, were in English and published between 1996 and 2014. The electronic databases that represent the article are; ABI, EBSCO, Emerald, JSTOR, Sage, Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis and Wiley. According to ABS's

Journal Quality Guide, Grade One journals were disregarded while Grade Two, Three and Four remained for the study.

The publication outlets and the number of articles that they had been published with their percentages are shown in Table 1. It indicates 71 articles that were published in 18-year period and in 24 different publication outlets. Journal of Services Marketing (15%) articles published between 2002 and 2009, Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (15%) between 2001 and 2014 and both published 11 articles whereas Industrial Marketing Management (14%) in the third place published 10 articles between 1996 and 2014. Seven articles published in Journal of Service Research (10%) between 2000 and 2013 whereas 6 articles published in Journal of Marketing Management (8%) between 2008 and 2013. Consequently, 39 articles were published in abovementioned outlets that constitute 54% of the total.

Table 1. Journals Used in the Article

JOURNALS	Article Numbers	Percent
Journal of Services Marketing	11	15%
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	11	15%
Industrial Marketing Management	10	14%
Journal of Service Research	7	10%
Journal of Marketing Management	6	8%
Journal of Business Research	3	4%
Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing	3	4%
Journal of Marketing	2	3%
Marketing Theory	2	3%
European Journal of Marketing	2	3%
Journal of Service Management	1	1%
Journal of Strategic Marketing	1	1%
International Marketing Review	1	1%
International Small Business Journal	1	1%
Marketing Science	1	1%
Journal of International Marketing	1	1%
The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	1	1%
Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management	1	1%
Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management	1	1%
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	1	1%
European Management Journal	1	1%
Decision Sciences	1	1%
International Journal of Electronic Commerce	1	1%
Journal of Advertising	1	1%
TOTAL	71	100%

The steps that were followed in the study to extract the necessary information for content analysis are mentioned as follows. First of all, the article topics, writers and journal names were listed down in Excel. Secondly, the nature of the study was identified. After the identification process, the third step was to extract, the objective of the study and methodological characteristics –regarding data collection, sampling design, data analysis – from

the articles. Fourthly, main findings and topics investigated (including all the headings, research questions, hypotheses and propositions) were also added to identify the themes. The last step after reading the articles notes were also taken for guidance in the coding process.

3. Findings

3.1. Methodological characteristics

Similar to the study of Brown *et al.* (1994), the literature regarding “services marketing” and “business-to-business” context showed that most of the journal publications in services marketing were empirical based and theory driven, whereas there were few conceptual models and discussions.

Among 71 articles, majority with 69% were empirical in nature whereas remaining 31% were theoretical. Studies were generally based on hypotheses testing, exploratory and longitudinal in nature. Time emphasis of the articles was as follows; 7 articles used cross-sectional data whereas 42 articles used longitudinal data. 22 articles were non-empirical. Most of the studies had taken industry (19 articles) as the unit of analysis. In 14 articles, the unit of analysis was specific firms, whereas in 9 articles, the unit of analysis was individuals. Dyads were also taken as the unit of analysis in 8 articles, and 2 articles just had taken groups as the unit of analysis.

With regard to data collection, 3 studies had used secondary data and only 1 study was relied on observation. Mainly data were gathered through post mail (31%, 15 articles,). Telephone surveys and face-to-face (personal) interviews were the other method of data collection and both have 14% share in total (7 articles each), whereas limited studies (4 articles) used electronic means (e-mail survey) for data collection. In 12 articles, data collection procedure were not specified. Among the 37 articles that employed data collection procedures, vast majority was mail with 41%. Telephone and personal (face-to-face) both had 19% share. The least of the data collection belonged to electronic/e-mail with 11% despite the benefits of internet.

Furthermore, the sampling design of the articles included whole population, probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of the sampling design according to the articles. The vast majority of the studies (25 articles) employed nonprobability sampling. Among 49 articles that employed a sampling design, nonprobability sampling constituted of 35% of the total. 22 articles were non-empirical which constitute of 31% of the studies. Probability sampling that was adopted in 15 articles, constituted 21% of the studies. Only 2 studies that constituted 3% of the total article, approached to whole population.

Table 2. Research Design

Time Emphasis		Data Collection		Sampling Design		Unit of Analysis	
Cross-Sectional	7	Mail	15	Whole Population	2	Firm	14
Longitudinal	42	Telephone	7	Probability	15	Dyads	8
Non-empirical	22	Personal	7	Nonprobability	25	Groups	2
		Electronic/E-mail	4	Not specified	7	Industry	19
		Observation	1	Non-empirical	22	Individuals	9
		Secondary	3			Not specified	1
		Not specified	12			Non-empirical	22
		Non-empirical	22				

Table 3 represents the data analysis procedure adaptation of the articles. The main data analysis procedure took the form of structural equation model (SEM) which was applied in 20 articles. The vast majority of the articles were based on model development, therefore SEM

applied in order to test theories (especially regarding relationship and its constructs) with the data. Factor analysis applied in 12 articles, 9 of the articles had applied regression analysis in order to show relationships. 8 articles applied case studies as a qualitative data analysis technique. Cluster analysis was used in 3 articles, whereas 3 articles used correlations and 2 articles applied experimental design. Others represent the remaining 4 articles that applied decision tree, hierarchical linear modelling (HLM), conjoint analysis and thematic analysis.

Table 3. Data Analysis

Data Analysis	Number of Articles
SEM	20
Model Development	18
REVIEW	8
Case Study	8
Factor Analysis	12
Regression Analysis	9
Variance Analysis	6
Correlation	3
Cluster Analysis	3
Coding	2
Experimental Design	2
Others	4

3.2. Thematic characteristics

During the tabulation process, the articles were inserted into excel according to their titles. It is worth noting at that point, 25 articles out of 71 involved directly “relationship” in the title and 16 of the others involved relationship constructs. Afterwards, the coding process completed to find the thematic areas for the research. The content analysis results were also identical to tabulation process that “relationship” found to be the most popular topic in services marketing and business-to-business. Fifty-three articles are coded under relationship. Second most popular research topic was business-to-business marketing strategy.

Most of the relationship papers (24 articles) represent content addressing the relationship aspects such as; quality, satisfaction, value, trust, commitment etc. (Filiatrault and Lapierre, 1997; Patterson, 2000; Mittal, 2010; Bennett *et al.* 2004; Money, 2004; Lapierre *et al.* 1999; Gounaris, 2005; Molinari *et al.* 2008; Rapp *et al.* 2008; Theron *et al.* 2008; Stan *et al.* 2007; Chumpitaz *et al.* 2007; Durvasula *et al.* 2002; Peterson *et al.* 2005; Doney *et al.* 2007; Parry *et al.* 2012; Ryals and Humphries, 2007; Mencarelli and Riviere, 2014; ALHussan *et al.* 2014; Kelly and Scott, 2012; Bolton *et al.* 2003; Keiningham *et al.* 2003; Vosgerau *et al.* 2008; Eid *et al.* 2006; Johnson *et al.* 2001), 6-7 studies addressed the network (Gummesson and Polese, 2009; Covelio and Brodie, 2001; Covelio *et al.* 2002; Wilkinson, 2006; Jones *et al.* 2013; Moliner-Velazquez *et al.* 2014), and 6 addressed buyer-seller relationship (Barry *et al.* 2008; Homburg and Garbe, 1999; Edvardsson *et al.* 2008; Viio and Gronroos, 2014; Edvardsson *et al.* 2014; Lambert and Enz, 2012). The remaining studies are related with relationship quality (Palmatier, 2008; Boles *et al.* 2000; Koku, 2009). There were few studies regarding other issues like personal selling (Sharma, 2007; Mai and Hoffmann, 2011), servitization (Raddats and Easingwood, 2010).

There were 17 articles addressing the content as “business-to-business marketing strategy.” Most of the studies addressed competitive advantage (Pires and Aisbett, 2003; Mitchell and Wilson, 1998; Leeflang *et al.* 2014), few were related to strategic management (Zahay and Griffin, 2004; 2010), account management (Ojasalo, 2002) and branding (*Brown et*

al. 2011). Another popular research area was diffusion of innovation. Six articles in this area addressed directly "information technology (IT) adoption" and its process (Zinkhan, 2002; Meadows and Dibb, 2012; Bigne *et al.* 2008; Gummesson, 2004; Leeflang *et al.* 2014; Pires and Aisbett, 2003). The most recent articles addressed theory related issues (Gummesson and Gronroos, 2012; Spencer and Cova, 2012; Wang and Song, 2011; Gummesson, 2014) in business-to-business and services context.

The thematic area of the remaining 11 articles is stated as "others." Under this category, pricing (Strandvik and Holmlund, 2010; Wang and Bowie, 2009), new product development (Noori and Salimi, 2005; Dai and Kauffman, 2002), service design (Paluch and Blut, 2013), service infusion (de Brentani and Ragot, 1996; Alam, 2012), outsourcing (Selviaridis and Spring, 2010; Wittkowski *et al.* 2013), and marketing communications (Stern, 1997), service failure (Gonzalez *et al.* 2010) can be listed.

4. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the contributions of services marketing and business-to-business in the marketing literature over time. Four thematic areas that are; relationship, business-to-business strategy, IT adoption and others, show that the vast majority of the studies are still based on relationship (75%). Among the remaining part, 17 percent addressed business-to-business strategy, where few were addressing IT adoption and other areas. Content analysis findings revealed that there are potential new areas for the researchers in services marketing and business-to-business context. These can be stated as follows; people, IT in services marketing and business-to-business, pricing and as an approach management science.

The findings also illustrated that there are lack of studies exploring people and their role in services marketing despite its importance. People can also be studied under strategy as the source of differentiation among service suppliers. Consistent with the gaps stated, most of the studies disregard this fact. Also, there are few attempts to integrate IT in services marketing. Pricing is another missing area in the field of both services marketing and business-to-business. Price is one of the most important elements of traditional and services marketing mix, however in both areas, there is lack of interest in the academic field.

There is still a lack of employing management science approach in services marketing and business-to-business for problem solving or building strategy. One exception can be stated as the study of Durvasula *et al.* (2012).

5. Limitations of the Study

In this study, e-journals were examined for the content analysis. From the reviewed journals, only the articles in English were selected for the analysis. The keywords used for the research were also limited to services marketing and business-to-business to explore the studies.

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